

## ONTOLOGY: AN INDIGENOUS MODEL

Now as you open your eyes, you can see all of the things that are around you. What you see is their physical form, but you realize that this form is really just the web of relations that have taken on a familiar shape. Every individual thing that you see around you is really just a huge knot – a point where thousands and millions of relationships come together. These relationships come to you from the past, from the present and from your future. This is what surrounds us, and forms us, our world, our cosmos and our reality. We could not *be* without *being in relationship* with everything that surrounds and is within us. Our reality, our ontology is the relationships.<sup>1</sup>

The underlying ontology of this work is based on an Indigenous model that is grounded in the deep relationality and interdependence of all aspects of the universe. It assumes that the multiple relationships we engage in not only sculpt reality, *they are reality*,<sup>2</sup> and that all physical manifestations of existence are a representation of the many relationships that converge into a moment of dynamic time and space that we perceive now.

An Indigenous perspective is holistic rather than mechanistic, cyclical rather than linear, and is based on the practical efficacy<sup>3</sup> that results from creating relationships with the environment and with those multiple forces or *persons* within it that sustain human societies. This is in contrast to a Western worldview that elevates a theological patriarchal ideal of an

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<sup>1</sup> Shawn Wilson, *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Nova Scotia, Canada: Fernwood Publishing, 2008). 76.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 7.

<sup>3</sup> Thanks to feminist scientist Demetria Shew for this term.

ultimate individualistic transcendence, is situated within a linear and mechanistic model, deifies the abstract, and funds authority to positivistic methodologies.

The differences between Western and Indigenous worldviews cannot be overstated. The ethnologist William Sturtevant illuminates this ontological rift when he wrote that any difference between “Christianity, Islam, and Judaism are minor compared to the difference between any one of these religions and the religion of any North American Indian Society.”<sup>4</sup> This difference in worldviews represents deeply different ways of perceiving—like the difference between seeing two-dimensionally and three-dimensionally. Eco-feminist Charlene Spretnak describes Western culture’s understanding of deep relationality<sup>5</sup> to be at a “kindergarten level.”<sup>6</sup>

American Indian writer Vine Deloria, Jr. describes the Western conceptions of a static homogenous understanding of time and a mechanistic operation of nature as a belief so virulent that explanations of natural events have been forced into this ideological pattern even when the facts were obviously otherwise. In *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* he recounts the search of present-day astronomers for cross-cultural evidence of a supernova that was visible in the sky in various parts of the world in 1054 c.e.<sup>7</sup> While this event appears to have been recorded in the rock art made by the Anasazi residents of the Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, little about it was recorded in European history. For centuries in Europe the heavens were understood to be constant and fixed because they were the divine creation of the Abrahamic god. Deloria postulates that because this worldview precluded any chaotic movement in the sky, Europeans

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<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Tooker, *Native North American Spirituality of the Eastern Woodlands: Sacred Myths, Dreams Visions, Speeches, Healing Formulas, Rituals and Ceremonials* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1979), xi.

<sup>5</sup> Although, she does not specifically refer the concept of the “deeply relational nature of reality” as having Indigenous origins.

<sup>6</sup> Charlene Spretnak, *Relational Reality: New Discoveries of Interrelatedness That Are Transforming the Modern World* (Topsham, ME: Green Horizon Books, 2011). 1.

<sup>7</sup> Hartmut Frommert, and Kronberg, Christine, "Supernova 1054 - Creation of the Crab Nebula," [http://messier.seds.org/more/m001\\_sn.html](http://messier.seds.org/more/m001_sn.html).

did not perceive the event—even though it was observable, *because their beliefs overrode their actual experience*.<sup>8</sup>

The idea that Indians appeared to have observed a celestial event was lost on the scholars who studied the rock art. Some wrote numerous books on the “primitives,” explaining in salient examples of Western academic ignorance and arrogance, how the Indians could not have known that a very bright star does not exist next to the moon. Because of the Western worldviews held by these scholars, they were not looking for a record of an event in the sky and because they did not understand the practical efficacy that is integral to an Indian worldview, they did not see what the art might have been depicting. In light of this type of academic “missing the point,” Deloria questions the validity of the interpretation of Indigenous religious symbols and beliefs in Western scholarship.

