

CHAPTER 4: METHODOLOGY: A FEMINIST, METAPHYSICAL, AND MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACH

This is a study of some of the subsumed and eclipsed European women's spiritual traditions that have survived and that have been transformed through a violent and complex history. It asks: How the ways in which European women ritually cultivated relationships with their ancestors and the spirits of nature that sustained them contributed historically to the development of Western culture and to our present-day spiritual legacies? How recreating these traditions may add to our evolutionary strategy in these current times of cultural and ecological crisis? It asks: What does the re-establishment of deeply intimate relationships with the ancestors and the natural world mean to present-day women seeking to explore their subsumed and distorted European spiritual heritages? It asks: How might the restoration of European female shamanic and spiritual ways of knowing inform Western assumptions about women's history and women's contributions to culture? Finally, this study challenges Western assumptions regarding the existence of the spirit world.

Feminism: Women's Subaltern History and Embodied Thinking

Painstakingly bringing these together, I finally began to comprehend the total reality. It was more than an inscription of an ancient prayer, more than an art relic sitting on a museum shelf behind glass, more than a grassy field strewn with parts of broken columns or the foundation stones which had once supported an ancient temple. Placed side by side, the pieces of this jigsaw puzzle revealed the overall structure of a geographically vast and major religion, one that had affected the lives of multitudes of people over thousands of years.²⁰⁰

²⁰⁰ Stone, *When God Was a Woman*, xxv.

Feminist theory asserts that women's voices are significant and valuable. This is no small declaration in light of traditional Western academia in which women's voices have gone mostly unheard. A feminist lens insists upon the inclusion of women's historic contributions to culture and religion as integral to the generation of *accurate scholarship*.²⁰¹ This means that not taking into account women's contributions and experiences in research is not only an oversight, it 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 includes the voices of European-derived women, as well as women of color, including non-Western and Indigenous women, who may or may not describe themselves as feminist, because feminism is part of an inclusive methodology that seeks to level the academic playing field for those perspectives that stand outside of the normative patriarchal paradigm, even as some of these voices are critical of feminism.

Besides being an efficient methodology for exploring historic female spiritual traditions, many of which may be subaltern, distorted, or demonized, a feminist lens allows me to use women's embodied ways of knowing as a valid research component. It gives me the latitude to take women's experiences in altered states of consciousness as a valid research component, and to take my own experiences as a present-day neo-Pagan practitioner as a legitimate component of my scholarly historical interpretation. More profoundly, it calls upon me to do

²⁰¹ Gross, *Feminism & Religion*, 21.

precisely this as a way of exploring women's historic spiritual experiences and adding to the body of knowledge that connects me with other women historically. 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 that have not been fully part of our Western historical, philosophical, and religious narratives.

Feminist methodology calls for what Christ has termed *embodied thinking*, which enjoins us to state our perspective as researchers. It assumes that analysis and interpretation are always based in experience and that the traditional academic assumption of a single *objective* reality or a single authoritative *normative* position is fallacious and produces biased research. According to Christ, “we unmask the biases and the passions that are hidden in traditional scholarship, and we freely admit our own.”²⁰²

This thinking illuminates why and how feminists have attempted to deconstruct the power of the dominant patriarchal narrative and to expand the academic conversation. From a feminist methodological perspective, women can begin to speak their stories within an academic framework that expands beyond reductionist, rationalistic, and androcentric assumptions—and their limitations, in ways that are more aligned with the inherent relativity expressed by the new sciences. Physicist F. David Peat and researcher John Briggs validate this academic trend in *Turbulent Mirror: An Illustrated Guide to Chaos Theory and*

²⁰² Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 36.

the Science of Wholeness. “The pursuit of reductionism into the heart of the atom also liberated important insights into the limits of reductionism.”²⁰³

Within this methodological opening, feminists have expanded the validity of women’s ways of knowing. Christ writes,

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.²⁰⁴

Integral to the feminist method of embodied thinking that acknowledges the inherent subjectivity underlying academic interpretation, is the component of empathy or compassion that allows one unique perspective to attempt to understand another.²⁰⁵ 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.”²⁰⁶ Feminist religion scholar Rita Gross calls this kind of inclusion necessary for accurate and sincere scholarship. She holds that approaching religious diversity as an “interesting resource” rather than as an “undesirable deviation from truth,” is the function of religious inquiry because information about and empathy for the other is “radically deabsolutizing.”²⁰⁷ This kind of breaking down of dominant

²⁰³ Briggs and Peat, *Turbulent Mirror*, 201.

²⁰⁴ Christ, *Rebirth of the Goddess*, 36.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁰⁶ Booth, Colomb, and Williams, *The Craft of Research*, xvii.

²⁰⁷ Gross, *Feminism & Religion*, 13.

and static worldviews allows for more variance and nuance in historical and religious scholarship. It allows for more voices to be heard and more experiences to be validated.

These approaches have helped to redefine a Western hyper-individualistic idea of self, which is a shift that is necessary for creating a relational approach to research that transcends the simplicity of hierarchical dualism. Religions scholar Jordan Paper writes in *The Deities are Many: A Polytheistic Theology* that “Modern Western individualism is not the primary mode of existence in other cultures.”²⁰⁸ This multivalent view more accurately models an Indigenous ontology in which relationships are fundamental to identity. Physicist F. David Peat, whose work has taken him into the realm where the shaman meets the Western scientist, expresses this Indigenous cultural priority that reflects an embodied and relational, rather than reductionist, way of knowing:

If you happen to hold that the human consciousness is no more than the epiphenomenon, or secretion, of our individual brains, then you are more or less trapped in your own skull. But if consciousness is open, if it can partake in a more global form of being, if it can merge with the natural world and with other beings, then, indeed, it may be able to drop, for a time, the constraints of one's personal worldview and see reality through the eyes of other.²⁰⁹

Indigenous researcher Shawn Wilson expresses relationality as fundamental to Indigenous methodology when he writes that all things are related and therefore relevant. Which data or interpretive lens is selected as relevant or valuable or

²⁰⁸ Paper, *The Deities Are Many*, 56.

