

Spiritualist Mediums and other Traditional Shamans:
Towards an Apprenticeship Model of Shamanic Practice

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Abstract

Spiritualism has its origins in 1840s America, and continues to occupy a niche in the Anglo-American cultural world in which the craft of mediumship is taught and practised. Spiritualist mediums seek to demonstrate personal survival beyond death and thus belong to a movement that posits the existence of a spirit world, peopled with those who were once incarnate upon the earth and with whom communication is possible.

Spiritualists often maintain that mediumship is a universal activity found across cultures and time, and some scholars have speculated in passing that Spiritualist mediumship might be a form of shamanism. This thesis uses both existing literary sources and ethnographic study to support the hypothesis that mediumship is indeed an example of traditional shamanism, and demonstrates that a comparison of Spiritualist mediumship and shamanism gives valuable insights into both. In particular, an apprenticeship model is proposed as offering a clearer understanding of the nature of mediumship and its central role in maintaining Spiritualism as a distinct religious tradition, helping to clarify problematic boundaries such as that between Spiritualism and New Age.

Existing models of shamanism have tended to focus upon particular skills or states of consciousness exhibited by shamans and are therefore framed with reference to outcomes, rather than by attending to the processes of development leading to them. The apprenticeship model of mediumship is proposed as the basis first, of understanding the structure of Spiritualism, and second and comparatively, of a new definition of shamanism, by offering a distinctive, clearly-structured approach to understanding the acquisition and nature of shamanic skills, without being unduly prescriptive as to which particular shamanic skills should be anticipated in any given cultural setting.

Acknowledgments

This thesis is the outcome of an extended process of learning, to which many more people than I can name have contributed, but to each of whom I am grateful and offer my sincere thanks. Dr. Steven J. Sutcliffe has been my primary supervisor and, I suspect, took on a harder task than he anticipated. I approached the task of writing this thesis from a background in law and divinity, with little familiarity with many of the thinkers and texts commonly regarded as central to the discipline of religious studies. The body of learning Dr. Sutcliffe introduced me to has been considerable, reflecting the extent of his own learning and intellectual curiosity (and ability), and assisted in no small part by his willingness to lend from his personal library; his attention to my sometimes rudimentary drafts has been meticulous, and this thesis is much improved by his contribution.

Professor James L. Cox has been my secondary supervisor, and his suggestion of using the Evenki as the basis of a comparison with contemporary Spiritualism has been highly productive. The origins of this thesis lie partly in my fascination with shamanism, prompted by Professor Cox's undergraduate course in the subject, which I much enjoyed as part of my degree in Divinity. Dr. Suzanne Owen, now of Leeds Trinity but formerly of Edinburgh, must also be mentioned; our lunchtime conversations in Rainy Hall, New College, musing over the possibility that Spiritualist mediums might be characterized as (ethnically) white shamans were also among the prompts for this thesis. Professor Cox's shamanism course introduced me to Dr. MaryCatherine Burgess, herself a shamanic practitioner and now Assistant Chaplain to Edinburgh University; she, in turn, introduced me to new friends at the Chaplaincy Centre, led by the recently-retired Chaplain, Reverend Di Williams OBE, who have valued and supported me in my work.

The community to which I owe most is easily Portobello Spiritualist Church, here in Edinburgh. Thanks beyond words are due to all those who have contributed to our Church, ably led by Reverend Bernice A. Winstanley and, more recently, by Reverend June Herraghty. All who contribute to the Church do so as unpaid

volunteers, and I can only admire those who take on the task of running a church that offers four weekly public services, a weekly development class for mediums and healers of the future, regular talks, workshops, naming services, marriages, funeral services, and the various other meetings and tasks required in keeping the doors of a busy church open. That there are those willing to maintain such responsibilities week in, week out, and year in, year out, over the decades, for no financial reward, often while also maintaining normal working careers, reminds us that religious devotion remains very real in twenty-first century Britain. It has been my privilege to honour this particular example by sharing, in this thesis, something of what it signifies.

My parents, Anne and Gordon, are members of Portobello Spiritualist Church; had they not been, I might never have walked through its doors. I give my thanks for your continuing love and support, as I offer mine. Also deserving of mention is my paternal grandmother, Williamina, whose continuing presence in this world keeps me feeling young.

To those who have contributed, on both sides of life, my thanks and love to you all, for the person I am and will yet be.

Author's Declaration

This thesis has been composed by me and is my own work: it has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification.

David Gordon Mackintosh Wilson

Chapter One

Introduction

1.1 A Spiritualist church service: questions arising

It is a Sunday evening, about a quarter past six, as I enter. I am handed a hymn book as I walk into a hall with chairs laid out in rows, a centre aisle leading to a raised platform with three steps leading up to it,¹ furnished with flowers, a lectern and three chairs. A dozen or so people are seated, with chairs for about fifty, which increases to about thirty as we approach six thirty, when the service starts I count five other men in the congregation. Various items adorn the walls: a cross, a picture of Jesus, countryside scenes and one of a little girl surrounded by fairies, another of a native North American with full headdress and the name White Eagle beneath it, and a board displaying what are described as the ‘Seven Principles’² set out in elaborate gold lettering.

A minute or two after six thirty, three well-dressed women (chairperson, medium and reader) walk up the centre aisle to take their places on the platform and the service begins. The chairperson welcomes everyone, asks that they check all mobile telephones have been switched off, and invites us to stand for the first hymn, which is sung without musical accompaniment.³ The hymn book includes a large proportion of Methodist hymns and a few other traditional Protestant favourites. The hymn is followed by the chairperson reading about thirty names from a healing book. The medium, who is visiting for the evening, is then invited to ‘open’ the service in prayer – an extempore prayer to ‘Divine Spirit,’ followed by the recitation of the Lord’s Prayer, in which the congregation joins. The third woman on the platform is

¹ Public demonstrations of mediumship are often given in halls with a raised platform or stage from which the medium works. Mediums who give public demonstrations of mediumship in churches are often spoken of as being ‘on the platform’.

² See Appendix 2. Most Spiritualist churches or other organizations adopt a set of ‘principles’ that function as a basic creed or summary of belief.

³ This is typical of Spiritualism generally, although some churches have an organist or pianist; some use recorded music.

then invited to give the reading: although there is a large Bible on the lectern, the reading is an extract from Eileen Caddy's 'Opening Doors Within'.⁴

The reader is thanked by the chairperson and the congregation invited to sing another hymn, this time 'to welcome the medium and her inspirers for the address.' A short extempore talk follows, of about seven or eight minutes' duration, during which the medium shares a mixture of personal reminiscences and what she describes as 'lessons learned about the place of Spirit' in her life, affirming that the 'presence of spirit' is something real in the life of everyone present and that her experiences 'just go to show how close our loved ones are.' At the conclusion of the address, the chairperson thanks the medium and invites the congregation to sing a further hymn 'to raise the vibration in the church' for the 'demonstration,' described as that part of the service 'where the medium will endeavour to bring forward messages⁵ from your loved ones in spirit.'⁶ This time the hymn is new to me, the first of the three verses, and chorus, as follows:

Open my eyes that I may see
Glimpses of truth Thou hast for me!
Help me to set the higher self free
So shall I serve and worship thee.

Silently now I wait for Thee,
Ready, my God, Thy will to see;
Open my eyes; illumine me,
Spirit Divine.⁷

The demonstration then goes on to occupy the next forty to forty-five minutes, being the bulk of a service that is a little over an hour in duration. During this part of the

⁴ 1987. Readings need not be taken from specifically Spiritualist texts. This work by Eileen Caddy is suggested because of an Edinburgh church at which readings are often taken from this particular book and because this highlights an often porous boundary between Spiritualism and New Age interests.

⁵ Communications given by a medium are generally referred to as messages.

⁶ The word spirit is used to denote both spirit people and spirit as the active energy of God, hence references also to 'the God force', 'Divine Spirit', 'Eternal Spirit', and so on. Mediums are often referred to as 'working for God and Spirit', referencing God, spirit and those individuals who are 'in' spirit. The word can also be a shorthand reference to a medium's own spirit guides or a group of other spirit people; for example, 'Spirit are with me'.

⁷ SNU Hymn Book, No. 265

service, the medium gives a number of messages from spirit to various members of the congregation.⁸ By way of illustration, I offer the following:⁹

It is a Sunday in mid-February 2006 and I am sitting in the back row at Portobello Spiritualist Church when I am called to by the medium, a middle-aged lady whom I do not know and who, so far as I know, does not know me.

‘Can I speak to the gentleman at the back in the lovely red, please?’

‘Yes, bless you.’

‘Gentleman, I have the name of Arthur on the father/grandfather’s side. I also have a grandmother and grandfather coming forward together, the male passed with cancer. You’ve had a wee dip recently, you’ve been there before, you always bounce back like a Jack-in-the-Box. I’m seeing lots of packing boxes, some still to be unpacked, shelves to do, painting, a long list of jobs, putting up curtains, it will be a good move for you. Money – more going out than coming in is a bit of a worry – employment will change, you have the means or will realise it shortly. A silver sixpence is being handed over. Grandmother is saying there was not always a lot of money, but there was a lot of love, bringing forward a horseshoe. The eyes, one lens not quite right, a gentleman is talking about one eye, the left, being weaker than the other. I also have a baby coming forward – do you have a brother in Spirit? The next eighteen months will be very interesting. You are talking, Spirit are listening. I have a gentleman with a hearing aid, says he didn’t always need it, selective deafness. You are quite aware of Spirit. There is writing to be done & the sooner the better. A gentleman is coming forward, painter & decorator, he will be helping you with the painting. A cross is also being brought forward for you – it will be a fruitful time ahead. A passport is being held over your head, travel, choose somewhere warm, as this lady always felt cold. Take the love & blessing from Spirit. Thank you.’¹⁰

In the space of a typical thirty to forty minute demonstration, some six to eight such messages might be expected. At the conclusion of the demonstration, the medium is thanked for her hard work, the reader is thanked, and the service concludes with the chairperson reading out a few church notices, the taking of a collection, standing to sing the first verse from ‘The day Thou gavest, Lord, has ended’¹¹ and a closing prayer by the medium, again extempore, with everyone joining in the ‘Amen’ at the end. Following a reminder to the congregation to ‘remain seated while the medium leaves the platform’, the platform party walks up the centre aisle to the back of the

⁸ This part of a service is referred to as the ‘demonstration’ (that is, of mediumship).

⁹ The message that follows was given to me at Portobello Spiritualist Church, Edinburgh in February 2006; it has been written up from notes taken at the time.

¹⁰ The passport went unused in the short term, and I remain unsure who the painter & decorator might have been but the painting got done. The remainder of the message made sense to me at the time.

¹¹ SNU Hymn Book, No. 357

hall, where tea, coffee and biscuits are served for everyone. A separate table with sandwiches and other extras is laid out for the medium, who is kept company by the chairperson and the reader.

After about thirty minutes, a few people start rearranging the chairs in front of the platform into a circle in preparation for a healing service, and those who wish to stay for this are invited to do so. There are two seats placed in the centre of the circle. The lights are dimmed and about a dozen people take their seats in the circle. A man stands and welcomes everyone, invites us to join in what he describes as ‘the healing hymn’ and leads the group in a short prayer, again extempore and this time addressed to ‘loving Father God.’ The words of the healing hymn are as follows:

Gracious Spirit, of Thy goodness,
Hear our anxious prayer!
Take our loved ones who are suffering
Neath Thy tender care.
Loving Father hear us!

Gracious Spirit, may Thy Presence
Shed a Healing Ray,
Turning all their night of darkness
Into glorious day.
Loving Father hear us!

Gracious Spirit, should'st Thou claim them,
Be their Light and Guide!
Lead them to the heavenly kingdom
Safely by Thy side.
Loving Father hear us!¹²

The man leading the circle then invites the healers forward and two of the people in the circle, a woman and a man, take their places, each standing behind one of the chairs in the centre; those who wish healing are then invited forward ‘whenever a seat is free.’ A compact disc player is switched on and gentle instrumental music is played quietly but audibly. Each person coming forward is greeted by the healer, asked if there is anything they would like the healer to concentrate on or to be aware of, and then invited to relax as the healer proceeds. The healers then place their hands

¹² SNU Hymn Book, No.3.

on the patients, around the head, shoulders and, in one case the knees; in another, the lower back, before finishing by holding the patient's hands for a moment or two. The patient then returns to the circle and another comes forward; altogether, six of the people in the circle come forward for healing. Apart from the brief and hushed conversations between patients and healers, everyone sits quietly. When it is clear no-one else wishes to come forward, the man who first stood rises again, invites everyone to join him in a 'closing prayer' and proceeds to deliver another extempore prayer. People rise and the chairs are returned to their former positions and people begin their goodbyes before the hall is closed for the evening.

This is not a description of any actual service I have attended but is instead a 'cameo' drawing together elements that seem to me to be typical of Spiritualist services I have participated in. That said, this portrait of a 'typical' service is very close to some I have actually witnessed, particularly those at Portobello Spiritualist Church in Edinburgh.¹³

The setting, format and language of the meeting is that of the Christian tradition, particularly nonconformist Protestantism. The medium is a visiting medium, meaning that he maintains a circuit of churches by which he is invited to work. The convention of having visiting speakers and demonstrators was adopted from Methodism in the nineteenth century, to address the problem of having only a limited number of mediums available of sufficient calibre to give public demonstrations of mediumship.¹⁴ But as well as drawing upon Protestant Christian forms, we also see indications of traditional western folk beliefs in fairies and other 'little people', as well as an interest in native North American traditions. With the 'Seven Principles', we see some attempt to articulate a specifically Spiritualist identity, but it is one that clearly draws upon these varied strands. This is an identity that combines ideas or concepts of God, spirit, angels, soul, personal development and responsibility,

¹³ 20a Bath Street, EH15 1HD. www.portobellosc.org.uk When referring to Portobello Spiritualist Church, I use variously 'Portobello Church', 'Portobello' and 'the Church', as well as 'Portobello Spiritualist Church', simply in order to avoid repetition. This church is used as the basis for the case study in Chapter 4.

¹⁴ The nature and importance of the circuit tradition are considered more fully in Chapter 4.

together with some form of communication between the inhabitants of a populated spirit world and the inhabitants of the natural world.¹⁵

As to the service itself, the central focus is the demonstration of mediumship. This takes place in the context of a setting that involves demonstrator(s) and audience. The medium is not the only person to whom the audience is responding, and is therefore not the only person responsible for the success of the demonstration. The chairperson may do this by giving a short explanation of how to respond to the medium, what to expect from the medium and will usually 'remind' the audience that the medium is simply an intermediary for people in spirit. Even as this point is made, there is often a reminder that the medium is well-known to the church, enjoys a good reputation within the movement or comes with a good recommendation. The chairperson sets the stage, establishes the tone for the meeting and manages audience expectations. The welcome to the medium also serves to introduce the medium to the congregation. In this way, the chairperson acts as intermediary for the purpose of establishing a relationship between medium and congregation, as a precursor to the medium then acting as intermediary for the purpose of connecting people in the spirit world with people in the natural world.

The meeting is therefore managed in various ways. The existence of a spirit world is reasserted at various points in the course of a single service. The opening prayer is a shared activity that involves speaking to someone or something beyond the natural world; the reading of the healing list and the request for healing is made to someone or something beyond the natural world. The choice of reading may be explained as a choice that is itself inspired by spirit and as having been chosen to guide the medium in their choice of topic upon which to give an address. The hymn prior to the address is explained as a way of welcoming not only the medium but also his spirit guides (or 'inspirers'). The hymn prior to the giving of individual messages during the demonstration of mediumship is also explained as being sung to welcome not only the medium but also the medium's spirit guides (or 'co-workers'), together with the

¹⁵ I use the phrase 'natural world' to refer to the everyday world, and the phrase 'spirit world' to refer to the world(s) beyond, which spirit entities are said to inhabit, or to be properly located in.

‘loved ones’ (deceased relatives and friends) of those in the congregation. An implicit theology becomes perceptible, reaffirmed by the wording of the hymns.

Finally, while the content of personal messages may constitute a form of healing (such as apologies by people in spirit for past behaviour), there is also the healing service following the main service. For those attending, including those who have not received the encouragement of a personal message from the medium, hands-on healing is available.

The Spiritualist world-view is implicitly reasserted in preparation for the medium’s demonstration, even as the audience is encouraged also to respond warmly to the medium personally. The chairperson also manages the medium; both supporting the medium, by encouraging and managing audience expectations, but also setting parameters within which the medium is then expected to work, and containing the nature of the demonstration by limiting the range of phenomena that are to be expected or, indeed, are permissible. Although the medium is the one ‘in touch’ with the spirit world, the chairperson is very much the master of ceremonies, fulfilling a distinct role from that of the medium but sharing responsibility for the success or failure of the demonstration.

At first sight, the format of a Spiritualist service may appear as a typically Christian container into which has been inserted somewhat un-Christian content. However, the progression of a full divine service¹⁶ represents a carefully managed process, whereby each stage in the order of service leads into an increasingly personal engagement with spirit. This adds to the richness of the relationships members of a church maintain with each other but crucially it also holds out the possibility of maintaining relationships with the deceased, relationships which otherwise might simply be regarded as having ended.

¹⁶ The format of the service described above is referred to as a ‘divine’ service because of the strong element of worship it retains, and is commonly adopted for Sunday services. Many Spiritualist services are more obviously demonstrations of mediumship, with the reading and address (and their related hymns) omitted from the order of service.

The attractions of Spiritualism might seem to be inherently emotional, subjective, irrational or downright superstitious, but this is a religious movement that has long claimed to be a philosophy or a science as well as a religion, and which has long had a close (if sometimes problematic) relationship with the field of psychic studies.¹⁷ The Spiritualist movement has in the past proved attractive to a number of prominent scientists, who have encouraged rational, experimental approaches to the study of mediumship.¹⁸

The rise of Spiritualism during the second half of the nineteenth century has attracted much attention, just as its decline or marginalization in the second half of the twentieth century has often been predicted or simply assumed.¹⁹ But Spiritualism persists; Portobello Spiritualist Church in Edinburgh prospers, and is one of almost one hundred such meeting places across Scotland.²⁰ It is also apparent that the practice of mediumship is central to Spiritualism. If we remove mediumship, there is little left that cannot also be found in certain Christian traditions. Even the various teachings of Spiritualism rely almost entirely for their authority upon the perceived quality of the mediumship by which they were brought forward.

The question that follows is ‘What is mediumship?’ I approach this question by asking what is comparable to Spiritualist mediumship, and whether there is an existing category of religious practice to which it properly belongs. A small number of other scholars have asked this question. Geoffrey Nelson, whose sociological work *Spiritualism and Society* remains the most comprehensive account of the

¹⁷ I refer here to the tradition of more expressly scientific attempts to investigate mediumship, a tradition exemplified in Britain by the Society for Psychical Research. See Haynes, 1982 on the SPR and, more generally on the paranormal and the issue of personal survival beyond death, Hill, 1919; Price, 1939; Gauld, 1968 and 1982; Zollschan, Schumaker & Walsh (Eds.), 1989; Beloff, 1993; and Storm & Thalbourne (Eds.), 2006.

¹⁸ These include Alfred Russel Wallace (Slotten, 2004); Sir William Crookes (Medhurst, 1972); Sir Oliver Lodge (Jolly, 1974); and Sir Arthur Findlay, who wrote a number of works influential within the movement, especially *On the Edge of the Etheric*, 1931. A contemporary example would be Professor Archie Roy, President of the Scottish Society for Psychical Research (also Astronomer Royale and former President of the SPR). Professor Roy provided the foreword to Jacqueline Jones-Hunt’s *Séances with God*, 2002, which contains a chapter entitled ‘The Ancient Shamanic Origins of Mediumship.’

¹⁹ For example, Winter, pp.76-7

²⁰ See Appendix 7

Spiritualist movement, proposed shamanism as the appropriate category,²¹ although the suggestion is not pursued in detail.

In British scholarship, Spiritualism and other mediumistic traditions tend to have been analyzed in terms of models of possession, illustrating the difficulty of establishing a clear boundary between shamanic and possession studies. The particular mediumistic practices found in Spiritualism arguably bear comparison with possession practices in Africa and elsewhere²² just as readily as with traditional shamanic practices, which have provided a popular template in North American scholarship on native peoples.²³ Attempting to choose between those two categories (on which scholars have differed) prompts the more fundamental question of whether there is a difference between them, or whether they might simply be two comparable models that have enjoyed scholarly popularity in different parts of the world.²⁴

Before we rush into conflating shamanic and possession models, it may be worth re-examining what it is about Spiritualist mediumship we should attend to in order to categorize. If mediumship is that which is distinctive about Spiritualism, it may be productive to ask ‘What is distinctive about mediumship?’ If a comparison of mediumistic practices does not give a clear answer (indicated by scholarly comparisons with both shamanic and possession traditions), perhaps we need to dig a little deeper and ask ‘What is it that gives rise to mediumship?’ Put more simply, how does one become a medium?

My field work at Portobello Spiritualist Church involved becoming a member of the Church’s development circle (its teaching forum), attending its weekly meetings regularly over a period of four and a half years and, over that period, becoming a medium who achieved recognition within the Spiritualist movement and now maintains a circuit of churches at which he demonstrates. Reflecting upon that process, and observing and sharing the experience of others also undergoing that

²¹ p.230

²² Skultans, 1974, p.5

²³ Jones, 2006

²⁴ Lewis, 2003, pp.xviii-xxi.

process, as well as consulting historical memoirs and other accounts of mediums and their careers, made me aware of the extent to which mediumship is the outcome of a lengthy and often highly-demanding apprenticeship. Not only that, but it is an apprenticeship with a very distinct structure, which I argue is also characteristic of traditions already identified as shamanic.

This observation has important implications. The category shamanism has generally been defined either with reference to cultural context, to particular practices regarded as characteristic (e.g. shamanic travelling) or by attempting to describe the state of consciousness a shaman is said to be able to achieve in order to practise (Eliade's characterization of the shaman as a practitioner of 'ecstasy' being the classic example²⁵). Scholars have variously used of each of these approaches, none of which has yet given rise to a generally-accepted definition. The definition I propose in Chapter 8 is ultimately derived from an understanding of Spiritualism as a shamanic tradition maintained by a highly particular apprenticeship, and which 'belongs' to, or might be said to be indigenous to, the social setting of the modern West.

For this reason, Section 1.2 briefly addresses issues of indigeneity and tradition. Shamanism has tended to be perceived as primitive or indigenous, a feature of pre-modern societies, and has not tended to be recognised in modern, urban settings. There are, of course, exceptions such as Korea²⁶ and Japan,²⁷ but these are often seen precisely as exceptions for those who prefer to define shamanism with reference to animal (or other natural or elemental) spirits, or to non-urban settings. Such characterizations lead naturally to a tendency to identify shamanism among 'indigenous' (meaning technologically primitive) peoples. Reference to culturally specific characteristics necessarily impedes the development of a cross-cultural definition. If such a definition is possible, it is to be expected that it will require reference to structures, as well as to content or historical context.²⁸

²⁵ Eliade, 1989

²⁶ Kendall, 1996

²⁷ Blacker, 1975

²⁸ Eliade, 1959, p.232

1.2 Mediums and shamans: traditions compared

Spiritualists commonly regard their movement as dating from 1848, when various physical phenomena claimed by the Fox family in Hydesville, New York captured the imagination of journalists and the public.²⁹ Although those events provide a convenient reference point, it is clear with hindsight that various developments in religious and scientific thought during the eighteenth century did much to prepare the way for a new movement based upon mediumistic practices.³⁰ Emic discussion of the ‘forerunners’ of Spiritualism tends to focus upon the activities of Franz Anton Mesmer and E. Swedenborg,³¹ whose ‘powers seemed to resemble those of a modern Spiritualist medium’.³² In addition, the writings of Andrew Jackson Davis, who practised as a professional clairvoyant from 1843 and was known as ‘The Poughkeepsie Seer’, were highly influential within the early Spiritualist movement.³³

The Spiritualist movement dating from the 1840s is often referred to as ‘modern’ Spiritualism. Awareness of mediumship as that which characterizes Spiritualism (whether articulated or not) does lead to comparisons being drawn with other, usually older, mediumistic traditions.

The raising of spirit and communication with the dead is often known as necromancy and is a widespread and ancient practice, ... Shamanism is one of the most widespread of religious institutions and the one which, although found among primitive peoples, most closely resembles modern Spiritualism.³⁴

Nelson consistently writes of shamanism as a ‘primitive’ form of Spiritualism, although he fails to articulate clearly what he means by this. Elaide’s *Shamanism* is

²⁹ There are numerous publications dealing with the Fox family; a recent example is Weisberg, 2004

³⁰ Spiritualism is only one of a number of religious movements that originated in New York State; see, for example, Cross, W.R.: *The Burned-over District; The Social and Intellectual History of Enthusiastic Religion in Western New York*, Cornell UP, Ithaca, 1950

³¹ Nelson, 1969, pp.48-54

³² *ibid.*, p.54. See, for example, Conan Doyle, 1926

³³ The group that gathered around Davis included the Rev. S.B. Britten, a Universalist Minister who converted to Spiritualism. He later married the prominent medium Emma Hardinge, whose mediumship gave rise to writings that later became the Seven Principles of SNU Spiritualism. See Nelson, 1969, p.53. There were originally six principles, the precise wording of which varies according to different sources.

³⁴ Nelson, 1969, pp.43-4

Nelson's main source on shamanism, and he wrote at a time when the term 'primitive' seemed less problematic for scholars of religion, and it may well be that Nelson also shared or unconsciously referenced wider assumptions as to the more sophisticated or 'advanced' nature of western culture. As James Cox has indicated, the gradual replacement of the term 'primitive' with the term 'indigenous' can mask the continuation of such attitudes, rather than reflecting an accurate understanding of cultures that may be primitive only in the sense of being technologically less complex.³⁵ That change in terminology may also reflect a degree of naivety or romanticism as to the innocence or 'purity' of such cultures, which can be an equally serious obstacle to appreciating them as the outcomes of social processes of exchange and development as old and complex as any.

The term 'indigenous' can have scholarly value where it is used to indicate a form of belonging evidenced by social stability. James Cox notes that attempts to identify the characteristics of indigenous religion seem,

consistently to produce a list, which at a minimum, comprises the following three features: (1) indigenous societies are local, or at least self-contained, and thus have no interest in extending their religious beliefs or practices beyond their own limited environment; (2) they are based primarily on kinship relations, and hence usually have a strong emphasis on ancestors; (3) they transmit their traditions orally, resulting in a fundamentally different attitude towards beliefs and practices than is found amongst traditions derived from and based on authoritative written sources.³⁶

Spiritualism is widespread across traditionally Protestant Anglo-American countries in North America, Britain & Iceland, South Africa, Australia and New Zealand. Spiritualism is not restricted to these jurisdictions but they represent its classic geographical locus. Further, the locus of the Spiritualist movement is specific in time, from the 1840s to the present day. This might seem to stand in the way of describing Spiritualism as indigenous but it is clear that there is a particular cultural setting to which Spiritualism belongs and expresses, and to which it can be said to belong. One thing that can be said of shamanisms generally is that they have tended to be regarded as traditions in which their practitioners are regarded as embodying, in

³⁵ Cox, 2007

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.61

concentrated or intensified form, beliefs found more widely in the societies in which they occur.³⁷ This, too, is part of the belonging of indigenous traditions. I argue that the inclination to locate indigenous traditions in particular physical spaces can obstruct an accurate appreciation of their extent, and should not be allowed to obscure the need to attend to the social location of a tradition as its proper ‘placing’ or home. This is not to say that physical locality is unimportant. Portobello Spiritualist Church is a successful church partly because, over more than sixty years, it has maintained a physical presence in the same community within the City of Edinburgh, allowing the development and maintenance of numerous local relationships.

The suggestion that indigenous societies tend not to proselytize is interesting in relation to Spiritualism. Although the propagation of Spiritualism is an official aim of many Spiritualist organizations,³⁸ most activity of this nature takes place within the western culture to which Spiritualism belongs. Further, my experience of Spiritualist churches is that, although they may give public demonstrations of mediumship, advertising of services and other events tends to be low-key. So far as admission to Spiritualist development circles is concerned, selected individuals are chosen from the Spiritualist community, rather than being sought out in the wider world. Further, there is a frequently expressed truism within the movement that Spiritualism ‘is not for everyone’.

For these reasons, I argue that Spiritualism exhibits the first of the three features of indigeneity listed above, provided we understand locality as including social, as well as physical, locality. This reinforces the need to attend to social tradition, including particular traditions such as apprenticeship.