Despite the racist and colonialist disregard, distortion, and appropriation of Indigenous cultures by Western scholars and the unilinear theories of early anthropology that relegated the status of “primitive” societies to the evolutionarily infantile, it turns out that Indigenous worldviews are incredibly profound and complex, and often mirror theories in quantum physics and the new sciences. In fact, current studies in neuroscience support Deloria’s analysis.

Traditionally in Western science, human perception was assumed to be determined by sensory information. However, new data reveals the opposite: that it is our predisposition to see that organizes diffuse visual stimuli into perceptions. It is our “intentional dynamics,” or macroscopic feedback loops driven by the limbic brain, that determine the data we seek and the

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<sup>8</sup> Vine. Deloria Jr., *God is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, Colorado: Fulcrum Publishing, 1992).  
134.

interpretations we make.<sup>9</sup> It is our emotional expectations and desires that filter what environmental input we focus on, what we process, and what we perceive. This means that what we expect to see we usually find and what falls outside of culturally acceptable parameters, which are largely shaped by acceptable cultural narratives, may go unprocessed by the brain as an apprehensible pattern and therefore not be perceived in our consciousness awareness. The normative Western assumption of a linear and causal equation is in fact a reversal of what the science is saying now.

Science and Indigenous perspectives also appear to meet in Gunn Allen's description of the "universe of power"—the world of medicine people and shamans in which spirits are accessible, which is reminiscent of Bohm's Implicate Order in that it exhibits the properties of non-locality and acausality.<sup>10</sup> The universe of power is a magickal realm in which the plasticity of time is related to the laws of movement and the relative permeability of matter.<sup>11</sup> This is a world in which form bends. This is the world of the shamanic shape-shifter.

Studies in neuroscience indicate that the states of consciousness necessary to access this shamanic realm are biologically hard-wired and are a primordial element in our species' cognitive evolution. These shamanic states of consciousness represent "deep structures of knowledge that operate independently of language."<sup>12</sup> Such states are normative to our species and are fundamental to understanding an Indigenous ontology. Seeing in this Indigenous way is our biological legacy.

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Winkelman, "Shamanism: A Biopsychosocial Paradigm of Consciousness and Healing," (Santa Barbara, Ca: Praeger, 2010). 9.

<sup>10</sup> Paula. Gunn Allen, *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*. (Boston: Beacon Press., 1991). 15.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.17.

<sup>12</sup> Winkelman, "Shamanism: A Biopsychosocial Paradigm of Consciousness and Healing" 3.

Within this universe of power many other *persons* exist, some who are relatable and some who are not. Making relationship with the non-human *persons* who inhabit this realm is the function of ritual, which Gunn Allen describes as “the great body of articulated experiential knowledge...and the point of entry into that universe.”<sup>13</sup> Contextualizing ritual within an Indigenous ontology is important for this work because ritual is a religious technique that women have used historically and cross-culturally to access relations with the *persons* and forces that sustain human life. Rather than a rote supplication to a transcendent deity, ritual in this worldview is a direct and embodied way to make relationship with the realm of non-corporeal *persons* we call the spirit world and an efficient way to access ancestral memory so that the generationally acquired wisdom of those who have gone before is still available to the community.

Non-Western Indigenous and hybrid cultures characteristically constellate their societies around ancestor access. This is because the human development of rituals that function to keep a living relationship with a community’s ancestors has been a successful evolutionary strategy and represents an example of Indigenous efficacy. Why reinvent the wheel? A society that benefits from the evolutionary trial and error of those who have come before as recounted in myth, story, and rite, has a better chance of successful and sustainable culture-making.

In the case of the diverse Southwestern Indian societies who claim to have always been on the North American continent, despite the controversies among Western academics as to their origins,<sup>14</sup> that represents a lot of ancestral information. The stories, myths, and rites that sculpt each society’s respective religious and social traditions contain information dating from the Palaeolithic era. Even as these stories have transformed through their histories, through climate

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<sup>13</sup> Gunn Allen, *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*. 8.

