A Case Study: 
Shamanisms in the Netherlands

The Netherlands witnessed the first public non-scholarly Dutch reflections on shamanism in 1973. In that year a Dutch elite readership was introduced to the literary interpretation of shamanism as published by the poet and novelist H.C. ten Berge. Reflecting on the increasing bureaucratisation and consumerism of that decade, he used Inuit poetry to compose his volume of poems *De Witte Sjamaan* (*The White Shaman*). In Ten Berge's poetical world, a shaman makes a purifying journey through landscapes of snow that sharply contrast with the world of 'grass people' who live in a consumer society. As an avant-garde writer, Ten Berge positioned himself in the literary field by claiming the distinctive ability to understand the essence of 'primitive poetry'. Yet the idea of shaman-poets made no headway in the Dutch literary field.¹

Within ten years of the publication of *De Witte Sjamaan*, however, shamanism had become a vital theme in the Dutch field of esotericism. Without referring to

Ten Berge, esoteric journals began to pay attention to shamanism and growth centres put shamanism on their agendas. Significantly, the earliest shamanic teachers who toured the Dutch field of esotericism came from abroad. The first teacher who taught shamanic workshops and courses in the Netherlands, for instance, was the Hungarian shaman-artist Joska Soos (1921-2008), who will feature prominently later in this chapter. Only at the end of the 1980s did the first Dutch shamanic experts appear, thereby instigating a process of autonomisation within the field of esotericism. This soon resulted in a proper Dutch field of shamanism.

This chapter deals with the genesis, the structure and the logic of the field of shamanism in the Netherlands. It differs from the other chapters as it is a case study and, moreover, it is based on fieldwork. Participation in shamanic practices in the Netherlands has enabled me to paint a more detailed and intimate picture of the strategic manoeuvrings of shamanic authorities and to differentiate the various Dutch shamanisms more clearly. Yet my focus remains the same, as I concentrate on the producers of knowledge of shamanism and shamanic knowledge and explore the ways in which they construct and authorise their notions of 'shaman' and 'shamanism' within the field in which they take action.

As I will interpret the establishment and logic of the field of shamanism in the wider social context of both the field of esotericism and Dutch society, I will start this chapter with an examination of the expansion of the Dutch field of esotericism during the second half of the twentieth century. I will relate this development to the concurrent changes in Dutch society. Subsequently, I look at the rise of shamanism in the field of esotericism as it resulted in the genesis of a specific, autonomous field of shamanism. Finally, I will depict four players who have gained prominent positions in the field of shamanism in the Netherlands. To grasp the logic of the Dutch field of shamanism, I shall review Jan Prins Searching Deer, the School for Shamanism, Shu’em Shamanism and the Institute of Siberian Shamanism. They all featured in the first section of Chapter 1, and, as I already noted there, they all take action in the same field and according to the logic of this field. At the same time they validate, authorise and authenticate their distinct forms of shamanism in rather different ways. Their comparison will provide a view of the intricacy of the field of shamanism in the Netherlands.

**The rise of esoteric practices**

The Dutch field of esotericism has changed its shape and features considerably during the decades following the Second World War. As can be expected, these changes are closely related to major developments in Dutch society. In their noteworthy and very readable sociological and historical study of New Age in the Netherlands, the Dutch sociologists Stef Aupers and Anneke van Otterloo distinguish
two periods in the rise of esoteric practices in the Netherlands. During the first phase, which lasted from 1950 until 1980, esoteric practices were a marginal phenomenon, closely related to what is known as counterculture. That is to say, during the 1950s, the 1960s and the 1970s esoteric practices were combined with protests against materialism, commercialism and capitalism. From 1980 onwards, however, esotericism lost its countercultural twist and went mainstream. In the next section I will roughly follow Aupers’s and Van Otterloo’s classification of phases.²

Counterculture, 1950s-1960s

From the late 1950s onwards, a group of Dutch avant-garde artists and intellectuals entered the public arena with playful anti-authoritarian provocations or ‘happenings’ with which they wanted to destroy the blinkered cage of conservative and ‘technocratic’ routines.³ The supposed countercultural resistance of these taste-makers also entailed a quest for ‘spiritual’ liberation. A marginal part of the avant-garde used psychedelic drug-induced journeys to explore their ‘inner realm’. In this scene, the psychedelic author Simon Vinkenoog (1928-2009) occupied a prominent position. Through his friendship and identification with American beat poets he became their indigenised Dutch version. Many other supposed countercultural tendencies in the Netherlands were also glocalised versions of American trends, such as the romanticisation of Native American Indians. The term ‘shamanism’, however, did not enter the rebellious vocabulary.⁴

During the 1960s the countercultural flow increased, but it was moderate and tranquil in comparison with its American counterpart. Nonetheless, a significant cultural revolution took place as a broader range of so-called baby-boomers, born after the Second World War, took up the struggle against the supposedly suffocat-

² S. Aupers and A. van Otterloo, New Age. Een godsdiensthistorische en sociologische benadering (Kampen, 2000) 53-95. According to Aupers and Otterloo, the breakthrough of New Age was primarily brought about by processes of psychologising and commercialisation.
ing tightness of Dutch conservatism. Their break with former conservative morals as well as sexual and spiritual dispositions was closely linked to rising wages and the growth of intellectual resources. The liberationist enthusiasm of the ‘cultural revolution’ of the 1960s went hand in hand with the weakening of traditional power relationships: priests and politicians lost great parts of the grassroots support and authority they had taken for granted.5

While some young people focused on political changes, others explored esotericism as a way to change self and society. The establishment of the Dutch esoteric journal *Bres* (*Breach*) in 1968 was illustrative of this trend. *Bres*, which was edited by Simon Vinkenoog, approached esotericism in a scholarly manner and aimed its esoteric knowledge at a small group of esoteric connoisseurs. Exemplary for the countercultural esotericism of the 1960s was the establishment of Utopian communities in the northern province of Drenthe and in the southern province of Noord-Brabant. Located in rural areas, away from urban life, they were aimed at small scale living and ecological consciousness. In contrast, the growth centre De Kosmos was established in Amsterdam in 1970. It was the product of the profiling of two youth centres in 1969: Paradiso became the centre for political activists, while Fantasio became a growth centre and was renamed De Kosmos. This event, however, brings us into the 1970s as it represents the separation of political activism and esoteric struggles, which was exemplary for what became known as the me-decade.6

The me-decade, 1970s

During the 1970s, the Dutch field of esotericism profited from a combination of social, political and economic developments that led to the pervasive urge for self-fulfilment that characterised the me-decade. Imperative for this development was the New Left *baby-boom* elite. They threw off the traditional Marxist stance of the social-democratic party at the beginning of the 1970s. Instead, they strove

5  De Liagre Böhl, ‘Consensus en Polarisatie’, 289-306; Wielenga, *Die Niederlande*, 305-16. In *Nieuw Babylon in aanbouw. Nederland in de Jaren Zestig* (Amsterdam, 1995) the American historian J.C. Kennedy argued that the ruling elites were the main force behind the cultural transformation of the Netherlands during the 1960s. In contrast, the Dutch historian Hans Righart (1954-2001) interpreted the changes in the Netherlands as a generational conflict in *De eindeloze jaren zestig. Geschiedenis van een generatieconflict* (Amsterdam, 1995), whereas the eminent Dutch historian J.C.H. Blom argued that while the one-sidedness of the books is part of their strength, it is also a weakness, as the societal changes of the 1960s were too complex to interpret in ‘themed’ books, “‘De Jaren Vijftig’ en ‘De jaren Zestig’?”, *Bijdragen en Mededelingen betreffende de Geschiedenis der Nederlandsen* 112 (1997) 517-28.

for transparent participation democracy aimed at the spread of income, knowledge and power. Their anti law-abiding image, their ideal of a permissive society and their emphasis on the self-development of individuals gained them political success. They even provided the Prime Minister from 1973 until 1977. With the help of confessional parties, they set out to abolish inequality and discrimination through the advancement of a social welfare system that, they supposed, would offer a setting in which citizens could advance.7

The welfare state undermined old social configurations as many Dutch citizens became increasingly independent of the social arrangements in their communities. The ways they managed their personal and social affairs also changed because of the transformation of work and working relations. Dutch people depended less and less on farming and industry for employment and more and more people worked in service industries. As a result, employees were presented with other lists of demands. Social and communicative capabilities replaced endurance and strength. This new ‘intellectual make-up’ of the nation was institutionalised through a schooling system that increasingly focused on the possibilities of individual pupils. At the same time that the Netherlands changed into a permissive society, entrusting its citizens with the space to create their personal lifestyles, it became a credential society that encouraged citizens to strive for educational and other improvements.8

The widespread emancipatory urge for self-fulfilment habitually expressed itself in psychological and individualist terms. For instance, the Dutch women's rights movement declared that ‘the personal is political’.9 Likewise, the social health system gradually turned patients into clients who could be helped by offering them opportunities to help themselves. In the new cultural climate everybody who was shy, timid, anxious or lacking in confidence could overcome this ‘disorder’ through a range of new emotionally-laden therapies. More and more people wanted to find out what the supposed true self was that they had to develop.10

In this configuration the field of esotericism bloomed as esoteric therapeutic practices easily linked up with the new therapeutic ethos. The field was a highly fertile seedbed for the development of a variety of ways to work at self-development and self-realisation. In many of these practices, the body was a focal point.

This was related to the new conceptions of bodies that came with the emancipator inclination. For instance, the upcoming permissiveness incorporated the so-called sexual revolution. The pill invigorated this trend. The strict dispositions that people had absorbed in their youth were not easy to overcome, however. It was easier to grow a beard than to absorb the new morals. Again, therapies offered the solution as they presented opportunities to embody the new fashionable free dispositions. Feminists groups also found support for their new self-confident personal-political femininity through therapeutic sessions that focused on body and mind.11

Illustrative of the expansion of the field of esotericism was the establishment of Ankh Hermes in 1975, a publisher specialised in esoteric literature. Furthermore, the renowned Dutch academic parapsychologist Henri van Praag (1916-1988) established *Prana: tijdschrift voor spiritualiteit en randgebieden der wetenschappen (Prana: journal for spirituality and the margins of sciences)* in 1975. Similar to *Bres*, *Prana* had a scholarly approach to esotericism. In contrast, the editors of *Onkruid (Weed)*, a journal that was established in 1978, had an apparently less scholarly approach. Significantly, it reached out for larger audiences.12

**Neoliberalisation: from 1980 onwards**

More than ever, the economy of esoteric goods expanded during the 1980s and 1990s. Exemplary for this process was the establishment of the monthly publication *Koörddanser (Tightrope Dancer)* in 1984. Unlike *Bres*, *Prana* and *Onkruid*, substantive articles were of secondary importance. *Koörddanser*’s primary target was its survey of esoteric practices through a national and an international agenda and the advertisements from the economy of esoteric goods. Disposed to struggle for authentic, perennial and archaic truths, a variety of players introduced new exotic practices.13 As we will see later in this chapter, shamanism was one of them.

The contemporary social, political and economic changes in the Netherlands had an enormous impact on the rise of esotericism. To begin with, the ideal of a malleable society had crumbled at the end of the 1970s. The progressive ‘politics of the imagination’ proved not to lead to the anticipated political reform, also because an economic recession stunted economic growth.14 With their suppos-

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12  Aupers and Van Otterloo, *New Age*, 71. Henri van Praag was ‘extraordinary professor’ of Parapsychology at the University of Utrecht from 1978 until 1986.
edly anti-ideological no-nonsense stance, the conservative parties profited. From 1978 onwards, conservative liberals and Christian Democrats started to pursue deregulation, privatisation and retrenchment policies. During subsequent decades, Dutch politicians implemented a neoliberalisation process. The ideal of a withdrawing government was even embraced by the social-democratic party, and with a social-democrat as Prime Minister, from 1994 until 2002, neoliberalisation governed the Netherlands as never before.