³⁷ Shirokogoroff argues strongly against abstracting shamanism from his wider study of the Tungus, arguing that his account of Tungus shamanism is only comprehensible in terms of Tungus culture (1999, p.241), a similar argument to that made by Janet Atkinson, 1992.

³⁸ By way of example, the SNU has a formal mission statement printed on the reverse of membership cards: ‘To Promote the Religion and Religious Philosophy of Spiritualism as based upon the Seven Principles.’

The second of Cox's three features, an emphasis on kinship and ancestors, is clearly present in Spiritualism. The craft of mediumship is primarily employed to maintain contact with deceased individuals known to those comprising the community served by any given Spiritualist church or medium. It is also clear in Spiritualism that some ancestors may be communal. The tradition of spirit guides is a long-established feature of the movement's teachings,³⁹ and it is possible for such guides to be referenced by a Spiritualist group as well as individual mediums.⁴⁰

Thirdly, the feature of oral transmission, is also characteristic of Spiritualism. This might seem a difficult claim in relation to a movement that has given rise to such an extensive literature, but mediumship is taught as a learned craft that is expressly 'not about book learning'.⁴¹ There are written texts that have been influential within the movement but they appear to have been influential partly because of the acknowledged quality of the mediumship they are regarded as evidencing. Despite the importance of certain texts, Spiritualism has no form of scripture, no founding teacher, and (particular, often short-lived, organizations apart) remains open to new information coming forward through contemporary mediumship. Further, although particular churches and other organizations make use of sets of principles that serve as a basic creed, their interpretation and application is accepted as a highly personal matter, and the number and wording of such principles is anything but uniform across the movement.⁴² The Spiritualist mediumistic apprenticeship maintained at Portobello is detailed in the ethnography in Chapter 4 but it is, I think, significant that during my own apprenticeship from February 2003 till June 2006, no written

³⁹ The role of spirit guides is also detailed more fully in Chapter 4. There are many examples of insider works dealing with spirit guides, typical examples being Richard Webster, 1998 and Ruth White, 2004

⁴⁰ Some Spiritualist organizations are founded with reference to the teachings of a particular guide; for example, the Greater World Christian Spiritualist Association was established in 1931 on the basis of the teachings of a guide known as Zodiac, communicated through the mediumship of Winifred Moyes. www.greaterworld.com (consulted September 27th, 2010)

⁴¹ The words in quotation marks were used by the circle leader at Portobello during one of my first circle meetings in February 2003.

⁴² In practice, the principles of the Spiritualists' National Union are highly influential, and are often used by non-SNU churches, including non-SNU churches outside the UK. For example, the SNU principles are used by the Burlington Spiritualist Society near Toronto, Canada, which I visited in August 2010.

text was recommended as part of my learning, other than brief handouts prepared internally.

Of these three features, Cox places particular emphasis upon location ‘as the major characteristic of Indigenous Religions’,⁴³ together with a ‘single and over-riding belief’ that,

derives from a kinship-based world-view in which attention is directed towards ancestor spirits as the central figures in religious life and practice.⁴⁴

I argue that Spiritualism is an indigenous religion, but this does give rise to difficulties with the characteristic of location. With Spiritualism, belonging to a physical location over an extended period can, as indicated, be crucial when analyzing the success of particular churches or organizations but, when considering Spiritualism the movement, we need to be alert to belonging as occurring in a social location rather than a physical one. Appreciation of social belonging also enables us to see that the ancestor spirits need not be personal ancestors but might instead, in some traditions, such as Christian Spiritualism, be tribal ancestors such as Jesus Christ.

This is why I argue for appreciation of the importance of social tradition, and of the ways in which traditions are maintained, as ultimately of greater importance than determining whether or not a particular tradition is indigenous. Physical locations can leave their mark upon societies and, therefore, upon their religious and other traditions, but religious traditions belong ultimately not to places but to those who adhere to them. For these reasons, and because of my emphasis upon shamanisms as apprenticeship outcomes, I prefer to speak of Spiritualism and other shamanisms as traditional, rather than indigenous.

In order to articulate what I mean by traditional, I make use (as does Cox) of Hervieu-Léger’s ‘working definition’ of religion as a chain of memory.⁴⁵ At first

⁴³ Cox, 2007, p.69

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ Hervieu-Léger, 2000

sight, it may seem odd to draw upon a model developed in the Roman Catholic background of France in order to analyse a religious movement that is characteristic of the Protestant Anglo-American world but I support Hervieu-Léger's contention that her model has wider application.⁴⁶

Rather than a grand theory of religion, Hervieu-Léger undertakes the task of fashioning a working definition or set of tools to aid our understanding of the ways in which existing religious traditions are maintained, and of the ways in which new forms of religious expression are created and subsequently maintained: essentially this is an enquiry into the processes of remembrance. Remembrance is undertaken individually and collectively: collective remembrance is undertaken in community and communities generally develop ways of recognizing authority or, in a religious context, of authorizing a set of practices and beliefs sufficiently coherent as to enable the maintenance of the community as embodying a distinct religious tradition. Hervieu-Léger asserts that the maintenance of a core lineage of religious leaders, which lineage constitutes that community's religious authority, is key to a religious tradition's ability to maintain itself. I propose that the apprenticeship model I identify in Spiritualism is the particular mechanism whereby Spiritualism (and, I argue, other shamanisms) maintains its own chain of memory. While the mechanism in other types of religious tradition may well also be apprenticeship, it appears reasonable to anticipate that different types of tradition will give rise to different types of apprenticeship.

For Hervieu-Léger, the imperfect recollection of tradition (the teachings passed on by the core lineage), and the breaking of links in the diachronic chain we call memory, is not only how existing religious traditions deteriorate but also how they adapt and how new ones (or new versions of old ones) arise. When part of an existing tradition is forgotten, or actively discarded, a link or section of the existing chain might be said to be lost. Thus religious activity is seen as a process of 're-

⁴⁶ Cox perceives difficulties with Hervieu-Léger's model in distinguishing between religious and non-religious traditions (pp.84-5). It is not my purpose here to address directly the question of whether Spiritualism is properly characterized as a religious tradition (something I do not regard as especially contentious). Instead, I address the more specific question of how Spiritualism and other shamanic traditions are maintained.

membering' or reassembling, because remembering must, over time, be done by different people in the light of ongoing experience and is never, therefore, mere repetition. This is a theme explored, for example, by Grace Davie in *Religion in Modern Europe*,⁴⁷ where she sees modern European religion as a collective memory that is undergoing a process of mutation.

Hervieu-Léger's model is therefore one that is intended to assist in understanding processes of religious change, and she proposes that one way to bring order to this apparent flux is to ask a number of questions in relation to any given religion. I frame Hervieu-Léger's approach in terms of three questions, each of which articulates a particular element of her model. First, is there an identifiable community and, if so, how is it created and/or maintained? Secondly, what is the tradition and its embodying core lineage (both in terms of a lineage of belief and a succession of authoritative teachers) to which (and whom) the members of that community adhere, and how do they witness them? Thirdly, what are the processes of belief that constitute or legitimate that tradition and its core lineage as the identifying authority for that community? I maintain that it is possible to give a clear answer each of these questions in relation to the Spiritualist tradition of mediumship and traditional shamanisms.

The distinction between shaman and spirit medium has not always been perceived clearly, particularly among North American scholars. By way of example, in his early study *Medicine Man: A Sociological Study of the Character and Evolution of Shamanism*,⁴⁸ John Lee Maddox largely uses the language of spirit possession, although he is aware that there is a real issue as whether it is the spirit or the medium who is doing the possessing, a sensitivity later scholars have not always displayed. It seems that this ambiguity was, of itself, an accepted feature of possession practices, including shamanism, rather than being seen as the potential basis of a distinction between shamanism and other traditions. Eliade resolved this ambiguity indirectly by presenting shamanism as an 'ecstatic' practice that enabled the shaman to 'travel' (by means of the soul leaving the body), with the ability to do so relying (at least in part)

⁴⁷ 2000

⁴⁸ 1923

upon the shaman being able to use the strength or power of helping spirits. This presentation lends itself to a perception of the shaman as the one in control, and is the perspective confirmed by Merete Jakobsen⁴⁹ in her study of the Greenlandic tradition.⁵⁰

Despite the characterization of the shaman as the one in control by Eliade and those who followed his lead, it remained possible for Lewis to assert that a comprehensive understanding of so-called ‘ecstatic’ religion required, as he put it, a study of both shamanism and spirit possession practices.⁵¹ Frederick Smith’s work on south-east Asian possession practices⁵² makes it clear that ‘possession’ can include a wide range of communicative traditions.⁵³

The hope that it might be possible to identify a common denominator among shamanisms spurred Eliade to write, has been picked up by writers such as Vitebsky,⁵⁴ and is a goal I pursue in this thesis. In reaction to the difficulties of such an approach, and the distortions it can give rise to, came pleas such as Atkinson’s⁵⁵ for more contextualized understandings, for the acceptance of shamanisms, rather than shamanism, so as to give due attention to characteristics of particular shamanisms that might otherwise be glossed over. This remains a valuable point. In attempting to determine a possible common element among shamanisms, it is important to be alert to the possibility that that element may not be a matter of common content but may instead be ‘structural’. By this I indicate a distinction between historical content in terms of particular practices on the one hand, and structure in terms of the social mechanisms that maintain a tradition on the other. The basis of a cross-cultural definition of shamanism may lie in understanding how shamanic skills are acquired, rather than the ways in which they are applied.

⁴⁹ 1999

⁵⁰ That the practitioner is the one in control is also taught as part of the mediumistic apprenticeship detailed in Chapter 4.

⁵¹ 3rd Edn., 2003.

⁵² 2006

⁵³ *ibid.*, pp.60-6

⁵⁴ 2001

⁵⁵ 1992

The challenge of responding to Atkinson's concern, while remaining open to the possibility of a common denominator across shamanisms, has led some writers to suggest that shamanism be understood not in terms of a single definition but in terms of a flexible set of practices or characteristics, not all of which need be clearly or markedly present in any given example of shamanism;⁵⁶ shamanisms thus become members of a family, some of whose members may have little or nothing in common. Ultimately, this is not a flexible definition but a failure to define, rendering shamanism useless as an intellectual category. As DuBois notes, scholars of religion have 'found shamanic traditions particularly thorny to categorize'.⁵⁷

This matters because categorization is crucial to understanding. Categories enable us to identify both commonality and difference: they exclude as well as include. In the field of religious studies, this leads us to formulate the question 'Is this particular religious tradition or practice a particular example of a phenomenon that has been more widely identified?' Scholars often do this quite naturally, hence the suggestion by Geoffrey Nelson that Spiritualist mediumship might bear comparison with shamanism⁵⁸ or the suggestion by Vieda Skultans that mediumistic practices in south Wales might bear comparison with spirit possession cults in Africa.⁵⁹ Attempting to answer such questions can lead to a redefinition of the category, where we feel that the particular example under consideration really 'ought' to be included but seems to be excluded by the existing definition. On occasion, this can change our understanding of what is central to the definition.

This thesis argues, first, that the 'active' characterization of shamanism is unjustifiably limited and tends to lead to a failure to appreciate the full range of shamanic practices; secondly, that the 'passive' characterization of Spiritualist mediumship (in common with other so-called possession practices) is also unjustifiably limited and tends to lead to a failure to appreciate the full range of mediumistic practices; and thirdly, that these existing characterizations or

⁵⁶ DuBois, 2009, pp.5-6

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.5

⁵⁸ 1969, p.230

⁵⁹ 1974, p.5

perceptions therefore need to be overcome in order to enable a fuller appreciation of both Spiritualism and shamanism. Further, once that fuller appreciation is achieved, it becomes clear that Spiritualism can usefully be interpreted or classified as an example of traditional shamanism. It is from this comparison that a new, apprenticeship-based definition of shamanism emerges. The focus upon apprenticeship allows us to see what different members of the ‘shamanic family’ do in fact have in common, despite being markedly different (or even apparently unconnected) in terms of the particular practices to be found within each tradition. The proposed model has a particular structure, comprising elements found across shamanisms, and which recur in a particular sequence: first, initiatory experiences (selection by the spirits or, on their behalf, by an existing practitioner); secondly, a period of training (by both the spirits and an existing practitioner but which can, nevertheless, be of an intensely solitary nature); and thirdly, public or communal recognition (both initially and on an ongoing basis). As to which practices are actually to be found in any particular example of shamanism, we must take on board Atkinson’s point that the category shamanism comprises a collection of shamanisms, each with its own particular cultural context and, therefore, content.

It might seem that the suggestion that Spiritualism should be added to the collection of recognized shamanisms threatens to stretch the category ‘shamanism’ (however it is defined) even further, potentially rendering it even less useful than it is already. The real challenge, therefore, is not simply to demonstrate why Spiritualist mediumship is properly regarded as an example of traditional shamanism but to ask whether its inclusion prompts and enables a new way of defining shamanism. I think it does but, in order to demonstrate why, I need to turn to the issue of methodology. My involvement in Spiritualism has led me to comprehend mediumship as an apprenticeship outcome. Accordingly, I define mediumship in terms of the apprenticeship that leads to it. The method became the model.

1.3 Methodology and the insider contribution

The British Spiritualist movement of the past forty years is, in academic terms, underexamined. Although this is the period during which much of the existing academic work on Spiritualism has been produced, much of that work considers the Spiritualist movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁶⁰ By contrast, the period from the late 1960s has seen the continuing production of extensive insider material, maintaining a long-standing literary tradition within the Spiritualist movement. In recent decades, mediumistic autobiographies have tended to become more prominent, perhaps reflecting the trend towards celebrity, but biographies have long been a feature of Spiritualist literature and function as one of the ways in which the movement remembers those who constitute its core lineage.

One autobiography I draw upon is that of the Rev. Bernice Winstanley, retired Minister of Portobello Spiritualist Church.⁶¹ Until her retirement, Bernice was my Minister and one of those who tutored me in becoming a working medium. My standpoint presents two particular challenges: first, selecting or developing a methodology that allows me to retain a sense of integrity towards my own religious understanding and, secondly, selecting or developing an academically credible methodology that allows me to make use of my experience of the Spiritualist movement, but which also renders my analysis of Spiritualist mediumship falsifiable by other scholars. Anything else risks being simply one more implicit claim to be right on the basis of insider status.

Developing a methodology that meets these concerns is no small task. Reference to existing literature is one very obvious way in which the particularity of research or other personal experience can be set in context, and tested for relevance in terms of whether or not it progresses scholarly understanding, but any chosen methodology leads to a particular selection (and therefore outcome) because methodologies contain underlying assumptions as to what is and is not relevant. As an insider, I

⁶⁰ Naturally, there are exceptions (i.e. modern scholars looking at contemporary Spiritualism) such as Vieda Skultans, 1974, Burke Forrest, 1986, John Walliss, 2001, and Hannah Gilbert, 2008

⁶¹ *A Spiritual Journey*, 2003

obviously seek a methodology that makes full but relevant use of the additional experiences to which my insider status gives me access (including personal subjective experiences and conversations with other insiders).

In Chapter 2, I provide an overview of Spiritualism, by considering some of the issues that have seemed relevant to previous commentators. In order to organize the material, I explore the supporting perspectives or world-views that other scholars have identified, and begin to explore the practices and mechanisms that enable the Spiritualist movement to cohere. In Chapter 3, I focus upon mediumship, as distinct from Spiritualism, and reach the preliminary conclusion that this is not only a learned craft but is the outcome of a particular apprenticeship, with a clearly-defined structure.

In Chapter 4, I set out an ethnographic account of Portobello Spiritualist Church and the training given in its development circle, in order to provide a detailed example of what a contemporary Spiritualist medium's apprenticeship entails. One aim in that Chapter is to make available an ethnography of contemporary Spiritualism, derived from my own experience of having developed as a medium through membership of a development circle.⁶² Crucially for this thesis, it is that involvement as an insider that made me aware of the extent to which Spiritualist mediumship is the outcome of a process of apprenticeship that typically takes place (and is expected to take place) over a number of years,⁶³ and the extent to which this is an accepted and uncontroversial point within Spiritualism (even if infrequently articulated).

In writing Chapter 4, I make use of what Forrest terms the subjective reality that I found myself inhabiting.⁶⁴ This refers to the visions, sensations and other perceptual experiences I was encouraged to accept as real, and to interpret in terms of the concepts articulated and maintained within the Spiritualist dialogue as carried on at Portobello. That dialogue is itself particular within the wider Spiritualist dialogue and therefore needs to be set in context. In order to develop an academically useful

⁶² Skultans (1974) and Forrest (1986) apart, scholarly accounts of participant-observation are lacking.

⁶³ Typically 4-5 years or more.

⁶⁴ 1986, pp.433-5

ethnography derived from this subjective reality, I have endeavoured to maintain the self-reflexive approach to ethnography advocated by Charlotte Davies,⁶⁵ particularly in developing the ethnography of Portobello Spiritualist Church set out in Chapter 4. As an insider, I fully identify with Sutcliffe's 'ambiguous experience of fieldwork',⁶⁶ and the inevitability of elements of hidden purpose, if not deception.⁶⁷ Within Portobello, and other churches at which I work, I have ensured that it is common knowledge that I am writing a thesis on Spiritualism, and using my experience of the Church and the wider movement as a research basis for, or at least to inform, my conclusions. Yet I am conscious that there are few others who have taken this route, and know full well that the ways in which I use information acquired as an insider may not be fully appreciated by my fellow practitioners. I am known and trusted as 'one of us', even as I am 'one of them'.

Being an insider, much information comes to me without being actively sought out; it enables the luxury (if it is that) of letting the phenomena under investigation to drive the research. I fully acknowledge that the selection of that Church itself was entirely a matter of personal and family history;⁶⁸ and that I visited no other Spiritualist churches prior to joining the church's development circle. I naively assumed that Portobello was a typical example of a Spiritualist church. In fact, the ethnography given in this study is of one of the largest and most active Spiritualist churches in Scotland. This is not to say that my research has remained unstructured; my knowledge of Spiritualism has developed through an appreciation of the practices, processes and structures I have discerned. Very gradually (in truth, some years into the writing of this thesis), it became apparent that apprenticeship was the name for what I was undergoing. My methodology not only emerged from the phenomenon being explored but then became the model for comprehending that phenomenon. This was a potent reminder of the extent to which social structures are processes of engagement and, without intending it to, apprenticeship became the significant structure this thesis focuses upon.

⁶⁵ 1999; esp. Chapter 9

⁶⁶ 2003, p.17

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, p.18

⁶⁸ At time of submitting this thesis, my parents and paternal grandmother continue to be members.

The challenge of making academically credible and worthwhile use of insider experience has often presented itself in the field of shamanic studies, particularly where scholars have made use of their experience of neo-shamanic practice. Two approaches tend to be evident, according to whether the scholar is also a practitioner.

One approach is to attempt to put the insider perspective to one side, be appropriately self-reflexive, and adopt an accepted methodology such as phenomenology that, through the exercise of *epochē*, is at least willing to record and utilize insider explanations or interpretations of the phenomena under examination, as constituting relevant data.⁶⁹ The openness of phenomenology in this regard, and in the role it accords to the exercise of ‘eidetic intuition’, renders it an attractive methodology for those insiders who wish to self-present as scholars articulating an account that is credible to, and can be engaged with by, other scholars who are (or may be) outsiders. Phenomenology is, in essence, an approach that involves making the attempt to maintain a set of attitudes but, although an understanding of those attitudes might be articulated by an insider just as easily as an outsider, one has to question whether the underlying attitudes that constitute an insider’s perspective can genuinely be put to one side.

This concern can lead to an ‘insider’ approach, which is to maintain that the insider perspective not only can but should be adhered to because of the additional insights that it can offer. In his study of neo-shamanism, Robert Wallis⁷⁰ has responded to this challenge by articulating what he terms an ‘autoarcheology’, meaning the development and application of an appropriate ‘interpretive framework’.⁷¹ For Wallis, this is necessary because when studying neo-shamanisms because they are,

experiential ‘spiritualities’ wherein modes of verification depend on personal insight: unlike a Wiccan ritual with its detailed, ‘revealed’ ceremony, neo-Shamanic ‘journeys’ cannot easily be ‘observed’ or ‘revealed’. Only by

⁶⁹ Cox, 2010, pp.20-1, 120-1

⁷⁰ 2003

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.2

adopting an experiential ethnographer's role did I achieve what aims to be well-rounded perspectives on the various interest groups considered here.⁷²

This is a point that applies equally to traditional shamanisms, including (in my view) Spiritualism, which itself comprises a number of different (but overlapping) interest groups (mediums, officials, church members, congregants). So far as mediumistic experience is concerned, the content of a message (for example, a description of a deceased person) given by a Spiritualist medium from the platform can be assessed. There is at least a dialogical text that can be assessed by an observer. Against that, like neo-shamanic journeying, the experience of healing, standing before a Spiritualist congregation and being mediumistically aware, or undergoing the experience of journeying (or astral travel), can no more be observed than the visions and other experiences that a medium or other traditional shaman perceives as real. Spiritualist mediums do make the effort to articulate these experiences to each other, not least for teaching purposes, but without having shared these experiences, this is a dialogue with which it is difficult to engage – not only for non-Spiritualists but for Spiritualists who are not themselves mediums.

Wallis adopts Jackson's understanding of what is required in 'developing and refining reflective and reflexive insider-based methodologies.'⁷³

To break the habit of using a linear communicational model for understanding bodily praxis, it is necessary to adopt a methodological strategy of joining in without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of other persons; inhabiting their world. Participation thus becomes an end in itself rather than a means of gathering closely observed data which will be subject to interpretation elsewhere after the event.

(Jackson 1989: 58)⁷⁴

When my involvement with Spiritualism began, I was not conducting fieldwork for academic purposes: I was simply exploring and testing something about which I was, if sceptical, increasingly curious. I had little more than that to say to anyone who asked me why I was doing it. Indeed, my involvement with Portobello Spiritualist

⁷² *ibid.*, pp.6-7

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.8

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

Church was, in the early stages, something I tended to obscure. That position is one I have moved on from. I have moved from scepticism through open-minded curiosity to a position of acceptance and trust in the reality of spirit, both in the general sense of a spirit world beyond this natural one and in the particular sense of individual spirits or discarnate people. Further, as a medium, speaker, healer, official and author, I now participate in the communal articulation of what it is to be a Spiritualist and, over time, in the development of the understanding that is expressed. Thus I am required now to reflect not only upon what is required in order to meet academic expectations but also upon what is required in order to meet a range of insider expectations. From my perspective, non-mediumistic Spiritualists are another category of outsider for whose benefit I seek to explain.

For this reason, I regard myself as an example of what Wallis refers to as one of ‘the many alternative voices which are marginalised by academia’,⁷⁵ or, at least, as an example of an unconventional researcher. As Wallis recognises, his is an overtly political stance.⁷⁶ Spiritualism, too, can have a marginalized feel to it but, so far as the academy is concerned, I might prefer to say that existing attitudes have led to an overlooking, avoiding overtones of intentionality but indicating limited awareness. What has been achieved thus far in terms of understanding Spiritualism is severely limited and this may reflect a wider failure adequately to attend to popular aspects of our own culture, although Martin Stringer’s recent work is a welcome sign that attitudes may be changing.⁷⁷

This thesis makes use of participant-observation in the form of a variation on Forrest’s ‘apprentice-participation’,⁷⁸ and comparative and historical analysis drawing upon existing fieldwork accounts. I employ different methodologies at different points in the argument. Wallis argues that we can err when choosing between different approaches:

⁷⁵ Wallis, 2003, p.9

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.23

⁷⁷ 2008

⁷⁸ 1986

The flaw in foundationalist epistemology is that it assumes ‘orthodox’ (correct) and ‘fringe’ (wrong) approaches are commensurable (Denning 1999a). This assumption is challenged by hermeneutics, in which multiple rather than single interpretations are encouraged. Instead of hegemonic terms like ‘deviant’, ‘fringe’, ‘cult’ or ‘pseudo’ archaeology, the less pejorative term ‘alternative’ should be used (Denning 1999a).⁷⁹

While I agree with Wallis that there is a need to entertain a range of interpretations, there remains also a need for coherence. For me, ‘alternative’ retains overtones of difference, separateness and of choosing between or prioritising and, although it may seem a fine point, my own preference is for the term ‘additional’. Spiritualism is one domestic voice among others and has, for over 150 years now, formed part of ‘our’ western religious repertoire. Spiritualism represents a world-view in which human relationships are not ended by death but instead continue to be lived and enjoyed. For many Spiritualists, issues of magic, religion and science do not obviously come into it but, instead, simply lie in the background as constituent elements of the western world-view to which, collectively, we subscribe.

Obviously, a sense of the value of human warmth is not something peculiar to Spiritualists: indeed, Spiritualism itself is not always exclusive to Spiritualists. At Portobello, Church members or other attendees often combine participation in Spiritualist services (or even formal membership of Portobello Spiritualist Church) with other religious traditions. These might include membership of other Christian churches, both Roman Catholic and Protestant, or other places of worship or spiritual practice including, for example, the Planetary Foundation for Healing (previously called The Shamanic Centre) in Portobello.⁸⁰ Thus some congregants engage in a practice I call ‘bundling’, whereby they collate in order to develop a personal bundle or set of beliefs, teachings and/or practices, the combination of which represents the spiritual understanding that makes sense of their particular experience. The practice of bundling is not about flitting between alternatives, about this not that, but about this *and* that. A coherent world-view may well be constructed from a number of different perspectives that are drawn upon in order to supplement one another. Such a composite world-view very naturally lends itself to drawing variously upon

⁷⁹ 2003, p.10

⁸⁰ High Street, Portobello, Edinburgh

magical, religious and scientific dialogues in order to find appropriate language to develop and maintain a specifically Spiritualist dialogue (i.e. to maintain an identity and, therefore, boundaries). Appreciating fully how this is done is perhaps only fully achieved by adopting an experiential ethnographer's role, but it would be foolish to insist that this is the only approach that can be productive, for the simple reason that such an approach still only takes us so far. Ultimately what Wallis presents is a variation on phenomenology: an attempt to maintain a particular set of attitudes (including a willingness to be self-reflexive) towards an insider experience that itself cannot be directly shared. The effort is made to articulate those attitudes carefully, to show familiarity with existing academic conversations and demonstrate intellectual capability, in order to engender trust in the insider's description and interpretation of that experience.

Phenomenology and methodologies based upon it might therefore be said (following Gavin Flood⁸¹) to privilege consciousness,⁸² regardless of whether the relevant study is being conducted by insiders or outsiders, and this may be another reason why the nature of consciousness so often becomes a dominant issue in shamanic and possession studies. All of which is implicitly to acknowledge or suggest that there are conversations that can be maintained among insiders but which are difficult (if not impossible) to maintain across the insider/outsider boundary. Further, this is a boundary that is present not only between insiders and outsiders in the traditional sense of those who subscribe to a religious practice and those who do not, but which also applies as between those scholars who have first-hand experience of a religious practice and those who do not. Those who do not inevitably rely upon the researcher's knowledge of the relevant tradition, upon the interpretive ability of the 'experienced' scholar.

For these reasons I maintain that Wallis's advocacy of a hermeneutical approach is to be supported but it is also why I maintain that it needs to be taken further, so that what is challenged is not this or that dominant or orthodox world-view but the very idea that human experience is so limited as to be fully comprehensible by any one of

⁸¹ 1999

⁸² *ibid.*, Chapter 4

those traditional dialogues. For Spiritualists, a world-view that simultaneously draws upon the magical, the religious and the scientific or rational, itself constitutes a single, coherent world-view, for all that it is forced by the limitations of language (employing concepts originating in more particular world-views) to draw variously upon magical, religious and scientific terminology.

Although the value of reflexivity (including self-reflexivity) is undeniable, and is emphasized by Flood,⁸³ he argues that if reflexivity is conducted in the context of an approach to the study of religion that privileges consciousness, we still find that academic inquiry reaches a point where it is obstructed. It is both in recognition of this difficulty and in an attempt to overcome it that Flood seeks to take us beyond phenomenology in the study of religion, tackling directly this issue of conversational difficulty by approaching the study of religion as an aspect of the study of communication. Appreciating that both mediumship and shamanism as traditions involving communication provides a useful shift in perspective in two ways: first, it encourages us to question the traditional typology of the medium as passive and the shaman as active, in favour of a more nuanced appreciation of both mediums and shamans as practitioners who communicate; and secondly, it encourages us to examine the ways in which the mediumistic tradition (and other shamanic traditions) are communicated by existing practitioners to their successors.