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changes, periods of domestication, and the advent of European colonialism, the memories of those earliest ancestors, and those who followed, and the *persons* they were in relation to, are encoded within the stories as they are retold. This ensures the continuation of a long line of memory and a perpetuation of a sense of cultural identity. A testament to the success of this culture-making strategy is the remarkable fact that the Hopi people, whose ceremonial life is centered upon the lifecycle of corn, have been able to successfully produce it from a desert environment.

In *Pueblo: Gods and Myths*, Hamilton A. Tyler asks, “Why do the Pueblos still dance? For whom do they dance? What do they mean by their dancing?” His examination of previous research revealed an obvious and conventionally satisfying answer: “For rain.” His response sheds light on the biased Western perspective in regard to Indigenous traditions, one that he did not share.<sup>15</sup> He writes that “Rain is not a wrong answer, but it is a limiting one. My first premise was that these people do not worship rain, *they invoke it.*”<sup>16</sup> This perspective is necessary for my methodology because this work includes my retrieval of some of the suppressed history of my European ancestors *through the practice* of their marginalized traditions. It allows me to ask not what historic female shamanic rites might *mean*, but rather *what they invoke* and *who they access* when practiced.

This way of perceiving the world is not the same as within a Western worldview, which does not recognize a spirit world other than one narrowly prescribed by the dominant Abrahamic narrative, which has played a dominant role in constructing Western consciousness.

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<sup>15</sup> Interestingly, Tyler is not a scholar who approaches his research from expertise in a particular field, but a writer who became interested in Pueblo culture after becoming fascinated with the land of the Southwest. This may be the reason for his refreshing, relatively unbiased and non-dogmatic approach.

<sup>16</sup> Hamilton A. Tyler, *Pueblo Gods and Myths* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1964). 10.

Consequently, Western people have experienced a transformation in their perception of, and relationship to, the environment that sustains them.

Lithuanian religion scholar Dr. Eglutė Trinkauskaitė, marks the loss of this worldview in European consciousness in her dissertation *Seeing the Swarming Dead: of Mushrooms, Trees, and Bees*.<sup>17</sup> In Lithuanian culture, the ancestors have served the vital function of linking humans to the spirit world and are understood to be reincarnated as aspects of nature, and specifically of the forest. The Lithuanian traditions of mushroom gathering, woodcarving, and beekeeping are based in Indigenous traditions, and although they have been secularized, they have survived because have been passed down generationally. However, because of globalization, these ancestral traditions are no longer being taught. Their loss represents the loss of a part of the Lithuanian identity as stewards of the land and as kin to those other *persons* inhabiting it. It is a loss of their connection to their Indigenous ancestral wisdom and the narratives that have defined them.

Trinkauskaitė's work is a welcome contribution to Indigenous European studies, but it is a grim reminder of the loss of our European Indigenous traditions that have functioned historically to keep our consciousness entrained with our environment. As these ancestral traditions fade in the face of globalization, the ancestral wisdom they transmit is lost to new generations. She finds this increasingly desacralized relationship with nature has contributed to environmental degradation. Like the premise of this work, she also asserts that a retrieval of European Indigenous ways of knowing represents a critical evolutionary strategy. "A possible

resacralization of nature through Lithuania's Indigenous religious perspective may promise the renewal of values that are necessary for the future."<sup>18</sup>

The loss of Western people's ability to make relationships with the *persons* and forces that sustain human life has not only contributed to our environmental crisis, it is also contributed to our unique Western spiritual dilemma in which we feel collectively disconnected. We do not remember, as a unified community, how to make these relationships because we have been cut off from our ancestral wisdom. Not only do we lack the knowledge to sustainably produce corn from the desert as a culture, we can barely survive in that environment without the mindless crutch of technology that most of us do not fully understand and mostly take for granted. Worse, as this ancestral knowledge of making relationships through rite and tradition has slipped from our Western-indoctrinated consciousness we have *forgotten that we even need to remember* how to do this for our own survival. This is because our Western worldview has traditionally precluded that perception.