Neoliberal policies transformed the Dutch atmosphere profoundly. Notwithstanding its calculable economic success, neoliberalisation threw citizens back upon their own resources (see also Chapter 7). Many people found themselves caught up in a process that deregulated more than just the economy. The pressure on citizens intensified and the Netherlands became a so-called ‘multiple-choice society’ and a ‘demanding society’. As in the foregoing decade, individualism was the guiding principle for most citizens. Yet in the new politico-economic structures the meaning of individualism changed. Once an ideological pillar of the permissive welfare state, individualism transformed into an urge for self-responsibility. People were still supposed to make choices according to their personal preferences, but the focus had shifted from equal opportunities to accountability. While the supposedly ‘natural’ status of individuals was perceived as the result of personal and free choices, the flexible labour market situation encouraged employees to arrange their lives to maximise their advantage on the labour market or, in other words, to be employable.

Neoliberalism urged individuals to work on themselves, and with the new optimistic devotion to self-improvement expectations rose. The increasing pressure on independent and personal decision-making, however, also resulted in frustration about failure, disappointment and disillusionment. Many women, for instance, struggled to make up the arrears on the labour market, while at the same time they still felt the force of traditional gender dispositions that passed them a dis-

proportionate share of the domestic responsibilities.\textsuperscript{19} The findings of the Dutch sociologists of religion Dick Houtman and Stef Aupers are in accordance with this analysis, as they argued that so-called post-traditional women might embrace spirituality more often than post-traditional men because they are being haunted more severely by problems of meaning and identity.\textsuperscript{20}

Within this neoliberal political and socioeconomic context, the field of esotericism transformed from a marginal movement into a part of mainstream society that became known as the New Age Movement. There was an enormous increase in esoteric products and publications, as esotericism reached wider audiences through mainstream television programmes, and more and more shops were established that specialised in esoteric wares. As could be expected, the number of ‘New Age’ centres also increased significantly. In 1990 there were approximately two hundred, but five years later there were more than three hundred.\textsuperscript{21}

The elective affinities between the logic of the field of esotericism and the logic of neoliberal capitalism were highly significant for the rise of therapeutic ideas and practices that sprang from the economy of esoteric goods, as I have already argued in Chapter 7. Significantly, not only the neoliberal quest for self-actualisation, self-determination and self-responsibility originated from the United States, many contributions to the booming field of esotericism in the Netherlands came from the United States as well, sometimes in the form of internationally operating teachers with Native American Indian names. In due course, they would become known as shamans.

\textit{The rise of shamanism}

One of the first times that the terms ‘shaman’ and ‘shamanism’ drew attention in the field of esotericism was when \textit{Prana} introduced the Hungarian-Belgian painter-shaman Joska Soos in 1977. Soos would play a major part in the genesis of a field of shamanism in the Netherlands. I will come back to Soos later in this chapter. For now it is sufficient to note that \textit{Prana} introduced him as a present-day shaman from an old Hungarian line of shamans. Soos presented shamanism as ‘the

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{21} Aupers and Van Otterloo, \textit{New Age}, 70-80.
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world’s oldest form of magic’ that allowed people ‘to take a look at the world beyond its manifestations’. A year later, the aforementioned parapsychologist Henri van Praag pointed out in Prana that recent decades had witnessed an increase in interest in shamanism. According to him, Eliade had filled a hiatus in knowledge with his 1951 Le Chamanisme. Prana would significantly contribute to the Dutch genealogy of shamanism but the term ‘shamanism’ did not enter its regular prose during the 1970s. It is telling that Lame Deer, Rolling Thunder and Carlos Castaneda were depicted as mystics and medicine men, not as shamans.

However, during the 1980s the term ‘shamanism’ gradually became a popular subject in the field of esotericism. It is noteworthy that a 1980 editorial in Prana used the scientific authority of ‘scholars of religion’ to call attention to the importance of shamanism as, according to Prana, these scholars increasingly concluded that ‘shamanism (which is the opposite of mystical silence) is the common foundation of cosmic and revelatory religions’. In a later issue in the same year, the editors even detected a ‘shamanic renaissance’. They saw it manifested through the revival of Indian wisdom and the increasing interest in Tibet, the Inuit, the Vedas, Gypsy music, tarot, tantra, ecstasy and Japanese religions. Remarkably, Prana attributed the growing popularity of shamanism to the work of the British historian of the paranormal and alternative medicine Brian Inglis (1916-1993) whose 1977 Natural and Supernatural had expanded the meaning of term ‘shaman’ so that it included Biblical figures such as Jesus and Moses.

Shamanism gained momentum in the field of esotericism in 1983, when Sjamanisme, het genezende evenwicht (Shamanism, the healing balance) appeared. Written by the Buddhist, therapist and publisher Robert Hartzema, it was the first Dutch esoteric book that explicitly focused on shamanism. In the same year, Bres also published his interpretation of shamanism as ‘the most ancient form of medicine’. Hartzema argued that ‘nature people’ or ‘primitive people’ experience their intimate bond with nature through rites and ceremonies in which they become the focus of natural and cosmic forces. Shamans are specialists who, after a long and hard apprenticeship, are able to use these energies to repair and ward off disturbances in the balance of force fields.

23 H. van Praag, ‘De erfenis der sjamanen’, Prana 14 (1978/79) 58-61. Bres only discussed shamanism in a 1978 issue that called attention to a recently surfaced collection of old picture postcards from Siberia and Central Asia that featured shamans. The editors introduced these ‘shaman-souvenirs from Russia’ by claiming that shamanism, ‘originally was a regular religious phenomenon in Siberia’. They described the shaman as ‘healer’, ‘magician’, ‘medicine man’ and ‘master of ecstasy’ and referred the reader to Eliade’s Shamanism, see Bres 73 (1987) 121-8.
25 R. Hartzema, Sjamanisme, het genezende evenwicht. Een universele benadering van ziekte en
Hartzema referred to Rolling Thunder, Carlos Castaneda, Mircea Eliade and Franz Boas to interpret shamans as technicians of the sacred who possess power and knowledge to operate energies and forces through techniques and tools. In contrast to the ‘mechanical’ model of scientific medicine, the holistic shamanic approach features energy centres, sometimes called chakras, and is aimed at the restoration of balance and the raising of blockades. Notwithstanding the variety of shamans all over the world, their practices consist of basic patterns and form a universal approach.26

The year 1983 also witnessed another momentous episode in the Dutch genealogy of shamanism. Growth centre De Kosmos organised a series of lectures, workshops and documentaries dedicated to shamanism. Joska Soos came to Amsterdam to manage workshops as well as the Native American Indian Archie Lame Deer who, on his Dutch tour, led a so-called sweatlodge ceremony at Elfenbank (1975-1995), a growth centre near Nijmegen that, as we will see, would become pivotal in the genesis of the Dutch field of shamanism.27

Prana’s autumn issue of 1984 was also dedicated to shamanism. Once more, Van Praag praised the virtues of Inglis’s book, but he added that Eliade, Halifax and Campbell also deserved special mention. In a ‘worth reading’ list of books on shamanism, Hartzema’s book was reviewed as well as those by Halifax, Larsen, Drury, Harner and Eliade.28 Van Praag also let his parapsychological light shine upon shamanism, concluding an exposé on Maria Sabina, Brooke Medicine Eagle and a Tibetan priest named ‘toelkoe’ by stating that the current psychic was the new version of the shaman.29 Another contributor described her paranormal experiences by the side of Maria Sabina, while the Dutch self-proclaimed ‘professor’ Jan R. Hakemulder wrote a text on shamanism largely based on Eliade’s work.30

Prana’s 1984 shamanism issue included translated contributions by American experts. Joan Halifax contributed as well as the Cuban-American medical anthropologist and transpersonal psychologist Alberto Villoldo, who traced the shamanic roots of medicine.31 The differences between the American and the Dutch

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26 Hartzema, Sjamanisme and ‘Sjamanisme’.  
contributors to Prana’s shamanism issue are noteworthy. The American experts based their expertise on distinct combinations of scholarly, traditional and experiential knowledge of shamanism. In contrast, the Dutch authors had acquired their knowledge through books, mostly foreign, and, consequently, offered a more detached interpretation of shamanism. Only later would Dutch experts follow the lead of foreign shamanic experts by claiming shamanic knowledge for themselves. Still, even though the perspectives on shamanism that reached the readership of Prana differed significantly, they all put shamanism on the map of esotericism as a global, universal and primordial therapeutic phenomenon that could be taught by experts.

While Dutch experts on shamanism who took steps in the field of esotericism approached shamanism in a scholarly way, Dutch scholars with academic positions were not involved in the genesis of a Dutch field of shamanism. When Dutch academic anthropologists focused on shamanism, they focused on ‘traditional’ shamanism. For instance, in 1982 two promising anthropologists from Groningen published two articles about shamanism in a Dutch weekly that was widely read in educated milieus. They described the shaman as ‘the handyman of the gods’, stressed the variety of scholarly interpretations of shamanism and paid attention to shamanism in the Islamic parts of the Soviet Union, but they did not take notice of the occurrence of contemporary western shamanisms.32 An article about shamanism in a 1984 issue of Tijdschrift voor Ziekenverpleging (Journal for Nursing) is also noteworthy. The author merely wondered whether shamans were conjurors or healers. He paid no heed to contemporary western shamanism at all.33

The Dutch structural anthropologist Jarich Oosten must also be mentioned here, as he used the term 'shaman' in his Arctic research. He participated in the international field of shamanology, for instance by publishing an article in Hoppál’s 1984 volume *Shamanism in Eurasia* and by participating in the second conference of the International Society of Shamanistic Research in Budapest in 1993. In contrast to many shamanologists, however, Oosten was wary of universal models and categories and argued that anthropologists should focus on processes instead of on essences. He stressed the importance of extensive fieldwork and, inspired by Wittgenstein, told his students to be always aware of one's own language games.\(^{34}\)

A pioneer (1): Joska Soos

The first esoteric teacher who achieved recognition as a shaman in the Dutch field of esotericism was Joska Soos. From the early 1980s onwards, he travelled around as an itinerant shaman visiting Dutch growth centres to offer his shamanic workshops. He profited from the publications of Hartzema, who also spread Soos’s fame via articles in *Onkruid* and *Bres* in 1984 and 1985. Hartzema also acted as a ghost-writer for Soos’s 1985 publication *Ik genees niet, ik herstel de harmonie* (*I do not cure; I restore harmony*) and he staged Soos in his 1987 collection of portraits of paranormal and spiritual healers. According to Soos’s life story as published by Hartzema, Soos was born with a caul. For this reason, the village shaman took him under his wing and initiated him by using dreams, chakras, magical signs, communication with animals, mind expansion, cosmic journeys, the vibration of sounds and other techniques to ‘shamanise’.\(^{35}\)

Above all, Soos authorised his shamanic expertise by referring to the traditional Hungarian roots of his shamanism and his profound shamanic experiences. That is to say, he had deepened his ‘spirituality’ when he, as a coal miner in Belgium from 1949 onwards, sometimes deliberately remained in the shafts to experience the darkness and silence in the mines. He quit mining when his artistic career as


a painter got going. While his wife guaranteed a basic income, he exhibited his paintings in Belgian galleries. Then his wife left him in 1975 and he collapsed. To defuse the crisis, he shouted and drummed for weeks, just like the village shaman had taught him. It was his first ‘shamanisation’. He healed himself with it. This breakthrough brought back his shamanic background and from then on he perceived the light creatures and sound creatures that he had already depicted in his paintings. Whilst in London, in 1981, he became involved with a group of Tibetan Buddhists who told him that he had been a Tibetan Llama, a Chinese mandarin and a Taoist in former lives. The scales and drums that they used in their practices remained important to Soos who, as a wounded healer, started to ‘shamanise’ others.36

Soos constructed an expert way of speaking rationally about his shamanism, with a strikingly learned and technical idiom, almost mimicking scientific knowledge. He claimed that his shamanism was built upon seven sources of shamanic knowledge: being born with the caul (1), his shamanic ancestors (2), the teachings of the village shaman (3), his thirst for knowledge (4), being creative as an artist (5), the vibration of sound (6), and the emergence of light creatures (7).37 By using drums and scales he worked with a complex system of spheres, chakras and perceptions. According to him, seven spheres of consciousness had developed in an evolutionary line: the personal level of consciousness (1), the human level of consciousness, which dated back to the point where humans evolved from animals (2), the amphibian level of consciousness, which dated even further back in time (3), the consciousness as water creatures (4), the crystal consciousness, which he described as ‘the androgynous condition in which people experience as it is’ (5), the light consciousness, ‘when the crystal starts moving’ (6), and sound consciousness as ‘in the beginning there was sound’ (7). He related these seven spheres to seven chakras and to ‘four degrees of perception’: the quadrilateral that stems from the body (1), the triangular that stems from emotions (2), the circular that stems from intellectual and creative perception (3), and the spherical that stems from the spiritual (4).38

Soos organised workshops for beginners and for advanced students, enabling his students to increase and deepen their shamanic knowledge in educational structures that fitted the logic of the credential society in which he constructed his shamanism. His practices also suited the therapeutic habitus that had gained dominance in the Netherlands from the 1970s onwards as his students could heal themselves by finding balance and harmony in themselves. Ultimately, Soos clothed his supposedly authentic and traditional Hungarian shamanism in inno-

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37 Soos, Ik genees niet, ik herstel de harmonie, 85-93.
38 Idem, 95-125.
vative, up-to-date and fashionable esoteric garments. By referring to Taoism and chakras and using technical jargon he presented his supposedly traditional Hungarian shamanic knowledge as a form of scholarly yet perennial esoteric knowledge.

