

FROM SHAMAN TO SCIENTIST: ESSAYS ON HUMANITY'S SEARCH FOR SPIRITS
by James Houran (Ed.). Lanham, MD: Scarecrow Press, 2004. Pp.
268. \$40.00 (paperback). ISBN 0-8108-5054-0.

From Shaman to Scientist is a disparate collection of essays that has little to bind it together. Neither shamans nor scientists are featured by many of the contributors, which is not to say that their essays fail to be interesting and informative. Chapters range from cutting-edge theoretical treatises to a review of arcane attitudes regarding ghosts (such as the ancient Greek penchant for mutilating the corpses of murder victims to prevent their revenge—shades of modern-day serial killers!) to exploiting ghosts for fun and profit on the Internet. Topics include everything from vivid descriptions of American Indian tent-shaking ceremonies to profiles of controversial personalities such as Harry Price and Eleonore Zugun.

The only essay that really steps up to the plate in terms of the book's presumptive concept is Michael Winkelman's "Spirits as Human Nature and the Fundamental Structures of Consciousness." The author does not attempt to address the ontological status of spirits; rather, he seeks to explain why spirits take the form that they do. Marshaling evidence from consciousness theory, neurophenomenological perspectives, and cross-cultural studies, he argues that "spirits are a part of the structure of human consciousness and human nature" (pp. 90-91).

According to Winkelman, "Experience of the divine other is the essence of animism, which lies at the basis of shamanism" (p. 87). Animism, the earliest and most pervasive form of conceptualizing a spirit world, springs from an inborn human tendency to perceive the world in terms of the self, a state of affairs that is inevitable given the neurological structures and cognitive models that filter our perceptions.

Drawing from basic tenets of consciousness theory, Winkelman postulates that we know ourselves "through what we perceive social others to hold as a view of our persons" (p. 61), and we know others by using "our own self as a model for understanding what the other would perceive and do" (p. 61). Casting the world in our own image, we give its unknown aspects shape and form through a projection of self-awareness, which incorporates knowledge of our bodies as well as our actions and intentions. It is this cognitive "embodiment" or internalized form of the body in relation to the environment that furnishes the template for experiencing spirit entities. Cognizing others in terms of the self "provides a basis for perceptions of and relations with the spirit world" (p. 67).

Winkelman explains essential aspects of shamanism—the soul flight, the guardian quest, spirit aggression, healing, dream incubation, and animism—in terms of primary structures or features of consciousness to illustrate that spiritual beliefs are essentially endogenous rather than culturally derived. Discussing the neurophenomenology of entheogens (often referred to as "plants of the gods" by indigenous peoples), he argues that these apparently exogenous producers of spiritual perceptions operate through direct action on the serotonergic neurotransmitter system and mesolimbic temporal lobe structures, and therefore their psychointegrative effects can be viewed as endogenous. Altered states of consciousness such as transpersonal or mystical experiences similarly involve a disinhibition of the serotonergic systems, which leads to cortical synchronization and an integrative mode of consciousness. This is characterized by "experiences that are fundamentally spiritual in their interpretation: the oceanic feeling of oneness with a sentient universe, the sense of self as a spiritual entity, and the presence of spiritual forces that surround our lives" (pp. 85-86). To demonstrate the consistency of spiritual experiences across time, the author explores spirit relations in the Catholic charismatic healing movement, showing that they too involve a divine other modeled on the self, in both its positive and negative aspects.

Winkelman's thesis is generally persuasive, given the brain and mind structures he describes (which include cognitive image schemas, presentational symbolism, and contiguity tropes). Those who are familiar with the author's work will recognize its Jungian undertones, which are acknowledged prior to the list of references. From Winkelman's perspective, the universality of spirits is viewed as a natural consequence of the human condition. He cautions against interpreting his viewpoint as reductive materialism—reducing spirits to mere products of the mind.

On the contrary, his premise addresses the commonalities in human conceptualizations and interpretations of spirits, without presuming that "whatever is out there" (p. 91) has no ontological reality.