In Indigenous cultures myth is a complementary religious element to ritual. Unlike in a Western worldview, in which myths are considered fallacies or fantasies that are opposed to linear fact, myths are accounts of actual interchanges between ancestors and other relevant *persons* accessed through ritual. Gunn Allen makes the distinction that the symbolism in tribal ceremonial literature is not symbolic in a Western literary or psychoanalytical sense, but is a way of denoting a sacred phenomenon or fact. "Corn" is not shorthand for dinner and "lake" does not allude to economic prosperity via fishing industries.<sup>19</sup> In this worldview, the color red as a ceremonial element is not reduced to an explanation of light refraction or the response of the

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<sup>18</sup> Eglute Trinkauske, "Seeing the Swarming Dead: of Mushrooms, Trees, and Bees" (Syracuse University, 2008).

<sup>19</sup> Gunn Allen, *Grandmothers of the Light: A Medicine Woman's Sourcebook*. 23.

oracular cells to light stimulus, but is the quality of a “being” (*person*), the color of whom, “when perceived in a sacred manner *is red*.”<sup>20</sup> She illuminates the practical efficacy of this worldview when she explains an aspect of an Indian story: “Pretty Shield is not indirectly articulating hidden and disowned psychological drives. She is telling about actual conversations with some chickadees.”<sup>21</sup>

Another distinction between an Indigenous and a Western worldview is the place of the feminine in spiritual and religious traditions and the role of women in societies. In many of the earliest Indigenous creation stories, a female creatrix thinks, spins, or breathes the lifecycle into existence. Rather than being a mother who births physical life, she is the initiator of the progressions of life and death whose sacred mystery is the power of nature to self-replicate. The template of this lifecycle is assumed to be female because women, with their ability to bring forth life from the unseen realm to the world of physicality, represent a holographic reflection of the original creatrix. It is women who birth the ancestors into the community. This worldview creates a far different consciousness and therefore a different culture than the idea that men alone are made in the image of a static male god.

This is why non-Western Indigenous and hybrid societies express gender and gender relations, and religious and social roles for women differently than in present-day Western societies. While Indigenous and non-Western societies are unique and can in no way be essentialized, women are often “at the center,” and exhibit to varying and particular degrees matrilineal, matrilineal, and matrifocal structures. In these societies women’s roles often reflect an inherent agency, respect, and power. Women are also traditionally transmitters and carriers of

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 6.

religious traditions and powerful magic is evident in the rites that women are associated with and partake in globally and historically.

Because an Indigenous ontology perceives reality as being cyclical rather than linear, these societies tend to be patterned more like a circle than a line. In fact, Indigenous constructions of human societies are patterned in the same way as a healthy cell in which diverse and individual receptors perform their unique functions within the cellular membrane and then entrain as a cellular unit. The cell then entrains to the other cells surrounding it and larger circles of cell harmonize to the same frequency. This is a biological example of deep relationality. A reflection of this pattern is evident in that these societies tend to be more inclusive of human diversity because the more diverse the unit, the more adaptable it is. Western societies that oppress diverse human expressions become unbalanced and unhealthy because they do not utilize the wisdom and perspective of as many receptors as they can access. Cells that do not move program their own death. The biological pattern that most resembles our societies in relation to our environment is a virus, which is unable to self-replicate.

I now can make three assumptions in this work that I could not have made without the inclusion of an Indigenous ontological model: that the function of religious rites is to establish deep relations with the universe of power or the spirit world; that the spirit world is not an abstraction or an aberration of the human mind but is *real in the sense that it can be accessed* in this manner, and that it is this access that represents ancestral female *spiritual power*.

## **METHODOLOGY: A FEMINIST, METAPHYSICAL, AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH**

### **Introduction**

This is a study of some of the subsumed and eclipsed European women's spiritual traditions that have survived and have been transformed through a violent and complex history. In conjunction, it explores some of the details and motifs found within this history that have intersected with experiences I have had while engaging in contemporary women's rituals, and neo-pagan and metaphysical practices, that have manifested in synchronistic events and patterns.

I use an emergent qualitative methodology that I describe as feminist, metaphysical, and multidisciplinary to explore the similarities of relevant patterns within cultural aspects of European history, art, archaeology, and folklore that may appear to represent a continuous stream of women's spiritual traditions of which I am an heir.

The academic study of history presents methodological considerations that need to be addressed. I find I need to ask an integral question: What do we remember? What we call "history" is a mix of details and remnants of past events and the mythologies that have evolved around them. What is salient to our consciousness now is only part of the story. We know that the histories of which we are aware have been sculpted by complex and dynamic forces that include political, religious, economic, colonialist, and environmental elements. We know that the study of history or histories does not represent a factual account of a single objective truth, but rather an interpretation of a complex and evolving story that is told and heard differently depending upon who is telling it. The question becomes: who controls the narrative?