A pioneer (2): Ronald Chavers

At about the same time as Soos, the American scholar Ronald Chavers entered the field of esotericism as a shamanic teacher. Chavers had acquired a doctorate in philosophy in Germany and claimed to have been initiated into ‘shamanic knowledge’, for instance when he lectured on Carlos Castaneda at the University of Utrecht in 1979. On this occasion he told the audience that even before the age of three he had been ‘taught to see’ by his great-grandmother, who had ‘shamanic abilities’. His great-grandmother, who was of Cherokee origin, had guided him into the realms of non-ordinary experience through prophesy. Chavers claimed that he had been involved in shamanistic activities throughout his life and, moreover, that he had studied theology, mythology, religion, psychology, philosophy, sociology and anthropology.39

Chavers’s struggles to acquire recognition both in the academic field and in the field of esotericism are noteworthy as they point to a fundamental difference between the genesis of the fields of shamanism in the Netherlands and the USA. To be precise, while the American field of shamanism was established in close association with the academic field, the genesis of a Dutch field of shamanism occurred without the participation of established academic scholars. Chavers was an academic scholar, but he never acquired an authoritative position in the academic field. His steps to establish his so-called ‘transversional psychology’ in the academic field failed, as well as his attempts to get his knowledge about shamanism recognised there. He invited academic scholars such as Jarich Oosten to cooperate with him, but Oosten and other Dutch academic scholars declined Chavers’s offer to cooperate as they principally mistrusted his knowledge claims.40

Still, Chavers entered the international field of shamanology. His name features on the list of founding members of the International Society for Shamanistic Research as published in Shaman and his article about shamanism as ‘total theatre’ appeared in Hoppal’s 1989 volume Shamanism. Past and Present, which included contributions by Ruth-Inge Heinze, Felicitas Goodman, Stanley Krippner and Jarich Oosten. At the aforementioned 1993 conference of the ISSR in Budapest he even performed a dance in which he depicted a number of animal transformations

40  Personal communication with Jarich Oosten, who told me that he had refused to cooperate with Chavers during the 1980s. See also P.P. Pedersen, ‘Review of A Dialectical Approach to Psychotherapy by Ronald E. Chavers’, Contemporary Psychology 31 (1986) 1000.
of the shaman.41 Chavers’s scholarly habitus is obvious, as his website also illustrates. It offers a view on his remarkable curriculum vitae, and the list of his many works is impressive. It is significant, however, that most of his scholarly output is unpublished.42

In the field of esotericism Chavers used the same mix of capital to authorise his expertise, but here he was somewhat more successful. He established his own growth centre, Dies Community for development-history, an institute where he taught his students the shamanic virtues of his ‘transversive-transformative’ method. As ‘Black Horse Chavers (Ronald)’ he advertised his ‘shamanic way’ as a form of ‘individual and total theatre’, for instance through a small ad in a 1983 issue of Bres. He also used this journal to announce his cultural journey to Indonesia. As a travel guide, he accompanied fellow travellers to ‘Indian tribes’ in the USA and to Japan, where they shared in the ‘field of tension’ between shamanism, Shintoism and Buddhism.43 He also worked as a tour guide in the Netherlands, where he took his students on excursions to Dutch megalithic monuments in 1988, teaching them that these were remnants of the ancient ‘matriarchal Great Mother Culture’ that had included shamans. Western culture, he argued, had systematically suppressed shamanism by wrongly pushing it away as ‘unscientific’. According to him, shamans aim at dissolving unconscious conflicts by using the opportunities for positive transformations and the value of dream symbols. Chavers also left his mark in the field of shamanism via his students, who, by referring to ‘Professor Chavers’ as their teacher, still transmit the scientific authority of Chavers as well as the logic of his shamanism.44

The genesis of a field of shamanism

During the second half of the 1980s the first Dutch shamanic teachers entered the field of esotericism. Most shamanic teachers who took action in the Netherlands during the 1980s, however, came from outside the Netherlands, calling on Dutch growth centres on their trans-border tours, as a look at Koördander reveals. In general, American visiting teachers had names with a Native American Indian flavour. The European instructors who travelled around the Netherlands had relatively different backgrounds. The aforementioned Swedish teacher Jonathan Horwitz (Chapter 7) toured, as well as the German Heilpraktiker and shaman Marie-Lu Lörler, whose book I will present in the next section. The Austrian shaman Margit Bohdalek (‘Raven Woman’) came to instruct Dutch clients in ‘astrology and shamanism’ and ‘the medicine wheel’. According to Bohdalek she had studied under different ‘American Indians and African shamans’ and under Arnold Graf Keyserling (1922-2005). Keyserling, who also visited the Netherlands as a shamanic teacher, deserves further consideration here as he was the son of Hermann Keyserling (Chapter 5) and president of the European Humanistic Psychology Association. He was inspired by his father, Carl Jung and Gurdjieff and was, according to the website of the current School for Wisdom at least, one of the first to introduce the Human Potential Movement and Native American shamans to Europe in the 1970s and 1980s.

Most books on shamanism published in the Netherlands during the 1980s were translations of international bestsellers. Lörler’s 1986 Die Hüter des alten Wissens was successfully translated for the Dutch market by Bres in 1987 and published as Praktische natuurmagie: Handboek voor de Moderne Sjamaan (Practical Nature Magic Manual for the Modern Shaman). Bres promoted the book by publishing Lörler’s account of her becoming a shaman and when she toured Dutch growth centres in 1989 Bres also paid ample attention to her. Other publications about shamanism that did well on the Dutch economy of esoteric goods were translations of publications inspired by core-shamanism. Significantly, a Dutch version of Harner’s Way of the Shaman was published only in 2001. By that time, Dutch shamanists had already established a subfield of shamanism in the field of esotericism. Even though many shamanic exercises in the field were based on the techniques that were initiated by Harner, his core-shamanism did not acquire a prominent position in the field of shamanism in the Netherlands.

45 Margit Bohdalek nowadays manages her shamanic practice from Poland, see www.margit-bohdalek.pl. See also J. Semah, Margit Bohdalek (Amsterdam, 1984).
47 W. Rutherford, Sjamanisme, de basis van magie (The Hague, 1986); M. Lörler, Praktische Natuurmagie. Handboek voor de moderne sjamaan (Amsterdam, 1987) and ‘Praktische
Evidently, the genesis of a field of shamanism in the Netherlands owes much to the influence of shamanic teachers from abroad. Myriam Ceriez’s 1994 *Sjamanen. Gesprekken, belevenissen, rituelen* (*Shamanism. Conversations, experiences, rituals*) illustrates the point. Ceriez, a Belgian woman who has settled in Amsterdam, portrayed ten different teachers who had been decisive for her education in shamanism. While she gave special credit to Elfenbank and Roelien de Lange, Ceriez primarily portrayed non-Dutch shamanic teachers. In addition to the aforementioned Annette Host and Joska Soos, she also portrayed, *inter alia*, the British psychotherapist and leader of the Order of Bards Ovates and Druids Philip Carr-Gomm, a North American ‘green witch’, a North American ‘medicine women’, a North American ‘voodoo priestess’ and a Peruvian shaman. As we will see, transnationalism would remain a crucial feature of the field of shamanism in the Netherlands.

The only Dutch teacher in Ceriez’s gallery of portraits is Daan van Kampenhout who was, without a doubt, one of the first Dutch instructors to take the shamanic horse by the reins. Decisive for his career and for Dutch shamanism in general was an event that took place in 1987. Under the direction of Van Kampenhout, who still was an art student then, a ‘project group’ prepared an experiment in shamanism. Only a small group of people was involved, but the experiment reached wider audiences in the field of esotericism via Van Kampenhout’s published account in *Bres*. Van Kampenhout had created his own shamanic costumes for his final examination at the art academy and now he wanted to use these outfits to find out if it was possible to get the feeling of shamanism. He also wanted to try to get in touch with animal spirits. According to his website, the frequent appearance of animals in his dreams had also inspired him to test shamanic techniques. The group camped in a forest, made music and danced around a birch tree that was made into a totem. Dressed up in Van Kampenhout’s Siberian-like shamanic costumes, the group performed rituals and gathered objects to represent the elements, powers and creatures that formed the space in which they camped and worked. They changed the ‘level of energy vibration’ by using voices and drums and, ultimately, they successfully connected with the spirits living in the area.

Two years later, growth centre Elfenbank decisively positioned shamanism in the Dutch field of esotericism by organising a ‘shamanism weekend’ with ‘professional coaching’ in 1989. The demand exceeded the supply and thus Elfenbank ini-
tiated a ‘shamanic school year’ that started in 1990. The focal point was ‘Shamanic earth consciousness’. The course did not train people to become a Castaneda, Elfenbank warned in the advert in Koördanser. Elfenbank invited a range of Native American Indian teachers to contribute to the educational programme. Joska Soos, Annete Höst, Daan van Kampenhout and other European shamanic teachers also contributed. This initiative turned Elfenbank into the central location for the genesis of the field of shamanism. Elfenbank became a breeding ground for Dutch initiates in shamanism.