²⁰⁹ Peat, *Blackfoot Physics: A Journey into the Native American Universe*, 11.

truthful is still ultimately based upon the observer or researcher and their relation to the material. The problem with not acknowledging bias in valuing which data is included, excluded, or highlighted in research, is that it hides the relationship of the researcher to the material, yet assumes that relationship to be normative.

Feminist Celtic scholar Mary Condren deconstructs the false academic standard of “objectivity” in *The Serpent and the Goddess: Women, Religion and Power in Celtic Ireland*:

History is not the objective science it was once thought to be but a particular form of power and knowledge, involving the manipulation of academic and political resources and serving to ensure the dominance of certain groups. The myth of ‘objectivity’ serves to conceal the hidden agenda of those in power.²¹⁰

She illuminates the power of this bias as it situates reality within male perspectives. “The sacredness of the male mind is allied to the struggle for power in that men, claiming objectivity, can also claim universal validity for their values.”²¹¹ In a feminist, relational, embodied, and empathetic interpretative historic lens, the reality of relationality is assumed, rather than subsumed. From an Indigenous standpoint, Wilson calls for research to be approached as sacred ceremony because we are responsible for the relationships that we form in research.

You can understand the responsibility that comes with bringing a new idea into being [or articulating/making visible an existing one]. The new relationship has to respect all of the other relationships around it. Forming

²¹⁰ Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, xxiii.

²¹¹ Ibid.

and strengthening these connections gives power to and helps the knot between to grow larger and stronger.²¹²

I find this perspective radical enough to shake me out of my preconceived ideas about Western academic research. I have approached this work as a living and transformative relationship with ideas, with history, with myself, and my ancestors, rather than as a stiff and dusty task of categorizing dead bugs on a pin reminiscent of nineteenth-century “arm-chair” science.²¹³ This has created a paradigm shift for me. And since I intend for this work to be a soul retrieval in which I bring to light female spiritual states of consciousness from the historical past that are not salient in present-day collective conscious awareness now, and since I intend to strengthen the relationships between our European ancestors and their present-day children through this study, I take responsibility with all the weight implied in Wilson’s statement. I must therefore acknowledge the women, and men, and all relationships 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 whose voices are only partially accessible. Some of their histories are traumatic. All of them were unique individuals whose experiences are ultimately not completely knowable. I cannot approach a cursory 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

²¹² Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 79.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 152.

material and therefore in relation with my ancestors in a living and transformative way.

Women's Cultural History

This dissertation is an examination of European women's suppressed cultural history from a feminist perspective, one that focuses on relational states of consciousness as they pertain to female spiritual potency and agency. It explores the transformation of women's shamanic and religious traditions and surveys the historic period from the Neolithic period through the European Witch hunts that occurred during the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries.

A feminist treatment of European history necessarily shifts perspective away from androcratic interpretations that have not traditionally taken into account women's experiences and voices, and that have devalued the practices that women engaged in and passed on through traditions that have been marginalized, distorted, and often demonized. This includes those historical elements related to shamanism, Paganism, and witchcraft. A feminist interpretive lens offers a non-unilinear alternative to traditional materialistic and androcratic versions of history that have focused on what cultural historian and social scientist Riane Eisler describes as "relations between men in the so-called public sphere."²¹⁴ Feminist scholar Gerda Lerner acknowledges in *The Creation of*

²¹⁴ Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure*, 180.

Patriarchy that, “Women have been kept from contributing to History-making, that is, the ordering and interpretation of the past of humankind.”²¹⁵

A feminist analysis of history assumes that of course women were doing *something*, including living, even though many of the details of their lives have been erased from the dominant historic narrative. Historian Aurora Levins Morales addresses this in *Remedios: Stories of Earth and Iron from the History of the Puertorriqueñas*. She is speaking about the women of Puerto Rico who have endured a history of colonialism, slavery, crusades, witch hunts, marginalization, and poverty.²¹⁶

We were always here, working, eating, sleeping, singing, suffering, giving birth, dying. We were out of their sight, cutting wood, making fire, soaking beans, nursing babies. We were right there beside them digging, hoeing, weeding, picking, cutting, stacking. Not one meal was ever eaten without our hand on the pot.²¹⁷

The purpose of a feminist lens in the study of history is to reclaim the stories and refocus interpretation toward a more inclusive analysis, one that includes subaltern data that may be regarded as irrelevant by androcentric academic standards but may, as feminist cultural historian Lucia Chiavola Birnbaum contends, survive as a memory that has “persisted underneath the dominant history of the historical epoch.”²¹⁸ The retrieval of subaltern history offers

²¹⁵ Lerner, *The Creation of Patriarchy*, 5.

²¹⁶ Morales, *Remedios*, xxvi-xxvii.

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xxxii.

²¹⁸ Birnbaum, *Dark Mother*, xxxix.

interesting excavations for feminist scholars. Historian Lisa M. Bitel addresses this scholarly challenge in “Women in Early Medieval Northern Europe.”²¹⁹ “Medieval women produced very few of the historical sources necessary for studying them.”²²⁰ Condren writes that the excavation of women’s spiritual agency and history is “intended to be ground-breaking, for which pickaxes are the appropriate tools. Thankfully, we now have a lush and fertile field for future work in which a thousand flowers can bloom.”²²¹ By using this approach I hope to join other feminist scholars who are blazing new trajectories and creating new narratives of reclaimed histories, and feminist philosophies and theologies, a heritage to which I hope to add my work.

Because women’s histories, rites, and narratives have often been buried within or erased from the dominant historical narratives, this work uses a feminist interpretation of “accepted historical categories” in order to illuminate “hidden structures of domination and exploitation.”²²² I include gender as a primary interpretive lens because it is a way of framing social power dynamics that include colonialist, racial, and religious elements, which are instrumental in

²¹⁹ Bitel, "Women in Early Medieval Northern Europe," 107.

²²⁰ Ibid.

²²¹ Condren, *The Serpent and the Goddess*, xxv.