This problem is even more interesting when we attempt to study what is not told or not remembered, or what is barely remembered as a remnant that has been stripped of historical

context, or what has been distorted. As scholars, how do we approach the silences of subaltern histories that stare out in bold relief to what has been remembered and retold? What if the current narratives that define our identities and sculpt our traditions do not resonate with how we perceive ourselves and with the world as embodied beings? What if we experience memories for which there are no culturally-sanctioned shared mythologies in which to contextualize them?

Finally, we have the problem of interpretation. Who gets to make it and based on what criteria? Interpretation is by its nature an inherently subjective endeavor. Western science no longer assumes that a single absolute truth exists, one that is attainable solely through positivistic methodologies by an objective observer. In a relational worldview, establishing point of view is the basis for creating a coherent means of interpretation. The methodological consideration then becomes how to frame the study so that the criteria for interpretation are consistent and transparent. This is not to imply that I am orienting this study from a post-modernist perspective in which nothing has meaning and everything is a construct. It is to say that perspective needs to be stated as does the researcher's relationship to the material.

What follows is a discussion of the three elements of this methodology as I address these methodological considerations. The first section discusses feminism and its importance as an academic lens in broadening the scope of how and in what ways we remember history. It discusses how we access and then interpret data, especially that which is subaltern to the dominant narrative. The second section discusses metaphysics as a holistic lens that offers a coherent way of looking at common elements of phenomena that may be deemed random in normative Western perspectives and is capable of bringing into focus this data into a non-linear patterned coherence. The last section discusses the current academic trend of using a multidisciplinary methodology that looks at data from within more than one Western discipline.

## **Feminism: Women's Subaltern History and Embodied**

### **Ways of Knowing**

Feminist theory asserts that women's voices are valid. This is no small declaration in light of traditional Western academia in which women's voices have gone mostly unheard. Secondly, a feminist lens insists upon the inclusion of women's historic contributions to culture and religion as integral to the generation of *accurate scholarship*. This means that not taking into account women's contributions and experiences is not only an oversight, but actually represents inadequate scholarship. A feminist academic perspective requires not only the inclusion of women as subjects of research, but also as researchers in order to create a more inclusive and accurate narrative. The arena of feminist scholarship also includes the voices of women of color, and non-Western and Indigenous women, who may or may not describe themselves as feminist, because it encompasses an inclusive methodology that seeks to level the academic playing field for those perspectives that stand outside of the normative patriarchal paradigm, even if some of these voices are critical of feminism.

Besides being an efficient methodology for exploring historic female spiritual traditions, many which may be subaltern, distorted, or demonized, a feminist lens allows me to use women's embodied ways of thinking as a valid research component. It gives me the latitude to use my own experiences in altered states of consciousness as one of many primary resources. More profoundly, it calls upon me to do precisely this as a way of exploring women's spiritual experiences and adding to the body of knowledge that connects me with other women. In other words, I take the feminist position that my spiritual experiences *matter* in that they are not only mine, but are also part of a larger female legacy of historic traditions and ancestral wisdom.

The model of embodied thinking represents new territory in creative scholarship because it is grounded within subjective and inter-subjective experience as an expression of the inherently relational nature of reality. Embodied thinking holds that analysis and interpretation are based in experience. Christ states:

My conviction that theology begins in experience means that I, like many other feminist scholars, can no longer write in an impersonal voice. I believe that I must not only acknowledge and admit that my views are rooted in my life, but that I must show how this is true.<sup>22</sup>

The use of this research model requires the deconstruction of biases and statements of personal worldviews, both of oneself and others, since it cannot be assumed any longer that there is one objective reality or a single *normative* position. For the purposes of this study, I have an obligation to be honest, and to make sure that the intuitive information I use is checked by traditional empirical research methods so that there is an external validation or correlation of internal processes. This is how I illustrate a collective historic application of the personal synchronicities of my shamanic journey.