A closer look at the founder and manager of Elfenbank and its shamanic curriculum, the Dutch artist and creative therapist Roelien de Lange, sheds light on what Bourdieu called the ‘amnesia of genesis’. De Lange adopted the term ‘shamanism’ to refer to her personal spiritual path at about the same time that she initiated the ‘shamanic weekends’. In her own account, however, she had experienced shamanism from 1972 onwards, during her visits to Native American tribes. Yet at that time she was still absorbed in dream therapy and she did not use the term ‘shamanism’. When Onkruid dedicated an article to her in 1988, she presented the Native American Indians who lectured at Elfenbank as ‘medicine men’ and she did not use the term ‘shaman’. Notwithstanding her long-lasting interest in Native American Indians, there are strong reasons to suggest that she introduced the concept of ‘shamanism’ only after it had become part of the lingua franca of the field of esotericism.50

It is time to return to Daan van Kampenhout, as he established his own Dutch Institute for Shamanism and Ritual in Amsterdam in 1992. From this institute he started to manage his own educational programmes, although he also coordinated Elfenbank’s very last ‘shamanic year training’ in 1993. Elfenbank was dissolved in 1995. Yet Roelien de Lange continued her ‘shamanic trainings’ and established the School for Shamanism in 1995. The shamanic activities in the field of esotericism during these years were decisive for the logic and structure of the field of shamanism. As esoteric experts increasingly adopted the term ‘shamanism’ and students of the first shamanic teachers slowly but surely set up their own shamanic practices, a Dutch field of shamanism came into being during the 1990s.51

The increase in Dutch practitioners of shamanism can be observed by looking at their positioning at the Eigentijdsfestival, the annual happening that I already referred to in the first chapter. This event started in 1993 as the Reiki Camping Festival, but it continued from 1994 onwards under the name Eigentijdsfestival. From the outset shamanism was one of the most prominent attractions on the


camping ground. The first to offer a type of shamanism at the festival was Roelien de Lange, who used the term ‘shamanism’ for the medicine wheel ceremony that she managed during the 1994 edition. At later editions of the festival her School for Shamanism literally occupied a central position in the field as she was allowed to build an eye-catching tipi camp around the central pond in the main field of the festival ground. The festival’s website and folders would even use a picture of this line of tents as the main representative image of the festival.52

Gradually, other shamanic teachers put up their tents at the festival. Daan van Kampenhout’s Institute, for instance, joined it in 1996 as well as a shamanic expert called Geronimo, whose shamanism is a combination of martial arts and tree worship. Geronimo distinguishes his shamanic practices from the other practices by pointing to his teacher, who is an English ‘druid’ or ‘tree shaman’. Other shamanic teachers had gathered their shamanic knowledge from a range of sources. Myriam Ceriez, for instance, made her first ‘trance journey’ under the guidance of Annette Høst and, as I have noted before, was profoundly influenced by Van Kampenhout under whom she studied shamanism at the Elfenbank. Ultimately, however, her shamanism is a mixture of druidism and shamanism, due to the guidance she received from the aforementioned British druid Philip Carr-Gomm. Yet when I participated in one of Ceriez’s shamanic workshops at the 2005 edition of the Eigentijdsfestival, she offered an emotionally laden workshop which was her shamanic variant of the controversial family constellations therapy. At that time, Daan van Kampenhout had already acquired an international reputation with the shamanic family constellations variant that he coined Systemic Ritual.53

The dawn of shamanism was proclaimed by Jan Prins, also known as Searching Deer, in the 1996 festival newspaper. In that year, his Magic Circle joined the Eigentijdsfestival. From 1999 onwards, a range of other shamanic healers joined the Eigentijdsfestival as part of the so-called Healing Field, where dozens of different healers demonstrate their practices. Some of these healers claim their practices are ‘based on shamanic traditions’, while others straightforwardly present their practices as ‘shamanic’. During fieldwork on the festival, in 2006, I was treated by the Dutch healer Thérèse van der Veer, who took care of her clients in a small tent. She told me she did not call herself a shaman, but that she used shamanic techniques in combination with, for instance, Reiki. She also told me that she had acquired her shamanic knowledge from Alberto Villoldo and from a range of South American

52 I am grateful to the administrative centre of the Eigentijdsfestival that allowed me to study their festival newspapers there.

‘traditional Inca shamans’. When she treated me she primarily made use of her collection of stones and crystals.54

On its route to success, the term ‘shamanism’ came to denote an increasing variety of ideas and practices. New arrivals in the field offered new variants of shamanism that were often inspired by their pre-shamanic interests. The established institutes also built up an increasingly multicoloured shamanic pallet, adding new rituals and new workshops. Roelien de Lange, for instance, added a remarkable new dimension to shamanism when, at the 2003 edition of the festival, she lectured on ‘Dolphins; Shamans of the Sea’. Searching Deer submitted new workshops every year, creatively constructing shamanism in his ‘concerto for the devas’ and in workshops with titles such as ‘be like a shaman Buddha!’ and ‘Carlos Castaneda’s exercises’. Remarkably, when the Dutch branch of Tensegrity demonstrated Castaneda’s ‘Magical Passes’ at the 2004 festival it did not use the term shamanism. Shamanic Dance, Siberian shamanism, Native American shamanism and a range of other shamanic workshops from different instructors joined the festival. Nevertheless, the varieties of shamanism that joined the Eigentijdsfestival were only a fraction of the range of shamanisms that were created in the field as shamanism came to complement practices such as Reiki, druidism, dream work, reincarnation and family constellations therapy. The concept ‘shamanism’ clearly has an elastic quality.

Alongside an increasing number and variety of workshops and courses in shamanism, other shamanic products entered the market. Nowadays, drums, rattles, talking sticks, jewellery, power objects, power shields, dream catchers, herbs, amulets, incense and candles are sold under the label ‘shamanism’. The field has engendered shamanic festivals, correspondence education in shamanism and different shamanic manuals. Again, Daan van Kampenhout stands out as a key figure. He has published several articles on shamanism in Bres and a range of books on shamanism. His 1995 Handboek Sjamanisme (Shamanism Manual) is a do-it-yourself instruction manual that is considered a classic in the Dutch field of shamanism. After he published his 1999 In de Geest van het Sjamanisme (In the Spirit of Shamanism), he primarily published about his mix of shamanism with family constellations therapy, for instance in his 2001 Beelden van de Ziel (Images of the Soul). Ultimately, he acquired an international reputation as a shamanic expert, practising throughout Europe. His books have been published in English, German, French, Spanish, Italian and Polish, further enhancing his reputation as an expert.55

54 See www.verderlicht.nl. As we have seen in Chapter 7, Harner identified quartz crystals as ‘the strongest power object of all’, The Way of the Shaman. A Guide to Power and Healing (San Francisco, 1980) 113-34.

55 D. Van Kampenhout, Handboek Sjamanisme (Amsterdam, 1995) and In de Geest van het Sjamanisme (Amsterdam, 1999). Both books were published by Bres. See also D. Van
Along the lines of Van Kampenhout, other Dutch shamanic experts also started to publish about shamanism. For instance, the alma mater of the field of shamanism, Roelien de Lange, published an account of her ‘shamanic journey’ in her 2000 *Vuurgodin. Een sjamanistische reis* (*Fire Goddess, a shamanic journey*), and in 2002 she published *Sjamaans Spiegel Orakel* (*Shamanic Mirror Oracle*), a self-help book that came with a set of Tarot-like cards with images of her paintings. The then chairman of the School for Shamanism Jos Kester published his 2003 *Sjamanisme* (*Shamanism*), an introductory book in a series of books that is supposed to offer ‘reliable, professional information on the world’s religions, religious groupings and movements’.

By and large, in the field of shamanism the concept ‘shamanism’ has come to designate a series of universal archaic therapeutic techniques that can be used to experience perennial wisdom. This concept delineates the field of shamanism but it is a flexible concept. Correspondingly, the boundaries of the field of shamanism remain porous and can be negotiated. A conversation I had at the 2006 *Eigentijdsfestival* is illustrative. A woman told me enthusiastically about the sweat lodges she had visited. When I asked her about her experiences with shamanism, I was surprised to find out that she had not associated sweat lodges with shamanism. For many others in the field, on the other hand, sweat lodges are crucial shamanic practices that help to connect with nature spirits and to gain self-knowledge. It is also difficult to pin down the healers that once used the tag ‘shamanic’ in the Healing Field of the *Eigentijdsfestival* but dropped it later on, to exchange it for labels such as ‘natural medicine therapist’, ‘tarot reader’, ‘energy medicine’ or ‘crystal healing’. It makes it nearly impossible to map the field of shamanism comprehensively and all-inclusively.

One former ‘shamanic healer’ told me that shamanism was still her way of life as she focused on the wholeness of nature. She still practiced shamanism, for instance, while working in her garden, but she had retreated from the milieu of ‘alternative healing’, which had disappointed her as it had become too commercial. According to her, too many people had lost their ideals and had started to use their talent merely for egoistic purposes. Too many conflicting egos were investing a reduced amount of energy merely to get more money and to gain prestige.

Indeed, one of the paradoxes of the Dutch field of shamanism is that, while it is an economy of shamanic goods that is structured as a struggle about the truth, truth-


57 Personal communications on 29-09-2008, see www.proceswerk.nl/.
fulness and authenticity of shamanic goods, many actors in the field of shamanism profess a dislike of consumerism and commercialism. Repudiating self-interest and accentuating authenticity are part of the struggles of shamanic experts for their legitimacy, and thus for the symbolic power to get their form of shamanism recognised as genuine shamanism in the field of shamanism.

It is also noteworthy that during my fieldwork I noticed that most participants in shamanic practices are women. In her ethnographic MA thesis about ‘neo-shamanism’ in the Netherlands, the anthropology student from Amsterdam Hanneke Minkjan even found that seventy percent of shamanists are highly educated, middle-aged women. Yet her interpretation differs from mine. According to her, ‘neo-shamanic teachers and their students find in neo-shamanism the spiritual values, life-fulfilment and answers to questions to their problems in life, which they lack in our modern, secularised, rational, materialistic disenchanted world’.  

Contemporary western shamanic practices may offer potential empowerment and may help to acquire a feeling of self-control and self-development. Yet the guidance of personal power animals and the purchase of shamanic power are aimed at changing individual lives, often even with the intention of achieving something within society, that is, neoliberal capitalist structures. Permanent education, self-accountability and individual responsibility are part of the basic logic of both shamanism and neoliberalism. While shamanic self-fulfilment and self-improvement are presented as antidotes to the competitive atmosphere of neoliberalism, they are part of the ‘self-improvement industry’ that, as I have argued before, contributes to the structures that it claims to resist.

Four shamanic practices

As we have seen, the economy of shamanic goods expanded as more and more Dutch shamanic experts began to take steps in the Dutch field of shamanism. During my fieldwork I came across a number of these shamanisms, on the internet and in real life. I participated in different kinds of shamanic practices, at the Eigentijdsfestival and elsewhere. I will not recount all my experiences; a few will suffice here. For instance, I participated in shamanic trance dance sessions and in a sweat-lodge ceremony that were organised by an organisation called Land van Bart near Groningen, both in November 2004. On these occasions, I was moved by the easygoing and comfortable atmosphere and the warm welcome I received.  


60 For Land van Bart, see http://home.deds.nl/~wiegers.
In 2005, I visited the Shamanistic Teachings, an annual three-day festival that is organised by a New Age centre called Mirre, Institute of Energy Work, in Valthe, which is near Groningen, my home town. I observed shamans from all over the world talking about their own kind of shamanism and shamanism in general. It was intriguing to see and hear this gathering of Cuban, Indonesian, Jewish, Maori, Mexican, Native Indian American, Siberian and other shamans talking about ancestors, sacred journeys, divine purposes and traditional knowledge in the middle of Dutch farmlands and woodlands. In the same year, I went to Amsterdam to take part in the open day of the shamanic institute Ceremony. During one of the workshops, I was asked to represent the power animal of a woman. I found it a bit awkward, I must confess, and, initially, I did not know what to do. Yet there I was standing in front of a woman who expected me to embody her power animal. I improvised, imitating the movements of a large bird because that seemed to be the easiest way to deal with the instructions. I thought my impression did not make much sense, but to my amazement the woman was deeply touched by my performance. Ceremony seems to have dissolved, but the woman in charge, Linda Wormhoudt, has published several books on shamanism since then. When the Siberian shaman Ahamkara organised an evening to introduce his course on shamanic healing in December 2006, I went there with a journalist and a photographer. It was an amusing evening and we were having fun, supplying energy to other participants by tapping and rubbing their bodies and vice versa, in a ritual that would help to rejuvenate our spirits.

Even though I did not go native and come back à la Lindquist, as I have explained in the first chapter, my fieldwork among the different shamanisms has helped me to obtain a more intimate sense of the ideas and practices of Dutch shamanisms. To shed light on the logic of the field of shamanism, however, and to get a closer look at the struggles that constitute the field, I will limit myself to a depiction of the four shamanisms that I encountered most often in the field. I shall portray them chronologically, starting with Searching Deer, as he was involved in shamanism before the other shamanisms under consideration had even been established. I pay Searching Deer some extra attention, as his practices allow me to focus on charisma and on globalism, and because his shamanistic museum is too noteworthy to leave out. I conclude this chapter with a Dutch version of Siberian shamanism which, peculiarly enough, is one of the most recent versions of shamanism in the Netherlands.