²²² Federici, *Caliban and the Witch*, 13.

contextualizing the historic degradation of women's power and agency in European culture.²²³

The element of gender is necessary, for example, when looking at the prehistoric artifacts of Neolithic Europe because the iconography predominantly denotes female imagery. I interpret the abundance of artifacts with stylized anatomical indicators of biological femaleness, and of shamanic motifs depicting females, as evidence that questions about the role and agency of women are *necessary* in understanding prehistoric European culture, even as controversy regarding interpretation of the archaeology abounds in academic discussion.²²⁴ I make the assumption that images, like myth and rite, are indicators of the consciousness of a culture, and so the repetition of patterns depicting females, and the motifs associated with these artifacts, make the perspective of gender an integral element of interpretation.²²⁵

When analyzing the period of the witch hunts in medieval and early modern Europe, three factors make necessary the inclusion of gender as a historical lens, and underscore this category's exclusion from various works in this arena as contributing to an omission in accurate scholarship; that there was a greater ratio of women to men accused and killed as heretics and witches, partially because their interests were antithetical, and even threatening, to the

²²³ Kwok and Donaldson, *Postcolonialism*, 2.

²²⁴ Tringham and Conkey, "Rethinking Figurines," 22-45.

²²⁵ Lauter, *Women as Mythmakers*, 4.

emerging powers of elite classes and the church;²²⁶ because women and their religious and folk rites were uniquely targeted by the church as not only heretical, but later as demonic; and because of the nature of the implements of torture that were designed specifically for horrific sexual abuse of women *by men* in power went beyond the “judicial limit.”²²⁷

Barstow writes about gender as a category of historical analysis.

Without mention of a *tradition of oppression of women* [emphasis mine], the implication for the sixteenth century is that of course women would be attacked—and that it must somehow have been their fault. This is what historians conclude when they have no awareness of traditional misogyny or traditional oppression of women.²²⁸

Within this context we can bring into sharp focus the fact “that women were accused primarily by men, tried by male juries, examined by male searchers, sentenced by male judges, tortured by male jailers, burned to death by male executioners—while being prayed over by male confessors.”²²⁹ This power dynamic contextualized within the lens of gender is integral to establishing a more fully accurate interpretation of this history.

Several issues regarding methodology and interpretation are relevant in the study of the witch trials. One of the subjects of debate is whether the information obtained through torture represented some kind of true, albeit

²²⁶ Ankarloo and Henningsen, *Early Modern European Witchcraft*, 9.

²²⁷ Barstow, *Witchcraze*, 1-2.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 9.

distorted, record of a European “witch” cult that survived since the Neolithic period. Anthropologist Margaret Murray began this conversation in her classic but now discredited work *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, published in 1921, in which she looked at the witch trial confessions as ethnographical data and postulated that a “Dianic” cult had survived into medieval times and worshiped a deity who was a man or a women wearing the skin of or having the attributes of an animal.²³⁰ Like other anthropologists of that time period,²³¹ Murray was criticized for sloppy scholarship and for a broad and uncritical interpretation of the trial material.²³² However, many contemporary scholars do believe that Indigenous European shamanism is evident in the some of the details of the witch trials. Ginzburg recognized “a correct intuition in Murray’s totally discredited thesis” when evidence of an ecstatic agrarian cult in the Friuli (Northeastern) region of Italy was documented by the inquisitorial trials. In this case, elements emerged that were distinct from the stereotypes imposed by demonologists.²³³ This is a paramount issue that concerns scholars when looking at the witch trial material because the confessions were coerced by way of the most horrific torture and then documented by the torturers themselves who had a Christian agenda that

²³⁰ Murray, *The Witch-Cult in Western Europe*, 12.

²³¹ Such as J. J. Bachofen and J. G. Frazer.

²³² Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 9.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 10.

was intent upon validating the narrative of the demonic origins of “god-denying” heretics.²³⁴

In the case of the Friuli cult both women and men who identified themselves as “benandanti” affirmed being born with a caul and projecting themselves out of their bodies at night to do spirit battle during particular times of the year.²³⁵ According to Ginzburg, these details did not fit the demonologist’s prescribed narrative and so offer an opportunity to winnow information of folk customs probably related to historical shamanism. Hungarian historian Éva Pócs finds shamanism and witchcraft as paradigmatic changes of systems that “assumed each other and were built upon one another.”²³⁶ However, she notes that we are almost entirely dependent upon the records of the witch trials to study how seers and witches operated and then only when they came into contact with the witch hunts.²³⁷ This means that the details surrounding our European ancestors as spiritual intermediaries that have not survived in folk tales and rites are lost to us historically except in those cases where they have been recorded as confessions derived through torture. Ginzburg writes that “we possess only hostile testimonies, originating from or filtered by the demonologists, inquisitors and

²³⁴ Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 21.

²³⁵ Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 9.

²³⁶ Pócs, *Between the Living and the Dead*, 9.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 8.

judges. The voices of the accused reach us strangled, altered, distorted; in many cases, they haven't reached us at all."²³⁸

Looking at the complex history of this period requires a multidisciplinary approach that takes into account the multiple cultural forces that shaped these historic and mythic events. In order to make sense of these forces, I draw from Cultural Transformation theory conceived by sociologist cultural historian Riane Eisler.²³⁹ This theory is a social scientific version of the idea offered in the new biology in which systems are produced by the interrelations and interactions of their parts. In Cultural Transformation Theory this applies also to social, political, religious, and economic dynamics. Cultural Transformation Theory assumes that complex relationships create culture at any one time in history and that any new "attractor" can, and has, changed the shape of culture.²⁴⁰

A main component brought into relief by using this theory as an interpretive lens in the study of Western history is the dialectical struggle between culture-making strategies that are based on partnerships models, such as are described by Gimbutas's interpretation of egalitarian Neolithic social models, and others who investigate non-Western cultures' Indigenous and hybrid cultures and prehistory, and those that focus on hierarchical societal rankings.

²³⁸ Ginzburg, *Ecstasies*, 10.

²³⁹ Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, xxii.

²⁴⁰ Combs, *The Radiance of Being*, 31.