This research model also calls for the cultivation of empathy or compassion that allows one unique perspective to attempt to understand another.<sup>23</sup> It requires an application of what English language and literature scholar Wayne C. Booth referred to as the “Golden Rule” of research that requires that one listens “to others as you would have others listen to you.”<sup>24</sup> This approach represents a redefinition of the Western hyper-individualistic idea of self and a holistic way of approaching research that transcends the simplicity of hierarchical dualism.

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<sup>22</sup> Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 36.

<sup>23</sup> Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 35.

<sup>24</sup> Wayne C. Booth, Gregory G. Colomb, and Joseph W. Williams, *The Craft of Research* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), xvii.

This multivalent view accurately represents an Indigenous ontology in which relationships are fundamental to identity. Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson expresses the need to approach research as a sacred ceremony. For this work I therefore must acknowledge the women who have come before me and who inform my work as *persons* who deserve a respectful consideration of their lives. My foremothers were real people who are now accessible by way of the realm of the ancestors. Some of their histories are traumatic. All of them were historically unique individuals whose experiences are ultimately not completely knowable. I cannot approach the research of their lives solely as an abstraction, as a subject to be analyzed without any effect upon my own sensibilities. I acknowledge that I am in relation with this material and therefore in relation with my ancestors in a living way.

## **Alternative Epistemologies: The Set and Setting Model for Altered States of Consciousness**

Within this feminist and emergent qualitative methodology I am able to use data gathered by way of alternative epistemologies that are empirical but not limited to patriarchally defined categories of what is explainable.<sup>25</sup> For example, dream imagery, trance and shamanic states, the content of visions, communions by way of ritual, and synchronistic events are sources of information that have been part of women's embodied ways of knowing historically and globally.

I use Ralph Metzner's heuristic Set and Setting model for identifying the occurrence of altered states of consciousness (ASCs). I use his definition of *consciousness* as a system or field that we think of as the mind. This includes what we understand to be thoughts, feelings, sensations, perceptions, images, and memories, all of which seem to function in patterned and cohesive relationships. In this model, consciousness can be considered to be *altered* if the functioning of these interrelated elements is significantly different for a definite period of time.<sup>26</sup>

Metzner's Set and Setting model, originally formulated in conjunction with psychologist Timothy Leary to be a practical open-ended strategy in psychedelic research, is not an explanatory or reductionist model because it does not attempt to generalize any underlying principle or mechanism arising from a closed or self-referential system. Rather, it was intended to be useful in ordering data in ways that can be tracked as cyclical patterns from a baseline or consensual state of consciousness to an altered state and back again, potentially facilitating new insights and understandings of these experiences. There is no interpretation of the *content*, only the empirical tracking of the process.

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<sup>25</sup> Metzner, *States of Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology*, 334.

<sup>26</sup> Metzner, *States of Consciousness and Transpersonal Psychology*, 331.

This theory assumes that the particular contents of an altered state experience are a function of an individual's *Set* – which includes internal moods, personality, expectations, values, and intentions – and the *Setting*, or context, which includes the physical and social environment and the behavior of others, especially guides, therapists, healers, or teachers.<sup>27</sup> A trigger, such as those provided by entheogenic drugs, rituals, mediations, or hypnosis, serves as the catalyst that moves consciousness from a baseline or consensual state of consciousness to an altered one where normal frames of perceptions are changed.

This is a useful model because it considers both the unique internal landscape of an individual (the *Set*) *and* the external, contextual and social influences, both historic and immediate (the *Setting*). This is relevant to my research because I am a unique individual woman performing particular historic rites. While the content or particulars of my experience are personal to me, I believe I have used the same, or at least similar, avenues to the ones that my foremothers used in order to create spiritual experiences that facilitate relations with the spirit world. I have attempted to walk a similar path as they have done and so have most likely met some of the same *persons* as have been historically accessed by others using these particular techniques and have obtained similar pieces of information in altered states of consciousness.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 334.

### Metaphysics: A Holographic Model

For the purposes of this work, the term *metaphysics* describes the comparison of essential patterns within separate phenomena, but does not describe a belief system. Rather it is intended as a scheme of interpretation, a way of describing a set of ideas sufficiently ubiquitous that are theoretically exemplified by all entities and events. Mathematician and process philosopher Albert North Whitehead defines metaphysics as “the endeavor to frame a coherent, logical necessary system of general ideas in terms of which every element of our experience can be interpreted.”<sup>28</sup> In other words, metaphysics represents a holographic model of reality that is uniquely suited for comparing patterns within a multidisciplinary inquiry because it is based in the inherent relationality of all phenomena.