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62 L. Wormhoudt, Goden en Sjamanen in Noord-West Europa (Geesteren, 2008), Ademtocht (Geesteren, 2009) and Seidr, het Noordev pad (Geesteren, 2010). Wormhoudt had been involved in wicca (modern witchcraft) before she studied shamanism under Myriam Ceriez and Daan van Kampenhout. To acquire more knowledge about plant and tree guides, she also took a correspondence course in druidism, see Minkjan, Geleid door Spirits, 21-3.
63 For an account of this meeting, see C. Boomsma, ‘Op zoek naar je krachtdier’, UK 16 (2007) 7.
manism that I have encountered in the Netherlands. Searching Deer, the School for Shamanism, the Asha Institute and the Institute for Siberian Shamanism have all gained prominent positions in the field of shamanism in the Netherlands. In the next section I will focus on their strategic positioning in the field to exemplify the logic and structures of the Dutch field of shamanism.

Searching Deer Jan Prins

Jan Prins’s rise to fame as one of the most prominent current Dutch shamanic authorities started when he encountered Joska Soos, at some point at the end of the 1980s. Soos adopted Prins as his apprentice and, after he had initiated him as a shaman, renamed him Searching Deer. Soos praised Prins as a shaman of the Aquarian Age and as a pupil in the ‘science of sound.’ It is not accidental that Soos’s work with Tibetan scales attracted Prins as in daily life he is a musician and music teacher. Music is also highly relevant for his shamanism. At the Eigentijdsfestival and via his website he sells ‘shamanistic music compact discs’ and, more importantly, as a ‘master of sound’ or ‘sound shaman,’ Searching Deer claims that he can hear the ‘Inner Sound’ or the ‘key note of the universe.’

Jan Prins told me that he had practised Gestalt therapy, had led meditation groups for years before he became Searching Deer. Blavatsky also inspired his shamanic practices. During workshops he puts on Gurdjieff’s music and he claims to receive messages from Master M El Moria, one of the legendary hidden masters of the Great White Brotherhood that sent messages to Blavatsky more than a century before. He even based his 1998 De Sjamanistische Leringen van de Meester M. Een handleiding voor de westerse mens (The Shamanistic Teachings of the Master M. A manual for western man) on these channelled messages. With these claims, Searching Deer has strategically positioned himself in the field as an initiated shaman in possession of different forms of secret shamanic knowledge. His position-taking is successful as he is one of the few individuals in the Netherlands who is recognised as a shaman powerful enough to initiate others as shamans.

Roelien de Lange, for instance, notwithstanding her authoritative position in the field of shamanism, only became a shaman in 2008, and only after Searching Deer initiated her. During the ceremony, he poured ‘milk of the Mother Goddess’ into a stag bowl from Glastonbury and he made her drink it in front of a local mega-

65 Interview with Searching Deer Jan Prins, 7 July 2007. See also Minkjan’s interview with him, Geleid door de Spirits, 53–6.
66 Searching Deer Jan Prins, De Sjamanistische Leringen van de Meester M. His teacher Joska Soos and the manager of the Eigentijdsfestival wrote forewords.
lithic gallery grave. He put her to the test by menacing her with ‘evil spirits’, but she came through and was reborn as a shaman. The ceremony clearly involved a reciprocal flow of capital: while she became a shaman he improved his position as a Dutch shaman as he demonstrated his power of consecration, that is, the power to consecrate objects and persons.\footnote{P. Bourdieu, ‘The Production of Belief: Contribution to an Economy of Symbolic Goods’, \textit{Media, Culture and Society} 2 (1980) 261–93; www.searchingdeer.nl/cms/news/9/1.html.} The location of the ceremony is significant. In his efforts to create an authentic European form of shamanism, Prins attracted the public interest years ago, at the beginning of his shamanic career, when he organized a ceremony to re-consecrate a megalithic monument. He wanted to revive the local tradition of shamanism. For him, the gallery grave was an almost forgotten source of power. Another form of power was involved in the ceremony as well. Especially because of the public attention the ritual received, it enhanced his status as a Dutch shaman.\footnote{See R.J. Wallis and J. Blain, ‘Sites, Sacredness, and Stories: Interactions of Archaeology and Contemporary Paganism’, \textit{Folklore} 114 (2003) 307–21.}

On his website, Searching Deer asserts that the shaman is the healer, the counsellor, the priest, the musician, the poet, the artist and the storyteller who mediates between the invisible world of the gods, the world of the spirits and human society. His own form of shamanism can make people hear their ‘Inner Sound’. As this is also the keynote of the universe, his practices may bring about a direct and conscious bond with the divine, or the ‘Source’, as he also calls it. He feels that it is his task, as a shaman, to reconnect people to these resources. Notwithstanding the European aspirations of his shamanism, Searching Deer emphasises that he has received an international education in shamanism. Joska Soos initiated him but he was also trained by an African ‘marabou’ and a Balinese ‘doekoen’. Furthermore, he was educated at Findhorn, at Glastonbury, at various esoteric schools and by teachers from all over the world. Searching Deer told me that he frequently travels around the world to get in touch with local shamans. He associated with a Balinese shaman, for example, after he read about him in \textit{Shaman’s Drum}.\footnote{Interview, 7 July 2007.} Searching Deer’s practices, therefore, offer an informative view of the global flows of shamanism.

His globalism is an important aspect of his shamanic practices. The way Searching Deer values the global and uses it as a reference point is closely related to his perennialism. For instance, on his journeys, he often asks locals if there are any shamans in the area. Sometimes he does not have to search for shamans, he told me, for they often find him. He functions like a magnet, attracting them. Searching Deer emphasises that he is one of the many spiritual teachers on earth and that he feels connected to the others. He told me that when in trance, travelling through the spirit world, he still regularly meets the shaman he met in Peru.\footnote{Idem.} These cosmo-
politain actions and experiences give direction and authority to his local practices. Moreover, with his journeys and his inquisitive travelling, Searching Deer’s shamanism are both a cause and a consequence of globalisation.

Travelling is Searching Deer’s route to different kinds of power. More than the average tourist, he consumes other cultures. The shamans he meets teach him new techniques and they teach him how to find new sources of power. Shamans worldwide are powerful resources for Searching Deer and he uses elements of all the different teachings creatively to fashion his own European form of shamanism. Searching Deer knows that there are differences between the various individuals he calls shamans but he perceives unity in the range of shamanisms. For him, the diversity of shamanisms around the globe essentially refers to the same underlying perennial truth. Travelling thus replenishes his cultural capital and it increases his already distinctive position in the field of shamanism. Others in this field recognize his international experiences as valuable spiritual gear and he is aware of this. By emphasising his global shamanic knowledge his website legitimises his specific authority as a shaman and his distinctive position in the field.

One of Searching Deer’s stories struck me in particular. He told me that he had lived for a while among the Hmong tribe in Birma. A native woman conveyed to him that she had the urge to become a shaman. The local shaman, however, was very old and could not initiate her anymore. Thus Searching Deer initiated her so that she could continue the long-standing and deep-routed shamanic tradition of her ancestors. This means that Searching Deer, in his own view, has evolved into the centre of a global flow of shamanic energy that can revive local traditions around the globe.

During his workshops, Searching Deer creates and demonstrates his distinct shamanic authority. For instance, for a session at the 2005 Eigentijdsfestival he had ingested hallucinogenic mushrooms so that he could communicate with the spirits for us. Participants could ask him questions. One of them asked after a deceased family member. One of his other workshops started with a lecture on ‘the healing tree’. While he lectured, we sat on chairs. But when he wanted us to recite and sing with him, he asked us to stand up. We also had to stand up for an exercise in which we could experience the tree of life in ourselves by waving our arms in the air like the branches of a tree. When he asked us who had ever experienced the energy of trees, almost everyone in the tent raised their hands. Trees, he explained, radiate a very light energy. At one point he told us to close our eyes and imagine ourselves walking through a forest towards a large tree in a field of grass. When he asked us afterwards what the guided fantasy had brought about, several people talked about the different animals they had met in the forest. Searching Deer explained the visions to them. For example, the person who had met a squirrel was told that as squirrels climb up and down trees, the spirit of the squirrel connects the different spiritual worlds. When participants got hold of some knowledge, Searching Deer was the authority to explain its mysterious meanings.
Searching Deer’s shamanism is materialised in his museum of shamanism. The museum is located on the ground floor of his large, monumental house in the centre of Groningen. People can only visit the museum on the first Saturday of the month, and only after they have made an appointment with him. The entrance fee is EUR 5. If no one calls, the museum does not open. We scheduled a visit early on a Saturday afternoon. After Searching Deer had let me and some of my friends in he offered us tea, and before he showed us around he explained the basics of shamanism. From the start it was clear that without the coaching of Searching Deer, the ‘ethnographic surrealism’ of his museum was a mishmash without clear references to what shamanism might be.\textsuperscript{71}

We did not master the code to decipher the collection; only Searching Deer is competent enough to explain the extraordinary reality his museum manifested. Only he knows what he has put on view and what it stands for. For example, as a true connoisseur, he recognises shamanic elements in Henri Rousseau’s 1910 \textit{Le Rêve} and, consequently, he put a reproduction of this famous postimpressionistic portrayal of a naked woman in the jungle on a wall of his museum. It is typical of the way he appropriates cultural forms to produce shamanic knowledge on his conducted tour. During our visit, he was more than our museum guide. He was our mentor, creating shamanic meanings for us.

Collecting is a set of distinctive practices that not only produces knowledge about objects, but configures particular ways of knowing and perceiving.\textsuperscript{72} That is to say, in combination with his guidance, Searching Deer’s collection offers a clear view of his globalism, his perennialism and his construction of shamanism. For instance, one of the altars in his museum has a large Buddha as an altarpiece, while another one has a picture of a Native American Indian with an eagle. A picture of Master M. El Morya is also in use as an altarpiece, as well as a Christian figure of the Virgin Mary. One of the altars is dedicated to his ancestors. On this altar he has arranged a picture of his late wife, a picture of his grandfather and some human bones and a human skull. He told us that the human remains were taken from a local excavation site near a church. In the different filing cabinets, he has arranged the artefacts geographically. Searching Deer attaches shamanic meanings to old and new images of Egyptian, Greek, Roman, African and Hindu gods. He put new multi-coloured kitschy plastic souvenirs alongside old and new wooden and bronze sculptures. Painted images of animals and stuffed animals also acquired shamanic significance in the museum.

There are objects from all over the world but the focal point of the museum is Searching Deer himself. On the walls are copies of newspaper stories about his


shamanic practices and in the middle of the largest room is a painted portrait of Searching Deer in his shamanic outfit. His shamanic drums and other instruments surround the painting. For visitors there can be no misunderstanding: Searching Deer is the authoritative source of shamanic knowledge. For Searching Deer, his museum is a portal of power, in different ways. It is his sacred shrine, filled with spiritual trophies. He told us that he uses many of the objects in the ceremonies for his Circle of Shamanic Learning. They are an important source of power. His museum also demonstrates his authoritative knowledge of shamanism. Like his journeys, the museum legitimises his position as a Dutch shaman.

Significantly, Searching Deer plainly takes an anti-commercial position in the field in opposition to what he calls ‘workshop-shamans’: ‘I do not sell weekend courses in shamanic techniques for 350 Dutch guilders. I hardly go to fairs to gain clients for my company. This is my mission: I want to bring a new, comprehensive shamanic doctrine that fits these times.’ Yet, even though he disavows ‘the economy’ of shamanism, he undeniably proved himself subject to the trends in the field of shamanism when he, during the period of my research, started to provide a shamanic training programme. According to his website, he would attune it to individual students and conclude it with a test. Successful students would receive a certificate from his ‘academy of shamanism’.