According to Eisler, this struggle is not only present in political and economic relations:

it is, and all along has been, over sexual, gender, and family relations” — with the common thread being the challenge to a system based on privilege and in those structures that serve the male authority at the head of the dominator model that is ultimately backed by force and the fear of pain.²⁴¹

Eisler’s work shifts the focus of historical research to a perspective in which intimate human familial relations are not viewed merely as incidental but rather as fundamental. The dynamics of *relations* between genders, between family members, and between families and communities, is a key factor in this approach to the study of history. This model can be extended to the relations between human communities and other-than-human communities, including ancestral spirits, and the spirits of the land.²⁴²

I also use as a lens of interpretation those areas that reveal power dynamics based on the appropriation of labor as energy. To this end I draw from Silvia Federici’s work, *Caliban and the Witch: Women, the Body and Primitive Accumulation*, which discusses the genderization of labor as it relates to class; the colonial appropriation of labor and the appropriation of women’s work and reproductive energy, and the cultural shift in terms of ownership, and therefore access to resources. We cannot make sense of the European witch trials without examining the elements of gender and class within patriarchal social structures.

²⁴¹ Eisler, *Sacred Pleasure*, 180.

²⁴² Sheils, "Toward a Unified Theory of Ancestor Worship," 427.

Nor can we ignore the appropriation and deliberate annihilation of earlier Pagan ways of living in Europe that caused the degradation of the status of women, which is based upon the distribution of the fruits of female and lower class male labor.

I also use Birnbaum's method of focusing historic research on the "subaltern classes," those who have been subordinated culturally, politically, and economically by the hegemonies of church and state and whose history is excavated by focusing on the "vernacular"—those elements based on popular, not authoritarian, narratives that are visible in the everyday activities of subordinated or colonized people.²⁴³ This approach looks for continuity of motif in the folklore, rituals, stories, occupations, and art of those not necessarily holding social power in order to construct subaltern historic narratives for clues to what ancestral wisdom was able to be transmitted and retrieved, even as it was transformed over time. This means considering details that may be deemed irrelevant or distorted by modern Western academic perspectives, but that looks to the activities and testimonies of actual women. Marguerite Rigoglioso asserts in her work *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity*, that she views folklore and rite, as "a repository for relics of traces of genuine historical events and cultic practices."²⁴⁴

²⁴³ Birnbaum, *Black Madonnas*, 3 - 4.

²⁴⁴ Rigoglioso, *Virgin Mother Goddesses of Antiquity*, 9.

The Question of Essentialism

The sin of essentialism within feminist, post-colonialist, and other theoretic discussions can be summed up in Kwok Pui-lan's critique of Mary Daly:

Daly's dreams of a cosmic tapestry and cosmic commonality of women have been criticized by feminist theorists, who label her an essentialist for assuming a common essence of women and for glossing over differences, and for espousing "the ideology of female nature or female essence reappropriated by feminists themselves in an effort to revalidate undervalued female attributes."²⁴⁵

There is merit in this argument that has caused thoughtful feminists and other researchers, myself included, to more deeply deconstruct assumptions about gender that include class, race, and sexual orientation, as well as to re-examine what constitutes normative ontologies and epistemologies. Women's spirituality scholar and philosopher Mara Lynn Keller writes in "Women's Spirituality and Higher Education," that "we need to be as specific and nuanced as possible in our discussions of women, men, differently gendered persons, and other-than-human species."²⁴⁶

In this work I have had to tread carefully when researching Indigenous traditions from which I did not originate. I took my lead from Indigenous researchers such as Paula Gunn Allen, and from Shawn Wilson, who wrote in *Research is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods*:

As part of white privilege, there is no requirement for them [Western researchers and scholars] to be able to see other ways of being and doing, or even to recognize outside of their entire mindset and ways of thinking.

²⁴⁵ Kwok and Donaldson, *Postcolonialism*, 76.

²⁴⁶ M. Keller, "Women's Spirituality and Higher Education," 62.

The ability to bridge this gap becomes important in order to ease the tension it

creates.²⁴⁷

I believe such an effort should be the goal of all Western researchers and was an important parameter in the process of my research.

However, the term “essentialism” has also been used to invalidate arguments of those researchers discussing the more intangible religious and spiritual elements of women’s history. This is especially true in the case of Women Spirituality scholars who have consistently found continuity of pattern in the remaining iconography and motifs of human civilizations. Yet, these researchers have been consistently dismissed due to the content of their research, and their conclusions, which have proven contradictory to the patriarchal narrative that has been considered normative in academia, rather than on the methodologies of their research.²⁴⁸ An example of using the argument of “essentializing” to discredit as naive or appropriative particular research, and to infantilize and dismiss the researcher, is Karlyn Crowley’s work *Feminism’s New Age: Gender, Appropriation, and the Afterlife of Essentialism*, in which she lumps all Women’s Spirituality research under the biased and academically derogatory term “New Age”:

Given the centrality of gender in New Age culture, why haven’t more women’s and gender studies scholars investigated this phenomenon? I believe it comes down to one word: disgust. Feminist academics view the New Age movement as reviving essentialist notions of gender, supporting

²⁴⁷ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 45.

²⁴⁸ Crowley, *Feminism’s New Age*, 113 - 32.

egregious ideas about race and primitivism, and promoting irrational loopy practices that set women back.²⁴⁹

Crowley's accusation of essentialism as a way to disregard an entire field of research that has been conducted by multiple individuals and diverse researchers fulfills the very definition of essentialism. She also uses this term as a shaming technique (a tactic used by inquisitors that I discuss in later chapters) in order to effectively maintain the authority of the patriarchal structures that define what constitutes credible research and who establishes academic authority.

Mary Daly addresses this kind of censorship in *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, in which she deconstructs the power of language, its construction, and its use, which she contends has all too often functioned to reinforce patriarchal power structures. "The sadosocietal system fixes and freezes women's Elemental Powers of Communication, confining their expression to 'appropriate' stereotypical activities, such as those assigned to wives and mothers, nurses, schoolmarms, hostesses, and efficient do-gooders."²⁵⁰

I agree with Keller that it is erroneous to presume that "any attempt to posit distinguishing characteristics of a group constitutes 'essentializing.'"²⁵¹ The truth is that we must be able to hold both ideas—that women are human beings, individual and unique, and also that women share a common biology, individually

²⁴⁹ Crowley, *Feminism's New Age*, 7.

²⁵⁰ Daly, *Websters' First New Intergalactic Wickedary of the English Language*, 8.