Flood notes that all dialogues are historically conditioned and that recent academic discourses (principally feminist, queer and post-colonial theories) have heightened our awareness of diversity, rejecting universalism.⁸⁴ At a metatheoretical level, Flood echoes Atkinson's plea for the contextualized study of shamanisms.⁸⁵ This is a plea that has been extremely productive, assisting the process of identifying and including additional shamanic traditions (the present thesis providing yet another). Flood's focus upon particular dialogues indicates an approach that has been also productive directly in relation to Spiritualist mediumship, with work such as that of Robin Wooffitt, culminating in *The Language of Mediums and Psychics: The Social*

⁸³ *ibid.*, pp.35-8

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.234

⁸⁵ 1992

*Organization of Everyday Miracles*⁸⁶ and, more recently, *Speaking of Spirit: Representations and Experiences of the Spirit World in British Spirit Mediumship* by Hannah Gilbert.⁸⁷ Yet a striking conclusion reached by Wooffitt is that the further pursuit of various issues raised by his work, including the ways in which mediums account for their own abilities or articulate the experience of paranormal cognition, ‘may also cast light on broader issues in the study of consciousness and the phenomenology of altered, anomalous or marginal conscious states’.⁸⁸ Try as we might, we seem unable to escape the relevance of phenomenology as a methodology, or of consciousness as an appropriate subject of inquiry in the study of religion (and particularly in relation to shamanism and possession studies).

In endeavouring to identify a practical way forward, I follow Walliss’s example in making use of my personal history as a mode of acquiring knowledge,⁸⁹ not so as to engage with attempts to comprehend the nature of consciousness *per se* but simply to identify the social mechanisms that characterize and enable the maintenance of the Spiritualist mediumistic and other shamanic traditions.⁹⁰ The principal mechanism I identify is the apprenticeship I underwent. The focus upon apprenticeship and the development of an apprenticeship model of mediumship offers a model, the usefulness and validity of which can be tested across the Spiritualist movement, and other shamanisms, by both insiders and outsiders.

In this thesis, I propose that Spiritualist mediumship is an example of traditional shamanism, a practice-based religious tradition, maintained by a form of apprenticeship that exhibits a specific structure. I use Portobello Spiritualist Church in Edinburgh as a case-study against which to test this hypothesis. I then propose that shamanism is also a practice-based religious tradition, maintained by a similar form of apprenticeship to that found in Spiritualism. I use the Evenki as a case-study

⁸⁶ 2006

⁸⁷ 2008

⁸⁸ 2006, p.194

⁸⁹ 2003, p.9

⁹⁰ This should not be taken as indicating that I regard discussion of mediumistic or shamanic consciousness as unimportant: far from it. Unusual states of consciousness are consistently associated with shamanic and mediumistic traditions and must therefore be expected to form part of their description. It is simply that enquiry into the nature of consciousness *per se* falls outwith the scope of this thesis.

against which to test this hypothesis. Finally, I propose that the apprenticeship structure I identify in both of these traditions might serve as the basis of a general definition of shamanism.

1.4 Research questions and explanation of chapter arrangement

The preceding outline leads directly to the following research questions:

- (i) How is the Spiritualist tradition of mediumship maintained?
- (ii) If mediumship is the outcome of a process of apprenticeship, what are the key features of that apprenticeship?
- (iii) If mediumship is properly identified as a form of shamanism, is there sufficient commonality of practice (with reference to recognized mediumistic and shamanic skills) to support that identification?
- (iv) Might this, then, suggest that shamanism is also the outcome of a process of apprenticeship and, if so, what are the key features of that apprenticeship?
- (v) Are the mediumistic and shamanic apprenticeships similar, and might this be why we find significant commonality of practice?
- (vi) If the mediumistic and shamanic traditions are maintained by the same apprenticeship mechanism, might this not serve as the basis of a general definition of shamanism?

The first two questions relate specifically to Spiritualism and are explored in Chapters 2, 3 and 4. In Chapter 2, existing studies of the Spiritualist movement are examined, and organized around the magical (or enchanted), religious and scientific-rational underpinnings of western modernity.⁹¹ I bring mediumship more closely into focus in Chapter 3, examining the mediumistic apprenticeship. My conclusions are tested, developed and illustrated by the case-study in Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, I go on to consider existing models of shamanism, paying particular attention to the work of Eliade (given his influence in the field) and his respondents.

⁹¹ Developing a short definition of western modernity is not easy; even a scholar such as Peter Pels, in his valuable *Introduction to Magic and Modernity*, 2003, with its suggestion of the concept of shamanism as a counterpoint to, because intimately connected with, modern rationality, does not attempt an express definition of modernity. I use the phrases ‘western modernity’, ‘modern west’, etc. to indicate the process of rationalization that is often taken as beginning with the European Enlightenment (a questionable assumption of itself), and those cultures in which that process has had significant influence. My view of modernity is that it is a process of rationalization marked by an ongoing dialectic between faith and scepticism (Pels, p.38; also Michael Taussig’s *Viscerality, Faith, and Scepticism: Another Theory of Magic* in the same volume, pp.272-306).

My approach is to begin (as so many others have before me) by returning to the work of Mircea Eliade, both to critique his model of shamanism and to use his work as a source. I demonstrate that my proposed apprenticeship model is implicit in Eliade's material on shamanism but is obscured because of his insistence that possession practices are not to be regarded as authentic or original shamanic practices. I propose that the particular apprenticeship structure I identify in Spiritualist mediumship is indeed the same as that found in shamanism, proceeding in Chapter 6 to use the Evenki as a case-study in testing this proposal. In Chapter 7, I draw together the material surveyed and conclusions reached in the earlier Chapters, illustrating the extent to which the same apprenticeship underpins both British mediumship and Evenki shamanism.

In Chapter 8, I go on to propose this apprenticeship model as the defining institution or social mechanism of shamanism and, therefore, as the basis of a general definition of shamanism. In order to establish this proposal, much more work needs to be undertaken than can be included in the present study but I consider that I demonstrate that there is, at the very least, good reason to pursue such a project. I indicate the possible usefulness of an apprenticeship-based definition by offering some thoughts as to how it might help to distinguish between Spiritualism and New Age, before outlining proposals for further research.

Chapter Two

Spiritualism: a modern movement

2.1 Introduction

Spiritualism has given rise to a considerable body of written literature covering a number of genres, ranging from biographies of mediums¹ and other figures prominent in the movement,² descriptions of (and reflections upon) mediumistic practices,³ to theological works engaging with and contesting traditional Christianity,⁴ personal reflections on spirit communication by mediums and others involved in Spiritualism or who regard themselves as having some experienced various phenomena,⁵ polemical works arguing the case for the soul's survival,⁶ histories of the Spiritualist movement⁷ or one or more of its organisations,⁸ and descriptions of the spirit world (some of which are presented on the basis that they are inspired or otherwise the product of mediumship),⁹ transcripts of Spiritualist meetings intended to act as records or examples of the kind of information that is

¹ Often regarded as synonymous with writing about Spiritualism; see, for example, Tabori, 1968. Eileen Garrett's *My Life*, 1939, is a typical example of a biography, as are Estelle Roberts' *Fifty Years a Medium*, 1969; and Harry Edwards, 1962, on Jack Webber in relation to physical mediumship. See also Peter Lamont, 2005, on the famous Victorian medium Daniel Dunglas Home.

² Jean Bassett's biography of Gordon Higginson, *On the Side of Angels*, a well-known British medium who also served as President of the Spiritualists' National Union from 1970 until his death in 1993, is a typical example. See also Branch, 1982, on Harry Edwards in relation to healing.

³ See, for example, Turvey, 1911; Leaf, 1938; Edwards, 1953; Barbanell, 1959; Edwards, 1996; Smith, 2004 and 2009

⁴ Also Findlay, 1933. For examples of Spiritualist re-readings of the Bible, see Elliott, both 1987

⁵ Typical examples include Lamond, 1924; Swaffer, 1925; Stuart, 1935; Nielsen, 1950; Dyer, 1985; Cooper, 1986; Hands, 1988

⁶ For example, Lodge, 1969

⁷ Perhaps the most famous example is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The History of Spiritualism*, first published in London in 1926

⁸ A typical example is Jean Bassett's, *100 Years of National Spiritualism*, 1990. Gerald O'Hara's *Dead Men's Embers*, Saturday Night Press, York, 2006 is an interesting account drawn from the minute books of a spiritualist society in York, covering the period 1899-1929, a valuable account of the grass-roots growth of Spiritualism. Another example also by O'Hara, with Ann Harrison, is *Mrs Miller's Gift: A Celebration of 75 Years of the Edinburgh College of Parapsychology*, 2007

⁹ There are many such examples; some of the more renowned within Spiritualism include Rev. G. Vale Owen's *The Life Beyond the Veil*, 1920; and the series of works by Anthony Borgia, including *Life in the World Unseen*, Odhams Press, London, 1954 (others in the series listed in the bibliography); and Edwards, 1976. A more recent example is Bill Williams' *Life in the Spirit World*, presented as a series of communications to the medium Muriel Williams by the late Professor Ian Currie (Professor of Sociology at Toronto University), 2006.

produced through the agency of a medium,¹⁰ and even guides to becoming a medium.¹¹ In addition, there is a large body of popular or journalistic literature on Spiritualism and mediumship.¹² Spiritualism is a movement that considers inspirational writing a form of mediumship of itself. Yet this is not the impression gained from reading Vieda Skultans' account of her time in a Welsh church's development circle. She tells us that,

my interest, as interpreted by spiritualists, did not make me significantly different from others, since all spiritualists consider that they are researching into the spirit world.¹³

It is clear from Skultans' work that this 'researching' primarily took the form of time spent in a development circle. This chimes with my own participation in the development circle at Portobello but there are many written texts that are drawn upon by Spiritualists in the search for an appropriate language with which to express their experience, and maintain the Spiritualist dialogue.

By contrast, the existing academic literature on Spiritualism is limited. In particular, examples of fieldwork such as that undertaken by Skultans and Forrest¹⁴ (and to a more limited extent by John Walliss¹⁵) are rare. Hannah Gilbert's¹⁶ recent contribution interviewing working mediums and undertaking a dialogue analysis of those texts is very welcome.¹⁷ While access to the literature and public demonstrations of mediumship is readily available, participant access to Spiritualist development circles is more difficult. Even where access is achieved, the process of

¹⁰ A classic of this genre is Lodge's *Raymond*, 1916, setting out communications between Sir Oliver and his son Raymond, who was killed in action in the First World War. See also Findlay, *The Way of Life*, 1953, setting out transcripts of communications through the Glasgow medium John Campbell Sloan.

¹¹ For example, Rose Vanden Eynden's *So You Want to be a Medium? A Down-to-Earth Guide*, 2006

¹² A good example is Brandon, *The Spiritualists: The Passion for the Occult in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries*, 1983. Other examples include Pearsall, 2004; Blum, 2007; Mary Roach's *Six Feet Over: Adventures in the Afterlife*, 2007 (which includes a chapter relating the author's visit to the Spiritualist centre, Sir Arthur Findlay College, at Stansted in England); and Melechi 2008. These few examples illustrate the extent to which Victorian Spiritualism, ghosts and the 'gothic' still attract attention, and continue to shape perceptions of Spiritualist mediumship.

¹³ 1974, p.2

¹⁴ 1986

¹⁵ 2001

¹⁶ 2008.

¹⁷ A useful example of fieldwork in relation to US Spiritualism is Todd Jay Leonard's *Talking to the Other Side: A History of Modern Spiritualism and Mediumship*, 2005.

mediumistic development is time-consuming, proceeding over years rather than weeks or months, and may require wider participation in the life of the church to which the circle is attached.¹⁸ This represents a commitment few scholars are likely to be either able or inclined to give, and for which funding can prove difficult.

As to emic literature, I maintain a focus upon the figure of the medium through the use of (auto)biographies, given the focus on mediumship in this thesis. I have not made use of biographies of mediums whose careers were prior to the mid-1920s. To some extent, this reflects a perception that mediumship often took the form of physical phenomena during the early years of the movement, whereas it has more consistently taken the form of mental activity from the second quarter of the twentieth century onwards.¹⁹ The teachers at Portobello Spiritualist Church sometimes express the view that many of the best mediums produced by the British Spiritualist movement were active during the second and third quarters of the twentieth century, and that the patience and dedication required to develop mediumistic ability have been less evident in recent decades.

¹⁸ Not all development circles are attached to a church or other centre and home circles continue to have a place in the Spiritualist movement. I am aware, for example, of two home circles maintained by mediums who developed at Portobello Spiritualist Church. The general comments made here still apply, however, given that access to private home circles is generally by invitation only.

¹⁹ Detailed mapping of developments in mediumistic practice could obviously be expected to reveal a more complex picture but that there is academic support for this perception; see, for example, Logie Barrow on the lessening of plebeian or demotic influence within the movement, 1986. Also Hazelgrove, p.275

2.2 Outlining Spiritualism

The Spiritualist movement commonly traces its origins to 1840s America and the phenomena associated with the Fox family in Hydesville, whereby various knocks or rappings around the house were interpreted as spirit communications from a pedlar who has been killed and buried in the basement.²⁰ In Britain, the movement comprises a number of overlapping networks of Spiritualist churches, centres and other meeting places (including private homes) where mediums are able both to develop and to practise their mediumship. It is not possible to speak of a Spiritualist church in the sense of a single organization, nor are there common statements of belief that all Spiritualist churches or other groups adopt,²¹ although there is common acceptance of the existence of a spirit world and the possibility of communication with people in that world through human mediums. Mediumship can therefore be regarded as Spiritualism's defining institution.

Demonstrations of mediumship reveal a format or container which is that of a Protestant nonconformist church service, into which has been inserted a 'demonstration', through the use of mediumship, of personal survival beyond death. In Spiritualist services, this demonstration is regarded as the main purpose of the meeting and it is difficult to contemplate a Spiritualist service proceeding without a medium being available.

Although the 'demonstration of survival' is the principal purpose to which Spiritualist mediumship is put, there are three principal applications of mediumship that characterize the movement, namely: (i) the demonstration of personal survival beyond death by giving 'messages' from deceased family members or others who can be identified by the recipient of such communications, (ii) the giving of spiritual teachings or guidance through a medium, ostensibly at the prompting of spirit teachers or 'guides' working with or 'overshadowing' the medium, whether verbally or by means of inspired writing, and (iii) the giving of spiritual healing through a

²⁰ Weisberg, 2004, pp.16-24

²¹ Although most Spiritualist organizations adopt a basic set of 'principles', examples of which are set out in Appendix 2.

medium acting as healer, again in conjunction with ‘guides’ or ‘co-workers in Spirit’. Spiritual healing is a little different in that information ‘from Spirit’ is not articulated; instead, the medium acts as an ‘instrument’ or ‘channel’ for some form of healing energy that is effective in bringing a degree of physical or psychological benefit to the patient.

So what have past observers made of all this and how has Spiritualism come to be regarded? In the introductory text edited by Linda Woodhead, *Religions in the Modern World*,²² the only mention of Spiritualism is in Wouter Hanegraaff’s discussion of what is termed ‘New Age Religion’.²³ For Hanegraaff, Spiritualism formed part of what he terms

an international cultic milieu with its own social networks and literature. Relying on an essentially nineteenth-century framework of ideas and beliefs, this cultic milieu has continued and further developed during the twentieth century, eventually to provide the foundation after the Second World War for the emergence of the New Age movement.²⁴

This might not, at first glance, seem an obvious description to develop on the basis of a Spiritualist church service, open to anyone who chooses to walk in. The description of Spiritualism as an occultist movement would, I sense, raise eyebrows among most of the Spiritualists I know, as would their inclusion in the ‘New Age’ section of an introductory work on religion. Yet it is indeed a movement that arose in the middle of the nineteenth century and which, somewhat arbitrarily, regards certain phenomena recorded in the State of New York in 1848 as its point of origin. It is an international movement, having spread throughout the Protestant Anglo-American cultural world, with a variant form (Spiritism) popular in the Roman Catholic environment of South America, and Spiritualism certainly has its links with New Age thought and practices.²⁵

²² 2002

²³ *ibid.*, Chapter 11

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.257

²⁵ Sutcliffe, 2003, pp.85-6. See also Brown, 1997, pp.50-3

Although a full appreciation of Spiritualism must take account of origins and subsequent interactions with other traditions, my experience of Spiritualists (and of being one) is that the Spiritualist identity, albeit in ways that tend to be unarticulated, is not based on membership of an occult society and is distinct from New Age. Individually, Spiritualists may take a personal interest in topics such as astrology, reincarnation, herbal lore, UFOs and so on, but few Spiritualists would regard such interests as defining (or even as part of) Spiritualism. It is entirely possible to be a Spiritualist and have absolutely no interest in such matters.

Gordon Melton, in another introductory text,²⁶ in a chapter entitled *Modern Alternative Religions in the West*,²⁷ mentions Spiritualism as one of a number of ‘groups built around the experience of various forms of psychic phenomena’²⁸ Indeed, Melton regards Spiritualism as providing the base from which other psychic groups could emerge, offering the following description:

Spiritualism centred upon the presentation of ‘scientific’ evidence of life after death, demonstrated in the practice of mediumship. Mediums were special people, capable of contacting, often while in a state of trance, the realm of the dead. ... the medium ... could explore in some detail the nature of the life to come and even locate accomplished teachers who could, having experienced and survived the veil of death, speak authoritatively about the great human questions of origins, meaning and destiny. ... By the end of the nineteenth century, mediums whose work specialized in the bringing forth of new teachings from the spirit realm emerged. Such mediums are today called channels.²⁹

Melton thus gives us an outline as to why Spiritualism might be regarded as a movement that is characterized by, among other things, the development of a body of esoteric or occult knowledge arising from the practice of mediumship. Yet I still do not quite recognize in that description the light, cheerful, entertaining, demotic Spiritualist services I have attended three or four times a week over the past nine years. My experience of Spiritualist services is that they tend to finish leaving participants buoyed by a sense of having been in contact with their loved ones once

²⁶ Hinnells, 1997

²⁷ *ibid.*, Chapter 15

²⁸ *ibid.*, p.602

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.603

again, encouraged and reassured sufficiently to carry on with their everyday lives, rather than being inspired to engage in religious or philosophical exploration (although it is certainly true that some, myself included, go on to do exactly that). It is not obviously wrong to describe the beliefs, tenets and practices that underpin Spiritualist practice as esoteric, but they lie in the background of everyday practice, and appear rarely to be the reason for attending Spiritualist services regularly.

Paul Tabori identifies the craft of mediumship as central to Spiritualism, which he regards as an ‘ecstasy or mystical trance’ enabling communication between the dead and the living: a practice that requires acceptance, if not of personal immortality, at least of survival beyond the point of death.³⁰ Tabori is also unusual in drawing attention, particularly in such a short summary, to the understanding of mediumship as the outcome of a process of training and, therefore as a learned (and, therefore, taught) craft. For Tabori, the elements of Spiritualism are nothing new; in fact, they are very old: what is new and justifies his description of Spiritualism as a ‘new religion,’ is simply its cultural setting.³¹

It is often noted said that Spiritualism appeals to those seeking ways of coping with grief or other difficulty, rather than to those with an interest in esoteric knowledge. Neither of these was my route into Spiritualism but coping reasons are suggested by scholars such as Stringer³² and Winters,³³ who supports the assessment that the hey-day of Spiritualism in Britain was the inter-war period, prompted by the experience of World War I³⁴ (with a further period of slightly lesser popularity following World War II).

Spiritualism can be understood as a popular movement in two senses: (i) popular because there have been times when it has enjoyed large numbers of adherents or, at least, those sufficiently interested to attend Spiritualist meetings, and (ii) popular in

³⁰ 1968, pp.14-5

³¹ *ibid.*, p.15

³² 2008, pp.71-4

³³ 1998, pp.58, 76-7

³⁴ See Chapter 3, *passim*

the sense of plebeian or demotic.³⁵ Both of these have led to attempts to account for Spiritualism in terms of popular culture, including traditional folk beliefs, the broadly Christian and rational or ‘scientific’ aspects of western, European and American culture and, more recently, various personal spiritual practices that tend to be gathered together under the heading of ‘New Age, even although this phrase denotes a particular genealogy within a wider range of alternative spiritualities’³⁶ Certainly, each of these can be identified in Spiritualist practice yet one suggestion recurs from time to time but which has not, so far as I can ascertain, been properly taken up: the comparison with shamanism.

Any review of the literature relating to Spiritualism needs to begin with Geoffrey Nelson’s work *Spiritualism and Society*.³⁷ This is the first modern work to give a general account of Spiritualism and to attempt a sociological understanding of the reasons behind its emergence and persistence. Nelson characterises 1840s America as a society in flux: excessive individualism and social chaos are the order of the day. Life is characterised not by relationships we are born into but by those ‘voluntarily entered into by independent individuals.’³⁸ Nelson anticipates Winter and Stringer by perceiving Spiritualism as popular and valuable because it offers a way of coping with social disruption and instability.³⁹ Nelson questions the view that Spiritualism appealed largely to the credulous, suggesting that, in this individualistic environment, ‘the educated and intelligent sought proof to support a reasonable theory of human survival’,⁴⁰ and that it was often those more willing to question existing religious teachings who were likely to be attracted to Spiritualism.

The early high-water mark of Spiritualism in America was not sustained. Among the causes Nelson suggests are the more pressing concerns of an impending civil war and continuing antagonism on the part of the churches, but he points also to

³⁵ Stringer, 2003, p.73

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.5

³⁷ 1969

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.70

³⁹ *ibid.*, pp.256-60

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.78

Spiritualism's own 'failure to develop either organization, ritual or doctrine.'⁴¹ Organisational difficulties arose because Spiritualist activity tended to take place 'in private circles meeting irregularly in the houses of members; these circles usually gathered around one or more mediums.'⁴² Early public demonstrations were important but they too were promoted by private individuals or local associations. As to ritual, Nelson suggests the medium as 'too charismatic a figure to build an organisation around'⁴³ and that the particular phenomena characteristic of the movement at that time (e.g. physical phenomena such as table-tapping or turning) were too unpredictable to be contained by formal ritual. Finally, Nelson suggests that there was 'a complete failure to develop a coherent and comprehensive doctrine'⁴⁴ beyond agreement on survival and communication. I argue that, rather than seeing these factors as reasons for Spiritualism's 'failure', they are better understood as indications that Nelson's own suggestion of Spiritualism as a shamanic tradition is accurate.

In this context, we have Nelson's own claim that Spiritualism, *in some form or other*, is,

a 'new religion', emerging from the essentially magical world view of Shamanism and witchcraft. A religion influenced by the teachings and practices of previous higher religions, but whose basic elements derive from an older and more traditional religion, which continued to underlie the veneer of Christianity, and emerged when the superficial layer of Christian influence was removed by the changing social conditions of mass migration and urbanism.⁴⁵

For Nelson, Spiritualism occupies an interesting position in British religious life, connecting with Christian beliefs, traditional or folk beliefs in magic, the scientific endeavour (expressed in the relationship between Spiritualism and psychic studies) but touching also upon Buddhism (in its use of meditational practices), Christian Science (in its understanding of spiritual healing) and what he terms 'pseudo-scientific cults' with an interest in UFOs and what today we would call channelling.

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.83

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ 1969, p.84

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ 1969, p.269

In attending to Spiritualism's persistent organizational weakness, Nelson brings out some of the reasons why Spiritualism is commonly referred to as a movement rather than religion:

The conflict between Shamanism and religious bureaucracy, which is a universal situation, finds its expression in the conflict between the Spiritualist movement and the churches.⁴⁶ At a deeper level this conflict forms the basis of the Spiritualist's rejection of organization. ... It is clear that the restraints of institutionalization would in fact destroy the spontaneity of the Shamanistic expression which is central to mediumship and to the movement. Spiritualism is dependent upon mediumship and Shamanship and consequently takes the form of a movement rather than an organization, a movement dependent upon the renewal of charismatic leadership, which would be stifled by the growth of routinization.⁴⁷

The growth of organizations and the control their officials tend to try to exert is not, however, the only way in which a process of routinization can occur. Mediumship in Spiritualism is in many ways highly routinized by elements such as the common format of most public demonstrations of mediumship and, perhaps more importantly, by the unwritten conventions to which Spiritualist mediums adhere, having been schooled in them during the course of their development or apprenticeship. The principal reason why Spiritualism is referred to as a movement becomes clearer as soon as it is appreciated that Spiritualism is principally a vehicle for the practice-based tradition of mediumship.

The term movement is consistently used by Spiritualists themselves and reflects an insider perception that mediumship 'is the unique contribution that Spiritualism has to offer',⁴⁸ that mediumship is a combination of 'latent gift'⁴⁹ and learned craft. Thus Spiritualism is understood as a practice-based knowledge system, and not as a belief system. There are frequent insider claims that Spiritualism is not 'just' a religion but

⁴⁶ A reference to more orthodox Christian churches. I say 'more orthodox' because some Spiritualist churches are Christian Spiritualist churches and regard themselves as an authentic part of the Christian tradition. Portobello Spiritualist Church, which forms the basis of the case study in Chapter 4, is one such example.

⁴⁷ Nelson, 1969, pp.254-5. Obviously, Nelson is drawing heavily upon Weber's concept of charisma in this paragraph.

⁴⁸ Barbanell, 2001, p.15

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.110

is instead a practice-based approach to acquiring ‘knowledge of spiritual matters’.⁵⁰ Against such claims, we might note that the first of the Seven Principles adhered to by the Spiritualists’ National Union is an affirmation of ‘The Fatherhood of God’, a more obviously theological assertion than which it is hard to imagine. However, a focus upon written texts (such as examples of Spiritualist principles) and formal organizations obscures the extent to which Spiritualism is a practice-based tradition.

Spiritualists do seek to be heard,⁵¹ and their claims as to the nature of Spiritualism acknowledge western expectations of rationality, and seek to benefit from the respectability (and consequent increased likelihood of being listened to) that follows when such expectations are met. It is, of course, possible to characterise this as a tension between competing religious and scientific perspectives but it is, I think, more accurate to interpret Spiritualists’ self-identification as members of a movement as referencing their (often unarticulated) perception of Spiritualism as characterized by mediumship, and of mediumship as a practice-based tradition. This is, I argue, what lies behind Spiritualists’ common disregard of organizations, and resistance to the attempts of officials to exert control. Such attempts are frequently regarded as inappropriate, even by Spiritualists who might be hard pressed to articulate why, or precisely what it is that they consider Spiritualism to be ‘about’.

⁵⁰ *Philosophy of SNU Spiritualism*, 2007, p.3

⁵¹ The SNU has a formal ‘mission statement’ that appears on the back of SNU membership cards: ‘To Promote the Religion and Religious Philosophy of Spiritualism as based upon the Seven Principles’.

2.3 Spiritualism: believing in modernity

2.3.1 Disparate connections

Analyses of modern Anglo-American society have often been cast in terms of the now familiar progression from magical or folk beliefs (an ‘enchanted’ world-view), to a less magical, more organized religious world-view,⁵² through to a scientific or rational world-view. From the late nineteenth century, and possibly throughout its history, Spiritualism has been seen as a superstitious leftover; in Georg Simmel’s words, an ‘obstinate clinging to or reversion to past cultural periods’.⁵³ The argument that, at each stage in this process, the new world-view replaced the previous one has become difficult to sustain in the face of the persistence not only of organized religion but also of religious movements that seek to recover (or reassert) an enchanted world-view.⁵⁴

In the course of developing her model of religion, Hervieu-Léger examines the nature of belief partly by utilizing the work of Jean Seguy and his concept of metaphorical religion as characteristic of modernity (drawing upon Weber).⁵⁵ The process indicated here is that one of the ways in which it is possible to maintain religious traditions is by shifting to a position where their teachings are accepted as metaphorical truths, rather than being maintained as literal truths. With regard to Spiritualism, it is possible that the movement might be an example of de-metaphorization, with its insistence on its teachings as literal descriptions and explanations but, arguably, the movement is more accurately interpreted as a refusal to allow that process of metaphorization even to begin. Although Spiritualism looks like the incorporation of aspects of modernity into existing systems of magical (rural) or religious (urban) belief, it arguably has more to do with a continuing inclination to literal, not metaphorical, belief.