In a holographic model, all manifestations of reality are microcosmic reflections of an infinitely fluxing, ultimately unknowable macrocosmic order (Bohm’s implicate order), in which every part has access to all information known by the whole. This is a foundational supposition in contemporary new paradigm thinking; it is based upon current advances in the new sciences that have successfully contested Newtonian explanations of the universe.<sup>29</sup> Contained within this holographic model are theories that view life in all of its forms as dynamic webs of interrelated events that exhibit holistic or emergent properties, which arise as a result of the complex relationships of their components, and that exhibit autopoiesis, which is the ability to self-regulate and self-create.<sup>30</sup> The holographic model supports General Systems Theory, which is

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<sup>28</sup> Thomas E. Hosinski, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance: An Introduction to the Metaphysics of Alfred North Whitehead*. (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 1993). 3.

<sup>29</sup> Capra, *The Turning Point*, Science, 302.

<sup>30</sup> Combs, *Radiance of Being*, 27.

concerned with this phenomenon in living systems;<sup>31</sup> quantum theory in physics, which has shown that subatomic particles are not isolated grains of matter but probability patterns;<sup>32</sup> and Gaia Theory, which asserts that the Earth is a self-regulating system in which component interactions and transformations are determined by component properties.<sup>33</sup>

The holographic model encompasses not only the new sciences, but supports Western metaphysical and mystery traditions that emerged prior to the development of Western philosophy. These traditions were later demonized, along with the practices of Pagan spiritual traditions, including Witchcraft, and ceremonial magick that currently informs neo-Pagan theologies and cultures. These magical systems operate through the act of invocation. When looked at through the lens and vernacular of the new physics, invocation can be understood as entrainment.<sup>34</sup> The Western esoteric adage *As Above, So Below* is an invocation of a holism that implies that all phenomenon are reflections of a unity manifested in different forms in all worlds (which is what Whitehead describes). In these esoteric traditions, rites function to align correspondences between the worlds; they create a way of entraining to the multiple holographic aspects of self that may manifest as other *persons*.

A metaphysical model is necessary for this work because it has the capability of framing incidences of spirit contact and relations with non-human *persons* that reveal an inherent order. This order is useful for the purposes of describing the particulars of spiritual states and psychic events perceived while in altered states of consciousness. It presents a model that is capable of mapping these mythopoetic realities that are coherent within their own non-linear context,

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<sup>31</sup> Pribram, Karl H. ed. *Brain and Values: Is a Biological Science of Values Possible*. Proceedings of the Fifth Appalachian Conference on Behavioral Neurodynamics. London. Lawrence Erlbaum Assc. Publishers. 1998. 251

<sup>32</sup> Capra, *Turning Point*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Margulis, *Slanted Truths*, 93.

<sup>34</sup> Capra, *The Turning Point*, 302.

including the contents of visions, dreams, trance states, and the terrains of the various worlds that shamans navigate during their ritual healing journeys. With a metaphysical perspective, it is possible to infer that the information I have received through oracular and ecstatic practices originates from a source that has a reality that is not separate from, but is ultimately more than my personal mentality. According to shamanic sensibilities, non-ordinary realms are perceived as *real* and not simply as mental constructs or archetypes.<sup>35</sup> This is because the shaman perceives holographically; a world of total aliveness, in all parts personal, in all parts sentient, and in all parts capable of being known in diverse ways.

### **Multidisciplinary Studies: A Comparative Synthesis of Perspectives**

Western disciplines such as archaeology, mythology, religious studies, folklore, and history must be understood as overlapping descriptions of similar events from different viewpoints. They do not represent absolute objective categories, but only somewhat cohesive ones that have evolved within Western academic disciplines. In Indigenous models, such separations rarely exist. In light of the current trends in scholarship, I use a multi-disciplinary approach that draws from these disciplines in order to compare patterns and make interpretations based on my feminist metaphysical perspective.