²⁵¹ M. Keller, "Women's Spirituality and Higher Education," 61.

experienced, culturally shaped, and often socially regulated. Therefore the term “woman” must be a valid historical category, one that must be included as an element in truthful scholarship. Biologist Lynda Birke writes in *Feminism and the Biological Body* that “we have by no means yet explored or understood our biological grounding, the miracle and paradox of the female body and its spiritual and political meanings.”²⁵²

In terms of exploring women’s spiritual and religious traditions, the biological aspect of women must be acknowledged as a legitimate lens for analysis, if only for the fact that women have been intentionally denied full participation as reflections of the creator father god in Western culture, *specifically because of their biology*, as I explore in a subsequent chapter. Another factor for researchers when taking into consideration the female body as a component in spiritual and religious traditions of historic cultures is that *female biology was apparently relevant to our ancestors*: a fact we cannot ignore when studying the artifacts they have left us. I think that Raphael sums this up best:

Female sacrality must, I think, mean more than the sum of a woman’s best physical and mental capacities. Sacrality is a religious phenomenon and here originates in a divine source immanent as the ground of the created order (not bestowed on privileged individuals as an act of grace from above). This is why the religious term “Goddess” is so often used to indicate that the source of female sacral energy is both identical with and transcendent to the self as immanent in all that is alive.²⁵³

²⁵² Birke, *Feminism and the Biological Body*, 30 - 31.

²⁵³ Raphael, *Thealogy and Embodiment*, 55.

Metaphysics: A Holographic Model

For the purposes of this work, the term *metaphysics* describes a method to compare essential patterns within separate phenomena; it 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 they 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.”²⁵⁴ He writes in *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* that “every proposition proposing a fact must, in its complete analysis, propose the general character of the universe required for that fact. There are no self-sustained facts, floating in nonentity.”²⁵⁵ Metaphysics can be understood to be a code for the efficient transmission of real and timeless relationality. In other words, metaphysics is a methodological way to frame a holographic model of reality that is uniquely suited for comparing patterns within a multidisciplinary inquiry because it assumes the inherent relationality of all phenomena.

In a holographic model, all manifestations of reality are microcosmic reflections of an infinitely fluxing, ultimately unknowable order (Bohm’s Implicate Order), in which every part has access to all information known by the

²⁵⁴ Whitehead, as quoted in Hosinski, *Stubborn Fact and Creative Advance*. 3.

²⁵⁵ Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology*, 11.

whole. This is a foundational supposition in contemporary New Paradigm thinking based upon current advances in the new sciences that have successfully contested Newtonian explanations of the universe.²⁵⁶ Encompassed 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 that 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.²⁵⁷ The holographic model supports General Systems Theory, which is concerned with this phenomenon in living systems;²⁵⁸ Quantum Theory in physics, which has shown that subatomic particles are not isolated grains of matter but probability patterns;²⁵⁹ Cultural Transformation theory, which views the transformation of culture as non-unilinear²⁶⁰ and Gaia Theory, which asserts that the Earth is a self-regulating (homeostatic) system in which component interactions and transformations are determined by component properties.²⁶¹

²⁵⁶ Capra, *The Turning Point*, 302.

²⁵⁷ Combs, *The Radiance of Being*, 27.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

²⁵⁹ Capra, *The Turning Point*, 91.

²⁶⁰ Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade*, xxii.

²⁶¹ Margulis and Sagan, *Slanted Truths*, 93.

A holographic perspective is able to frame a nonhierarchical interpretative lens because it is inherently acausal.²⁶² This way of framing interpretation allows for an enlarged and more nuanced understanding of relationality because phenomena that share similar attributes or patterns can be assumed to be reflections of one another, rather than necessarily as causes or effects, which is a predominant characteristic of Western materialism. An example of this philosophical error of causality is evident in David Lewis-Williams and David Pearce work *Inside the Neolithic Mind: Consciousness, Cosmos and the Realm of the Gods* in which they describe “The three interlocking dimensions of religion” in which “euphoric and transcendent religious experience *derives* [emphasis mine] from the human nervous system.”²⁶³

In a holographic model we can view patterns, and their continuity through different multidisciplinary media, as reflecting a coherency of order as they manifest through different modalities of time and space. Rather than depending on a linear or reductionist explanation of their relationship based on an illusionary perceived causality, they can be understood to be concomitant or emergent reflections of each other, and so are inextricably in relation and inherently accessible to one another. This model includes a holistic rationale for the phenomenon of “synchronicity” in which two or more events connect, “not by

²⁶² Combs and Holland, *Synchronicity*, 74 - 75.

²⁶³ Lewis-Williams and Pearce, *Inside the Neolithic Mind*, 25.

virtue of causing the other,” but by appearing to the observer to reflect a common meaning that is personally relevant.²⁶⁴

In this holographic model of interpretation, phenomena are not interpreted as symbolic, abstract, metaphorical, or theoretic, but are analyzed by the criterion that *form follows function*. This means that how something is shaped—its pattern—represents a visual depiction of how it behaves. In other words, how something moves or does not move sculpts the shape of its form, and its form can be understood to indicate its function.²⁶⁵ For example, a triangle can be interpreted as symbolic, but it is fundamentally a reflection of the energy it embodies. Its shape reflects the properties inherent to it, and it functions in accordance with those properties in all places it is found. In the case of the triangle, its shape functions to allow it to sustain pressure, which makes it a building block in three dimensional constructions. It also functions to amplify sound or energy.

The holographic model is not only congruent with the new sciences, but supports Western metaphysical and mystery traditions that emerged prior to, and in conjunction with, the development of Western philosophy. These traditions were later demonized, along with the practices of Pagan spiritual traditions, including Witchcraft, and ceremonial magic, that currently inform neo-Pagan

²⁶⁴ Combs and Holland, *Synchronicity*, xvi.

²⁶⁵ Barrett, "Cellular Shaman," 22.

theologies and cultures.²⁶⁶ These magical systems operate through the act of invocation. When looked at through the lens of the new physics, invocation functions because of the phenomenon called “entrainment.”²⁶⁷ At the subatomic level, everything in the universe, both matter and mind, is ultimately an oscillating wave pattern. When separate phenomena begin to vibrate at an identical frequency, they entrain, or effectively merge into a single wave but with increased amplitude.²⁶⁸ In a real sense, they become a unified pattern with increased power –a different entity. From a shamanic perspective, this transformation can be understood to be “shapeshifting.” The shaman changes the pattern of her consciousness in order to entrain with other non-corporal *persons* necessary for the specific shamanic task she is undertaking.