⁵² Thomas, 1991

⁵³ Frisby and Featherstone (Eds.), 1997, p.289; also Stocking, 1971

⁵⁴ With Spiritualism itself arguably an example of this; see, for example, Walliss, 2006

⁵⁵ 2000, pp.66-71, 74-5

Just as it has become clear that process of rationalization that has marked the modern scientific endeavour often proceeded by supplementing rather than displacing religion, so too it has become increasingly clear that religion often supplemented or overlaid the enchanted world-view expressed in traditional folk-beliefs, rather than displacing it entirely. Spiritualism is well-known for attempts to press modern science, and modern inventions, into service in seeking evidence of spirit.⁵⁶ The extent to which Spiritualism and mediumship are socially embedded become clear as we examine the extent to which this movement draws upon each of the three world-views (enchanted, religious and scientific) that combine to constitute the modern Anglo-American world-view. This world-view is both a believing and a rational one. The extent of this social embedding enables the maintenance of stable networks of relationships that do not rely on formal organizations. It also enables the long-term maintenance of particular places where Spiritualists meet, mediumship is taught and demonstrations given. This, in turn, alerts us to the significance of place in the maintenance of relationships, of the importance of physical location in understanding belonging or indigeneity and, therefore, in the maintenance of tradition.

Nelson's work has already been noted, together with his suggestion that the modern western questioning of religious authority allowed the re-emergence of an older magical religiosity, leading to the creation of a 'new religion' that attempted to be both rational and magical.⁵⁷ Nelson identifies the scientific, religious and magical aspects of western modernity as combining, so as to provide the broader social context in which Spiritualism took root. The further implication is that Spiritualism would not arise or persist in a society in which only one of those perspectives entirely dominated at the popular level.

Writing shortly after Nelson, Bernice Martin⁵⁸ describes 'the main features of the Spiritualist religious service' in Britain, suggesting that a comparison of anthropological analyses of shamanic phenomena might be productive in

⁵⁶ The use of photography is one example; see, for example, Jolly, 2006

⁵⁷ 1969, pp.269-71

⁵⁸ 1970

understanding the content of Spiritualist services.⁵⁹ In 1974, *Intimacy and Ritual: A Study of Spiritualism, Mediums and Groups* by Skultans was published, the outcome of three years spent as a participant-observer in the development circle of a Spiritualist church in the industrial outskirts of a town in south Wales.⁶⁰ Skultans notes that the main purpose of a development circle is to produce mediums by developing ‘the latent and nascent mediumistic powers of its members’,⁶¹ reflecting the Spiritualist ‘belief that everyone possesses psychic power in a latent if not fully developed form.’⁶² Although Skultans does not use the language of shamanism, it is her view that it represents one example among others of a spirit possession tradition, and that it ought therefore to be possible to develop a cross-cultural definition of mediumistic practices inclusive of Spiritualism.⁶³

In his 1977 work, *In Search of White Crows: Spiritualism, Parapsychology and American Culture*, Laurence Moore surveyed Spiritualism in the United States, concluding that its popularity derived from an ability (and desire) to adhere to both religious (principally Christian) and scientific world-views.⁶⁴ Broadly, this is also the conclusion reached by Janet Oppenheim, surveying the relationship between Spiritualism and psychic research in Britain during the years 1850-1914.⁶⁵ In the following year, 1986, Logie Barrow’s *Independent Spirits: Spiritualism and English Plebeians 1850-1910*, argued that Spiritualism’s support during this period derived from the personal independence and radicalism of nineteenth-century liberalism and early twentieth-century socialism, and often represented a reaction against traditional Christianity.⁶⁶

Moore also observes a pattern of organisational weakness and doctrinal variety, noting that ‘magical categories of thought’ still appeal and do form part of the

⁵⁹ p.146

⁶⁰ pp.1-2

⁶¹ p.2

⁶² p.3

⁶³ Ref

⁶⁴ pp.36-9

⁶⁵ 1985, pp.391-7

⁶⁶ Ref

explanation of the Spiritualist phenomenon. Although Moore gives a limited account of twentieth century Spiritualism itself, he does feel able to suggest that

‘certainly the average American spiritualist in the twentieth century was apt to know something about the Rosicrucians, New Thought, Yoga, Hermetics, faith healing, pyramidology, Scientology, and flying saucers. Marginality in various historical contexts may encourage associations that make little sense on strictly intellectual grounds.’⁶⁷

Moore appears to suggest that marginality is, of itself, a sufficiently strong identifying characteristic to explain this association of apparently disparate interests. That Spiritualists are in some way (socially) marginalised finds frequent expression and it has often been noted that the experience of childhood exclusion, loneliness or being misunderstood is widely claimed by Spiritualist mediums.⁶⁸ The characterisation of mediums as in some way set apart is also present in Moore’s comment that, despite biographical variety, one particular pattern ‘does seem to fit many of their lives. They associated their first awareness of spirit company with the early years of lonely childhoods and dated their actual mediumship from adolescence.’⁶⁹

Alex Owen’s *The Darkened Room: Women, Power, and Spiritualism in Late Victorian England*,⁷⁰ interprets the preponderance of female mediums as evidence of a wider desire to subvert normative female roles in Victorian society, but which is itself shaped by a male medical establishment’s inclination to interpret mediumistic activity in terms of illness, typically hysteria, and which, in practice, can serve to reinforce existing gender norms.⁷¹ In Britain, the emancipation of women and the early feminist cause were assisted in various ways by the disruption of the First World War, but it is also in this setting that Jay Winter, in *Sites of Memory, Sites of*

⁶⁷ p.227

⁶⁸ A topic more fully addressed in Section 3.3.1

⁶⁹ p.125

⁷⁰ Owen, 1989

⁷¹ pp.236-242. Published in the same year, Ann Braude’s *Radical Spirits: Spiritualism and Women’s Rights in Nineteenth-Century America*, covers similar ground in relation to the United States, but concludes with a more positive assessment of the contribution made by US Spiritualism to women’s rights and other forms of social and political radicalism.

Mourning: The Great War in European cultural history,⁷² regards Spiritualism as uniquely expressive of a collective effort to cope within existing traditions, existing communal memories and understandings, leading to a flaring-up of the ‘magical and mythical realm.’⁷³ Winter sees Spiritualism as one of the major tools people used to cope with and transcend their loss and which, once that work had been done, was put aside again:

After the Second World War, spiritualism, in its original sense of communication with the dead, faded into the margins of cultural history, where it has remained to this day.⁷⁴

Winter argues for the persistence of older traditions, whose strength lay in their ability to enable people to cope with bereavement, contrary to the modernist interpretation according to which the First World War enabled and represented a clean break with the past. Equally, the rationalism of modern western society still shaped public dialogue and, for Winter, the popularity of Spiritualism during and immediately after the First World War is explained by this wider context coping with bereavement in a way that attempts to marry science, theology and socialism.⁷⁵

To the extent that Spiritualism offers coping mechanisms, it reflects and reinforces rather than changes existing social norms, as Skultans noted in the south Wales of the early 1970s⁷⁶ and as Robert Cox has noted more recently in relation to nineteenth-century American Spiritualism.⁷⁷ Despite the ambitions of Spiritualists themselves to change the wider world, and a history of connections to radical social causes, the preponderance of academic opinion appears to be that Spiritualism is conservatively expressive of contemporary western society.

⁷² 1995

⁷³ p.76

⁷⁴ p.77. Such comments are difficult to reconcile with the British experience, however true they may be of the wider European one. Nelson also states that ‘at no time since the [Second World] war has Spiritualism attained the popularity or membership it had in the thirties’, citing statistical information showing the number of SNU churches peaked in 1938 at 530, with a post-war peak of 498 in 1954/55. As against that conclusion, the statistics provided by Nelson himself show individual membership of SNU churches at a peak of just over 19,000 in 1950, with the number of personal memberships of the SNU itself at a peak of 1,644 in 1963. See pp.273-88

⁷⁵ Ref.

⁷⁶ 1974, p.75

⁷⁷ Cox, 2003, p.18

Spiritualism in the inter-war years is the focus of Jenny Hazelgrove's book *Spiritualism and British society between the wars*.⁷⁸ There is broad agreement with Winter as to the prominence of Spiritualism as part of the wider European experience in the aftermath of WWI. This enables Hazelgrove to examine connections with traditional Roman Catholic teachings, rather than the more obvious connections with Protestant Britain and America. Although I anticipate that connections with Catholicism would not be in the least bit obvious to Spiritualist themselves, it is consistent with Hazelgrove's wider exploration of continuing folk beliefs in ghosts, demons, states of possession, guardian angels and saints. This is a range of beliefs or phenomena that Catholicism has continued to speak of formally but which, in Protestant cultures, have been forced to persist as traditional folk beliefs or practices, often dismissed as superstitions. Although Hazelgrove does not make this particular argument, she highlights an unmet need in Protestant culture that Spiritualism answers. Like Winter, Hazelgrove sees Spiritualism as tapping into existing culture, allowing the reinterpretation and reorganisation of existing beliefs, enabling the continuation of an existing discourse, an invaluable communal tool in a time of social crisis. The popularity of Spiritualism derives from its ability to validate and organize both traditional folk beliefs and religious (principally Christian) teachings in a way that offers a sufficient appearance of rationality as to render it socially acceptable (or, at least, sufficiently so to attract the support that it does).⁷⁹

Hazelgrove's willingness to accept ambiguity and uncertainty in the characterisation of mediums leaves the reader surprisingly unclear as to the nature of mediumship. This leads to a slight lack of clarity as to her conclusions, compounded by a somewhat idiosyncratic use of sources, as noted by both Callum Brown and Steven Sutcliffe.⁸⁰ Brown comments that this is,

apparent in the book's material on Helen Duncan, the medium from Callander, where it is not explained that her Old Bailey trial of 1944 was under the 1735 Witchcraft Act, and likely arose from the fear of British naval

⁷⁸ 2000

⁷⁹ 2000, Chapters 1 and 2, *passim*

⁸⁰ Reviews of Hazelgrove.

intelligence that she had secret knowledge of the sinkings of HMS Hood and HMS Barham, and that she could reveal D-Day plans.⁸¹

In fact, the career of Helen Duncan offers the opportunity for rather more: her conviction invigorated the Spiritualist campaign for repeal of the Witchcraft Act, which came with the passing of the Fraudulent Mediums Act, 1951. That post-war parliamentary time should be devoted to this issue is itself evidence of the weight of Spiritualist ideas in British public life at that time.⁸²

2.3.2 The enchanted world-view

For Hazelgrove, looking at Spiritualism during the 1920s and 1930s, one of the strengths or attractions of Spiritualism was its ability to provide an interpretive framework within which traditional beliefs in ghosts, fairies and angels could remain credible in the modern era. Hazelgrove explores this theme in a chapter entitled 'Catholic Connections',⁸³ noting that despite the persistent association of Spiritualism with Protestantism in England,

'Modernity' and progress' may have figured strongly in Spiritualism's urban and plebeian culture, but its relation to the dead closely resembled the mutual bonds and obligations characteristic of an earlier, Catholic culture.⁸⁴

Hazelgrove notes that both Christian and non-Christian Spiritualists alike were 'immersed in the Christian tradition,'⁸⁵ and that much Spiritualist dialogue showed parallels to traditional Catholic attitudes to the dead, particularly a sense of continuing relationship. In arguing for the continuity of popular beliefs found in Catholicism, and even for express Catholic influence upon Spiritualism,⁸⁶ Hazelgrove overlooks the possibility that Catholicism and Spiritualism might both

⁸¹ Brown review, 2001, p.1006

⁸² There have been several Spiritualist attempts to secure a pardon for Helen Duncan; she retains an almost iconic status for many in the Spiritualist movement, partly for her reputation as a convincing medium and partly because she became akin to a modern martyr after her death at home in Edinburgh in December 1956, following her injury in a police raid on a Spiritualist meeting in Nottingham two months earlier. The literature on her is extensive, and continues to increase. The principal works are Cassirer, 1996; Brealey 1985; Armour, 2000; Gaskill, 2001; and Hartley, 2007.

⁸³ Chapter 2

⁸⁴ p.53

⁸⁵ p.54

⁸⁶ See pp.56ff.

provide religious containers or rationalizing structures for popular folk or traditional beliefs that predate or accompany more formal religious doctrines. On this basis, Spiritualism might be less a religion influenced by Catholicism, and more a religion that appeals in Protestant cultures because it allows the retention of an enchanted world-view that includes spirits and possession phenomena, of the kind that Catholicism (particularly the pre-Reformation Church) has traditionally accommodated,⁸⁷ and which Protestantism has more often deliberately tried to exclude.⁸⁸ It is possible that the decline of British Christianity⁸⁹ facilitates at least a partial recovery or reaffirmation of an enchanted world-view.⁹⁰

That Spiritualism both draws upon and helps to sustain popular folk beliefs is clear. In *Cunning Folk and Familiar Spirits: Shamanistic Visionary Traditions in Early Modern British Witchcraft and Magic*,⁹¹ Emma Wilby concluded that,

Although it may seem as if magical beliefs are being re-discovered in response to the decline of Christianity, in reality they have never really left us. Recent research by historians such as Owen Davies establishes what folklorists have long known, that magical belief and practice remained remarkably strong and widespread in rural Britain until the early twentieth century.⁹²

For Wilby, Spiritualism itself has its roots in ‘magical theory and practice;’⁹³ although this is an assertion she does not expand upon or offer justification for, it is a common perception and, in the introduction to her work, she takes the view that Spiritualism is one of a number of ‘magical belief systems’ which have protocols for ‘the development of relationships with spirit-familiars,’ by which she means ‘spirit-guides, ancestors, elemental spirits, fairies, guardian angels, archetypes, power animals and so on.’⁹⁴ That Spiritualist mediums have spirit guides is nothing new and my own involvement in the movement has introduced me to people who maintain,

⁸⁷ Sluhovsky, 2007

⁸⁸ Emma Wilby, 2010

⁸⁹ Brown, 2001

⁹⁰ Walliss, 2006, p.32

⁹¹ 2005

⁹² *ibid.*, p.253

⁹³ *ibid.*, p.252

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.4

quite matter-of-factly, that they have seen fairies. Diane Purkiss⁹⁵ reminds us of Conan Doyle's enthusiasm for the case of the Cottingley fairies⁹⁶ and, indeed, that of other Spiritualists such as the medium Geoffrey Hodson, author of *Fairies at Work and Play*.⁹⁷

In *Witchcraft, Magic and Culture 1736-1951*,⁹⁸ Davies clearly sees Spiritualism as deriving sustenance from existing belief systems and, in his subsequent work, *Popular Magic: Cunning-folk in English History*,⁹⁹ goes on to suggest that Spiritualism masked or drew attention away from the continuing strength of the popular belief in magic.¹⁰⁰ It is worth noting Wilby's comment above that belief in magic remained strong in rural Britain, whereas Spiritualism is often characterised as an urban movement.¹⁰¹ More research would be required to sustain the case that less formalised rural magical beliefs and urban Spiritualism are direct counterparts¹⁰² but it is a possibility worth exploring, and it does seem reasonable to conclude that Spiritualism, in some degree, draws support from a magical or enchanted world-view that is more widely present in contemporary British society at a popular level. While Walliss's suggestion of Spiritualism as an example of the (re-)enchancement of modernity may seem attractive, it might be worth asking whether modernity ever stopped being enchanted in the first place.

Traditional folk beliefs in Britain and, more specifically, in Scotland (where my own involvement in Spiritualism has been situated), are increasingly interpreted in terms of a shamanic model. Not only do we have MaryCatherine Burgess's preliminary identification of shamanic elements in Scottish folk beliefs¹⁰³ and Wilby's 2005 work

⁹⁵ *Fairies and Fairy Stories: A History*, 2000

⁹⁶ The Cottingley fairies refers to photographs, claimed to be of fairies, taken in 1917 by two girls, Elsie Wright, aged fifteen, and Frances Griffiths, aged ten. The photographs were accepted by Conan Doyle as genuine, and widely promoted by him. Elsie turned out to be an amateur photographer, and the photographs false. See Purkiss, 2007, Chapter 9

⁹⁷ Purkiss, 2007, p.319

⁹⁸ 1999

⁹⁹ 2003

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.53

¹⁰¹ Nelson, 1969, pp.260-4

¹⁰² Many Spiritualist churches in Scotland are located in smaller towns and draw upon rural areas for their congregations (see Appendix 7); suggesting that Spiritualism draws upon (or is partly an urbanized version of) rural magical traditions or folk beliefs.

¹⁰³ MSc dissertation, Edinburgh, 2002

mentioned above, but we now also have Wilby's analysis of the witchcraft confessions of Isobel Gowdie from 1662,¹⁰⁴ in which she argues strongly for the persistence of a pre-Christian shamanic tradition.

2.3.3 The religious world-view

There can be little doubt that there has always been a close, if complex, relationship between Spiritualism and Christianity. John Highet included Spiritualism in his survey of the Scottish Churches,¹⁰⁵ and non-Spiritualist Christians have sometimes regarded the movement as a Christian sect.¹⁰⁶ Spiritualism derives the format of its services from Protestant Christianity and its language is clearly Christian.¹⁰⁷ Spiritualism has given rise both to Christian Spiritualist organizations¹⁰⁸ and to Christian Spiritualist churches.¹⁰⁹ Hazelgrove comments that Spiritualists were 'immersed' in the Christian tradition,¹¹⁰ and much Spiritualist literature shows a deep engagement with traditional Christian doctrines, which Spiritualists variously seek to rebut or clarify.¹¹¹ 'True' or 'corrected' accounts of the life of Jesus Christ and/or of Biblical teachings continue to be a popular (or at least persistent) genre among emic publications.¹¹² The boundary between Christian and non-Christian Spiritualists is not something I have space to explore here but it has often been commented upon as

¹⁰⁴ Wilby, *The Visions of Isobel Gowdie: Magic, Witchcraft and Dark Shamanism in Seventeenth-Century Scotland*, 2010

¹⁰⁵ *The Scottish Churches: A review of their state 400 years after the Reformation*, Skeffington, London, 1960

¹⁰⁶ Davies, H.; *Christian Deviations: The Challenge of the Sects*, SCM Press, London, 1961 [1954]

¹⁰⁷ Evidenced, for example, by the SNU's Seven Principles, other similar sets of principles or statements of belief, and the many publications in which their meaning is discussed.

¹⁰⁸ Greater World Association

¹⁰⁹ Portobello Spiritualist Church being one such example.

¹¹⁰ 2000, p.54

¹¹¹ This continues to be evident today even in introductory publications such as the SNU's 'Philosophy of SNU Spiritualism', 2007, and particularly in the content of the SNU Lyceum Manual (which is essentially the SNU teaching guide).

¹¹² My own book, *Discovering the Christ Light*, 2007 [2005], is an obvious example of this genre. Other representative examples include the body of work produced by the Washington DC attorney James Padgett, *True Gospel Revealed Anew by Jesus*, written during the period 1914-1923, and published in four volumes by his trustees between 1941 and 1972; Alan Ross's *New Testament of Spiritualism*, 2003, *The Genuine Jesus*, 2003, and *Lost Teachings of Spiritualism*, 2004; various works published by the Greater World Christian Spiritualist Association, such as *Teachings of Zodiac* and *Spiritual Revelations of Zodiac*, both 2001; and a wide range of publications from the White Eagle Publishing Trust, such as *The Living Word of St John*, 2000 [1949] and *The Light Bringer*, 2001, both Spiritualist re-readings of the Fourth Gospel.

evidencing two slightly different (but both religious) attitudes within the movement, namely, those Spiritualists for whom Spiritualism offers the opportunity to verify and correct (or amplify) traditional Christian teachings, and those for whom Spiritualism offered the opportunity to justify a rejection of traditional Christian teachings in favour of an internally rational religion, justified by experiment using spirit communication. These two strands are often characterised as representing the religious and scientific strands of Spiritualism, yet non-Christian Spiritualists generally adhere to the obviously Christian terminology that marks the Spiritualist dialogue.

There is no doubt that there has been a decline in Christian Spiritualism as a distinct strand or constituency within the Spiritualist movement but this seems simply to reflect the wider decline in Christian discourse in British society mapped by Callum Brown,¹¹³ rather than being due to factors specific to Spiritualism. Of course, a religious world-view is not necessarily a Christian world-view and a further factor in support of the characterization of non-Christian Spiritualists as nevertheless religious is the common tendency in the movement to reject traditional Christianity in favour of exploring other religious traditions.¹¹⁴ One of the most significant imports has been eastern meditation techniques, in that meditation has become a central tool in the Spiritualist medium's apprenticeship.¹¹⁵ Similarly, the Spiritualist tradition of spirit guides seems consistently to draw upon other cultural traditions such as those of the indigenous peoples of North America,¹¹⁶ China, and ancient Egypt, as well as representatives of the Judaeo-Christian traditions. Indeed, Nelson speculates that an awareness of traditional beliefs among the indigenous nations of North America was one of the factors supporting the growth of Spiritualism.¹¹⁷

¹¹³ 2001

¹¹⁴ Even within Christian Spiritualism, the spirit guides described are often from non-Christian backgrounds, White Eagle being an obvious example.

¹¹⁵ See Chapter 4.

¹¹⁶ So-called 'Red Indian' guides continue to be particularly prominent within the movement. One work that has proved popular in the British movement Ernest Seton's *The Gospel of the Redman: An Indian Bible*, Psychic Press, London, 1970. The 'Silver Birch' transcripts from Hannen Swaffer's home circle in London have proved popular and enduring; see, for example, Riva, P.: *Light from Silver Birch*, Spiritual Truth Press, Oxshott, 1999. Silver Birch was Maurice Barbanell's guide and the early publications were edited by his wife Sylvia Barbanell; see, for example, *More Wisdom of Silver Birch*, Psychic Press, London, 1945

¹¹⁷ Discussed further in Chapter 8

Healing is also an area where we see further connections to Christianity. Barbanell tells us of the Glasgow medium, Margaret Lyon, whose healing abilities were called upon by the wife and son of Church of Scotland minister Rev. J. Cameron Peddie, whose church was in the Gorbals district of Glasgow. The minister and his wife went on to join Mrs Lyon's circle to develop their healing abilities and we are told that 'The medium often accompanied the minister on his visits to sick parishioners.'¹¹⁸ Barbanell goes on to tell us (writing in 1959) that:

There is apparently an apostolic quality in any gift of the spirit, in the sense that one who possesses it can stimulate it in another where it is latent. Just as Margaret Lyon was able to kindle the spark of Mr Peddie's healing, so he in turn was able to perform a similar function for other ministers. In this manner the healing has spread until there are now nearly a hundred ministers practising healing in Scotland.¹¹⁹

The Christian tradition is also clearly evident, sometimes very much so, in the teachings (often termed philosophy) given under the auspices of mediums' spirit guides. Particularly prominent among the accounts of mediumistic activity related by Barbanell are those derived from time spent in Estelle Roberts' circle at which her guide, Red Cloud, is described as speaking and we have already noted reference to Jesus as 'the Nazarene.'

The writings published as being authored by Silver Birch, Barbanell's guide, do show Christian influence but, amid talk of 'the divine' and 'spirit,' reference tends to be made to 'the Great Spirit' and notions of reincarnation and 'karmic debt' are often adduced as part of the explanation as to why a particular person might be beset with difficulty.¹²⁰ Yet even here the attempt is not merely to retain some kind of importance for the example of Jesus but actually to preserve priority for it. The 'Nazarene' is presented as the greatest teacher who ever incarnated but whose teachings have been misrepresented throughout history.¹²¹

¹¹⁸ Barbanell, p.171

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.172

¹²⁰ Riva, pp.117-8

¹²¹ Austen, A.W.: *Teachings of Silver Birch*, 1962, p.95

Barbanell gives prominence to the work of Geraldine Cummins, whom he describes as ‘the greatest living exponent of automatic writing’¹²² and who became well-known within the Spiritualist movement for her scripts dealing with the New Testament era, including expanded versions of the Acts of the Apostles. Miss Cummins’ activities were of interest to a number of academics, including Professor W. P. Paterson, Professor of Theology at Edinburgh and Professor D. Morison, Professor of Moral Philosophy at St. Andrew’s, who wrote the introduction to *The Scripts of Cleophas*.¹²³

Inevitably reaction varied but the level of interest is indicated by the detail with which Butterworth¹²⁴ considers Miss Cummins’ material in testing, as he puts it, the ‘claims of Spiritualism to be a religion, based on a revelation of truth.’¹²⁵ Butterworth’s work is broadly a defence of traditional Christianity and criticism of the claims of Spiritualism, concluding that the material is the product of the ‘non-religious mind of the twentieth century’.¹²⁶

2.3.4 The scientific-rational world-view

For many, the modern era has been a period during which religion and science have been at odds, despite the continuing religious convictions of many of those who were doing the science. As Colin Tudge¹²⁷ reminds us,

The birth of modern science is often portrayed by secular philosophers as the ‘triumph’ of ‘rationality’ over religious ‘superstition’. But it was much more subtle and interesting than that. The great founders of modern thinking – Galileo, Newton, Leibniz, Descartes, Robert Boyle, the naturalist John Ray – were all devout. ... Pythagoras, five centuries before Christ, saw science (as he then construed it) as a divine pursuit. Galileo, Newton, Ray and the rest saw their researches as a form of reverence.¹²⁸

¹²² p.93

¹²³ Cummins, G.: *The Scripts of Cleophas: A Reconstruction of Primitive Christian Documents*, (2 vols.), Psychic Book Club, London, 1938

¹²⁴ Butterworth, G.W., *Spiritualism and Religion*, SPCK, London, 1944

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, p.vii

¹²⁶ *ibid.*, p.46

¹²⁷ *Secret Life of Trees*, Penguin, London, 2006

¹²⁸ *ibid.*, pp.7-8

The scientific-rational underpinnings of Spiritualism are evident in two ways: first, in Spiritualist claims ‘that they are researching into the spirit world’,¹²⁹ and secondly, in the willingness of mediums to work with psychic researchers.¹³⁰ That willingness varies inevitably from medium to medium but the Spiritualist movement has a long-standing, if often problematic, relationship with the field of psychic studies.¹³¹

One of the more famous Spiritualists of the mid-twentieth century was Maurice Barbanell, who tells us that,

I am a convinced Spiritualist because life after death has been proved, beyond a shadow of a doubt, to me. This is not due to wishful thinking. For thirty-seven years I have witnessed extraordinary psychic phenomena which, in my judgment, have only one explanation. ... I began my enquiry into Spiritualism as a sceptic ... My outlook was unashamedly materialistic ...¹³²

But Spiritualists have often done more than simply claim to be rational. Estelle Roberts’ autobiography includes many accounts of ‘messages from spirit’, adduced as ‘proof’ of the reality of the spirit world and we are told that her guide Red Cloud, speaking through Roberts in trance (referred to as ‘direct voice’),

delivered scores of lectures, both in public and private sittings. Some of them, particularly those having a scientific basis, have been too abstruse for the comprehension of the average circle-member, though great scientists, such as Sir Oliver Lodge, read many of them with respect and understanding.¹³³

Thus we have a claim not merely to a scientific or modern, rational approach to enquiry into the reality of spirit but a claim to be bringing forward information of interest to scientists and to be engaging with current scientific enquiry.

¹²⁹ Skultans, p.2

¹³⁰ For example, Helen Duncan spent time working with the psychic investigator Harry Price under the auspices of the Society for Psychical Research; see Haynes, pp.144-6

¹³¹ Hazelgrove, Chap. 7; Wooffitt, pp.13-8

¹³² Barbanell, p.9

¹³³ *ibid.* Sir Oliver was principally a physicist, and became a visiting teacher at the Department of Electronic and Electrical Engineering at University College, London. Also known for a biography of Marconi. See Jolly, 1974

2.3.5 The modern world-view of Spiritualism

That Spiritualism is modern or, at least, has modern aspects to it, may also contribute to a fuller understanding as to why it has been overlooked as a traditional shamanism: in a contemporary urban setting, scholars (and others) alert to the possibility of contemporary shamanic practices are perhaps more likely to notice examples of neo-shamanism, whereas those exploring the possibility of traditional shamanic practices may be more likely to explore traditional beliefs or folklore, on the presupposition that they are to be found in an older, more ‘primitive’, setting.