For this aspect of my methodology, I follow the lead of Gimbutas who created her own version of a multidisciplinary methodology, which she termed *archaeomythology*. Gimbutas drew from archaeology, mythology, folklore, and linguistics in order to contextualize the

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<sup>35</sup> Halifax, *Shamanic Voices*, 22.

sophisticated iconography evident in European Neolithic artifacts because Western methodologies proved insufficient for interpretation. She transgressed the limitations of Cartesian archaeological methodologies because they were unable to encompass the mythic and spiritual perspectives of Indigenous European cultures. She needed a method that could synthesize the findings of similar elements within diverse media, and that allowed her to compare the patterns in the art with their corresponding occurrences and transformations in mythology, folklore, and linguistics. What she found was an order and coherency of pattern that informed her interpretation of the archaeological material. She writes that the “archaeological materials are not mute. They speak their own language. And they need to be used for the great source that they are to help unravel the spirituality of those of our ancestors who predate the Indo-Europeans by many thousands of years.”<sup>36</sup>

In this work, I seek to interpret events and experiences, undertaken by way of shamanic techniques, which I am assuming produce similar states of consciousness to the ones my ancestors experienced, even though the particulars of such experiences may be uniquely individual. I explore the occurrences of particular motifs that have shown up in my experiences as a shamanic practitioner, as well as in additional resources, so that I can reveal the order of such events and make sense of the information I have obtained through altered states of consciousness as a way to retrieve ancestral information.

To do this I draw from mythology, folklore, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, and religious studies as a way of contextualizing my interpretation of my shamanic experiences. This multidisciplinary approach is consistent with my metaphysical methodology because it

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<sup>36</sup> Gimbutas, *Language of the Goddess*, xix.

assumes that similar patterns are reflections of each other and their reoccurrences represent a unity.

### **Limitations of the Methodology**

In tandem with the exploration of a history of Indigenous female shamanic culture from the Neolithic to the present, my study utilizes my personal experiences in altered states of consciousness as primary research. In this way, my study is unique because it cannot be reproduced exactly, and any information obtained through the empirical knowledge of spiritual and psychic events must be contextualized within the fields of feminism, women's spirituality, neo-Paganism, and Indigenous studies, all areas in which theories and perspectives are constantly transforming.

This work will add to the academic and spiritual conversations about these subjects. It discusses the findings and interpretations of a single Euro-American woman situated within a unique present-day perspective who is attempting to retrieve information using ancestral female shamanic techniques that are historic but that have been rejected in traditional Western academia. These techniques have been rejected not only because they are, by their very nature, supra-rational, but because they are grounded within historically-situated female shamanic epistemologies. This means that for this part of the dissertation, I will be writing from liminal territory. Because of the challenges inherent in breaking this new ground, I have had to make a unique methodological map that synthesizes the various areas of study that allow me to reveal the order that emerges from my own shamanic and spiritual processes and research. My methodology is both informed and limited by this condition.

I believe my feminist, metaphysical, and multidisciplinary methodology can be used by other women as an approach to melding the spiritual with the academic. However, the results of other inquiries using this methodology will differ from mine, both in content and interpretation, because the data set itself is filtered by individual mythology, which is informed by an individual's unique relationship to the ancestral realm that is their legacy and by their unique relationship to geographical and historical place. In other words, the Set and Setting will be unique but the process of mapping can be similar to what I have outlined here.

This methodology is in alignment with Indigenous ontology in which a spiritual path is undertaken using ceremonial/academic parameters to guide the way, but in which the journey/embodied research is undertaken alone. In this way it is limited because such a journey is inherently personal and subjective, even as the particulars of such a process can be described and catalogued, as I will be doing in this work. However, individual stories of these types of journeys are part of the history I seek to remember.

It is important to state that although I am using Indigenous methodologies as much as possible, and that I am referring to shamanism in general, and the states of consciousness and mythological narratives associated with this ancient human religious tradition, I am not attempting an anthropological study of shamanism globally. I will be drawing from shamanistic rites and myths from the Pueblo traditions in the American Southwest, and aboriginal cultures from other parts of the world, but only in those instances that they exemplify examples the *function* of shamanism as it pertains to my recovery of European female shamanic traditions.

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