The Western esoteric metaphysical adage *As Above, So Below* is an invocation of the holism that all phenomena are reflections of a unity manifested in different forms in all realms of the multiverse. It implies that the explicit patterns and relationships evident around us do not represent the manifestation of nature at its deepest level, but rather are patterned expressions of an underlying “implicate or enfolded order.”²⁶⁹ This means that all relations and their perceivable manifestations represent a holographic reality in which information

²⁶⁶ He calls ceremonial magic "intellectual magic," to differentiate it from popular or folk magic. Clark, "Witchcraft and Magic in Early Modern Culture," 160.

²⁶⁷ Capra, *The Turning Point*, 302.

²⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

²⁶⁹ Peat, *Superstrings*, 26-27.

from many levels are enfolded in a complex way into the topographical manifestation. From this assumption, it is possible for distant events, meaning, and information from other correlates on the time-space continuum to be “be directly connected” and therefore accessible.²⁷⁰ In Western esoteric traditions, rites function to align correspondences between the worlds and to facilitate entrainment with the multiple holographic reflections of self that may manifest as other *persons*. Specifically, you become one with what you invoke because you entrain to it. This means you have access to the information it carries because the relationship is holographic. So the shaman invokes her spirit guides, shapeshifts her consciousness to entrain with them, and then gains access to their perceptions and power.

A metaphysical methodology that assumes a holographic model is necessary for this work because it is capable of framing incidences of spirit contact and relations with nonhuman *persons* in a way that reveals an inherent order. Order is identified by the occurrences of synchronicities that are identifiable as patterns. Such coincidences are evidence that one is in relationship with *persons* and that the rites of invocation that have been undertaken are effectively working to some degree. For example, while driving to an Owl initiation in which I was to enact the role of Persephone in an Underworld ritual for other women, I was suddenly flooded with an influx of poetry. I literally heard words in my head and had to pull over to write them down. From that transmission I was able to transcribe eight poems nearly verbatim. The first poem

²⁷⁰ Ibid.

recounted in detail Persephone's descent into the earth, one that took her down a spiral staircase with walls that felt like sandstone. A few years later, while I was on an academic and spiritual pilgrimage to Malta, our group had the rare opportunity to visit the underground Hypogeum at Hal Saflieni.²⁷¹ Here I found myself descending down a spiral staircase, fingering the limestone (sedimentary stone) walls of a temple carved into the earth by our ancestors just as I had described in that trance state in the poems that I received. The acoustics in the Hypogeum were unique, and as our tour guide Jennifer Berezen echoed our names in the patterned chambers, I had a sort of spasm. I began to shake. Norma had taught that the priestesses who fall ill at the sacred geographical sites were understood to be priestess of that site. On that trip I became sick more than once and experienced lucid dreams of being in descent. This story of course, has many more synchronistic components, however this is an example of the synchronistic patterns that occur when one is in communion with *persons* we call the gods that in my case was facilitated by deliberate shamanic initiation.

With this application of the metaphysical methodology that assumes a holographic ontological model, it is possible to infer that the information I, and other women functioning in shamanistic roles such as priestesses and witches, 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 our personal mentalities. According to shamanic sensibilities, non-ordinary realms are

²⁷¹ Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 172-73.

perceived as *real* and not simply as mental constructs or archetypes.²⁷² 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

The experience of women healers, like the experience of women in general, is a shadow throughout the record of the world that must be sought at the interface of many disciplines: history, anthropology, botany, archaeology, and the behavioral sciences.²⁷³

Western disciplines such as archaeology, mythology, religious studies, folklore, and history must be understood to be 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. However, in light of the current trends in Western scholarship, I use a multidisciplinary 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 an integrated multidisciplinary methodology, which she termed *archaeomythology*.²⁷⁴ Gimbutas drew from the disciplines of archaeology, mythology, folklore, and linguistics in order to contextualize the

²⁷² Halifax, *Shamanic Voices*, 22.

²⁷³ Achterberg, *Woman as Healer*, 2.

²⁷⁴ Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 342.

sophisticated iconography evident in European Neolithic artifacts, since she found Western empiricist methodologies had proven to be insufficient. In her work she transgressed the limitations of reductionist archaeological methodologies because they were unable to encompass the religious elements she believed were represented by the artifacts. In her work *Civilization of the Goddess: The World of Old Europe*, she addresses this shortfall in academia when she writes that treating religion as “irrelevant” is an “incomprehensible omission since secular and sacred life in those days were one and indivisible. By ignoring the religious aspects of Neolithic life, we neglect the totality of culture. Archaeologists cannot remain scientific materialists forever.”²⁷⁵

By taking an archaeomythological approach to her research, Gimbutas was able to bring into relief the coherency of patterns that represented a continuity of motif in 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.”²⁷⁶

For this work I draw from cultural studies of mythology, folklore, archaeology, history, cultural anthropology, religious studies, life sciences, physics, and consciousness studies. I also draw from my personal experiences as a shamanic practitioner, which informs my analysis, interpretations, and

²⁷⁵ Ibid., x.

²⁷⁶ Gimbutas, *Language of the Goddess*, xix.

conclusions. There is precedent for this kind of research that melds empiricism within the context of experiential data and I hope to follow the path of those scholars who have been informed by their personal knowledge and experience of European spiritual traditions. This includes Ralph Metzner,²⁷⁷ Caitlin and John Matthews,²⁷⁸ Vicki Noble,²⁷⁹ and Glenys Livingstone, who writes in *PaGaian Cosmology: Re-inventing Earth-based Goddess Religion* that, “My method of approach has been informed by my deep personal involvement in the topic, my need to ‘place’ myself here—as feminist philosopher Luce Irigaray suggests that woman needs to do.”²⁸⁰

The Methodology of Marija Gimbutas and the Backlash Against Her Work

It is important to briefly discuss the methodologies of Marija Gimbutas and the controversies surrounding her work, since I rely upon her analysis and categorizations of Neolithic European art.