James McClenon's ritual healing theory provides the fulcrum for his chapter, "How Shamanism Began: Human Evolution, Dissociation, and Anomalous Experience." The theory proposes that an inborn mammalian capacity for trance and dissociation conferred an evolutionary advantage. The repetitive rituals of early primates, and later shamans, provided the benefits of relaxation and stress reduction, which enhanced immune system functioning. As language evolved, shamans incorporated therapeutic suggestions into the rituals, and a survival advantage accrued to those who were more hypnotizable and therefore more likely to benefit from healing suggestions. The physiological, genetic basis for traits of dissociation is linked in turn to paranormal experiences. In McClenon's view, "Dissociation should be viewed as a universal skill that, in its extreme form, allows trance and unusual perceptions. The increasing frequency of hypnosis/dissociation genes affected the nature and frequency of unusual experiences" (p. 23). Such perceptions (and the author gives particular emphasis to macro-PK experiences) served to promote and sustain the belief in spirits and unseen worlds, characteristics found both in shamanism and societies throughout human history.

Reviewing macro-PK motifs in anecdotal reports gathered by his North Carolina college students, and found in the work of Batchelder, Brookes-Smith, the "Philip the Ghost" group, and the Society for Research on Rapport and Telekinesis (SORRAT), McClenon concludes that under appropriate circumstances sitter groups can produce genuine PK effects and that early shamanic cults were similarly able to do so. Witness inhibition and ownership resistance must be overcome, and suspension of disbelief is necessary, but shamans had techniques (including sleight of hand and a conspicuous dramatic flair) for manipulating these variables. The author maintains that the resulting PK experiences, regardless of whether their impetus was genuine or illusory, augmented the practical benefits of shamanic healing and served to promote ideologies that incorporated an afterlife and a hidden world of spirits.

More than half of the article is devoted to a discussion of American Indian tent-shaking ceremonies, buttressing McClenon's contention that many of the PK effects reported by sitter groups and spiritualists are routine elements of shamanic rituals. Although he frequently entertains hypotheses of fraud to explain the ostensibly paranormal effects (e.g., ventriloquism, the Houdini effect, hidden confederates), McClenon's attitude toward sitter-group phenomena—indeed macro-PK in general—appears to be deeply ambivalent and vacillates between extremes of credulity and skepticism.

While the sketchy outlines and broad brush strokes of the ritual healing theory are certainly likable enough, the author's lack of specificity and frequent leaps of faith do little to bolster its scientific acumen. If his

theory is correct (and he gamely presents some suggestions for how it might be tested), one wonders why high-hypnotizables are as rare as they are in the general population and why so many dissociative personality types are agnostic or atheistic in their beliefs.

The chapter by Anekatrin Puhle and Adrian Parker, "Science in Search of Spirit," appears to be primarily a defense of psychical research. Discussing philosophical problems implicit in defining objectivity, as well as the difficulties of verifying elusive phenomena, the authors herald the emergence of a new paradigm, one that represents "an ongoing shift toward seeing extrasensory perception . . . as a form of interrelatedness or interconnectiveness" (pp. 12-13). Mario Varvogalis's 2002 presidential address to the Parapsychological Association is cited as a harbinger of the new perspective. In his address, Varvogalis suggested that psi research requires both dispassionate objectivity and participatory engagement of the phenomena (wearing "the hat" of the shaman as well as the scientist). Puhle and Parker see in the new paradigm a chance to discover whether holism is a fundamental aspect of nature, and they advocate designing experiments that incorporate ritual and spiritual elements, promising that such research "will reveal surprises that surpass our intellectual expectations" (p. 16).