The importance of Spiritualism in relation to modern Icelandic society is emphasized by William Swatos and Loftur Gissurarson in, *Icelandic Spiritualism: Mediumship and Modernity in Iceland*.¹³⁴ The authors suggest that the popularity of Spiritualism in Iceland derives from its ability to offer a way of continuing to value older folk beliefs and religious traditions, arguing that it is precisely this combination of world-views that characterises modernity. In examining the relationship between mediumship and modernity, the authors conclude that Spiritualism has been integral to the Icelandic transition to modernity. However, rather than facilitating a re-enchantment of the world by a disenchanted society, the authors concluded that Spiritualism enabled the retention of Iceland’s religious and spiritual heritage into the modern era. Spiritualist mediums not only acted as bridges between the worlds of spirit and material but between the worlds of religion and science.¹³⁵

These writers reject ‘the oppositional thinking of Western dualism’¹³⁶ evident in the works of writers such as Durkheim and Eliade, in which (for example) the sacred and the profane are distinguished and contrasted, arguing instead that,

The sacred takes meaning precisely as it runs in and through the everyday life-world in constant dialogue with the constant demands of day-to-day existence.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ 1997

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.233

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.234

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.235

In this, Swatos and Gissurarson perceive a fundamental difficulty with the Durkheimian approach whereby the sacred and the profane are distinguished and opposed, especially in that it leads to a tendency to devalue the mundane, overlooking the importance of the everyday, popular aspects of people's sense of what it is to be religious.¹³⁸ The authors do not propose that Spiritualism was simply a continuation of the mythic culture of Icelandic folklore, or of paranormal traditions contained within it, but that this heritage provided 'a fertile cultural soil' in which Spiritualism could thrive.

The authors argue for Weber's approach that it is processes and relationships, or processes of interaction, 'that are at the heart of religion as lived experience';¹³⁹ and they go so far as to argue that, in Iceland,

Spiritualism was midwife to the birthpangs of modernity because of its two-sided approach to life and death (life here *and* on 'the other side' – a pregnant phrase for the duality model), the spiritual displayed through the material, ... The 'scientific' ability to talk with the departed on the other side showed that change *and* continuity could be accommodated in a single socio-cultural worldview, precisely because this world view does *not* posit a closed paradigm for knowledge.¹⁴⁰

Thus Swatos and Gissurarson argue that the dualistic paradigm of the Christian west did not dominate in Iceland: 'While Western Europe generally was being subjected to scholasticism, the Icelanders were writing the sagas.'¹⁴¹ If this is correct, the presence (and persistence) of Spiritualism in modern Anglo-American culture implies that the western world more widely has also been resistant, in some degree, to a dualistic world-view. Spiritualism is therefore characteristic (and expressive) of modernity precisely because both it and modernity represent an ongoing dialogue between enchanted, religious and scientific world-views.

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, p.234

¹³⁹ *ibid.* It is partly an awareness of the importance of processes and relationships, arising from my experience of Portobello Spiritualist Church, that first led me to think in terms of mediumship (and by extension other shamanisms) as an apprenticeship outcome.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.234

¹⁴¹ *ibid.*, p.236 The work of Swatos and Gissurarson in noting the prominence of Spiritualism in Iceland and arguing for its importance in understanding modern Icelandic culture is strongly supported by Robert Anderson in his more recent work, *The Ghosts of Iceland*, 2005

2.3.6 The New Age cousin

It is noteworthy that the literature reviewed thus far has given rise to mention of the New Age category but not to any significant discussion of it. This can be explained in some degree by the tendency among both academic and popular writers on Spiritualism to examine the movement during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries but it may also suggest that actual or perceived connections between Spiritualism and New Age are of more value in endeavouring to delineate and analyze the category of New Age than they are in comprehending Spiritualism. Nevertheless, there is a very porous boundary here (not least as to shared terminology), that has been notoriously difficult either to map accurately or to explain. In Section 7.4, I briefly outline how my proposed definition of shamanism, derived from the apprenticeship model developed in this thesis, meets this test to the extent that it helps significantly in demarcating the boundary between Spiritualism and New Age.

2.4 Conclusions

I have demonstrated briefly that Spiritualism expresses a world-view characteristic of modern Western society. This may go some way to explaining why Spiritualism arose and persists in modern Anglo-American culture but has not spread significantly beyond it.¹⁴²

Where the enchanted world-view prevails, Spiritualism has tended to veer off into the realm of fairies, ghosts and hauntings; where the religious world-view prevails, Spiritualism has generally taken the form of Christian Spiritualism; and where the scientific-rational world-view prevails, Spiritualism has tended towards some form of psychical research. Whether there is a Spiritualist organization that manages contemporaneously to encompass the enchanted, religious and scientific-rational world-views, holding each of these three in balance, and being resistant to any one of them prevailing at the expense of the others, is a moot point. All of which is interesting, and may be incidentally supportive of Hervieu-Léger's analysis of modernity as characterized by belief, but does not of itself tell us what it is about Spiritualism that, for its adherents, renders it expressive of that modern world-view.

John Wallis¹⁴³ is one of the few since Nelson actually to take the time to look at what goes on in Spiritualist churches, focusing on the process of message-giving from the platform, but there is still little sense of who might undertake this occupation and how it is one gets to the point of being able to do it. These are questions that remain unexplored. These are not criticisms of Wallis, simply reminders that we are still seeking answers to underlying questions as to what Spiritualism 'is'. Is it *sui generis*, an odd feature of the modern Anglo-Saxon world that defies categorization, or is it

¹⁴² I distinguish Brazilian Spiritism from Spiritualism, a distinction that Spiritists themselves also draw; see, for example, Bragdon, E.: *Kardec's Spiritism: A Home for Healing and Spiritual Evolution*, Lightning Up Press, Woodstock, 2004. See also McGregor, P.: *Jesus of the Spirits*, Stein and Day, New York, 1967 and Hess, D.J.: *Spirits and Scientists: Ideology, Spiritism, and Brazilian Culture*, Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991 on the Christian religious and scientific traditions underlying Spiritism. Spiritism is an example of a movement derived from the mediumistic or inspired writings of nineteenth-century Frenchman Allan Kardec.

¹⁴³ 2001

something that has its parallels in other cultures, parallels that might help explain its role in ours?

Simply to say that something is *sui generis* and defies categorisation is, in the end, a failure of comprehension. It is a claim that can be useful as a political or defensive strategy,¹⁴⁴ aimed at securing a form of protection¹⁴⁵ or special treatment,¹⁴⁶ but even where honestly claimed, we need to be able to say why it is that a thing seems not to fit our existing categories, what that tells us about the thing itself, what that tells us about ourselves by revealing what we attend to or notice and what it shows us as to how our existing categories are lacking and might be developed. Spiritualism persists in western society. Whatever one's attitude to it, it has its place in the religious landscape of twenty-first century Britain and America. That must mean it can be 'placed' or categorized, if we can but find the tools for the task. We find them, I suggest, by examining the practice of mediumship.

¹⁴⁴ McCutcheon, R.T.: *Manufacturing Religion: The Discourse on Sui Generis Religion and the Politics of Nostalgia*, Oxford UP, 1997

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.221, n.11

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*, pp.15-6, 160-1

Chapter Three

Understanding Mediumship

3.1 The acknowledged medium: his role and craft

That mediumship is central to Spiritualism, and key to understanding it as a movement, is often simply assumed. Many who write about Spiritualism do so by writing about the movement's more famous mediums¹ or about developed mediumship.² The medium is the focus of attention during Spiritualist services and other demonstrations of mediumship. Yet such meetings are communal: there is no demonstration without an audience, and the presence (or unavailability) of a medium is generally the reason why Spiritualists will (or will not) gather together.³ Further, much of the teaching undertaken within the movement takes the form of experiential learning in Spiritualist development circles and, to a lesser extent, workshops and courses such as those offered by The Arthur Findlay College at Stansted Hall,⁴ or by Spiritualist churches. The more philosophical teachings of Spiritualism have generally only become influential within the movement to the extent that they have been recognised as the product of proficient mediumship.

3.1.1 The centrality of mediumship within Spiritualism

Although mediumship *per se* is not the focus of Nelson's *Spiritualism and Society*, a number of suggestions by Nelson have been among the prompts for this thesis and his work remains a useful starting point. In his exploration of the rise of nineteenth-century Spiritualism in Britain, Nelson identifies two main forms of activity:

¹ Tabori being an obvious example.

² By developed mediumship I indicate the practised mediumship of a medium who has developed sufficiently to achieve recognition as an able practitioner (as distinct from a medium who has not yet achieved that recognition).

³ Where a medium fails to appear, a Spiritualist church service will not, in my experience, proceed unless another medium happens to be present or is nearby and can be available at short notice. I have seen congregations dismissed for lack of a medium.

⁴ Stansted Hall in England was gifted to the SNU by Sir Arthur Findlay in 1964 and functions as its headquarters. A wide variety of residential courses is offered: see www.snu.org.uk (consulted September 27th, 2010).

A group might form around the charismatic figure of a spontaneous medium,⁵ or on the other hand a group of friends might decide to investigate Spiritualism and create an informal circle to carry out their studies.⁶

Development circles have always been a feature of Spiritualism but the first circles were established by those curious about psychic phenomena.⁷ Nelson characterizes the mediums of the early movement as charismatic or ‘natural’ mediums, rather than trained, suggesting that the need for freedom to express one’s ‘spontaneous psychic experiences’ has led to a resistance to formal organizations.⁸ Drawing upon Weber’s concept of charisma, Nelson suggests that it (attaching directly or indirectly to mediums) has remained spontaneous in Spiritualism and has not become routinized.⁹

Weber seems to have failed to see that in certain limited cases a permanent movement might be carried on by a succession of charismatic leaders, and this in spite of the fact that he was aware of the central importance of shamanism as a form of charismatic leadership in the religion of many primitive peoples. ... The major difficulty is containing charisma in such a way that it is prevented from proliferating a multiplicity of competing groups.¹⁰

Nelson suggests that the reason why there have been few breakaway groups from Spiritualism is because it is a movement rather than a formal organization, but this explains little. Spiritualism is indeed a movement but it has proved a very resilient movement with a clear identity, one that has practised mediumship in very specific ways that have been widely accepted across the movement, across both organizational boundaries. The training of mediums is key to understanding how Spiritualism manages mediumistic charisma. What can seem in the moment to be a very spontaneous expression of spirit is in fact highly circumscribed, acceptable only because it meets the requirements and expectations of a particular audience, in a particular time and place, in a particular cultural and social setting. The Spiritualist

⁵ This particular comment by Nelson is significant because it alerts us to the fact that early Spiritualism was more in the nature of a (potentially temporary) religious phenomenon rather than a movement, precisely because it was not characterized by apprenticeship. Nelson thus alerts us to the point that mediumship as an institution, enabled and supported by the mechanism of apprenticeship, is necessarily a structure that developed over time. I return to this point in Section 8.1

⁶ 1969, p.91

⁷ *ibid.*, p.92

⁸ *ibid.*, p.238

⁹ *ibid.*, p.239

¹⁰ *ibid.*, p.240

identity need no more be expressed in the constitution of formal organizations, or even written down, than that which constitutes any other social identity. Spiritualism's success in maintaining its identity is principally due to the mechanism of mediumistic apprenticeship, with all the discipline, and theoretical and practical learning it entails. Thus I take issue with Nelson's further suggestion that there is

complete freedom of belief and practice within the movement, which is limited only by the fact that unless one believes in the existence of spirits and in the possibility of communication with them one can hardly be classified as a Spiritualist. Given these two basic beliefs, mediums are free to proclaim any additional teachings they are 'given' by the spirits.¹¹

This is to overstate things considerably. Although Spiritualist groups consistently allow liberty of individual interpretation,¹² nevertheless they tend almost universally to have a set of basic principles such as the Seven Principles of the SNU.¹³ In practice, these provide a basic framework that shapes (and is intended to shape) any member's concept of spirit: in effect, a Spiritualist creed.¹⁴ In addition, the conventions surrounding platform demonstrations set limits to what can be demonstrated, with some topics or beliefs being expressly or implicitly excluded and others approved.¹⁵ I return to this point below¹⁶ but, to give a brief example, it seems generally to be accepted that reincarnation may not be taught from the platform, and I have heard it reiterated by SNU tutors that reincarnation in itself is not part of

¹¹ *ibid.*, p.241

¹² Indeed, this was at one time itself a guiding principle of SNU Spiritualism, and remains so at Portobello Spiritualist Church; see Appendix 2.2

¹³ See Appendix 2.1

¹⁴ My expectation is that most Spiritualists would object to the description of the Seven Principles as a creed, on the basis of, for example, the SNU's official position that the organization's interpretation of the Seven Principles 'is not to be seen as absolute or definitive.' *Philosophy of SNU Spiritualism*, 2007, p.3. In practice, the Seven Principles do much to shape the Spiritualist dialogue (and are intended to do so); for example, the SNU requires that services in SNU churches commence with a recitation of the Seven Principles. Practice, however, varies; in some churches the congregation joins in the recitation, in others the requirement of recitation is disregarded altogether. Further, one of the conventions or protocols attaching to platform demonstrations in SNU churches is that the address (sermon) delivered by the medium or other speaker should inform the congregation about one or more of the Seven Principles (again, actual practice varies).

¹⁵ For example, and continuing the point made above in the preceding footnote, one of the conventions or protocols attaching to platform demonstrations in SNU churches is that the address (sermon) delivered by the medium or other speaker should inform the congregation about one or more of the Seven Principles.

¹⁶ See Section 4.4.2.2

Spiritualism.¹⁷ The only reason I have ever heard given for the opposition to any formal teaching of reincarnation is simply that ‘it cannot be demonstrated’. Against this, many Spiritualists personally adhere to some version of reincarnation, even though they generally adhere to the convention against its formal teaching in the context of a Spiritualist meeting. This is also a convention that goes against the teachings of some very popular spirit guides (such as White Eagle) who affirm reincarnation. This is just one example of the ways in which the unwritten conventions surrounding demonstrations of mediumship ensure that mediums are not in fact free to proclaim whatever they feel inspired to say.¹⁸

Attending to mediumship as an institution within Spiritualism provides a tool with which to test and correct claims about the wider movement. Further, just as I argue (as have others), that understanding mediumship is key to understanding Spiritualism, so too I argue that understanding the mediumistic apprenticeship is key to understanding mediumship. I am strongly supported in this view by the fieldwork undertaken by Vieda Skultans in the early 1970s.

Skultans describes mediumistic development in terms strongly indicative of an apprenticeship. In the church she attended in south Wales, we see a lack of ‘head office’ influence, principally because Spiritualism is a movement in which ‘Religious beliefs and practices are learnt from other more developed mediums, usually in the context of the developing circle.’¹⁹

Owen is another who emphasises the importance of understanding mediumship as the outcome of a process of apprenticeship, and strongly reinforces the outline given by Skultans. There is recognition that communication with ‘spirits’ needs to be restrained or managed and cannot simply be spontaneous; further, that the development circle (whether private or connected to a church or society) plays a vital

¹⁷ Reincarnation was traditionally one of the points of contention between Spiritualists and Theosophists.

¹⁸ Some, of course, break with convention: serious breaches can lead to the point where the host church simply stops booking that medium. Not all development circles approach the teaching of platform conventions systematically, with the result that some conventions are broken or ignored unknowingly, particularly by inexperienced mediums.

¹⁹ 1974, p.3

role in the transmission of the concepts needed to do this safely. Finally, we have a clear statement that mediumship requires the practitioner to be the one in control. Owen uses typically shamanic language in saying that there is a need on the part of the medium to gain ‘control’ over the spirits and harness their power.²⁰ Finally, we have an indication of risks for the unskilled in attempting communication with spirits: an understanding found in both the Spiritualist movement and in other shamanisms.²¹

Similar themes are reflected in Hazelgrove’s analysis of Spiritualism in the first half of the twentieth century. Although Hazelgrove devotes a chapter to ‘becoming a medium’,²² this is largely an examination of career patterns, and tells us little about the process of mediumistic training. More usefully, Hazelgrove draws closely upon mediums’ (auto)biographies²³ and brings out the marginality of mediums and the high incidence of initiatory experiences,²⁴ the importance attached to a sense of relationship with significant others in spirit (both relatives who have ‘passed over’ and guides in the sense of personalities providing assistance or guidance of some sort, often from other cultures), the communal nature of the mediumistic persona and the attainment of recognition, and a widespread experience of mediumship as active rather than passive.

In recent decades, examples of extended fieldwork with mediums have been limited but, in her recent doctoral thesis,²⁵ Hannah Gilbert interviewed seventeen mediums, seeking information on a number of issues, including as to the key moments that had led to their becoming mediums. All of her informants identified as significant the experience of having an existing medium identify their (as yet undeveloped) abilities.

²⁰ 1989, p.44

²¹ Ibid.

²² Chapter 8

²³ Much of the (auto)biographical material Hazelgrove draws upon is post-war: it is, therefore, useful for the purpose of this thesis but it is not quite consistent with the declared time period covered by her work. This choice of material can perhaps be partly justified on the basis that mediums who had achieved recognition by the post-war period were apprenticed or ‘developing’ during the inter-war period, although this is not a justification that Hazelgrove herself offers.

²⁴ Not a term Hazelgrove uses but one I employ to indicate experiences that, usually with hindsight, are understood to be experiences of the spirit world that prefigure becoming a medium.

²⁵ *Speaking of Spirits: Representations and Experiences of the Spirit World in British Spirit Mediumship*, University of York, 2008

Early childhood experiences are common, following which there is typically a delay into adulthood, with mediums reporting a high incidence of existing practitioner validation in recontextualizing those childhood (or later adulthood) experiences as indicating a possible mediumistic career.²⁶

Access to development circles (to the process of apprenticeship and therefore to mediumistic status) is in the hands of existing mediums. That development circles should be led by existing mediums is widely accepted across the Spiritualist movement. Again, we need to attend to the conventions and protocols that frame the mediumistic apprenticeship in order to understand the extent to which mediumship is the institution that holds the Spiritualist movement together. In order to do this, the structure of that apprenticeship needs to be identified and articulated. If the apprenticeship model I identify is indeed that which enables a correct understanding of mediumship, it follows that this is the central tool for testing the thesis that Spiritualist mediumship is a traditional shamanism. If that which is central to an understanding of mediumship cannot also be found in other traditional shamanisms, the thesis fails. If, on the other hand, the same apprenticeship mechanism can be identified in both western mediumistic and acknowledged Siberian shamanic traditions and, perhaps crucially, can be shown to lead to similar outcomes in each, then the thesis is considerably strengthened.

Two preparatory steps remain. The first, in Section 3.1.2, is to survey the full range of mediumistic practices to which apprenticeship can lead. I do this to develop a fuller appreciation of mediumship but particularly to demonstrate the inadequacy of the limited typology of the medium as possessed passive instrument of the spirits. In this way, I prepare the ground for a similar demonstration in Chapters Five and Six of the inadequacy of the equally limited typology of the shaman as journeying active user of the spirits.²⁷ I do this in order to demonstrate that this apparently straightforward contrast in fact represents a long-standing but serious misinterpretation of the available material. I proceed to demonstrate that there is a high degree of commonality of practice as between Spiritualist mediumship and

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.284

²⁷ A contrast often drawn, particularly in semi-popular works; see, for example, Drury, 1987

other acknowledged examples of traditional shamanism, as a direct result of their common apprenticeship.

The second preparatory step, in Section 3.2, is to consider briefly the issue of mediumistic consciousness. This is not to engage with discussion as to the nature of consciousness *per se* but is necessary because mediumistic and shamanic practices are commonly regarded, by both scholars and practitioners, as characterized by an altered state of consciousness. Mediumistic awareness has often been characterized as ‘trance’, and marked by a lack of awareness during trance and partial recall afterwards, or even complete amnesia. Shamanic consciousness, has more often been presented as a form of heightened awareness or ‘ecstasy’. In this way, the issue of consciousness has also given rise to a convenient but, I argue, equally inaccurate, contrast between medium and shaman. Mediumistic consciousness is, in fact, typified by a heightened, not diminished, awareness, which is the intended outcome of the mediumistic apprenticeship.²⁸

Explanations of mediumship as a form of illness or neurosis have been frequent.²⁹ In the context of shamanism, the interpretation of practitioner consciousness as psychological illness is now widely discredited and increasingly disregarded.³⁰ That said, Spiritualist mediums themselves often describe their apprenticeship as involving psychological or emotional healing, with the development of mediumistic ability being seen in an increasingly positive light.³¹ I maintain that the disruptive psychological experiences typically undergone by mediums, and often adduced as evidence of mental abnormality or incapacity, are properly understood as initiatory experiences of a shamanic character. Further, I argue that such experiences are properly understood as constituting the first of three distinct phases in the

²⁸ I use the terms consciousness and awareness interchangeably, that of which we are aware being that of which we are conscious or cognizant.

²⁹ Owen closely documents this aspect of the history of British Spiritualism; see 1989, pp.144-6, 183-8. Such attitudes still appear to persist; see, for example, Dr. Andrew Norman’s *Arthur Conan Doyle: Beyond Sherlock Holmes*, 2007, in which he suggests that Doyle’s interest in Spiritualism might be explained in terms of his father’s alcoholism being due to a predisposition inherited by the son.

³⁰ See Znamenski’s *General Introduction in Shamanism: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, Vol. 1, 2004, pp.xxxvi-xli

³¹ See, for example, Huskinson, L.: *Analytical Psychology and Spirit Possession: Towards a Non-Pathological Diagnosis of Spirit Possession*, pp.71-96, in Schmidt, B.T. and Huskinson, L.: *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Continuum, London, 2010.

mediumistic apprenticeship. In this way, considering mediumistic consciousness leads directly into a discussion of apprenticeship in Section 3.3.

3.1.2 Varieties of mediumistic experience and practice

Although it is not one of the books I first came across, Barbanell's *This is Spiritualism*³² is the one I have most frequently heard mentioned by mediums visiting Portobello Spiritualist Church (and referred to by the both the past and present Ministers and some of the other Committee members of the Church), as being one of the best available descriptions of what Spiritualism 'is about'.³³ Barbanell was himself a medium, editor of a number of Spiritualist newspapers³⁴ and a Spiritualist minister. As a medium he was the channel for the guide known as Silver Birch, and the teachings presented in that capacity became (and remain) very popular within the movement.

Although a medium, Barbanell chose not to write about his own mediumship. Despite his reticence, we might expect that experience to inform what he chose to say about the wider movement, and it is no surprise that the opening statement in Chapter 1 tells us that 'Mediumship is the unique contribution that Spiritualism has to offer.'³⁵ Barbanell sees the value of mediumship as consisting in its enabling 'communications which prove the existence of an after-life.'³⁶

As well as the focus upon mediumship and the demonstration of life after death, we have a strong claim that becoming a Spiritualist was a rational act, that this was something done after due investigation into and reflection upon phenomena that follow natural, universal laws.³⁷ The claim is made that in time past, when people lived closer to nature, the spirit world was more accessible because human psychic

³² 1959

³³ The preface to the 2001 edition describes the book as capturing 'the essence of Spiritualism in the first half of the last century', p.3.

³⁴ Including the monthly Spiritualist magazine *Two Worlds*.

³⁵ 1959, p.15

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.11

faculties ‘operated more readily.’³⁸ Spiritualism is not spoken of as a religion that has all the answers but as a rational spiritual practice or process of enquiry.

The tool used to pursue that rational enquiry into the spiritual is, of course, the human medium or, perhaps more accurately, mediumistic consciousness. Descriptions of mediumistic demonstrations are organized around a preliminary discussion of mediumship and a brief description of ‘life in spirit’, which provides a general context for some of the communications related. Mediumship is described as ‘sensitiveness, the ability to register vibrations, radiations or frequencies which cannot be captured by any of the five senses.’³⁹ There is said to be a world of energy beyond the physical, which some individuals are able to perceive. In particular, a medium is defined as one who ‘tunes in to those on her wavelength and registers what she “sees” and “hears”.’⁴⁰ Thus we are told that,

Mediumship involves the use of the faculties of the spirit body which we all possess and which we will utilise when we die. These faculties of the psyche are either dormant or nearer the surface. When they are nearer the surface you have the potentialities of mediumship, which then have to be developed. In that sense mediumship is a gift with which the person is born. Mediums are born, and then have to be developed.⁴¹

This process of development takes place ‘in conscious co-operation with’ a medium’s spirit guides.⁴² From Barbanell’s account, three important points emerge: first, Spiritualism is (notwithstanding its claims to scientific rationality) a religion that posits a spirit world beyond the earthly, peopled by the discarnate spirits of those who were once incarnate; secondly, communication with spirit people is possible through human mediums; and thirdly, mediumship is understood to be a craft that involves the development and fine-tuning of innate abilities through a process of training or apprenticeship, undertaken in conjunction with spirit teachers or guides.

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.17 A claim reminiscent of claims made in some traditional shamanic societies that the shamans of the past were more powerful; see, for example, Jakobsen, p.155

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.15

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.17

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*, p.18

Barbanell states that mediumistic phenomena are varied but he makes a basic distinction between mental and physical mediumship. Mental mediumship is a phrase used to indicate those forms of mediumship that involve the communication of ideas or information: for example, the public demonstrations of mediumship given in churches, inspired or automatic writing. Psychic art, where a medium draws a likeness of a spirit person rather than giving a verbal description of them, would also fall into this category.⁴³ So too might journeying or ‘astral’ travel, where the medium travels in the spirit world(s) and, upon returning, relates what has been seen there.⁴⁴ Other famous Spiritualist writers and mediums from Barbanells’ era, such as Harry Boddington,⁴⁵ Harry Edwards,⁴⁶ and Horace Leaf,⁴⁷ as well as more recent mediums such as Gordon Smith,⁴⁸ further distinguish between clairvoyance, clairaudience, clairsentience,⁴⁹ psychometry⁵⁰ and healing.

Physical mediumship is also said by Barbanell to have many varieties, including those phenomena captured by ‘spirit photography,’ a reference to manifestations of spirit being captured on film, including orbs or other lights or materialized forms.⁵¹ Materialization is a form of physical mediumship whereby a spirit person or object ‘materializes’ using a substance referred to as ectoplasm, understood to derive, at least in part, from the medium’s body and manipulated in some way so as to take on the desired form. Although materialization is often popularly regarded as characteristic of Spiritualism,⁵² Barbanell tells us that it is the ‘rarest of all phenomena.’⁵³ Leaf,⁵⁴ Edwards⁵⁵ and Roberts⁵⁶ mention additional practices such as

⁴³ Coral Polge was a noted exponent of this form of mediumship; see Polge, 1991

⁴⁴ A good example of this form of mediumship is Frederick S. Sculthorp’s *Excursions to the Spirit World*, 1961

⁴⁵ 1947

⁴⁶ 2003

⁴⁷ 1976

⁴⁸ 2009

⁴⁹ Clairvoyance: clear-seeing (objectively or visionary); clairaudience: clear-hearing (objectively or by means of words or thoughts coming to mind); clairsentience: clear-sensing (a catch-all term, referring to impressions which a medium articulates).

⁵⁰ The mediumistic ‘reading’ of a physical item.

⁵¹ See, for example, Jolly, 2006. Also Ferris, 2003; Kaplan, 2003; Schoonover, 2003

⁵² See, for example, Brandon, 1982.

⁵³ 1959, p.18

⁵⁴ 1976

⁵⁵ 2003

⁵⁶ 2006

transfiguration,⁵⁷ telekinesis, rappings, table-tilting, levitation, apportion⁵⁸ and the use of mechanical devices such as ouija boards,⁵⁹ planchettes⁶⁰ and trumpets.⁶¹ The use of mechanical items or devices is not characteristic of post-War Spiritualism; indeed, the same could be said of physical mediumship generally. A good example of an insider biography of a physical medium is Tom Harrison's biography of his mother Minnie;⁶² although the book is recent, it describes a career at its height in the 1940s.

One form of physical mediumship Barbanell prioritizes is spirit healing, where

the human instrument becomes the channel for a spirit power which demonstrates its reality by achieving cures ... The medium's development ... consists of learning, by constant practice, to become the vessel for the greatest possible degree of spirit power to be poured through him.⁶³

Again, mediumship develops through learning by practising. Because healers are mediumistic, they are sometimes able to perceive the aura, 'the coloured emanations from every individual which surround his [physical] body like an ovoid.'⁶⁴ Whether

⁵⁷ Transfiguration refers to a form of mediumship where the appearance of a spirit person can be seen superimposed upon that of the incarnating medium.

⁵⁸ Apportion refers to a form of mediumship involving the dematerialization of an inanimate object and its rematerialization in a new location; an occurrence of this nature is referred to as an 'apport' (which may also reference the item itself).

⁵⁹ An ouija board is a device with letters or numbers set out in a circle or arc, with an item (such as an upturned glass) which, when touched by the medium (possibly together with other sitters), indicates (by moving towards) various letters or numbers which, when written sequentially, spell out a message or other communication. In my experience of Spiritualism, the use of Ouija boards is discouraged on the basis that there is no clear control over which spirit entity might take the opportunity to be expressed. Harry Edwards comments on the use of ouija boards, table communications etc. as 'elemental and crude' and as having 'reflected discredit on the good name of Spiritualism' (2003, p.36).