Gimbutas was a groundbreaking, influential, and controversial twentieth-century academic pioneer, and an acclaimed Bronze Age scholar²⁸¹ who was accomplished in the areas of archaeology, linguistics, mythology, and folklore.²⁸²

²⁷⁷ Metzner, *The Well of Remembrance*, 5.

²⁷⁸ Matthews and Matthews, *The Encyclopaedia of Celtic Wisdom*, 1.

²⁷⁹ Noble, *Shakti Woman*, 1-9.

²⁸⁰ Livingstone, *PaGaian Cosmology*, 4.

²⁸¹ Marler, "Introduction," 1.

²⁸² Spretnak, "Anatomy of a Backlash," 25.

She compiled a unique and comprehensive corpus of work that detailed and categorized extant artifacts and excavated sites from the Upper Paleolithic and Neolithic Eurasian continents.²⁸³ In her many works, she examined material evidence from Europe before the Bronze Age. Her conclusions describe Neolithic European culture as being comprised of diverse matristic societal models in which women appeared to have had spiritual and social agency, in which communal relationships appeared to be primarily egalitarian, and where the primary deity was understood to be female.²⁸⁴

Her Kurgan theory postulated that Indigenous Europe, which she termed “Old Europe,” was disturbed and dislocated by invading Proto-Indo-European people from the East whom she called “Kurgans.”²⁸⁵ This influx of people came in three waves between the mid-5th and mid-3rd millennia.²⁸⁶ With them they brought an antithetical belief and symbol system that is discernible from the Old European cultures.

Gimbutas’s interpretation of Old European culture was the result of meticulous multidisciplinary analysis of the patterns and themes in the art of this period that she categorized by their abundant representations of the lifecycles of

²⁸³ Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, 222.

²⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, x.

²⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 352.

²⁸⁶ Marler, "The Beginnings of Patriarchy in Europe," 59.

women and nature.²⁸⁷ What she found was a continuity in the motifs that suggests an encompassing feminine principle that has persisted in art, mythology, folklore, and linguistics for thousands of years. Motifs depicting the stylized bodies of females in various stages of shapeshifting relative to the cyclical patterns of nature are predominant in the art of this period. Male figures constitute only a small percent of the images,²⁸⁸ and according to Gimbutas, there appears to be little evidence of a “father figure.”²⁸⁹

Gimbutas theorized that the patterns evident in the Old European art reveal an intrinsic order, a kind of grammar and syntax that represents a “meta-language by which an entire constellation of meanings is transmitted.”²⁹⁰ She described this symbolic language as representing a “pictorial script,” which when interpreted from *within its own frame of reference*, offers unique insight into the “basic worldview of Old European culture.”²⁹¹

What is relevant for this study is her revolutionary interpretation of the patterns evident in the art, which she categorized by their representations of the energies of the lifecycles in a way that illuminates the Indigenous-based concept that form follows function. I have always thought that she was misunderstood in

²⁸⁷ Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, xxii.

²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 175.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 316.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, xv.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*

this regard because few have explored her interpretations from within the parameters of an Indigenous ontology in which practical efficacy is paramount and the establishment and nurturance of relations is fundamental. Mostly, this art has been analyzed from a Western materialist perspective in which quantitative metrics such as economics have driven interpretation rather than more intangible, but equally important, societal elements such as religion and spirituality.²⁹² This is because these categories do not conform to the parameters of accepted reductionist methodologies that are fundamentally built upon materialistic biases.²⁹³

Devaluing the intangible, which often includes female-based epistemological and ontological elements in research, has the effect of erasing women's voices from historical memory. Addressing this gap in the study of archaeology, and keeping in mind that Western academic disciplines are not absolute categories, but ultimately somewhat coherent conveniences, Gimbutas writes that: "I do not believe, as many archaeologists of this generation seem to, that we shall never know the meaning of the prehistoric art and religion."²⁹⁴

The ubiquitous critique that Gimbutas overstepped the boundaries of interpretation fails to take into account the possibility that the art served as a technology designed for the invocation of Indigenous states of consciousness, and

²⁹² Marler, "The Circle Is Unbroken," 21.

²⁹³ Spretnak, "Anatomy of a Backlash," 28.

²⁹⁴ Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, xv.

functioned as social reinforcements of sustainable culture-making traditions of establishing, maintaining, and mastering relationships with nature, which must have been at the heart of Neolithic religious traditions.²⁹⁵ Gimbutas understood this important distinction when interpreting the art of prehistory. She expressed that “tombs, temples, frescos, reliefs, sculptures, figurines, pictorial painting, and other sources need to be analyzed from the point of view of ideology [meaning *theirs*]. For this reason it is necessary to widen the scope of descriptive archaeology into interdisciplinary research.”²⁹⁶

By approaching this art from the point of view that its patterns function to invoke Indigenous states of consciousness, I have been able to look at Gimbutas’s material from a unique standpoint, one that illuminates the complexity of her vision. In *Language of the Goddess: Unearthing the Hidden Symbols of Western Civilization*, she writes, “This book explicitly seeks to identify the Old European patterns that cross the boundaries of time and space.”²⁹⁷ Here she indicates her understanding that these images and their universal motifs are still relevant today, and will remain relevant in the future, because they are capable of transmitting ancestral information in a nonlinear way to present-day people. This is important

²⁹⁵ My Master's thesis compared the patterns in the art to images from micro and macro space available only now through technology using an Indigenous ontological model. Sikie, "Reclaiming the Indigenous European Mind.

²⁹⁶ Gimbutas, *The Language of the Goddess*, xv.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

because it offers a glimpse into alternative ways of making culture that are based on sustainable female-identified models.

Another important element of Gimbutas's work was her contention that during the human cultural shift from gathering and hunting to domestication, "there was no major change in the structure of the symbolism, only a gradual incorporation of new forms and the elaboration or transformation of the old. Indeed what was striking is not the metamorphosis of the symbols over millennia but rather the *continuity* [emphasis mine] from Paleolithic times on."²⁹⁸

Despite her accomplishments, including a revolutionary contribution to the study of European history, and prolific publishing on prehistoric Europe, Gimbutas was the subject of an infamous backlash against her work.²⁹⁹ She has been accused of essentialism;³⁰⁰ of flawed methodology;³⁰¹ of elitism;³⁰² of interpreting material finds using unsubstantiated assumptions,³⁰³ including "exaggerated claims" that figures that appear to depict female breasts and female

²⁹⁸ Ibid., xix.