History buffs will find a cornucopia of biographical sketches in Peter Mulacz's "Historical Profiles in Poltergeist Research." Beginning in France with the astronomer Camille Flammarion and the lesser-known Emile Tizané (a police commandant who used dispassionate police reports to construct a typology of poltergeist features), the author hops across Europe recounting the lives and theories of Ernesto Bozzano, Puls, Reinhard Piper, Bruno Grabinski, Baron Schrenck-Notzing, Fanny Moser, Countess Wassilko, Harry Price, Hans Bender, Walter Von Lucadou, and William Roll. The sketches, which the author likens to "intellectual biographies" (p. 127), are sometimes cursory but often relatively substantial. Peculiar phenomena from the era of "spook mediumship" that are now, as the author puts it, quite "out of fashion" (p. 177) are portrayed. The characteristics of the poltergeist are reviewed, and the author discusses pertinent theoretical themes—e.g., elusivity, novelty, and Von Lucadou's model of pragmatic information—making the chapter quite a sophisticated primer on the subject of the poltergeist. Although his survey is limited to only a selection of twentieth-century researchers, Mulacz can be commended for reviving neglected but noteworthy figures and introducing us to some previously unknown ones.

Sylvia Grider examines tales of the supernatural in "American Children's Ghost Stories: Manipulation and Mastery of a Belief System." The author maintains that such stories act as "the primary vehicle through which children learn the rudiments of an ancient supernatural belief system" (p. 192). She discusses how American children's appreciation of ghosts is shaped by Halloween rituals, stock elements in beloved retold tales, immigrant influences, and the media. The author points out that children's

unsupervised ghost-storytelling sessions offer practical advantages because they teach youngsters how to distinguish fantasy from reality, exercise control over their fears, and learn basic literary skills such as plot sequence and development.

Christina Tucay explores necromantic traditions in "Interactions with Apparitions, Ghosts, and Revenants in Ancient and Medieval Sources." Reviewing interesting themes and elements drawn from Greek and Norse legends, she argues—not very convincingly—that Christianity reshaped ancient concepts regarding the dead. Tucay's essay, which could have benefited from a native English-speaking editor-cum-translator, ends quite abruptly, leaving the reader wondering if a page or pages had been inadvertently left out.

A final chapter by John Potts, "Ghost Hunting in the Twenty-First Century," reviews popular ghost-hunting practices as illustrated by information available on Internet Web sites. The author coins the term "techno-mysticism" to describe what he regards as a deplorable tradition that stretches from eighteenth-century mesmerism to modern times. Techno-mystics are obsessed with the trappings of science and technology, which they invest with magical properties, concocting "a fusion of scientific method and spiritual belief" (p. 211). Photographic "orbs" produced with electronic cameras by contemporary ghost chasers are linked to reports of ectoplasm from nineteenth-century spiritualists. The author takes issue with proselytizers of ghostly phenomena, particularly those who construct pseudoscientific taxonomies or promote electronically produced audio or photographic documents as evidence of ghosts.

The book contains a promotional foreword and afterword (by Richard Wiseman and Loyd Auerbach, respectively) that celebrate the diversity of content in the essays. James Houran provides an introduction in which he discloses his somewhat skeptical social science perspective and then recounts his young son's preoccupation with "Black Eye," a scary entity lurking about the family domicile. Perhaps in an attempt to link the book's content to its title, Houran borrows thematically from Mario Varvogalis when he says: "It may be overreaching to suggest that [psychical researchers] acted as surrogate shamans, but many of them attempted to interact directly with the phenomena" (p. xv). If, as seems likely, Varvogalis's presidential address, "Scientists, Shamans, and Sages," inspired the title for Houran's eclectic collection of essays, that is where the resemblance pretty much ends.

Nevertheless—and perhaps just because of its thematic heterogeneity—the book would make a useful addition to anyone's parapsychological library. The publisher, however, receives poor marks because of the substantial number of editorial gaffes. (One might have expected that any publisher with the temerity to charge 40 dollars for a 268-page paperback would have provided a competent proofreader!) Moreover, the initial reviewer's copy that was sent to me was practically

illegible—insufficient ink left gaping holes in many of the letters—making the book quite frustrating to peruse. A telephone call to the publisher swiftly remedied the situation, demonstrating that there are adequately printed copies available. But for those who routinely buy books on the Internet, be forewarned that the book ought to be inspected prior to purchase.

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