As a teacher running an academy, Searching Deer can deal strategically with the ambiguities of authority in the field. That is to say, running an academy allows Searching Deer to bind clients to him for longer periods of time, and to be as formative as legitimately possible in a context in which nonformative authorities are the norm. In the next sections I will introduce a Dutch shamanic institute that has become a successful player in the field as a result of its educational programme. One note must be made, however.

Even though Searching Deer is the undisputed charismatic leader of his Circle of Shamanic learning, it should not be inferred from this that he constructs his shamanism on the basis of his self-authority as a shaman. Rather, his manoeuvrings in the field should be interpreted as the result of strategic improvisation, that is, neither imposed nor chosen but based on a distinct habitus and drawing on the resources available in the field. In other words, Searching Deer takes a position within the objective structure of relational positions that constitute a field. Interpreted in this manner, his practices are contextualised in relation to the dispositions and available resources within the field of shamanism.

73 Searching Deer Jan Prins, De Sjamanistische Leringen van de Meester M., 11.
74 www.searchingdeer.nl
The School for Shamanism

In contrast to Searching Deer and his Circle of Shamanic Learning, the School for Shamanism is structured as a fluctuating collective of shamanic practitioners who all have their own expertise and specialisms. This network structure is a fundamental quality of the School. It was established when Roelien de Lange left the management of the School for Shamanism to her students during the 1990s, and they started to manage the School, taking it in turns to be president. The current chairman of the board of the School for Shamanism is Tineke ten Cate, who is also known as ‘She who looks into the dark’. She received this name when Searching Deer initiated her as a shaman in Glastonbury in 2007. According to the well-designed and bilingual website of the School, she ‘tries to throw a bridge between the western psychology and old wisdom of native people’. In her private shamanistic psychological practice she guides and coaches people with techniques such as soul retrieval, shamanistic counselling, trance journeys and ancestral family constellations. Once a month she also co-supervises a drum circle. On request, she performs ceremonies at important events in daily life.76

The variety of authorities who structure the school can be found on the website, as the teachers are introduced there. In contrast to Searching Deer, who is located in Groningen, the School for Shamanism is not located at one particular spot. The bi-annual open day is not organised in a building of the school, but in rented space, and the locations differ. The website seems to be the central location of the School. It is, therefore, noteworthy that the web pages change annually, with the changing of teachers. One teacher is introduced as a former student who has been especially inspired by the sweat-lodge ceremony and ‘(ancestral) family constellations’, and another teacher/former student conveys that: ‘Nature is my greatest source of inspiration, as well in art as in rituals’. Another teacher found recognition of her shaman path at the Elfenbank in the 1990s and nowadays works as a shamanistic counsellor and supervisor, moving ‘between the powers of the mystician and the magician’. Like other teachers at the School, she also manages her own shamanic practice outside the School.77

It is customary for teachers of the School to have their own shamanic enterprise. Although some teachers have left the School to dedicate more time and energy to their own practices, they still function as guest teachers. Indeed, the agenda, the link page and the list of guest teachers on the School’s website show that the School is the heart of a network of shamanic alliances. For instance, the mother superior of Dutch shamanisms, Roelien de Lange, who nowadays provides workshops from her own institute, is one of the prominent guest teachers, as well as the former chairman. The diversity of shamanic opinions and courses is one of the major

76  www.schoolvoorsjamanisme.nl/engels/teachers.html [29-12-2010].
strengths of the School. In this arrangement teachers and students can create their own specific form of shamanism and can get it recognised through the symbolic capital that they acquire through the School.

Most teachers at the School practise shamanism without claiming the label ‘shaman’ for themselves. Nonetheless, a former chairman of the School confided to me that the School had made advances and had acquired recognition as a real shamanic institute. For instance, he had learned how to talk to shamans on their own level.78 The presidency of the School is not reserved for shamans. Instead, it is an administrative position that functions through a rational logic that permeates the organisation of the School. The administrative logic of the School was established after Roelien de Lange left and her students established the reasonable regulations that guide the presidency of the School. The management of the School is democratic and egalitarian on various levels. That is to say, these qualities are also shown during the shamanic workshops that the School offers. During the workshops that I took part in, participants were told to envision their own spirit world and to explore it on their own. During the collective evaluation conversations of trance journeys, for instance, teachers do not start the kind of shamanic exegesis that Searching Deer offers. Instead, they create a non-directive setting in which participants are supposed to discover the connotations, meanings and/or significance of their experiences for themselves. Teachers impart advice, for instance about how participants might discover the significance of specific animal spirits in fairy tales and biology books, but, ultimately, even the question of whether the spirit world is real or a part of our unconscious mind is for the apprentices to decide.

At the open day in 2006, which was held in a growth centre in Westdorp, a small village in the northern province of Drenthe, the chairwoman of the School clearly demonstrated this liberal openness. After she told us that every human being is born with a personal power animal, she added that not all teachers share her opinion on this matter. The then secretary of the board confirmed this when he told me he that he was an atheist. According to him shamanic techniques are useful tools to examine the unconscious layers of the self as spirits were merely aspects of the unconscious. For him, shamanism was a continuation of the dream work he had practised before he started to practise shamanism. As a biologist, he values shamanism as an intimate and respectful contact with birds, plants and other forms of life. As a musician, he enjoys the drumming. For these reasons, and because he enjoyed helping people, he manages local so-called ‘drum circle’ sessions every two weeks in collaboration with the chairwoman of the School.79

Notwithstanding their differences of opinion about shamanism, the drum circle that I attended in the city of Groningen in November 2006 went very smoothly. Both teachers drummed to facilitate the trance journey of the six people who par-

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78  Personal communication, Open day of the School voor Sjamanisme, 9 April 2006.
79  Interview, 24 November 2006.
Tineke ten Cate added the distinctive shamanic elements that only she embodied by launching the ceremony with Native American Indian-like shamanic songs and matching movements. After she greeted and invited the spirits of the underworld, the upper world and the four quarters of the world, she asked the participants to put a personal item on the altar that she had set up for the evening. When she had added her own contribution, a gnome, she told us that at that time she was fascinated by gnomes and elves.  

Another drum circle I attended, at the 2006 open day of the School in Westdorp, was a completely different exercise. Instead of experiencing drumming on mats on the floor, we were encouraged to take one of the many percussion instruments and drum and rattle collectively, weaving rhythmic patterns. We were told to make contact with the earth through our feet and our tail bones first. After we touched the cosmos and spoke out our names and our intentions we started drumming. Some participants clearly lacked any sense of rhythm and were unable to keep time. Although this made the workshop amusing, it did not disturb its earnest character. The instructor never commented on the drumming capabilities of the participants. Instead, she interpreted the off-stroke beats as the clip-clop of turbulent animal spirits we had summoned. With this, she demonstrated her specific ability to experience the attendance of spirits and, moreover, that we had indeed summoned the spirits with our combined drumming. By misrecognising our incoherent human effort as such, she made clear that it was impossible for us to fail. Furthermore, she demonstrated that shamanic knowledge and authority were transferable through training, preferably via the educational programme of the School.

A year before, the same instructor had demonstrated the same non-directive qualities of the School during a medicine wheel ceremony that she managed at the 2005 open day in Valthe, where I would later also attend the Shamanistic Teachings. We gathered on a field of grass amidst farmlands and woodlands and were supposed to structure a circle from stones that lay waiting for us in a pile. Collectively we construed an outer expression of our inner worlds as every creative choice we made was supposed to be a spiritual one. Choosing stones meant feeling which stone to pick. We also had to sense intuitively where to position ourselves in the enchanted circle of stones, where to move, where to put other stones and what intentions to articulate. Through the medicine wheel we were supposed to tap into our sensory experiences to gain insight into our life situation. Every option in this enchanted circle was full of personal significance and loaded with meanings. To appreciate these, we had to depend on our own intuition; a potentially powerful sense that could be trained, of course, through the School’s educational programme.

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80 See also C. Boomsma, ‘Op zoek naar je krachtdier’, UK 16 (11 January 2007) 7.
The website of the School describes its courses as ‘an additional vocational training for anybody wanting to develop on a personal level at the School.’ The programme, which is organised in accordance with the cyclical pattern of the medicine wheel, ‘gives an opportunity to integrate what you have experienced during the training in your daily life, your recent or future work.’ In other words, the School proposes a pragmatic and practical approach to shamanism. It has gained the School enough capital to develop into one of the major Dutch shamanic institutes. It has become the starting place of a range of other Dutch shamanic practices and, through its distinct configuration, the School has become an important source of capital for its students.

The students of the School may use shamanic techniques for introspection, and they habitually argue that they feel more powerful as a result of these teachings, but they also emphasise that they value the connectedness amongst students and teachers, and that they have found new friends, a new family even, as they explained to a scholar who wrote a sympathetic 2002 article about shamanism in the Netherlands. The author, however, stressed the self-authority of shamanists and their rejection of dogmas. According to her, they try to find an existence based on their own experiences and search for their own power. At the same time, shamanists connect their own power with other people in the cosmos.81

Without a doubt, the network quality of the School is crucial. Students acquire shamanic knowledge and authority, but the School also allows them to become part of an extensive social network in which symbolic capital is exchanged. Shamanists may experience contemporary shamanism as based on self-authority and a rejection of dogmas. In my interpretation, however, the individualism, the rational logic and structuring of the School as well as the pragmatic and practical focus on integrating shamanism in daily life and work, has close affinities to the structures and logic of neoliberalism.

The Asha Institute

According to the website of the Asha Institute, which is located in Amsterdam, shamanism is the world’s oldest form of science and, at the same time, ‘the oldest and most original path of spiritual growth of humanity. It is the source of most world religions.’ During fieldwork at the Eigentijdsfestival, I repeatedly heard the leader of the Institute, Stefan Wils, emphasise that his Shu’em shamanism does not involve all the trimmings that characterise the many woolly New Age practices that presented themselves elsewhere on the camping ground. In contrast, Wils ex-

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81 S. van der Post, ‘Sjamanisme als levenshouding,’ in S. Poldervaart (ed.), Leven volgens je idealen. De andere politieken van huidige sociale bewegingen in Nederland (Amsterdam, 2002) 402–35 at 429–30. It must be noted that the respondents told the author that while they had made new friends they had also lost friends because of their involvement in shamanism.
plained the workings of his Shu’em shamanism in a psychological jargon that gives the impression of being scientific. His practices are effective and based on an ancient tradition. Significantly, the Asha Institute offers its shamanic workshops at the Eigentijdsfestival in a tent that is constructed at the edge of the festival ground. This contrast with the position of the School for Shamanism is exemplary for its position in the field of shamanism.

The websites of the Asha Institute offer an abundance of the specific expert lingo of Shu’em shamanism. One of the websites explains that ‘Shu’em shamans’ perceive ‘human life’ as

ongoing parallel perception of different fields of perception. (...) Within a continuum of fields they distinguish four general fields: the material field of perception; which is perceivable by body and its sense perception. The mental field of perception; which is perceivable by mind and its perception through thinking. The causal field of perception; which is perceivable by soul and its perception of feeling. The vital field of perception, that is perceivable by spirit and its motivation. Body, mind, soul and spirit could be regarded as beams of a torchlight in their respective field of perception; with it you light up segments of these infinite fields. This also implies that within each field of perception we are only conscious of small parts of it.

During the workshops that I attended at the Eigentijdsfestival, Wils was the person in charge. While he managed all workshops, his students assisted him. They sat down in a ring and invited the participants inside the circle; women on one side, men on the other. From the start it was clear that Wils was the major authority in the tent, with a wealth of experiential and intellectual knowledge of shamanism. In his introductory speech, for instance, he lectured on the workings of his shamanism as an educator addressing his pupils, explaining that he and his assistants would chant, meditate and play the drums to facilitate an energetic setting in which we, the participants, could leave our ‘standard rational mindset’ behind to be able to explore our inner, ‘deeper dimensions of perception’ in a ‘mood of compassion and ease’. In a distinctly nonchalant tone, he made his expertise very much felt, demonstrating his access to shamanic power and knowledge that are hidden to the layman. Wils explained that he and his assistants function like a strong electromagnet, strong enough to pull us along into other dimensions. We were merely expected to be inactive, relax and lie down on mats on the floor to submit ourselves to the streams of energy that floated through the tent.