⁶⁰ A planchette is a writing device upon which a medium's hand rests, the idea being that a spirit overshadowing or incarnated by the medium may then produce legible script by moving the planchette, without the need to control the medium's hand so closely as to write directly.

⁶¹ In demonstrations of 'direct voice' phenomena, trumpets were often used to amplify the actual sound ostensibly produced by the spirits; the idea is that less energy is then required in order for the phenomena to manifest.

⁶² *Life After Death: Living Proof*, 2nd Edn., 2008

⁶³ 2001, p.20

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.21. Barbanell goes on to mention a work entitled *The Human Atmosphere* by Dr. Walter J. Kilner of St. Thomas' Hospital, London 1911, which documented researches into the aura using a solution of dicyanin (coal tar dye) between two sealed pieces of glass, said to render the aura visible to normal sight. Such older references to the aura counter suggestions that the concept is a New Age import into Spiritualist healing (this has been suggested to me by some Spiritualist healers, especially when interpreted in terms of the seven chakras corresponding to the seven colours of the rainbow) but

the spiritual body retained, in Spiritualist thinking, at death can be equated with the aura is not clear from reading Barbanell's account but it is suggested that the colours of the aura 'display' a person's characteristics and that certain illnesses can have their seat or origin in the aura, rather than in the physical body. Barbanell gives prominence to healing as a form of mediumship, saying that the 'healing medium is characterised by the fact that he works in conscious co-operation with the spirit beings who are his guides.'⁶⁵

Estelle Roberts' mediumistic career covered much the same era as Barbanell's, and was famous for her public demonstrations of mediumship and the philosophy or teachings delivered under the aegis of her guide, Red Cloud. 'A great deal of Red Cloud's work is devoted to healing.'⁶⁶ Barbanell also wrote a work specifically on healing,⁶⁷ containing examples of the work of many of the healers he knew of in the Spiritualist movement (including Harry Edwards, who became particularly famous for his healing work). The understanding of healing as mediumship is evident in Edwards' statement that 'The two essential factors for contact healing are (a) attunement with spirit and (b) the blending of myself with the patient.'⁶⁸

The same chapter of Roberts' autobiography includes an account of an exorcism, where an obsessing spirit person is separated from the patient being affected by their influence. Barbanell mentions Carl Wickland's classic work,⁶⁹ which contains many accounts of such 'rescues', undertaken through the mediumship of his wife, Anna. This scenario is not only what is classically called possession in western culture but is also what is specifically referred to as possession within Spiritualism. The reason this is often addressed as a form of healing is because the approach in such cases is often for a 'rescue circle' to be convened. In this way, the combined energy of all circle members is thought to be brought to bear for the benefit of the patient.⁷⁰

the idea of an aura is obviously a concept with a longer western history (including in Spiritualism). Barbanell mentions the 'colours' of the aura but does not use the term chakra.

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.21

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.41

⁶⁷ *Saga of Spirit Healing*, Psychic Book Club, London, 1954

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, p.111

⁶⁹ *Thirty Years Among the Dead*, 1968

⁷⁰ An account of a healing circle convened to achieve a physical healing is given in Section 4.4.2

Roberts gives two accounts of proceedings in such circles,⁷¹ and the issue of possession is one that continues to be written about by Spiritualists.⁷² It is clear from Wickland's work that the possession is understood as arising when a spirit is unable or unwilling to depart the world of the living. The task before a medium leading a rescue circle is to 'lead' the possessing or obsessing spirit to their appropriate 'place'. In this context, we see the Spiritualist medium acting as psychopomp, conductor of the dead to their appropriate place in spirit.

For Barbanell, it is obvious that mediumship lies at the heart of Spiritualism, hence his focus upon the figure of the medium and the mediumistic craft, rather than upon the wider movement. Two particular issues arise in this context: first, the extent to which mediumship should be seen as involving the experience of trance and, secondly, whether mediums are born (mediumship as gift) or whether they are taught (mediumship as learned craft). I consider the first of these points in Section 3.2, and the second in Section 3.3.

⁷¹ pp.44-8

⁷² See, for example, Fiore, E.: *The Unquiet Dead: A Psychologist Treats Spirit Possession*, Ballantine Books, New York, 1988; Maurey, E.: *Exorcism: How to Clear at a Distance a Spirit Possessed Person*, Whitford Press, Atglen PA, 1988; Allen, S.: *Spirit Release: A Practical Handbook*, O Books, Winchester, 2007

3.2 Trance and the issue of mediumistic consciousness

If, then, there be a wider world of being than that of our every-day consciousness, if in it there be forces whose effects on us are intermittent, if one facilitating condition of the effects be the openness of the 'subliminal' door, we have the elements of a theory to which the phenomena of religious life lend plausibility. ... At these places at least, I say, it would seem as though transmundane energies, God, if you will, produced immediate effects within the natural world to which the rest of our experience belongs.⁷³

Discussion of mediumship, by both Spiritualists and scholars, often becomes the discussion of consciousness. It is a commonplace that mediums (and other shamans) work in an altered state of consciousness, sometimes referred to as a trance state, and that this is in some way connected with, or even central to, mediumship.⁷⁴ Works such as that of Roberts,⁷⁵ which list the various forms of mediumship, often include a chapter on trance, even as they tend also to maintain that it is rare.⁷⁶ As William James suggests, the divine (or particular expressions thereof) intrudes into the everyday or natural world by entering into our consciousness, making its presence known by manifesting such that we are aware of it as a subjective reality.⁷⁷ The underlying question of whether mediumistic phenomena are in fact evidence of a spirit world, is naturally (and perhaps appropriately) expressed by an interest in mediumistic consciousness, which can also offer a way to sidestep concerns as to whether direct investigation of the reality of a spirit world is an appropriate scholarly activity.⁷⁸ It has been noted that varying levels of mediumistic awareness appear to correlate with different forms of mediumship; in particular, physical mediumship such as materialisation, is often said to involve the medium working in a state of deep trance,⁷⁹ even as physical forms of mediumship are often those associated with fraudulent or dishonest mediumship.⁸⁰ On this basis, mediumistic ability appears

⁷³ James, 1985, pp.523-4

⁷⁴ Boddington, 1967, Chapter 14; Edwards, 2003, pp.10ff.

⁷⁵ 2006

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.28

⁷⁷ Forrest, 1986

⁷⁸ Turner, E., The Reality of Spirits: A Tabooed or Permitted Field of Study?, *Journal for the Anthropology of Consciousness*, 1993, Vol. 4, No. 1, pp.9-12

⁷⁹ Smith, 2009, p.106

⁸⁰ On this see Jack Hunter's suggestion that occurrences of 'fraud' might form an accepted preparation or management of the subjective reality of those who attend demonstrations of physical mediumship;

very obviously to bear some connection to human awareness, and to different states of consciousness.

Attempts to understand the nature of that relationship have given rise to a wide range of questions concerning the nature of trance, whether mediums are possessed (and, if so, in what sense), and whether mediums are in control of what they do or whether they regard themselves as being controlled. The issue of a medium's self-control is also relevant to psychological explanations of mediumship (and explanations based upon the interpretation of mediumship as a form of psychological illness).⁸¹

I therefore focus upon three aspects of the issue of mediumistic consciousness; namely, (i) the nature of mediumistic trance and the issue of whether or not the medium is aware and in control of proceedings, (ii) mediumship as a form of self-control (where I raise the question of how that self-control is achieved, and propose mediumistic apprenticeship as the answer), and (iii) the perceived connection between mediumistic ability and psychological illness. It is often instances of apparent illness that initially lead on to the commencement of a mediumistic apprenticeship.

3.2.1 Entranced or awake? Degrees of trance

Barbanell suggests that one way of distinguishing between different forms of mental mediumship is by attending to what he terms 'degrees of trance,' explaining that phenomena such as direct voice⁸² generally require a fuller degree of trance than is generally seen, for example, during public platform demonstrations.⁸³ Further, for Barbanell, the degree of trance can also be indicated by the extent to which a medium is subsequently able to recall what was said. Barbanell begins by asking,

The Issue of Performance and Fraud in Mediumship, www.paranthropology.weebly.com (consulted 9 November 2009)

⁸¹ Huskinson, 2010

⁸² 'Direct voice' mediumship is a way of referring to a form of incarnatory mediumship (managed possession) where the medium is so heavily overshadowed by a spirit person that the voice of the medium changes to the extent that it appears to be that of another.

⁸³ I have, however, witnessed (and demonstrated) noticeable degrees of apparent overshadowing during addresses given by mediums, such that there is a noticeable change in the intonation or timbre of the medium's voice.

What happens when a medium enters the trance state and willingly surrenders control of her body to a spirit guide? The action is always a voluntary one, for the essence of mediumship is that the medium is always mistress of her own physical being. ... I asked Helen Hughes⁸⁴ to describe her reactions as she went into trance and came out of it. The process is akin to falling asleep, she said. As a preparation, she relaxes physically and mentally; she becomes aware of a gradual drugging of her consciousness which reminds her of the sensations accompanying the inhalation of chloroform.⁸⁵

Although it is said to be the medium's choice as to whether or not to enter a trance state, the impression given is that, once entered upon, control is surrendered. We have a very clear sense of trance mediumship as something passive and, although entered upon voluntarily, marked by an absence of awareness, resulting in the lack of a clear memory of it. Barbanell's discussion might seem to presuppose that trance is characteristic of mediumship, yet he also describes the application of the word trance to mediumship as a 'misnomer.'⁸⁶ He makes the point that there are 'degrees' of trance, from what he terms 'overshadowing' (indicating that the medium is being only slightly influenced or impressed upon by the guide or other spirit), through to 'complete insensibility' (indicating full control by the guide or other spirit). Accordingly, there is variety in the degree of awareness on the part of the medium both during and after the period during which mediumship is being practised, and it is this variable degree of awareness that Barbanell seems to indicate when using the word trance. Boddington suggests that, over time, the best mediums hone their skills so as to achieve the 'ideal' of passing 'through unconscious control to conscious co-operation'.⁸⁷ Developed mediumship is, therefore, a collaborative practice.

This is, I suggest, what lies behind Barbanell's comment that the word 'trance' is a misnomer when applied to mediumship. Although this might seem a paradoxical statement, it appears to be a warning note against suggesting too readily that control by the medium of his own physical body is *fully* surrendered:

⁸⁴ A reputed medium of the mid-twentieth century.

⁸⁵ 2001, p.77

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.78

⁸⁷ Boddington, p.192

My mature judgment is that even when the trance reaches the stage of complete oblivion, this does not mean that the medium's subconscious mind has been entirely eliminated. I would assert that it is very rare, in any form of mediumship, to receive a hundred per cent. of spirit communication.⁸⁸

Just as William James suggests that the 'subliminal door' being open is relevant to the possibility of spiritual phenomena, so Barbanell suggests that the role and characteristics of a medium's mind are crucial, with the process of relaxing the conscious mind allowing the contents of the subconscious to be expressed *under spirit control*. The quiescence of the conscious mind opens the door to spirit but, for Barbanell, this does not mean that the guides or others in spirit are then free to express themselves without distortion. Their self-expression remains 'coloured' by the medium because the contents of the medium's subconscious constitute inherent characteristics of the instrument being used.

I recall an illuminating experience with one of our greatest mediums, whose guide made a certain pronouncement. Then he said: "That is not my view. It is an idea that is dominant in my medium's conscious mind."⁸⁹ The only way that I can continue to function in freedom is to express this dominant thought and get it out of the way.⁹⁰

The totality of a medium's life experience might be said to constitute the attributes of that particular instrument, or the extent of the vocabulary that is available to spirit when using that medium as a means of expression. Even where there is 'full' control, the inherent psychological attributes or characteristics of the instrument cannot be changed. Thus there are limits to the possible range of phenomena that might be associated with any given medium. The relaxing of conscious control enables communication, even as the particular contents of the medium's mind characterize or

⁸⁸ 2001, p.79. The material discussed up to this point is a very truncated version of *Waking the Entranced: Reassessing Spiritualist Mediumship Through a Comparison of Spiritualist and Shamanic Spirit Possession Practices*, pp.186-204, in Schmidt, B.E. and Huskinson, L.: *Spirit Possession and Trance: New Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, Continuum, London, 2010, where I undertook a preliminary reassessment of mediumistic trance & consciousness.

⁸⁹ The reference in the quotation is to the conscious mind, rather than to the subconscious. Reading Barbanell, the suggestion appears to be that conscious thoughts are a particular, focused expression of the subconscious, hence are present there also. Thus subconscious thoughts or ideas that have been strengthened, by becoming conscious ones, may still manifest in trance and, indeed, are more likely to do so than subconscious contents the medium is yet to become conscious of. This point is not articulated by Barbanell and this note presents my attempt to resolve (as faithfully as possible) apparent contradictions in his book.

⁹⁰ 2001, p.81

‘colour’ that communication. The psychological and other characteristics of the medium bound (that is, contemporaneously enable and constrain) communication. It follows that mediumistic communication is heavily coloured by the medium’s cultural setting.

There is an acknowledged range of mediumistic practices such as clairvoyance, healing, trance speaking, astral (out of body) travelling, transfiguration and the production of ectoplasm to allow materialization of spirits, but Anderson is one of the few to attempt to rank these different practices on the basis of the degree of skill, and therefore length of training, required. Anderson’s analysis is highly provisional, in that it is based upon the personal history and understanding of one English medium (Deborah) who developed a strong reputation in Iceland, after visiting and demonstrating regularly.⁹¹ This medium’s history is not, therefore, one that expresses the Icelandic process of development, nor is it necessarily typical of British Spiritualism. It does, however, raise various points that are relevant to the apprenticeship structure developed in Section 3.3.⁹²

Deborah’s development as a medium began with her seeing and hearing the spirit world from being a small child, later having these experiences validated by an existing medium. That initial validation involved Deborah being characterized specifically as a healer, which then became the form of mediumship she trained for.

Deborah describes being ‘schooled’ in healing by her tutor, who worked with her for many months, telling her where to put her hands, to focus on the place of a patient’s pain, and allowing herself to be used as a vessel for healing energy; she relates being told that she should ‘just tune myself into the spirits’.⁹³ The teaching Deborah was given held strongly to the position that it was the ‘spirit world’ who were doing the healing, not Deborah. The tutor also explained to Deborah that she should think in

⁹¹ Anderson, R.: *Ghosts of Iceland*, Thomson Wadsworth, Belmont CA, 2005. The biographical information about the medium Deborah is set out at pp.59-65

⁹² It is, in addition, one of the few mediumistic histories described in detail in a scholarly work.

⁹³ Anderson, 2005, p.60

terms of healing the spiritual body, rather than just the physical body.⁹⁴ Finally, Deborah's tutor also spent time explaining the ethics of healing, by which she appears to mean the etiquette involved in conducting healing sessions.⁹⁵

Following the healing phase of her mediumship, Deborah met another medium who told her that her clairvoyant abilities were her stronger gift. Accordingly, she went on to develop these skills, adding them to her existing ones.

By developing her clairvoyant abilities she soon became able to converse with spirits in the sense that she could detect their thoughts and gain impressions of their bodily and facial gestures, which she was then able to explain to her clients.⁹⁶

The impression given is that during this phase Deborah developed with the aid of her spirit guides, the involvement of existing mediums being limited to explaining puzzling experiences in terms of their being attempts by her guides to make themselves known to her.

The next phase in Deborah's development involved trance mediumship, where her own consciousness became diminished, so as to allow the spirits to speak directly through her (sometimes so it is claimed, in Icelandic). A further phase saw Deborah develop as a transfiguration medium, where her physical form began to take on the appearance of the 'possessing spirit'.⁹⁷ Finally, another teacher guides Deborah into developing as a physical medium, allowing the production of ectoplasm that can be moulded or formed into the shape of the spirit person.

The learning involved in these further phases is not described, nor are we given any detail on the precise role of the teaching medium (indeed, none is mentioned in relation to the trance and transfiguration stages). All that is indicated is a process of learning, undertaken by Deborah with her spirit guides, which gradually accustoms

⁹⁴ Spiritualists generally regard the human body as having a spiritual counterpart, which is retained at death; some equate the spiritual body with the aura.

⁹⁵ This is a reference to such practical matters as where it is (or is not) appropriate for a healer to place the hands on a patient's body.

⁹⁶ Anderson, 2005, p.60

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.62

her to working in an ever deeper trance state in which her personal consciousness, although ever more fully diminished, *is never entirely lost*. Further, this is not a process of development that seems in any way to be forced upon Deborah but is instead something she actively sought, devoted a great deal of time to and had to work at, showing a great deal of personal discipline in seeing it through to a conclusion. What is described is an ongoing, phased course of development during which the medium builds up a working relationship with her spirit guides such that she comes ever more fully to trust in the reality of, and inhabit, the inner or subjective world in which a medium works.

Deborah's career progression follows a clear line of development: first, there are early experiences of spirit, followed by later selection by an existing medium; secondly, an extended process of training by existing mediums and spirit guides; followed by, thirdly, a process of public recognition (achieved gradually and requiring ongoing maintenance). It is also clear from this account that the sequence of initiatory experience, training and recognition describes a course of development that may (as regards training and recognition), be repeated several times over in the course of an individual career, as new mediumistic skills are developed and added to the repertoire of an already-acknowledged medium. It is a truism I have repeatedly encountered in the Spiritualist movement that there is no such thing as a 'developed' medium, even as it is also recognized that any individual medium may simply not be suited to particular forms of mediumship.

The common thread through Deborah's acquisition of different mediumistic skills appears to be an increasing ability to enter more deeply into a state of trance, and Anderson uses this particular career account in order to propose a hierarchy of mediumistic skills; physical mediumship being the most highly-regarded, and healing the least so, on the basis that physical mediumship is the most difficult to achieve and healing the easiest or most accessible.

This particular hierarchy is not confirmed by my findings in the course of my own involvement in Spiritualism. I have more commonly encountered a spiritual

hierarchy that places healing and the teaching of inspired philosophy at the pinnacle, with the clairvoyant demonstration of personal survival as the starting point or foundation upon which all else is built. It does seem to be widely recognized that forms of mediumship thought to be reliant upon deeper levels of trance (such as physical mediumship), take longer to develop.⁹⁸ It is also true that reports of physical mediumship are uncommon and for that reason attract attention, but Anderson goes too far in using one medium's career path as the basis for the hierarchy he proposes. Acknowledged rarity is not necessarily to be equated with social value. In addition, although more extensive than those displayed by many mediums, Deborah's mediumistic skills do not extend to other familiar practices such as astral travel or journeying. Broadly, Deborah's skills set comprises what I term incarnatory practices, by which I indicate possession practices involving intentionality on the part of the medium. In order to take this point further, I now proceed to examine more closely the issue of possession and control.

Before doing so, I note there are aspects of Deborah's course of development that are dissimilar to that of many British mediums; in particular, her succession of different teachers. The vast majority of British mediums develop in the context of a church or other development circle under the guidance of that circle leader; alternatively, a developing medium may be taken on as personal apprentice to an existing medium. In looking more closely at the issue of possession and control, I revert to Skultans and the more familiar setting of a Spiritualist church's development circle.

3.2.2 Possession: control of or by spirits?

Skultans undertook her research through membership of the development circle of a Spiritualist church in south Wales, first attending a service in March 1969.⁹⁹ Like Nelson, Skultans is attracted to using the possibility of cross-cultural comparisons in her analysis of mediumship: implicit in her account is mediumship as a form of spirit possession, a possibility she raises in the following terms:

⁹⁸ Leaf, 1976, p.129

⁹⁹ Skultans, 1974, p.10

‘[the issue] is one of establishing whether spirit possession has a core of critical characteristics, on the basis of which one can compare, for example, spirit possession cults in South Wales with spirit possession cults in Africa.’¹⁰⁰

Skultans’ methodology expressly involves making a number of a-priori assumptions about Spiritualist activity: first, she expressly assumes that mediumship is a form of spirit possession and, secondly, she assumes that spirit possession always relates to (i) illness (mental or physical incapacity), and (ii) the ability to assume social roles that are not otherwise available to the possessed person.¹⁰¹ No theoretical basis is given for these assumptions: they are at best (and then only by inference), implicit conclusions drawn from her fieldwork.¹⁰² Interestingly, as one of the few to have spent time in a Spiritualist development circle, Skultans maintains that inquiry as to the nature or authenticity of mediumistic consciousness (possession states) is ‘misplaced’ because,

possession does not require any prior peculiar state of mind but rather, membership of a social group in which detailed attention is given to bodily states and in which heightened awareness of such states allows them to be identified and defined in a special way.¹⁰³

The implication here is that mediumistic awareness is an intensification of normal consciousness, rather than something abnormal. Skultans stands firmly in the Durkheimian tradition of explaining religious activity in terms of social context. Skultans identifies mediumistic consciousness with possession, whereas the insider perspective is that it is possible to ‘raise’ one’s awareness or enter into some degree of trance but that this of itself does not necessarily lead to communication, let alone possession (a point that Roberts emphasises).¹⁰⁴ Skultans notes a heightened awareness on the part of the other circle members, and mediums themselves would make the point that it is precisely this ability to focus so as to achieve a heightened

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*, p.5

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.5

¹⁰² Although Skultans herself does call them assumptions, rather than conclusions.

¹⁰³ Skultans, 1974, p.7

¹⁰⁴ Roberts, pp.28-37. The insider explanation as to why a medium entering a state of mediumistic awareness does not necessarily lead to communication is that ‘opening the door’ does not, of itself, oblige anyone ‘in spirit’ to walk through it.

awareness that a mediumistic apprenticeship seeks to teach.¹⁰⁵ Skultans does valuable work in demonstrating that the entranced, unaware medium of popular imagination is something she simply did not encounter.

Skultans regards the Spiritualist understanding of spirit communication as complex in the sense that it ‘requires an active response on the part of the developing medium as opposed to a passive surrendering of one’s conscious personality’.¹⁰⁶ Both the medium and the guides (or other spirit persons) are thought to be active. Although Skultans feels that the flow of information is regarded as being from the spirit world to the material world,¹⁰⁷ the connection or link that enables it requires activity rather than passivity on the part of the medium. Although Skultans regards mediumistic communication as a form of possession, it is an intentional possession; one that requires the medium to engage in order to establish the connection and for the ‘possession’ to succeed.

Perhaps surprisingly, Skultans’ work tells us little about the development of mediumship. It is possible that this is partly due to the nature of the particular circle Skultans attended, as she notes that ‘there is a conspicuous lack of any real change in the lives of spiritualist women’¹⁰⁸ (who make up the bulk of the membership). Skultans acknowledges that the principal purpose of a development circle is to produce the movement’s mediums but this particular circle appears only to enjoy limited success in this. The impression is of a circle that has become self-preoccupied and is failing to tutor new mediums effectively. Skultans describes the circle as encouraging its members to become reconciled to illness, rather than overcoming it or utilizing it.

¹⁰⁵ See esp. Section 4.4.2.1 below.

¹⁰⁶ 1974, p.37

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ 1974, p.44

3.2.3 Mediumistic ability: chronic illness or illness overcome?

The suggestion of a connection between control (or lack of it) and psychological illness arises because of the assumption that the mentally incapacitated are (by definition) less likely to be in full control of their mental state, and are therefore more likely to be susceptible to control by outside influences, whether real or imagined. Owen has shown in some detail that this was the perspective of nineteenth-century attempts to offer psychological explanations for mediumship. In her discussion of the impact of Dr. Henry Maudsley, Alex Owen tells us that he

‘was keen to show that both spiritualist mediums and believers were basically unstable ... and he linked ecstatic religious experience with the clinical condition of epilepsy. ... Anticipating contemporary anthropological debate, he argued that primitive shamans were epileptics who deliberately chose young sufferers to be their pupils.’¹⁰⁹

Although the suggestion of a comparison with shamanism catches my eye, the characterisation of shamans as epileptics is one that cannot now reasonably be maintained. As a paid-up Spiritualist and, indeed, working medium and healer, who has never experienced anything even remotely akin to an epileptic fit, I would probably have my differences with Maudsley. Things have, thankfully, moved on a little but, as I demonstrate below, analyses of mediumistic development as involving some process of healing remain current in the academic literature. They do so, I suggest, with justification, even if the characterization of mediumship itself as a form of illness is misconceived.¹¹⁰

Nelson tells us that,

Weber seems to have recognized that mediumship, at least in its primitive form of Shamanism, is charismatic, since he says, ‘Shamanistic ecstasy is linked to constitutional epilepsy, the possession and testing of which represents a charismatic qualification’. We may however agree with Eliade in holding that Shamanistic ecstasy differs from mental disease in that the

¹⁰⁹ Owen, p.145

¹¹⁰ Huskinson, 2010

Shaman is always in control and can direct his powers, whereas the insane have no control over their seizures.¹¹¹

Rather than remain with supposed connections to epilepsy, I draw attention to Nelson's statement that it is characteristic of shamanism that the practitioner is in control of his powers, and that this seems to Nelson to be a mark of similarity between shamanism and mediumship, rather than of difference. Implicit in this is an understanding of mediumship as a practice or craft where the medium is in control.

Writing shortly after Nelson, Martin describes the form of service used in Spiritualism as 'taken over from familiar Nonconformist models', with its content or substance involving demonstrations of trance and possession.¹¹² The Spiritualist meeting is interpreted by Martin as a reinforcing social therapy. Although ostensibly demonstrating personal survival beyond death, Martin suggests that as well as enabling various forms of personal healing,

the second major social function of the clairvoyance seems to be to reinforce the recipient's identification with his allotted social role and give him a sense of purpose to carry on in what must often be a colourless existence.¹¹³

Value judgments aside, it is worth noting that this is Martin's characterization of Spiritualists generally rather than mediums, and it is one that finds more recent (and more positive) expression with Martin Stringer¹¹⁴ and his characterization of Spiritualism as a 'coping religion', and therefore as a modern example of what he suggests might be the basic form of religion.¹¹⁵

Skultans tells us that 'spirit possession always relates to illness: possession involves a degree of mental or physical incapacity.'¹¹⁶ There may be something to this (to the extent that certain forms of mediumship require the medium to achieve what might be termed a quiescent consciousness), but achieving this remains an intentional act

¹¹¹ 1969, p.240

¹¹² 1970, p.147

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.154

¹¹⁴ 2008

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, pp.111-3

¹¹⁶ 1974, p.5

the medium is capable of because of techniques learned during an extended apprenticeship. Skultans chooses to see Spiritualism 'in terms of the coping techniques and the rewards which it is able to offer its members'.¹¹⁷ Unlike Martin, however, this is a characterization based upon observation of the members of a development circle, rather than congregants attending a public service; hence the suggestion that questions of illness, incapacity, dis-ease and, therefore, healing (at least as ways of coping, perhaps leading to a distinction between healing and curing) are proposed as central to the mediumistic identity. The ability to assume a new social role is itself proposed as the principal coping technique available within the Spiritualist tradition to its mediums, relying upon

the assumption of roles which in the ordinary way lie beyond the social repertoire of the possessed person, but whose assumption during possession is mystically sanctioned.¹¹⁸

In its modern setting, Skultans perceives mediumship to be a form of apprenticeship undertaken with an identified leader or tutor in the context of an affirming group (the circle); the apprentice's craft is one she terms spirit possession, characterised by the experience of illness and the assumption of 'ordinarily inaccessible' roles carrying a degree of recognition or authority, such as teacher, healer or leader. For Skultans, the value of mediumship for its practitioners is closely bound up with the tools or normative concepts that it embodies and makes available to apprentices so as to comprehend and overcome the prompting illness. On this basis, mediumship is illness turned to account, mediumship as personal transformation.

I indicated above that I regard the continuing discussion of illness in relation to mediumship as having some justification. I note that Skultans' descriptions of illness among Spiritualists (which led her to regard illness as characteristic of possession), are indicative of initiatory experiences on the apprenticeship model. She notes a tendency to regard illness as having some underlying spiritual cause and interprets

¹¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.4

¹¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.5

this as part of an ‘eclectic’¹¹⁹ coping approach to dealing with illness. Thus the ability to use the Spiritualist word-view to make sense of illness explains why people choose to become Spiritualist mediums. There may well be truth in this but not, I suggest, because the perception of spiritual causes forms part of an eclectic coping approach; rather because mediumistic apprenticeship makes use of that perception to offer a *highly structured and consistent* coping approach.

Thus far, it has only been possible to indicate suggestions of a process of initiatory experience, training and communal recognition, but this apprenticeship model provides a valuable, non-prescriptive structure for exploring mediumistic development. The next section develops this model, with the first phase (initiatory experiences) proposed as offering an answer as to why psychological disruption (or other illness) and mediumship are so often connected. The problem has been the failure to identify such ‘illnesses’ as initiatory in the shamanic sense. It is on the basis of this characterization that I explore such illnesses as a psychologically disruptive, intrusive or unwelcome initiatory experiences, often resisted by the potential candidate, but capable of being resolved productively using the tools available within the Spiritualist mediumistic tradition.