²⁹⁹ Spretnak, "Anatomy of a Backlash," 25.

³⁰⁰ Tringham and Conkey, "Rethinking Figurines," 22.

³⁰¹ Thomas, "The Varieties of Neolithic Religious Experience," 375.

³⁰² This is a critique of M. Keller as well as Gimbutas, and uses the tactic of marginalizing and humiliating females who suggest expanded epistemologies and ontologies. Hayden, "An Archaeologist Evaluation of the Gimbutas Paradigm," 40.

³⁰³ Goodison and Morris, *Ancient Goddesses*, 8.

genitals can be assumed represent females.³⁰⁴ Gimbutas and her work have been dismissed, marginalized, erased, and even sometimes appropriated by others who do not give her credit; and in some cases, by those who admit they have not read her work.³⁰⁵

This is primarily due to the fact that Gimbutas came to the conclusion that male dominance, and the accompanying characteristic societal hierarchy and violence required to enforce patriarchal systems, cannot be presumed to be a normative culture-making strategy when interpreting European prehistory.³⁰⁶ Her informed analysis postulated a new model with respect to the earliest Neolithic European human societies. Because of her apparently radical conclusion, one that shifts the assumption of power in history from the male back to the female, and therefore exposes contemporary consciousness to the possibilities of alternative egalitarian human culture-making strategies,³⁰⁷ Gimbutas has been accused erroneously of pandering to false “feminist” and cartoonish utopian fantasies of prehistoric matriarchal societies.³⁰⁸

³⁰⁴ Tringham and Conkey, "Rethinking Figurines," 27.

³⁰⁵ Spretnak, "Anatomy of a Backlash," 25.

³⁰⁶ Gimbutas, *The Civilization of the Goddess*, viii-xi.

³⁰⁷ In this essay she cites the undeconstructed bias of some researchers of Neolithic cultures who interpret material findings from the point of view that conflict, male dominance, and violence are a priori in all human societies. Marler, "The Beginnings of Patriarchy in Europe," 63-66.

³⁰⁸ Crowley, *Feminism's New Age*, 129.

There are many resources that describe the marginalization of feminist theologians, philosophers, and women scholars who seek to excavate non-patriarchal social models of prehistory. One of the main inflammatory canards lobbed at their research includes the erroneous assumption that the term “matriarchy” necessarily means the opposite of “patriarchy,” as defined by power dynamics, when in fact it has predominantly meant something quite different.³⁰⁹ But I think that the few sentences proffered by biologist, philosopher, and atheist Richard Dawkins, who is held as a scientific and secularist authority, best sums up the dismissal of Women’s Spirituality and feminist scholars of prehistory who postulate that prehistoric women may have had agency, and were relevant and contributing members, even leaders, of prehistoric societies. He writes in his best seller *The God Delusion*, that “some feminist theologians seek to address historic injustices” by designating a monotheist male god as female, which is a “ditzily unreal intersection of theology and feminism.”³¹⁰

In the interest of honest scholarship, Gimbutas understood that the Neolithic art of Old Europe cannot be understood from a Western perspective, but must be contextualized within its own Indigenous cultural perspective. As Spretnak describes in “Anatomy of a Backlash: Concerning the Work of Marija Gimbutas,” this art has been subject to the stubborn and arrogant attempt to theorize about pre-Western cultures from Western worldviews in which

³⁰⁹ Biaggi, *The Rule of Mars*, 13.

³¹⁰ Dawkins, *The God Delusion*, 36.

prehistoric art describing stylized women's bodies as they relate to nature are "objectively" seen as pornography, or "merely" as fertility fetishes.³¹¹ I find it funny that "fertility" is presented as a term of devaluation in this context when the idea of fertility is so highly valued in our present-day culture of fundamentalist interpretations of Abrahamic religions, which are preoccupied with it as perhaps the most important element of human culture-making, and in which human biology and social contracts have been reduced to human reproduction and the ways in which contemporary Westerns notions of gender serve that function. In this strategy, human reproduction is brilliantly and ironically, both exalted and diminished in these examples of Western thought in a way that dramatically affects the lives of living women.

In order to excavate subaltern histories in which women were spiritual agents and practitioners, and to bring into relief historical narratives that are eclipsed by conventional Western patriarchal interpretations, I use a multidisciplinary methodological approach that allows me to compare patterns within conventionally unrelated disciplines. I contend this methodology is useful in that it allows for a synthesis of data and interpretation in a holistic way that allows for the inclusion of details of women's ways of knowing, as well as shamanic epistemologies to come into relief. This study looks in depth at such ways of knowing that inform shamanic practices, and so a multidisciplinary methodology pioneered by Marija Gimbutas and others who followed in her footsteps allows for a new trajectory of research and analysis.

³¹¹ Spretnak, "Anatomy of a Backlash," 15.

Limitations of the Methodology

In tandem with the scholarly exploration of some elements of Indigenous female shamanic culture from the Neolithic to the present, my study utilizes my personal experiences in altered states of consciousness as a shamanic practitioner to inform my analysis. 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, Indigenous studies, and consciousness studies, all areas in which theories and perspectives are constantly transforming. Some limits are set by the parameters that define Western science and academics that inform how I draw upon in my scholarly research and my spiritual experiences as they are relevant to analysis and interpretation.

This work will add to the academic and spiritual conversations about several fields of study mentioned above. Along with extensive research of the topic of soul retrieval using an Indigenous European perspective, 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 partly by using ancestral female shamanic techniques to inform my academic analysis. These techniques have historic precedent, but have been traditionally rejected in traditional Western academia because they are, by their very nature, suprarational, and because they are grounded within historically-situated female shamanic epistemologies. This means that for this part of the dissertation, I write 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 holographic and metaphysical order that emerges from the continuity of the patterns that manifest in this research that is informed by my own shamanic and spiritual processes and experiences as a practitioner. 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. 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 I am referring to shamanism in general, and to 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 draw from shamanistic rites and myths from Indigenous cultures from non-European parts of the world, but only in those instances where they exemplify examples of the *function* of shamanism as it pertains to my recovery of European female shamanic traditions.

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