Wils demonstrated that he is more than just an intellectual leader, however. He made it evident that the required energetic setting can only be created by his em-

82 See www.shuemsterdam.nl and www.shuem.eu.
83 Idem.
bodied knowledge of shamanic forces. He performed his corporeal knowledge by making strong breathing noises. Everyone in the circle could hear him inhale and release gulps of air. In his opening speech he explained the sounds: they result from his regulating the streams of energy that float around during the workshop. Implicitly, he demonstrated, yet again, that he surpasses all others because only his body knows how to function like a valve. His body is a crucial shamanic control device. One of his students once told me, during a brief meeting at the Eigentijdsfestival, that, according to him, Stefan Wils is a true shaman and that he, therefore, is very unlike the other shamanic practitioners in the field. Pointing at the line-up of tents of the School for Shamanism, he addressed their practices as a kind of shamanic kindergarten. On another occasion, a student of Shu’em shamanism told me that she thought that the practices of the School of Shamanism involved too many bells and whistles.84

Wils claims to have stripped the exoticism from shamanism: ‘no tipi, no bear hides, etc.’ During a workshop at the Eigentijdsfestival he demonstrated his no-nonsense disposition when he told us that he regarded shamanic journeying as an amusing practice. He pointed to the ‘more than twenty other tents at the festival’ where we could take such trips and argued that Shu’em shamanism was different. Wils also differs from other shamanic practices in that he explicitly incited participants not to focus on their experiences during the workshop. We should not assess them afterwards, as it would only shift our awareness down to a lower level. By talking about it we would take the chattering in our mind seriously, while his shamanism aimed at withdrawing attention from it. People were slaves of their thoughts and opinions and could be released by mastering their attention, he argued. Attention, however, could be turned away from the self towards the larger oneness that, in some religious cases, was known as God. In fact, his teachings often reminded me of the Zen-like teachings of don Juan and, in view of this, it did not surprise me that an interview with him on the website was titled ‘the way of the inner warrior’.85

The strikingly nonchalant pitch with which Wils explains his shamanism and separates it from other shamanic practices is crucial for his presentation. Through his tone, he demonstrates his mastery of the game that, he assures his audience, is focused on a dispassionate and unconcerned cerebral stance. On different occasions, Wils used the metaphor of a spinning wheel to teach us the Zen-like lesson that we could find inner peace and silence in the spindle of the wheel. Most people identify with and cling on to the continuously turning wheel and its many spokes, and therapies merely shift our awareness from one spoke to the other. Shu’em shamanism worked differently as it could enable us to experience and become

84 Personal communication at the Eigentijdsfestival 2005; personal communication subsequent to a workshop on shamanistic meditation in Groningen, November 2004.
85 See www.shuemsterdam.nl/interview.htm.
one with our wordless core. It could effectively produce a state of attentiveness in which we would not be diverted by the comings and goings of irrelevant thoughts and opinions.

One of the distinctive qualities of Shu’em shamanism is that it is presented as a form of Sufism, which backs up Shu’em’s claim to authenticity with a genealogical argument: Shu’em shamanism has been passed on from master to master. When Stefan Wils met the master who would initiate him he was practising hypnotherapy, had participated in the Gurdjieff movement and been involved in different other esoteric practices.86 His turn to Shu’em shamanism occurred after he met the Dutchman Frederic Wagemakers, who is nowadays known as abHabib Abbah and was formerly also known as Abbah Frederic. According to his website, he worked for the United Nations as a non-western sociologist in the Middle East, where he came to know several local healers. Back in the Netherlands he became involved in the Nimatallahí Sufi Order of the Persian psychiatrist and Sufi master Javad Nurbakhsh (1926–2008). His career and his ‘spiritual development’ conflicted, however, and he suffered a crisis that resulted in a vision. It conveyed that he had to sacrifice his life for the spiritual wellbeing of others. As a wounded healer, he concluded that he had to work out his own path instead of the path of his master.87

After his break with his Sufi master, Wagemakers created his own ‘path of beauty’ that he named Shu’em shamanism. He established the Shu’em Foundation in the early 1990s, which became the heart of a remarkable combination of institutes that he and his followers established in the Netherlands. The basic logic behind all the Shu’em shamanic practices is a system of thought he called Siweb, a ‘way of perceiving life as a continuous subjective experience’. According to an article written by his assistant, abEmir Sergo, Siweb is a ‘model that anatomises subjective perception’ into a ‘body dimension, a ‘mind dimension’ and a ‘soul dimension’. It allows people to find ‘inner harmony’ and to find ‘solutions for personal and relational problems’. This system forms the basic logic of all Shu’em shamanic practices.88

Even as a ‘shaman’, Wagemakers held on to the master-disciple structure that he had picked up in the Sufi order. He became the midpoint of a cloister-like organisation located in Belgium and later also in Spain. In the Netherlands, he estab-

86 Minkjan, Geleid door de spirits, 45–6.
88 See: www.managernet.nl/Upload/Artikelen/SIWEB.PDF.
lished the Raven Institute, which is a Centre for Shamanic Studies from which one of his disciples managed shamanic healing from 1992 onwards. Other disciples set up a ‘school for holistic development’ specialised in ‘holistic work with children and adolescents’ and the Siweb Experience Matrix (SEM) for management and organisation. Other offshoots from the Shu’em shamanic tree include the Shu’em Press, the Foundation Way of Beauty, Natural Coaching, Ya Hayy, the Circle of Oneness and, of course, the Asha Institute.89

Notwithstanding his contemptuous sneering at what he describes as New Age practices, Stefan Wils presents his practices every year at the Eigentijdsfestival. I also met him at the annual Onkruid fair in 2007 where Wils presented his shamanism alongside a range of other shamanisms, as the fair was devoted to shamanism. He told me that he attended this fair and the Eigentijdsfestival every year because he had to stay in the picture.90 At the Onkruid fair Wils did not manage a workshop. He only lectured on the workings of Shu’em shamanism, its powerful techniques to change and move energy, attention and consciousness. He also talked about the various courses, healings and workshops his institute offers. They all depart from the same principles, he argued, and they all provide means to train and practice concentration. The workshops in ‘Shamanic Horsemanship’, for instance, are enlightening as horses provide feedback directly and confront you with the way you focus your attention. Again, he stressed that it was a powerful technique to ‘stop the world’, to bring the miserable stream of thoughts to an end and to focus on the here and now.

An interesting result of the discordant positioning of Shu’em shamanism in the field is that some people in the field distrust Shu’em shamanism. At an online forum on shamanism that is managed by Shamanic Institute Ceremony I found a discussion on Shu’em shamanism that had taken place in 2007. The critics recognised the power of Shu’em shamanism, as one commenter observed that during a Shu’em session they had ‘tried to mess with her mind’, and that she had been right to ‘raise all her defences’ to protect herself against it. Adversaries dismissed Shu’em as ‘a sect’ that used shamanism to attract new members. Shu’em was too much focused on masters and gurus and thus it could not be considered true shamanism.91

These struggles illustrate a crucial point that James Beckford made when he referred to the politics of defining religion. Paraphrasing him, I would argue that disputes about the definition of shamanism within the field of shamanism relate to struggles for power. In this case, positioning one form of shamanism in opposition

90 One of the most recent efforts to stay in the picture and promote the activities of Shu’em shamanism occurred in December 2010, when a Facebook page was dedicated to Shuem Shamanic Healing, see www.facebook.com/shuemhealing.
to other forms of shamanisms is part of the struggle about the power of shamanism. Ultimately, by legitimising and authorising their own forms of shamanism, shamanic authorities make their own shamanism more powerful.92

The Institute of Siberian Shamanism

The leader of the Institute of Siberian Shamanism is Petra Giesbergen, who is also known as Altaiskaya Byelka. She received this name from the Siberian shamanic teacher who initiated her as a shaman in Siberia. According to the life story that she publishes on her website, she immediately recognised him when she met him for the first time. He was the man who had appeared in her dreams from the age of seven onwards, offering valuable spiritual lessons. In real life, he also recognised her and he took her to Siberia where he introduced her to his teacher. This shaman used harsh ordeals to initiate her into shamanic knowledge. She persisted, her old self died and she was reborn as a shaman. Afterwards, she set up her own Institute in Etten-Leur, a small town in Noord-Brabant, from where she began to offer her Siberian shamanic services in the Netherlands. She invited shamans from Siberia to perform their ceremonies and above all, she established a reputation as a shamanic leader herself, offering many courses, workshops and educational programmes.93

Her life story, or personal narrative, can be interpreted as an act of self-representation, as it is assembled in accordance with the demands of the field in which she takes action. Her narrative is an action that takes place in a social arena that involves social roles, relationships and power. Indeed, a ‘life history’ is, in the words of Bourdieu, ‘at least partially motivated by a concern to give meaning, to rationalize, to show the inherent logic, both for the past and for the future, to make consistent and constant, through the creation of intelligible relationships, like that of the cause (immediate and final) and effect between successive states, which are thus turned into steps of a necessary development’. By trying to understand a life as a unique and self-sufficient series of events associated with the ‘subject’, however, the sociologist can be tricked by the ‘biographical illusion’, Bourdieu argues, as the biographical events should be interpreted as just so many ‘investments’ and ‘moves’ in a space of possibilities. In this process the successive states of the field through which a trajectory has progressed are of importance, as well as the movements from one position to another.94

93 See http://siberischsjamanisme.nl/interview.htm.
It is, therefore, noteworthy that before Giesbergen became Byelka, she had already built up a career in the field of esotericism. She graduated as a reincarnation and regression therapist in 1990 and received an education in dream work, in Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP) and in aura healing and aura reading. After she found her vocation in shamanism, however, she constructed a form of Siberian shamanism in accordance with her former passions. Shamanic death, for instance, is one of her focal points. As usual, she was cloaked in a Siberian shamanic fabric when she presented a Siberian shamanic workshop at the 2007 Onkruid fair. It concerned reincarnation and regression. That is to say, during the workshop participants could deal with traumatic events by going back and forth in time. These time warps entailed visits to the four worlds of Siberian shamanism and the guardian spirits that rule these worlds. Before we started, she introduced the Siberian shamanic world and worldview with the aid of her shamanic drum on which these worlds and their guardian spirits were painted.

The journey started after we performed an ‘energy dance’ during which we had to stamp on the floor to feel the energy flowing through our bodies. Subsequently, we were instructed to travel to the past, to the world of Erlik, the guardian spirit of the underworld who is associated with former times. Turning anticlockwise would take us there. When we arrived, we had to ask him to take over the load that bothered us so that we could leave it behind. Subsequently, we could travel back by turning clockwise. This move could also bring us into the future, where we could ask Ulgien, the guardian spirit of the upper world, for favours. Byelka emphasised that we had to be careful about the way we expressed our wishes; if we were not specific enough, the consequences could be surprising. She stressed that we had to ask Ulgien with the intensity of children begging for biscuits. To authenticate her claims, she told us some mysterious supposedly factual stories about how Ulgien had fulfilled the wishes of her students. Byelka’s knowledge about the four different worlds of the Siberian spirits is crucial. She is in possession of the atlas and she knows the ritual movements that can guide participants to the specific spirit worlds. She knows how to get there and she left us in no doubt that participants depend on her knowledge as ignorance makes people vulnerable to the tricky world of the spirits.