¹¹⁹ *ibid.*, p.30

3.3 The mediumistic apprenticeship

Mediumship as the outcome of an apprenticeship has often been noted in the literature but has not been properly explored. For example, in his account of Spiritualism in Iceland, Anderson notes that mediumistic abilities,

usually manifest early in childhood. ... there is also an achieved component, insofar as aspiring mediums almost always are identified and even coached by established practitioners. Ultimately, status must be confirmed (achieved) by acknowledged success in mediating conversations between the living and the dead.¹²⁰

This is close to being a basic version of the apprenticeship model I propose. Spiritualism did not become established in Iceland until the early twentieth century, by which time it had already become a movement characterised by apprenticeship; to that extent, it is no great surprise to find an apprenticeship tradition in Iceland. That said, the continuing success of Icelandic Spiritualism, and the contemporary identification of apprenticeship in that setting, provides valuable support for the argument that apprenticeship is the principal means by which the Spiritualist tradition is maintained.

From the quotation above, we can identify three phases: an initial (usually childhood) manifestation, identification of the apprentice by an existing practitioner as leading to a period of training and, finally, some form of public recognition that a sufficient degree of mediumistic proficiency has been achieved. This brief statement contains a great deal that needs to be tested and refined; for example, the spirit manifestations I refer to as initiatory experiences are not restricted to childhood and also appear (or reappear) in early adulthood, or even later.

3.3.1 Phase 1: Initiatory experiences

What makes someone aware that they are a potential medium? It is often said by Spiritualists that children are ‘close to spirit’ and there is frequent mention in the

¹²⁰ 2005, p.44

literature of childhoods marked by unusual experiences. There is also, however, frequent mention of such experiences in adult life. These are more properly regarded as initiatory experiences in that they are the more proximate cause of mediumistic development when taken as an indication of potential.

Experiences described include a sense of marginality¹²¹ or exclusion arising from lonely childhoods,¹²² together with the common reaction that the initiatory experience was unsought or even unwelcome.¹²³ A delay into at least early adulthood is normal before the active development of mediumistic potential¹²⁴ and, just as the initiatory experience might be unsought or even feared, so too the later interpretation of that experience by an existing medium might be unwelcome and initially rejected.¹²⁵ Also noted is the characterization of initiatory experiences as illness,¹²⁶ overcome by those who successfully undergo the process of mediumistic training, with success requiring the ability to manage the disruption caused the initiatory experience or 'illness' using the conceptual framework available within the Spiritualist tradition.

Thus the initiatory experiences that may be interpreted as some kind of 'call' are not necessarily to be understood as being sudden or of short duration: lonely childhoods go on for quite some time.¹²⁷ Initiatory experiences may well be mystical or other-worldly experiences of brief duration but they may also be more in the nature of conditions or situations (including predispositions of character) that prevail over an extended period. Hazelgrove tells us that all of the mediums discussed in her book felt themselves to have 'encountered the supernatural world in direct and intense ways before becoming mediums'.¹²⁸

¹²¹ Hazelgrove, 2000

¹²² Moore, 1977; Garrett, 1939

¹²³ Owen, 1989

¹²⁴ Owen, 1989; Gilbert, 2008

¹²⁵ Moore, 1977, p.107

¹²⁶ Skultans, 1974

¹²⁷ Garrett, 1939

¹²⁸ 2000, p.237

As to what makes an experience initiatory of future mediumship, two possibilities immediately occur: first, the reaction or interpretation of the person undergoing the experience (which presupposes they have some knowledge of mediumship) and, secondly, interpretation of that experience by another, followed by acceptance of that interpretation. Anderson speaks of mediums self-selecting through ‘undergoing a profound emotional experience, and exceptional personal traits’,¹²⁹ likening this to Weber’s suggestion of prophetic self-selection through supernatural revelation and personal charisma.¹³⁰ To this, Hannah Gilbert has recently added the importance and prevalence of identification of future apprentices by existing mediums.¹³¹ On this point, it may be worth bearing in mind that being singled out as a potential future medium by an existing medium, particularly during a Spiritualist service surrounded by other members of the congregation, might itself be felt by the recipient as a powerful initiatory experience. Additionally, identification of a potential apprentice need not be on the basis of an initiatory experience and may itself be a mediumistic ‘message’, in which case the identification is understood to be made ‘by spirit’ speaking through a medium, rather than directly to the candidate. Geraldine Cummins ‘laboriously trained herself’ to become a medium, with the assistance of a friend who recognised and validated her mediumistic abilities.¹³²

Among the particular experiences Hazelgrove notes are visions¹³³ (including auditory visions in which voices are heard),¹³⁴ such as seeing the soul of another leave their body,¹³⁵ visions of deceased family members,¹³⁶ sensations of reassurance and peace, and vivid dreams (including auditory dreams in which voices are heard).¹³⁷ The lonely childhood of the medium Eileen Garrett is detailed at length as an ongoing catalogue of visions (particularly of colours and of other ‘spirit’ children) and a sense

¹²⁹ 2005, p.45

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

¹³¹ 2008, Chapter 6 (containing interview transcripts).

¹³² Hazelgrove, p.249. The nature of the training undertaken is not detailed. Cummins was famous for a number of books (including *The Scripts of Cleophas* mentioned above) that she maintained were the product of automatic writing, and which supplemented the Biblical account of the early years of the Christian church.

¹³³ Hazelgrove, p.237

¹³⁴ *ibid.*, p.240

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, p.237

¹³⁶ *ibid.*, p.239

¹³⁷ *ibid.*, p.238

of close connection to a living or enchanted natural world that compensated for feelings of being misunderstood and disbelieved.¹³⁸ For Garrett, a sense of recognition and validation came as a result of her meeting and developing a friendship with the socialist and seer Edward Carpenter, who ‘explained to her that she was of a new breed of humans gifted with cosmic consciousness.’¹³⁹ Subsequently Garrett met an existing Spiritualist medium who more specifically identified her abilities as mediumistic,¹⁴⁰ which led to her becoming a member of a development circle at the Spiritualist Association of Great Britain in London.

Accounts of childhood experiences are common in mediumistic biographies: Estelle Roberts recalls the vision of a knight in shining armour,¹⁴¹ Doris Stokes the vision of a recently-deceased neighbour standing next to his corpse after it was recovered from a fire,¹⁴² Stephen O’Brien the experience of hearing and seeing physical manifestations such loud nocturnal banging in his home and door latches lifting of their own accord,¹⁴³ Robert Brown the experience of seeing a deceased uncle’s face at a window five storeys up,¹⁴⁴ and the famous television medium Colin Fry tells us that ‘I’ve been able to communicate with the spirit world since I was ten years old.’¹⁴⁵ Another contemporary medium, Gordon Smith (a medium who has served Portobello Church), relates that he was a nervous child ‘who would go into my own little world as much as I could’ and who had thoughts about things he could not have known, including premonitions.¹⁴⁶ The well-known psychic artist Coral Polge tells us that she was not psychic as a child but that did have numerous out-of-body experiences, in which she floated above her bed looking down at ‘a small body which somehow was also Me’.¹⁴⁷

¹³⁸ *ibid.*, pp.240-4

¹³⁹ *ibid.*, p.245

¹⁴⁰ *ibid.*, p.248

¹⁴¹ 2006, pp.13-14

¹⁴² 2002, p.6

¹⁴³ 1989, pp.9-13

¹⁴⁴ 2004, pp.4-7

¹⁴⁵ 2008, p.ix

¹⁴⁶ 2006, p.6

¹⁴⁷ 1991, p.9

Although common, such childhood experiences are not acknowledged by all mediums. Of the twentieth-century mediums who have been famous for physical mediumship, the one whose mediumship (rather than life story) is most closely documented is perhaps Jack Webber,¹⁴⁸ whose childhood is described as having been ‘as ordinary as that of most children’ and who showed no obvious mediumistic potential until joining a development circle in adulthood.¹⁴⁹ The well-known US medium John Edward writes that, as to psychic and spiritual matters, he was ‘clueless until I was a teenager’.¹⁵⁰ Similarly, the contemporary actor and medium Liam Scott¹⁵¹ tells us that his spiritual experiences began in adulthood after a series of illnesses. In particular, he relates the experience of entering a meditative state during which he became ‘aware of an extremely sweet fragrance, and was overwhelmed with an incredible sense of peace’; upon opening his eyes, he found himself in a temple with ‘a huge bowl of incense’ and a meditating monk ‘surrounded in a beautiful golden light’. Scott tells us that he returned very gently to his own sitting-room but that the experience made him wary of meditating for some time after, an example of an unexpected and slightly unwelcome experience.¹⁵²

Owen supports the understanding that mediums often had childhood experiences: among those she cites are ‘prolonged day-dreaming, visions or rare flashes of clairvoyance’,¹⁵³ along with ‘vivid images, glowing balls of light, and trance-like states’.¹⁵⁴ She suggests that such experiences could initially be gentle but, if ignored, could become stronger and more persistent to the point of being disruptive or even frightening, particularly with the onset of adolescence or early adulthood.¹⁵⁵ Owen notes that Spiritualist development circles offered a place of refuge; partly because they offered an intelligible explanation of these experiences but also because the traditions of the Spiritualist movement more widely offered a context in which such

¹⁴⁸ Thanks to a biography written by Harry Edwards, *The Mediumship of Jack Webber*, Harry Edwards Trust, 1962.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.17

¹⁵⁰ 1999, p.3

¹⁵¹ Known for his work with The Royal Opera House; also for a number of film roles, including the Duke of Sussex in *Young Victoria*.

¹⁵² 2009, pp.58-9

¹⁵³ 1989, p.42

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.43

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, pp.42-3

experiences had potential value. Thus Owen confirms the pattern of unexplained childhood experiences prompting uncertainty, fear and resistance before later finding validation in a Spiritualist circle or being resolved by a ‘diagnosis’ of mediumistic ability by an existing medium or other experienced Spiritualist.¹⁵⁶

In his account of Spiritualism in the United States, Moore examines mediums’ responses to their initiatory experiences. One point that emerges consistently from mediums’ autobiographies is that the mediumistic career was not actively sought but was instead often accepted reluctantly or even resisted:

They were, they reported, frightened by their powers and reluctant to develop and demonstrate them. However, the spirit controls insisted and forced them to comply.

Emma Hardinge, for example, came from England to America as a young person, and after failing as an actress, she became one of the most successful public mediums of the nineteenth century. She first learned of her professional destiny at a spirit circle; horrified, she rushed out of the room and in her haste took a tumble down the stairs.¹⁵⁷

The conclusion frequently reached is that the mediumistic career begins with some form of initiatory experience affecting or intruding upon the potential apprentice’s everyday awareness, which typically becomes recognised as indicating a potential future medium, either by the individual himself, or following validation and interpretation by others recognised within the Spiritualist movement as having the authority to validate and interpret the experience (because they have the mediumistic skills prefigured by the initiatory experience).

Exceptionally, I have met one medium in Scotland (now in her forties) who did not become a medium through membership of a Spiritualist development circle; instead, the clarity with which she perceived spirit people during her childhood years led her to develop her mediumistic ability through her own patient efforts in conjunction with her spirit guides.¹⁵⁸ For this medium, her initiatory experiences of spirit also

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, pp.42-4

¹⁵⁷ 1977, p.107

¹⁵⁸ Thus the element of training by the spirits remains present, as does a process of learning by trial and error about the conventions of mediumship (particularly those of platform work), together with the process of becoming recognized as a competent medium.

came to be looked back upon as also being in themselves the commencement of her mediumistic training. This pattern of development is reminiscent of the mediums of Spiritualism's early history, before the movement's particular pattern of apprenticeship developed. I mention this because the perception of mediumistic ability as a gift rather than being entirely learned does persist in Spiritualism. Even with an established pattern of apprenticeship, it remains the case that Spiritualists regard mediums as having been identified by spirit; either directly, by means of an initiatory intrusion into the candidate's normal consciousness, or indirectly, by a medium acting at the behest of spirit. Although initiatory experiences have not hitherto been clearly identified as the first stage in a consistent pattern of apprenticeship,¹⁵⁹ they are commonly referenced by mediums because they are widely accepted within the movement as a sign of having been 'chosen'.

Barbanell devotes a chapter to the question of whether mediums are born or trained, although he does not otherwise deal with the process of development. His view is that those who go on to become mediums are born with a 'latent gift.'¹⁶⁰ The basis for this view is the perceived frequency with which mediums undergo unexpected or uncontrolled experiences of spirit communication in childhood and we are given five pages detailing Estelle Roberts' early encounters with her guide, Red Cloud.¹⁶¹ The remainder of the chapter is taken up with similar accounts of the early lives of mediums Gladys Leonard and Helen Hughes.

Estelle Roberts was a highly esteemed medium in the movement, her mediumistic career covering the period from the First World War to the end of the 1960s. In her autobiography, *Fifty Years a Medium*,¹⁶² little developmental detail is given beyond

¹⁵⁹ This may be why there is no commonly-accepted Spiritualist term for these experiences. The common (but misleading) habit of calling them childhood experiences I think arises because many of them are childhood experiences and because it articulates something of the perception that these are the early experiences of a medium's role in life. The phrase 'childhood experiences' does, however, have the disadvantage of obscuring the large number of such experiences that occur in biological (as opposed to mediumistic) adulthood. I have borrowed the phrase 'initiatory experiences' from shamanic studies for convenience; its use is not intended to presuppose the outcome of a comparison that is yet to be made.

¹⁶⁰ 1959, p.110

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp.110-4

¹⁶² 2006

ongoing unusual experiences which, for Roberts, themselves constituted a process of unfolding:

This was accomplished, not by special training, but simply by opening up my mind to receive impressions from the spirit world and in so doing becoming the instrument for the exercise of the divine power through Red Cloud.¹⁶³

Despite this claim, Roberts does relate that she and her husband would ‘sit for spirit’ at home regularly, hence this ‘opening up’ of the mind is not something that simply happened but relied instead upon the willingness of the Roberts to sit regularly for this purpose over an extended (if unspecified) period of time. This turns out to have been prompted in part by messages given to Estelle Roberts by other Spiritualist mediums, especially one given to her by a Mrs Elizabeth Cannock at a meeting at Hampton Hill in London, the contents of which were apparently confirmed for Roberts by subsequent domestic experiences.¹⁶⁴ Thus we have a little more going on than someone simply born with a gift that somehow developed over time into mature mediumship. What we have, I suggest, is a process consistent with the general picture of training or development over time undertaken in conjunction with spirit teachers or guides: the classic developmental phase of any Spiritualist medium. This may be a small circle of only two but it is still a circle, and the pattern Roberts describes is one I have seen with contemporary mediums, where their private development circle comprises the medium and his or her spouse or partner.

Finally, it is perhaps worth acknowledging Skultans’ observation that Spiritualists often maintain that anyone has the potential to develop as a medium,¹⁶⁵ a point Nelson also makes in support of his characterization of Spiritualism as inherently democratic. This is, I think, misleading. One analogy I have used in discussing this issue is to say that anyone can learn mediumship just as anyone can learn to play the piano; namely, that anyone can apply themselves so as to achieve some degree of proficiency but only a few will show a real aptitude for it, and only very rarely will a ‘Mozart’ appear. The analogy can be continued by making the point that even the

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.29

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, pp.24-5

¹⁶⁵ 1974, p.3

talented need to practise or train in order to turn their ‘gift’ into the ability to demonstrate, and the place of training or ‘development’ in the movement may well be key to the movement’s ability to reconcile the ‘democratic’ idea of God’s universal spirit with the more aristocratic idea that mediums are selected. Notwithstanding the potentially universal nature of mediumistic ability, the histories of those who do in fact go on to be acknowledged as mediums show clearly that they regard themselves as having been selected in some way, and that they are usually so regarded by other Spiritualists.¹⁶⁶

With Polge and Scott, we saw that travelling or journeying can feature among mediums’ initiatory experiences. Karl Müller, then President of the International Spiritualist Federation, wrote that,

For every individual having experienced an astral projection the overwhelming sensation of being freed of one’s material body brings about a conviction of immortality, henceforth never to be shaken. This shows the importance of spiritual development, either by means of a Spiritualists’ development circle or by meditation and other exercises, together with the application of spiritual principles in daily life.¹⁶⁷

I quote this extract from Müller because he selects as a typical initiatory experience for mediums, not the experience of their body being overshadowed or possessed by another spirit, but the experience of astral travel or journeying. That is not to make the claim that the experience of astral travel is the most common initiatory experience but merely that it is sufficiently common for at least some prominent Spiritualists to regard it as normal.¹⁶⁸

Initiatory experiences of this nature are of potential interest for a number of reasons: one aspect that I wish to draw attention to is that such experiences do not, of

¹⁶⁶ The English medium Eileen Winkworth, now resident in Edinburgh, once expressed this during an address given at Portobello Spiritualist Church by saying that ‘We waited to see if we were touched by God.’

¹⁶⁷ Sculthorp, *Excursions*, 1961, Appendix, p.157

¹⁶⁸ Müller’s suggestion that the experience of astral travel brings a conviction of immortality was certainly not true in my case, although this is the kind of theological superstructure many Spiritualists are prone to construct upon the basic experience. That said, his phrase ‘the overwhelming sensation of being freed of one’s material body’ is a very apt description of my own experience related in the following Chapter.

themselves, necessarily indicate that a mediumistic career lies ahead: this depends upon the response of the one undergoing the initiatory experience. A mediumistic interpretation only becomes likely where the experiencer has some knowledge of Spiritualism and/or mediumship or where an existing medium identifies the experiencer as a potential apprentice medium, leading to the later interpretation of the experience as an initiatory experience prefiguring a mediumistic career.

3.3.2 Phase 2: Developing

A major difficulty in piecing together an accurate picture of mediumistic apprenticeship from existing literature is that, although mediums have tended to attract the attention of scholars, the process of becoming a medium has not. Like Hazelgrove, Owen offers no sustained examination of the process whereby the beginner becomes the recognized practitioner, but she acknowledges that such a process occurs:

All experienced believers recognised the importance of a stable setting within which the attention of the spirits could be restrained and developed, and this was what a good local society or private developing circle could provide. Mediums might be made in heaven¹⁶⁹ but mediumship, the combination of gift and craft, required careful preparation under a skilled and benevolent eye. Mediums must serve an apprenticeship which involved gaining control over the spirits and harnessing their power.¹⁷⁰

Owen is one of the few to use the terminology of apprenticeship but she too seems not to see the significance of this observation, nor does she articulate why she refers to ‘control’ over the spirits in language reminiscent of shamanism.

Most of the scholars considered thus far have drawn their conclusions from mediums’ (auto)biographies and prior scholarship. One exception is Skultans, but we also have the benefit of fieldwork by the US scholar Burke Forrest, who also spent time as a participant-observer in Spiritualist development circles.¹⁷¹

¹⁶⁹ Again, the acknowledgment of selection.

¹⁷⁰ 1989, p.44

¹⁷¹ 1986.

Skultans' introduction confirms that development circles are the places where mediums learn their craft, that they are led by 'mediums of long-standing and high reputation',¹⁷² that regular attendance over an extended period is expected and considered necessary to the development of mediumistic skills,¹⁷³ and that local practice and belief are prioritized in that they are learned from the leading medium rather than from Spiritualist literature (there being an overt bias in favour of individual inspiration).¹⁷⁴

Skultans' account offers glimpses into mediumistic teaching,¹⁷⁵ noting that

Everybody is thought to have an aura. It is half-physical, half-spiritual, like a rainbow surrounding the body', and can be seen by those who are 'spiritually developed'.¹⁷⁶

Apprentices are taught to 'take on' physical ailments, to allow themselves to receive the impression of having that ailment. This might be interpreted as 'picked up' by being sensitive to the aura of another person, or it might be interpreted as an impression being given by someone in spirit, either as part of their description of a condition they suffered while incarnate (and therefore as evidence of who they are) or as indicating a condition being suffered by someone in the material world (and therefore evidence of the spirit person's continued awareness of and concern for the one suffering).¹⁷⁷ Skultans notes a marked continuing preoccupation with physical illness in the Welsh circle; even among the more practised mediums, illness forms a significant part of the content of the 'messages from spirit' that are given.

Skultans' circle is taught that there is a clear sense of hierarchy among people in the spirit world according to spiritual development, with the least developed (or lower rank of the hierarchy) regarded as closest to the physical world.¹⁷⁸ Help can flow both ways; for example, mediums might assist the recently-deceased to begin the

¹⁷² 1974, p.2

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.3

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.3

¹⁷⁵ Principally in Chapter 3 entitled 'Privacy and Pain', where Skultans focuses on 'the part played by illness in spiritualist belief and practice', p.27

¹⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.30

¹⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.37

¹⁷⁸ *ibid.*, pp.32-4

task of comprehending their new environment.¹⁷⁹ We are told that ‘an aspiring medium’s education involves training in the presentation of messages’.¹⁸⁰ We are not told in detail exactly what is expected, save that the messages given should encourage a focus upon the spiritual rather than the material, and should offer encouragement or ‘upliftment’ to the recipient.

Finally, although Skultans says little about spirit guides, she notes that they may make their presence known through a series of minor accidents.¹⁸¹ As an apprentice’s awareness of people in spirit (particularly of guides) develops, the ability to communicate is regarded as involving both ‘listening’ and attending to spirit, or being ‘impressed’ upon by spirit. As to the kind of information spirit communicators are thought to convey, Skultans tells us little beyond impressions of physical ailments, save that these may be interpreted symbolically as having a spiritual meaning.¹⁸²

Anderson is one of the few expressly to ask ‘But what does it take to become a spirit medium?’¹⁸³ The thoughts Anderson offers are based upon conversations with six Icelanders, one of whom is described as enjoying ‘high status in the profession’,¹⁸⁴ with the others ‘resembling mediums in some ways but incompletely so’.¹⁸⁵ The pattern that emerges is, for Anderson, one of ‘recruitment and authentication’,¹⁸⁶ as follows:

spontaneous encounters with the spirit world from early life, teaching by an existing medium, and ‘social recognition ... achieved by demonstrating success in communicating with spirits, which can include foretelling future events and curing disease.’¹⁸⁷

¹⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.33

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.41

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*, p.38

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.41

¹⁸³ 2005, p.47

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.58

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.59

Although the general outline of an apprenticeship model reappears, detail as to what existing mediums actually teach and what skills apprentices actually develop, is again largely lacking. The descriptions hint at the apprentices becoming aware of their spirit guides over an extended period so as to be able to communicate with them. One of the mediums, Jóhanna, speaks of being tutored in hands-on healing by an English medium, stating that her tutor ‘showed how to do it and how to come into communication with the spirits’.¹⁸⁸ Over time, Jóhanna explains that she became able to sense the dead but her ability to communicate had only developed only to the point of being able to sense their emotions.¹⁸⁹

This indicates two distinct aspects to the process of apprenticeship: first, training in the Spiritualist tradition and, secondly, training that is regarded as being given by spirit guides. These aspects of mediumistic training intertwine: for example, part of the ‘traditional’ training given is what to look out for as indications of the presence of spirit guides but, once that presence has been perceived, the developing medium will typically be expected to ‘work with’ that spirit person in correctly discerning who they are, why they are present and what they wish to communicate. Although I distinguish ‘traditional’ and ‘spiritual’ training for the purpose of organizing the material, I do it also to reflect an emic perspective that clearly perceives a developing medium’s training as a course of instruction given by both incarnate and discarnate teachers. I use the case study in Chapter 4 to illustrate this more clearly.

3.3.3 Phase 3: recognition as a medium

Anderson’s work is valuable in identifying social recognition as a distinct stage in the process of becoming a medium. He tells us that recognition requires the medium to demonstrate the ability to mediate productively between the spirits and the earthly community served by the medium; in addition, continuing recognition requires continuing demonstrations of mediumistic competence. Indeed, Anderson regards the willingness to serve a community as itself an indicator of mediumship, and the failure to serve an identifiable community is observed by him as one of the reasons

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, p.50

¹⁸⁹ *ibid.*

people with mediumistic ability do not self-identify as mediums in the Icelandic setting.¹⁹⁰ Further, the element of communal service shapes mediumship in that the ability to communicate with the dead must extend beyond those who are personally known to the medium. If a wider community is to be served, the medium must be sufficiently skilled as to be able to identify, and communicate with, spirits they may never previously have encountered, but who are known to members of his client community.¹⁹¹

Absent in Anderson's account is any presentation of a particular ritual, event or demonstration that marks public recognition of a medium. Spiritualism is a twentieth-century phenomenon in Iceland and organizationally the movement is represented by two bodies, the Icelandic Society for Spirit Research (ISSR) and its offshoot, the more recent Icelandic School for Spirit Research (established in 1994),¹⁹² supplemented by networks of private circles and privately-organized public demonstrations. Iceland lacks the tradition of networks of Spiritualist churches modelled on the Christian tradition that developed in the nineteenth century in Anglo-American countries. For this reason, the ability to be recognized as a medium in Iceland largely depends upon the ability to develop a personal network of clients. This can be assisted by the ISSR, which is willing to 'authenticate' mediums, and engages some mediums to offer private sittings, but ISSR authentication is not crucial in that a medium may nevertheless proceed to develop a reputation in Spiritualist circles, on the basis of which a personal following is built up.¹⁹³ Although mediumship and mediumistic status are maintained as stable concepts, the recognition of individual mediums can be highly fragile and requires them, in effect, to socialize actively in order to maintain their status. Anderson observes that where a medium gives unconvincing demonstrations or fails properly to diagnose illness, their mediumistic status can become subject to 'contestation and renegotiation',¹⁹⁴ making it clear that there is ongoing communal monitoring of the skill or proficiency of individual mediums.

¹⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.58

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² *ibid.*, pp.135ff.

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, Chapter 8 *passim*

¹⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.59

In relation to British and US Spiritualism, Nelson also notes the stability of mediumship and mediumistic status as concepts, reminding us that, strictly, charisma belongs to the spirits who are expressed through or by the medium.

Most mediums are careful to point out that credit should be given to the 'spirit guides' and not to themselves. The medium is thus an ambiguous figure in the movement, a mouthpiece for beings greater than himself and yet having certain charismatic powers at least in respect to the non-mediums within the movement ... and the general public.¹⁹⁵

This belief as to the true attribution of charisma means that the institution of mediumship and the reality of communication are protected from the inadequacies of individual mediums. A particular medium may not be highly regarded but their failure to demonstrate effectively is unlikely to shake the underlying belief in a spirit world and the possibility of communication with those who inhabit it, nor even in the expectation that there are or will be other, more effective mediums. Thus the authority or charisma attaching to mediums partly attaches to them collectively, as representatives of Spiritualism's defining institution.

For Nelson, the understanding of charisma as communal rather than personal helps to explain the democratic or congregational nature of many Spiritualist churches and other associations. The suggestion is that a democratic structure is most accepting of the 'freedom' that mediums require in order to express the spirits spontaneously¹⁹⁶ and Nelson feels that this is why the more autocratic bodies that have been established by charismatic individuals have not tended to last. Again, I suggest that things are not quite so straightforward. A more subtle and complex picture emerges if we attend to the process of mediumistic development. As noted, there is much about Spiritualism that is anything but democratic: this is a movement whose authoritative practitioners typically enjoy (in effect) some form of divine election, and who achieve recognition by the wider Spiritualist community by being able to demonstrate an appropriate response to that 'call' by undergoing prolonged tutoring by prior holders of that authority.

¹⁹⁵ 1969, p.244

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.245

Nelson saw Spiritualism as a cult¹⁹⁷ but, when we bring the importance of mediumistic apprenticeship more sharply into focus, this movement begins to look much more like a modern version of a mediaeval guild. The habitual failure of the more autocratic bodies established by charismatic individuals to survive the loss of the founder has little to do with a medium's need to express the spirits 'spontaneously' but a great deal to do with the failure to offer apprenticeships to possible successors. Churches without development circles find that their existing mediums inevitably retire; over time, such churches become dependent upon the availability and goodwill of mediums trained by other churches. The tradition of mediums working a circuit provides a degree of institutional support but this is obviously a more fragile basis upon which to maintain a church. The greater the proportion of churches without circles, the more vulnerable the wider movement.