Byelka’s personal stories are a significant ingredient of her self-presentation. They help her to create an intimate sphere that unites the people gathered in her workshops. At the same time, the stories help her to construct the reality of her Siberian shamanism and her distinct position as an expert. For instance, in an

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95 In contrast to what Michael F. Brown, ‘Dark Side of the Shaman’, *Natural History* 11 (November 1989) 8-10 found, I have noticed that Siberian shamans do not always disregard the dark, violent side of shamanism. Byelka, for instance, emphasised the harsh conditions during which she had been initiated and the ruthless methods of her teacher. Moreover, Minkjan met a shamanic teacher who argued that shamanism involves intense suffering and being tortured, *Geleid door Spirits*, 19.
interview that is published on her website she relates a story about a man whose intestines hurt continuously until he discovered that he had been killed on a battlefield in a former life. Doctors had never been able to help him but by dealing with the forgotten emotions of losing his life he could release himself from this painful heritage. Byelka habitually confirms the power of her Siberian shamanism by telling miraculous success stories.  

A striking case in point was an anecdote she told during a shamanic death workshop at the 2005 Eigentijdsfestival. In the course of this spine-tingling session five animals spirits ‘ate’ five segments of our bodies in five stages. We lay on mats on the floor for more than two hours while Byelka sang, drummed and invoked the spirits. In different sections of the process, her assistant touched us gently, thereby functioning as an intermediary between us and the spirits. His strokes represented the bites of the animal spirits that were eating us. After we had turned into empty skeletons the same spirits came round to fill us up with pristine body parts. As the spirits restored our stripped parts, we were reborn. Afterwards, one of the participants asked whether the spirits were imaginary or real, as we all knew that we had felt the hands of her assistant. Byelka, however, told us that her assistant was a very accomplished mediator and that she had actually seen the spirits moving through the tent. In fact, she told us, she was once surprised to see dogs enter the tent, eating her clients. When she told her reborn clients about the dogs and their appearance, some people had recognised their own deceased dogs.

The Institute of Siberian Shamanism offers the kind of shamanism that is considered the most archaic form of shamanism, namely Siberian shamanism. It is, therefore, remarkable that Giesbergen does not explicitly distinguish her Siberian shamanism from other shamanisms. On her website she explains that her shamanism is of Siberian origin, and she refers to the apparent Siberian underworld and its spirits, but her description of shamanism does not significantly differ from the descriptions that can be found on the websites of other shamanisms. That is to say, she defines shamanism as ‘ancient knowledge’ and shamans as ‘powerful healers.’  

Yet during her practices Giesbergen unequivocally embodies her Siberian form of shamanism by dressing in long robes with exotic Siberian details. Her Siberian name demonstrates that even Siberian shamans have acknowledged her as a shaman. During her workshops she plays Siberian music and she chants Siberian songs. On one occasion, some of her regular assistants backed her with their version of Siberian throat singing. She also regularly invites her Siberian shamans to

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97 www.siberischsijamanisme.nl
offer their services to Dutch audiences. One of the guest teachers she invited, the ‘Hereditary Tuvan Shaman’ Nikolay Oorzhak, is a ‘Master of Khooomei Throat Singing’. He concentrates on throat singing, shamanism and self-healing as they are, he asserts on his website, ‘effective in harmonization of mind and body (Spirit and Soul). It assists one’s personal grows, self-healing and self-knowledge, improves the energy movement in the body and approach the spiritual enlightenment’.98 Unmistakably, some of the travelling Siberian shamans have adopted a transpersonal therapeutic lingo to explain the workings of their practices to European audiences.

Siberian shamanism is a powerful sign of authenticity in the shamanic struggle for recognition. Yet it takes a distinct accumulation of capital to make Siberian shamanism credible and convincing. Petra Giesbergen initially acquired shamanic education from Daan van Kampenhout, whom she assisted for six years. Later, she was also involved with the Altai Ashram Foundation, a Dutch foundation that was established by a Russian woman who had taken up residence in the Netherlands. For a while this Foundation successfully positioned itself in the field of esotericism, as can be deduced from the fact that one of Siberian shamans allied to it was granted the privilege to manage the closing ritual of the 1999 Eigentijdsfestival. Giesbergen went on a ‘transformation journey’ to Siberia that the Altai Ashram Foundation organised with its Russian associates, the Russian Esoteric Academy. The Russian woman who had established the Foundation functioned as an interpreter. Shortly afterwards she left the institution as she had become suspicious of the ulterior motives of her Russian colleagues. She is also judgmental about the naive ways Dutch individuals manage shamanic powers. According to her, they do not recognize the dangerous powers involved.99

Years later, in 2006, Petra Giesbergen also dissociated herself from the Russian Esoteric Academy. She even sent an e-mail to the recipients of her digital newsletter to underline that she had stopped cooperating with this group of shamans. According to the newsletter, the Russian Esoteric Academy had sent damaging e-mails about Byelka’s institute. Byelka even enclosed links to websites that sceptically denigrated the ‘ashrams’ of the Russian group as a ‘totalitarian sect’ that was based on ‘a strange mixture of concepts of magic, karma, tantra, yoga, shamanism, Christianity, Buddhism as well as knowledge extracted from many esoteric books’.100 The event only slightly influenced Byelka’s self-presentation. In earlier

99 Although he did not use the label anymore, shamanism still inspired her work at a wellness clinic, personal communication on 04-11-2008.
100 See www.freedomofmind.com/resourcecenter/groups/r/rea/. It is noteworthy that Hanneke Minkjan remarked that in contrast to other shamans she had encountered during her study of shamanism in the Netherlands, the Siberian shamans of the Esoteric Academy wanted to be paid for being interviewed by her, Geleid door de Spirits, 15. It was difficult to find reliable information about the Esoteric Academy on the internet. It seems that the
autobiographical accounts she explicitly mentioned her former teacher, the Siberian ‘scientist-turned shaman’ Biven Mamonta. At that time, she hailed him as ‘a very powerful shaman’ and she invited him to her institute in the Netherlands. Yet as this former parapsychologist was a disciple of the ‘totalitarian’ leader of the Academy, she excluded his name in later accounts. Displaying her feel for the game, she still sang the praises of her severe but now anonymous Siberian teachers.101

Byelka’s Institute is anything but totalitarian. Her Siberian shamanic workshops and courses are clearly non-formative and she manages them from an esoteric centre in which other instructors offer workshops and courses in, for instance, astrology, channelling and aura healing. Byelka founded this all-encompassing centre herself. According to the website, she asked ‘Higher Powers,’ ‘guides’ and ‘spirit helpers’ to help her find a special place. She found a house located ‘on a power spot’ in the vicinity of ‘wonderful energetic locations.’ From her institute, Byelka offers workshops such as Siberian healing, Shamanic Death, Guidance on your Path of Life, Soul Retrieval and Power Extraction. It is noteworthy that in many of her workshops people throw their inhibitions to the gentle winds and cry, move, dance and shout like in the alternative psychotherapies that became popular during the 1970s.102

Incontestably, parallel with her former Russian partners, Byelka has creatively mixed a range of esoteric concepts to create a version of supposedly authentic Siberian shamanism. Paradoxically, the most archaic form of shamanism adequately matches the neoliberal imposition towards self-realisation. Byelka’s holistic focus on self-development, healing and do-it-yourself bodywork also seems to be more akin to Californian Esalen demeanours than to supposedly ancient Siberian ways as described by Adam Brand in 1698.103

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103 See www.esoterischcentrum.com. One of the teachers is Dorina Giesbergen. Although her programme of study included Reiki and shamanism she has devoted her esoteric career to the channelling of messages from the ‘Archangel Michael’ and Jesus, see www.freewebs.com/lebleuet.
Conclusion

A field of shamanism in the Netherlands came into being during the 1990s in a process of autonomisation that took place within the field of esotericism. Similar to the American field of shamanism, the Dutch field of shamanism is structured by a wide variety of nonformative shamanic authorities who struggle to get their shamanic goods recognised as authentic. Guided by consumerism, individualism, perennialism and primitivism, they put their shamanic expertise on the national or international market as archaic sources of individual power. From the start, the field of shamanism in the Netherlands was part of a transnational field of shamanism.

The Dutch process of neoliberalisation was a key factor in the genealogy of shamanism in the Netherlands. The shamanic opportunities for individual empowerment dovetailed well with the demand for individual self-accountability. Similarly to Beckford’s New Religious and Healing Movements, shamanisms are sources of power and healing. Moreover, the psychologism and the depoliticised power that structure the economy of shamanic goods are part and parcel of what Beckford calls macro-sociological processes, that is, the neoliberal logic and structures that permeate Dutch society. As we have seen, this may also account for the significant majority of female shamanists.

In contrast to the American field of shamanism, the Dutch field of shamanism was established outside the academic field. The result is that the field of shamanism in the Netherlands does not overlap with the Dutch academic field. Nevertheless, a scholarly logic does structure the Dutch field of shamanism. And no wonder, for the American field of shamanism was highly influential for the genesis of a field of shamanism in the Netherlands (1), the concept ‘shamanism’ was introduced to the Dutch field of esotericism through scholarly publications in esoteric journals (2), and the first experts who brought experiential knowledge of shamanism into the field (Ronald Chavers and Joska Soos) legitimised their practices through scholarly rationalisations of their shamanism (3).

Yet there is an important difference between the field of shamanism in America and the field of shamanism in the Netherlands. My genealogies demonstrate that the specific characteristics of a field of shamanism are outcomes of the strategic manoeuvring of shamanic experts within a distinct context. The strategic steps of the early shamanic experts in America differed considerably from their Dutch counterparts, as we have seen. In the Netherlands, as in America, later shamanic experts took action in accordance with the established shamanic logic and structures, strategically manoeuvring within the space of shamanic possibilities. In other words, contemporary shamanisms are social constructions that acquire their form and meaning within distinct social contexts. That is to say, the strategic actions of Dutch shamanic experts are guided by dispositions that reflect the specific genesis and logic of the Dutch field of shamanism.
The adaptable quality of shamanism seems to be one of its strengths, as the malleability of shamanism offers an abundance of opportunities to players in the field to construct new forms of shamanism. Shamanism is, indeed, a relatively ‘free-floating phenomenon’, to use Beckford’s concept again. Guided by distinct renderings of primitivism, perennialism and psychologism, nonformative authorities continuously structure the field of shamanism by positioning their distinct forms of shamanism within it. The internet is an important part of this field, as most shamanisms offer websites with loads of information about their ideas and practices. In the terms of Bourdieu, the field of shamanism a field of possibilities, which means that the authorities draw upon the resources available in the field to improvise within its given logic and structures, thereby further structuring the field of shamanism.¹⁰⁴

Instead of acknowledging their own shamanisms as products of this field of possibilities that, as I argue, is part and parcel of contemporary circumstances, Dutch shamanic experts emphasise the timeless and essential qualities of their shamanisms. This combination of charisma ideology and amnesia of genesis, as Bourdieu called it, is an inextricable part of the logic of contemporary shamanism. To be exact, while I interpret the ‘universe of belief’ of Dutch shamanisms as a social construction, the actors in the field misrepresent their shamanisms as unconstructed, that is, pure, ancient, natural and authentic as well as being part of a perennial wisdom that has always existed. Dutch shamanic authorities have closed their eyes to the fact that they have created their shamanisms from the shifting sands of what was constructed before them, to adapt Gloria Flaherty’s words.¹⁰⁵

Our closer look at four Dutch shamanisms has illustrated the politics of defining shamanism in the Netherlands. There is an enormous variety of ways in which shamanic authorities continuously create and legitimise their forms of shamanism. The diversity of shamanisms, however, should not be interpreted as the result of the individual choices of autonomous shamanic experts on the basis of their own authority. Instead, in line with Bourdieu, the players in the field of shamanism are part of a social game with a distinct logic. Shamanic experts who have a feel for the game improvise but still conform to the regularities that structure the field. Ultimately, Dutch shamanic experts strategically legitimise and authorise their ideas and practices in accordance with the logic of the field in which they continuously reconstruct their shamanism.

¹⁰⁴ Wood and Bunn ‘Strategy in a Religious Network’, 286-303.