¹⁹⁷ 1969, pp.231-7. See also by Nelson, 'The Membership of a Cult: The Spiritualists National Union', *Review of Religious Research*, Vol.13, No.3, (Spring 1972), pp.170-7, and *Cults, New Religions and Religious Creativity*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1987, pp.53-8

3.4 Conclusions: apprenticeship and the maintenance of tradition

In this Chapter, I have outlined my argument that Spiritualist mediumship is a craft that is learned through apprenticeship. I have proposed, on the basis of literary sources, a particular apprenticeship structure with three principal phases: a first phase comprising initiatory experiences that prompt the candidate to undertake the second phase of the apprenticeship proper, leading to the third phase, where the apprentice graduates or achieves public recognition. In Section 1.2, I posed three questions derived from Hervieu-Léger's model of religion as remembered tradition. Having examined the importance of the institution of mediumship within Spiritualism, we are in a position to propose answers to those questions.

Our first question then, is whether there is an identifiable community and what are the ways in which it is maintained? At one level, this is easily answered: there is certainly an identifiable Spiritualist community, namely the networks of churches and other groups which hold meetings at which demonstrations of mediumship are given. The regular holding of such meetings is the main external signifier of the presence of a Spiritualist community. In the past, many Spiritualist meetings were conducted in private and some still are. In addition, many development circles (which are the movement's main teaching forums) are private occasions, as are (obviously) private sittings with a medium, all of which can make the full extent of Spiritualist activity difficult to determine.

Further, attending to the process of mediumistic training demonstrates that apprentices and graduates (recognised practitioners) constitute a core or sub-community within Spiritualism. This sub-community comprises those who are the core lineage of Spiritualism and who, by maintaining the Spiritualist body of mediumistic knowledge through the practice of mediumship, embody or constitute the Spiritualist tradition.

We therefore have a very clear answer to the second question I pose: what is the tradition's core lineage and how is it witnessed? The Spiritualist movement's

defining institution is its tradition of mediumship. The core lineage of belief is the existence of a spirit world populated with those who once inhabited the natural or physical world, and that it is possible to communicate with spirits through mediums. This core lineage of belief, embodied in a lineage of practitioners and practitioner-teachers, is witnessed by other Spiritualists by the public and private use of mediums and healers.

This takes us on to the third of the questions I formulate: namely, what are the processes of belief that constitute or legitimate that tradition and its core lineage as the identifying authority for that community? Part of Hervieu-Léger's argument is that believing remains central to modernity. Rather than exploring the nature of belief *per se*, Hervieu-Léger's purpose is to identify the processes by which people come to trust in the validity of a particular tradition. For contemporary Spiritualist mediums, the processes of belief involved are principally the learning processes of the mediumistic apprenticeship. Further, although it is often maintained that anyone has the potential to develop as medium, it is also accepted that mediumistic ability is demonstrated by (and properly recognised as having been acquired by) those who have taken the time to develop. It is principally those who are the product of the mediumistic apprenticeship whose teachings, opinions and advice become more widely diffused among the wider Spiritualist community.

The initiatory experiences that mark the first phase of the mediumistic apprenticeship fall into three categories: (i) childhood experiences indicative of psychic or spiritual awareness, (ii) adulthood experiences leading more directly to mediumistic apprenticeship, and (iii) identification by an existing practitioner of the candidate as having mediumistic potential. A medium's career may be marked by experiences falling into one, two or all three of these categories. The training that marks the second phase has two principal aspects: (i) training by spirit guides, and (ii) training by an existing practitioner in the tradition's existing body of teachings, both as to spiritual matters and as to the practicalities of mediumistic demonstrations. The third phase, where public recognition is achieved, can also be considered as having two

aspects: (i) achieving initial recognition, and (ii) developing and maintaining recognition over the course of a career (including taking on one's own apprentices).

Spiritualism is an interesting and valuable case study for Hervieu-Léger's model: its overt remembrance of the dead highlights that fact that, in relation to religious traditions, processes of belief are themselves principally processes of remembrance. Spiritualism offers valuable support for Hervieu-Léger's treatment of religion as a chain of memory. With regard to Spiritualism, the wider influence of mediumistic apprenticeship (supporting its identification as that which is key to the movement because it is the mechanism that establishes and maintains the movement's core lineage) is illustrated by asking an apparently simple question: namely, what is involved in being able to hold Spiritualist meetings on a regular basis? The answer to this question has two parts. Hervieu-Léger points out that remembrance takes place communally and individually, and in relation to Spiritualism, this highlights two quite distinct aspects to the processes of remembrance taking place within the movement.

The first aspect is the shared life of the group. There is a core lineage of past mediums who have been connected with a church (and the standing of a medium may be partly the result of having been tutored by another who was prominent), there are those who were apprentices together, there is a shared history among those who take on the administrative tasks involved in keeping a church's doors open or in supporting Spiritualist organizations in which many churches come together, and so on. But, ultimately, the core statement that Spiritualists believe in or 'gather around' is that we survive death, retaining our personal consciousness, and that it is possible to communicate between the natural and spiritual worlds. This gives rise to the recurrent need for a medium to be available for each service in order to enable that communication. Much of the effort that is put into the Spiritualist movement supports the training and development of mediums and the regular convening of meetings, not only because Spiritualists seek to come together in shared acts of worship but also because these meetings are now prominent among the 'places' where a mediumistic career can be pursued.

The other aspect of the process of remembrance within Spiritualism is highlighted when we consider that the ability to pursue a mediumistic career depends upon competence in bringing forward evidence of the presence of ‘people in spirit’; that is, being sufficiently convincing to those attending the meeting for them to maintain their acceptance of the teaching of survival and the possibility of communication. At one level, this relies upon the maintenance of the memory of people as they were before they passed and the giving by the medium of details that may be mundane in themselves and may indicate a very ordinary life, but which are special and significant precisely because they are private and not previously known within the worshipping community. Convincing evidence that Uncle Freddie is ‘with’ the medium may well rely upon the medium being able to relate such things as his passion for Campbell’s meatballs or the title of the book he was reading when he passed. In Spiritualism, we have an example of a shared belief that, for its adherents, relies upon its ability to ‘bring forward’ the private and personal, the domestic rather than the public and, in doing so, to render the private and personal valuable and meaningful as a matter for public reflection, acknowledgment and validation.

But my experience of Spiritualist congregants is that once they have accepted a person is ‘present’, they want more. Some will go on to seek descriptions of what we might call ‘life in spirit’ and teachings of one sort or another, answers to the grander philosophical questions we pose from time to time about origins and meaning: indeed some scholars such as Wouter Hanegraaff are inclined to regard Spiritualism as an esoteric movement because of its attempts to respond to such questions.¹⁹⁸ But while that strand is there, for the overwhelming majority of people who attend

¹⁹⁸ See, for example, *On the Construction of Esoteric Traditions*, pp.11-61, in Faivre, A. and Hanegraaff, W.(Eds.): *Western Esotericism and the Science of Religion*, Peeters, Leuven,, 1998, in which Hanegraaff regards as ‘highly remarkable’ Pierre Riffard’s suggestion that ‘spiritism (sic) falls outside esotericism’ and, arguably, lies beyond ‘even modern occultism as such’, p.25. Interestingly, Spiritualism and mediumship go unmentioned in both Antoine Faivre’s *Access to Western Esotericism*, State University of New York Press, 1994, and Kocku von Stuckrad’s *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, Equinox, London, 2005. To the extent that Spiritualism and mediumship have seemed to me to be ‘hidden’ practices, this has been entirely down to the privacy that tends to surround development circles. Laurence Moore offers an interesting essay, *The Occult Connection? Mormonism, Christian Science and Spiritualism*, 1983, in which he notes that although these movements developed vocabularies ‘tinged with occult associations’, ‘we are not dealing with elaborate occult systems’; p.156

churches such as my own at Portobello, the ‘something more’ is more likely to be confirmation that the spirit person is ‘with’ them in their daily lives, aware of what they are going through, receiving their thoughts and attempting to respond to them: ultimately, that the relationship between them is being maintained, meaning that it continues to develop. Acceptance that a spirit person is present requires a description of them as they were ‘when they were here’ but that is generally followed by the question ‘what have they got to say to me?’, the answer to which needs to be relevant, and to show an awareness of what is going on now.

This is a very simple, straightforward, human question to want an answer to. Answering it is anything but simple and straightforward. It is in order to show how Spiritualism approaches this task that I proceed in the following Chapter with a case study of one particular Spiritualist church in Edinburgh, Scotland.

Chapter Four

Case Study I: Portobello Spiritualist Church, Edinburgh

4.1 Introduction

The development and training of mediums and the maintenance of churches or other centres as places where a mediumistic career can be pursued constitutes a highly complex and time-consuming involvement on the part of existing mediums and administrators within the movement. The teaching and practice of mediumship involve the transmission and maintenance by mediums of a highly complex set of conventions and understandings, designed not only to assist apprentice mediums in making sense of their psychic experiences but also to do so in such a way as to maintain a cohesive, identifiable movement. In order to describe and analyze how this is done, I make use of this Chapter to present a case study of the Spiritualist church where I developed as a medium. This chapter sets out a limited ethnography of Portobello Spiritualist Church¹ in Bath Street, Portobello,² Edinburgh, one of the larger Spiritualist churches in Scotland.³ I say limited ethnography because limitations of space and the requirements of the thesis itself oblige me to focus upon mediumistic apprenticeship.

I present this account for a number of reasons. First, given the limited amount of scholarly attention given to Spiritualism (particularly to contemporary Spiritualism and to the voices of mediums),⁴ an ethnography based upon almost a decade of fieldwork centred upon this church represents, of itself, a useful addition to the academic corpus. Secondly, this account maintains (I submit, faithfully) a focus upon Spiritualist practice, reinforcing the presentation of Spiritualism as a lived tradition, a practice-based movement, rather than an esoteric society or priestly religion. Thirdly, this is a valuable opportunity to demonstrate in detail the importance of mediumistic

¹ In addition to using the full name of Portobello Spiritualist Church, I make capitalized references to the 'Church', 'Portobello' and 'Portobello Church' to avoid repetition.

² Portobello began as a small seaside town to the north-east of Edinburgh city centre, known for pottery and glass-making. A brief description is given below in Section 4.2.1.

³ www.portobellosc.org.uk (site revised as at September 27th, 2010)

⁴ Gilbert, 2008, pp.12-3

apprenticeship in maintaining the Spiritualist tradition, by illustrating its central importance in the life of a particular church community. Comprehending the extent to which the teaching that takes place within Portobello Spiritualist Church's development circle shapes and supports the life of the Church is key to understanding how Portobello maintains its mediumistic tradition. In this way, Portobello illustrates the importance of mediumistic apprenticeship for the wider Spiritualist movement. Fourthly, it is my own ethnographic experience of having developed as a medium in Portobello's development circle that first made me aware of mediumship as the outcome of an apprenticeship.

My connection with Portobello Spiritualist Church began in November 2001, after I chose to end my legal career and return to the University of Edinburgh in order to read Divinity (2001-3). At that point in time, I had little understanding of mediumship and was sceptical of its claims (if intrigued by them). I had no intention of joining the Church's development circle, let alone of developing as a medium. I had no thought of studying for a PhD and, until the academic year 2002-3, little knowledge of shamanism or of the field of possession studies. Portobello became the focus of my involvement in Spiritualism because my parents and paternal grandmother were members (with my father also a member of the development circle).

At the time, I did not consciously choose between particular methodologies. I adopted an open approach to the study of a religion in much the same way that a phenomenologist might employ *epochē*. Like any good lawyer, I was simply gathering evidence, asking questions, making comparisons, pursuing inconsistencies, and trying to determine whether there was an internally consistent narrative account that constituted a credible explanation for the phenomena I witnessed, or heard others witness.⁵ A preliminary conclusion was that an answer was only to be had by following in my father's footsteps and joining the Church's development circle, so as to 'see for myself'. In modern scholarship, there is almost universal pressure to reflect upon one's preferred methodology prior to initiating any programme of

⁵ I refer here to both verbal and literary accounts by other Spiritualists. Arguably, of course, this is itself a traditional comparative methodology

research, for the perfectly good reason that different methodologies embody and express different assumptions as to what can or, in some cases, should properly be regarded as capable of being enquired into within the field of religious studies, and how that enquiry is best undertaken. By contrast, this thesis is the outcome of an almost complete omission of prior methodological reflection.

As to comparable methodologies, I indicate that proposed by Burke Forrest in her brief ethnography of two Spiritualist development circles, one in southern California and one in southern England. Forrest suggests that there is value in researchers opening themselves to the experience of the ‘subjective reality’ inhabited by religious insiders⁶ and, like her, ‘I began the research not with a hypothesis to test, but with an interest in a phenomenon’.⁷ Forrest also found that her methodology emerged during her fieldwork as an apprentice:

I call this methodology *apprentice-participation* and will suggest that, in spite of the particular and idiosyncratic nature of occult settings, it can be used to reveal their embedded social meanings. ... it resembles the grounded theory of Glaser and Strauss (1967), but because of the nature of the settings for which it is advocated, it calls for a serial timing of the subjective and objective research techniques rather than an early and continuing analysis of the data.⁸

The period of my membership of the Portobello circle (my subjective research) overlapped with the period during which I have undertaken a more objective analysis in order to further this thesis. Indeed, my ongoing involvement as a working medium and Church official requires this. Balancing these two concurrently is no small task and Forrest ultimately failed to find a way to do so. Forrest, in fact, did not entirely inhabit the Spiritualist reality: she did not adopt the Spiritualist ‘belief system’ and found herself without a conceptual framework such as might have enabled her to cope with the visions and other experiences that marked her apprenticeship. The result was severe psychological stress, resulting in physical symptoms (principally severe weight loss) and advice from her physician to discontinue the research. Her

⁶ 1986

⁷ *ibid.*, p.439

⁸ *ibid.*, pp.432-3

way forward was to undertake a literature review and gradually to re-inhabit the unified perspective of the researcher, so as to develop her analysis.⁹

As one who fully inhabits a Spiritualist perspective, I have not experienced quite this difficulty. My major problem has generally been the more practical one of balancing the time demands of being a church leader and circuit medium travelling across Scotland with those of a doctoral thesis. My position as a Spiritualist requires me to continue to inhabit Spiritualist reality at the same time as maintaining a critical stance to both my inner experience and my analysis of the processes involved in the maintenance of mediumship as a social tradition. At first this can seem like a constant shifting of perspectives but, over time, it does become possible to find a state of equilibrium and to maintain one's poise. My methodology has nevertheless been an example of apprentice-participation, which is why I argue that Forrest's description of this methodology as sequential (subjective phase, followed by objective phase) is simply a consequence of her position as, ultimately, an outsider.

Following Forrest, I use my openness to an involved experience of Portobello Spiritualist Church to develop the following ethnography, focusing upon the process of apprenticeship offered by membership of the Church's development circle. During 2006, I did begin a series of semi-structured interviews with other (past and present) circle members, including the circle leader, the Rev. June Herraghty. This was done in an attempt to adopt a more structured process of enquiry, and to gather different perspectives to act as a check on my own. Six interviews were conducted, of between one and three hours in length, during which various topics were proposed for discussion, rather than asking specific questions. The discussion was allowed to 'wander' as the interviewee felt inclined, on the basis that this would allow the interviewee greater freedom of expression and might be more likely to allow points I had not anticipated to come into the discussion. In the ethnography that follows, I have not drawn upon those interviews directly to any significant degree but they have provided me with material against which to check my analysis. Although the interviews covered aspects of mediumship that I now organize within the specific

⁹ *ibid.*, pp.446-8

apprenticeship structure I subsequently identified, that structure was not itself a topic of discussion. In the time available, it was not possible to undertake follow-up interviews, although some later questions were put informally to interviewees.

In writing the following ethnography, I have identified the current and previous Ministers (and circle leaders) of the church by name: given their legal status as ministers of religion, their identities are a matter of public record. However, an ethnography such as this reveals much that would not normally become a matter of public record; accordingly, I have given both of those individuals an opportunity to consider this Chapter. Revs. Winstanley and Herraghty have each read and commented upon it, and each has confirmed to me that they are content for it to be part of a document that is publicly available. The material set out in this Chapter is otherwise presented so as to avoid any express or implied attribution to any particular individual and I have been mindful of the need to avoid using any information of a confidential nature.

4.2 The Church

In this Chapter, I present what I have learned from my involvement in the life of the Church but I also draw upon the autobiography of the Rev. Bernice Winstanley,¹⁰ President of the Church from May 1979 to March 2000 and Minister from 1987 to 2008. The present incumbent, the Rev. June Herraghty, succeeded the Rev. Winstanley as President of the Church and, subsequently, also as Minister.¹¹

4.2.1 Description and history

Portobello is a coastal town to the north-east of Edinburgh, which now falls within the boundaries of the City of Edinburgh but once had its own mayor. The town was a very popular seaside resort for people from across Scotland during the first half of the twentieth century and still maintains a strong sense of local community. The town hall is still in regular use and, indeed, has been used by Portobello Spiritualist Church to stage public demonstrations of mediumship intended for a larger audience than the Church itself can accommodate. In December 2008, the town hall was used to stage a public demonstration of mediumship by the well-known medium Tony Stockwell.¹²

Portobello Spiritualist Church was established in 1946 in a basement room at 28 Wellington Street,¹³ Portobello by a married couple, Pastor Walter Bisset¹⁴ and Mrs Eliza Bisset. Pastor Bisset subsequently purchased premises at 25c Bath Street, where the Church met until 1974, when those premises were sold and the Church purchased 20a Bath Street from The Salvation Army. The Church was subsequently extended by the addition of a purpose-built, octagonal church hall, which was opened in 2000 with a seating capacity of 80-90 people. On the ground floor, there is an entrance hallway giving access (including disabled access) to the main hall from

¹⁰ Winstanley, Bernice A., *A Spiritual Journey*, Edinburgh, 2003; private printing but available within the Church.

¹¹ The difference between the two roles is explained in Section 4.2.2

¹² I attended and would estimate some 200 attendees. The hall is capable of seating four times that number.

¹³ Since renamed Marlborough Street.

¹⁴ Ordained by the Spiritualists' National Union.

Bath Street, and from Wilson's Park at the rear of the building, together with a tea room & kitchenette, disabled toilet and storage cupboards. On the first floor, the Church has a larger tea room & kitchenette, office, additional toilets and storage cupboards. There are garden areas to the front and rear of the building, with a small car park to the rear for use by disabled drivers.

4.2.2 The members and structure of the Church

In legal terms, Portobello Spiritualist Church is an unincorporated association, with each full member having one vote in general meeting. Membership is initially on an associate basis; associate members may attend general meetings but may not vote. Associate members may apply to the Committee for full membership after one year. As at its Annual General Meeting on March 8th, 2009, the Church had 78 full members and 31 associate members. Those attending the Church need not be members and, in practice, members regularly make up a only a minority of those attending.

Those attending the Church as congregants are overwhelmingly white Caucasians, and predominantly female. In order to illustrate this, I recorded attendances during the period August to December 2005 and found that male congregants constituted between 10 and 18% of those attending demonstrations of mediumship.¹⁵

The members meet at least annually in general meeting, usually in March. The AGM elects a Committee of up to eighteen to serve for the coming year. From the general Committee members, a President, two Vice-Presidents, a Secretary and Treasurer are elected. The Committee meets five or six times in the year, smaller day-to-day tasks being dealt with by means of informal discussion among the office-bearers and other Committee members.

¹⁵ This broadly confirms the findings of other scholars, such as Nelson, Martin and Skultans. At Portobello, men make up a much higher proportion of those attending the Wednesday evening meditation and healing service (sometimes a majority).

The Church was reconstituted on this basis in May 1979¹⁶ and Mrs Bernice Winstanley was appointed President, serving in this capacity until 2000. Upon her retirement from full-time employment in 1987, Mrs Winstanley became registered in Scotland as a Minister of Religion. The position of Minister does not exist in terms of the Church constitution, thus there is no provision for any stipend.¹⁷ The Minister is the acknowledged spiritual leader of the Church, and it is established practice that the Minister has the right to attend Committee meetings.¹⁸ Committee meetings are opened in prayer. Following the Church's Annual General Meeting in March 2009, a Committee of seventeen was elected,¹⁹ all of whom were past or present members of the Church's development circle, and included four men and eleven Edinburgh residents. Of the remaining members, two were resident in Prestonpans, and one in each of Musselburgh,²⁰ Bonnyrigg, Lasswade,²¹ and Auchtermuchty in Fife. I first joined the Committee in March 2004, and was elected Vice-President in March 2009.

Apart from the Committee, the other 'body' within the Church community is the Church's development circle, which meets on a Monday evening at 7.30pm. Meetings of the circle are based on two semesters: September to December and late January to June, with a break over the summer. The circle has no formal existence in terms of the Church's constitution and exists entirely as a matter of practice. The Portobello circle is a 'closed' circle, indicating that admission is by invitation by the circle leader.²² Most development circles are closed, with the intention of maintaining a stable group. Received wisdom appears to be that closed development

¹⁶ The Church closed briefly for a few months during the Spring of 1979 due to falling attendances and lack of volunteers to attend to the running of the Church.

¹⁷ There are no paid positions in the Church. It is widespread feature of the Spiritualist movement that churches are run on a voluntary basis.

¹⁸ This right also extends to the previous Minister, the Rev. Winstanley, in her capacity as Honorary President.

¹⁹ Making a total of eighteen, including the Rev. Winstanley.

²⁰ Prestonpans and Musselburgh are towns in East Lothian, to the east of Edinburgh.

²¹ Bonnyrigg and Lasswade are towns in Midlothian, the south of Edinburgh.

²² Rev. June Herraghty. An 'open' circle is open to anyone who wishes to attend but will still have a circle leader (a medium) who manages proceedings. Circles are also referenced by the activity for which they are convened: the purpose of a development circle is to develop spiritual awareness (including mediumship of one form or another), a rescue circle is generally understood as one held to free someone from uncontrolled possession by a spirit (although the attempted rescue is of the spirit as much as the embodied soul), a physical circle aims to produce physical phenomena, a healing circle is held to give more powerful healing than can be given by one healer alone, and so on.

circles of five or seven are ideal²³ but the full circle at Portobello presently has a total of twenty-six members, comprising eighteen women and eight men. A sub-circle largely made up of those who are at a slightly more advanced stage of development (in terms of proceeding towards giving platform demonstrations of mediumship), meets downstairs in the Church under the guidance of another experienced medium, but is not regarded as a separate circle. The downstairs circle generally has a membership of seven or eight, including the leader.²⁴ Meetings of the 'full' circle are held from time to time, partly to reinforce a sense of unity within the church.

Admission to the circle is prized, not only because of the opportunities it offers for personal development but because it also carries with it recognition by the circle leader, the authority figure within the Church, as one who has potential mediumistic ability. Generally, admission to the circle is restricted to those who are full members of the church.²⁵ A list of those seeking admission to the circle is maintained but it is not a waiting list; the circle leader selects from among those interested but does not regard herself as the one who chooses. This was explained to me by saying, 'I've got to get the thought from spirit.' Admission to the circle therefore carries with it not only recognition by the Church's authority figure but also the cachet of being chosen by spirit.

One important qualification for admission to the Portobello circle is that the applicant must not previously have been a member of any other development circle, a rule applied expressly to preserve the tradition that is handed down within the Church. This rule is not uniform across the Spiritualist movement but only rarely does Portobello depart from it. Further, once an apprentice has been admitted, he or she is required to be a member of the Portobello circle only. Should the circle leader

²³ On the basis of conversations with Rev. Winstanley.

²⁴ Membership figures given for the full circle include members of the downstairs circle.

²⁵ The one-year associate membership (effectively a form of probation) gives the circle leader an opportunity to gauge a possible recruit's degree of commitment to the Church. The restriction of circle membership to full members of the Church is not absolute: a clearly gifted individual might be allowed (and encouraged) to begin their apprenticeship sooner.

become aware that a circle member has also become a member of another circle, that person will be required to choose between them.²⁶

Membership of the circle also brings new duties within the Church. Circle members are expected to attend Church services and to be the ones principally responsible for assisting in the running of the Church, preparing for services, assisting in workshops, making teas after services (formalized on a rota system), volunteering for maintenance, putting up and taking down Christmas decorations, and so on.²⁷ Quite apart from the spiritual training offered in the circle itself, the conditions of entry and ancillary requirements of membership are intended to create an intimate core of committed members, a family within the family, which supports and maintains an often fluid congregation, and whose responsibility and loyalty are not simply to Spiritualism but specifically to Portobello Spiritualist Church and the local mediumistic tradition it maintains. This was expressed succinctly by the Rev. Bernice Winstanley one evening in 2007 when she took a meeting of the circle and reminded the Church's apprentices that 'Monday evenings are when you take from the Church: the other nights are when you give something back'.

Such reminders are necessary, of course, precisely because, in practice, members of the circle vary enormously in the time and degree of personal commitment they are able or inclined to give to the Church. Some will be diligent in their attendance at circle meetings but otherwise make little effort, some are haphazard in attending both circle meetings and services, while others show a high degree of commitment to both. The members of the circle, being human, may fall short of the ideal they are encouraged to aim for, but the point I make is that Portobello actively uses the circle to maintain an inner core within the wider Church community, sufficiently reliable as to maintain Portobello as a physical location, where public demonstrations of

²⁶ This is not just a 'paper' rule: this situation occurred during my time in the circle.

²⁷ Indeed, when it comes towards Christmas, one of the circle meetings is used not to 'sit for spirit' but to put up the decorations in the Church, deliberately emphasizing that practical contributions to the Church are also part of an apprentice's spiritual development. During my time in the circle, this was articulated by the circle leader each year, lest the point be missed.

mediumship can be given.²⁸ In this way, the Church's core lineage of mediums is able to transmit to future generations the mediumistic tradition embodied by the Church's current authoritative practitioners.

It is also worth reiterating the point that, at the Church's AGM in March 2009, every person elected to the Committee was a past or present member of the development circle. This was not in the least unusual: in practice, someone without experience of the circle is unlikely to find their name put forward for election to the Committee. The only exceptions I have observed are in relation to the office of Treasurer, where the Church has sometimes chosen to prioritise an individual's experience of the banking sector and take them onto the Committee, either as Treasurer or in order to support the Treasurer.²⁹ Regardless of the terms of the Church's written constitution, in practice it is not the general membership of the Church that provides its Committee members: it is the circle.

We see here the crucial importance of attending to underlying dialogues, including practices. The circle at Portobello has no formal existence and is not even mentioned in the Church's constitution but the mediums who emerge from that circle are the reason Portobello has a congregation; a congregation who, in turn, fund the maintenance of the physical space where the circle meets, and the continuation of the tradition embodied by the teachers and apprentices who make up the circle. Further, those with responsibility for managing of the Church's business are overwhelmingly drawn from its development circle. Portobello Spiritualist Church is a church run by mediums for mediums. The maintenance of the mediumistic tradition is given priority, both in terms of the Church's management and its activities, through mechanisms (apprenticeship, facilitated by circle and circuit) that exist entirely as unwritten (and partially hidden) social conventions.

²⁸ The collections from which, of course, fund the upkeep of the Church building and thus enable the maintenance of that physical space where the tradition is maintained.

²⁹ When I joined the Church, the Treasurer was a retired banker.

4.2.3 Church activities

Portobello is an active church, with regular weekly services including demonstrations of mediumship on Sunday and Tuesday evenings, and Friday afternoons; on Wednesday evenings, there is a meditation and healing service. The format of these services is detailed in Appendix 1. Friday evenings are occasionally used³⁰ to hold ticketed demonstrations of mediumship by a more experienced or famous medium visiting the Church.³¹ One-day workshops are also held on aspects of mediumship. On the last Thursday of each month, private sittings are offered by Church mediums³² but it must be acknowledged that Portobello does not place high priority on being able to offer private sittings, preferring instead to encourage attendance at Church services. In September 2009, the Church instituted a series of lectures on various topics, including the history of Spiritualism, the history of Christian Spiritualism within the Spiritualist movement, and accounts of the afterlife.

In August each year, a month before the circle's Autumn semester begins, the Church holds an introductory day-long workshop one Saturday,³³ for those who have expressed an interest in knowing more about mediumship. The workshop is offered on the basis that it is an opportunity to learn a little about mediumship but, from the Church's perspective, its purpose is to give Church leaders an opportunity to identify potential apprentices.

Finally, it is important not to overlook the social enjoyment that Portobello, like any church or other religious community, offers to its members. Workshops tend to be well catered for by Church members, with quantities of food provided well in excess of what is actually needed on the day. Evening 'specials' are generally followed by food and drink, as is the Church AGM each March. In May 2006, a week of special events was held to celebrate the Church's 60th anniversary, including a costumed party with a 1940s theme. Part of the preparations included the creation of a visual

³⁰ On average, every second month.

³¹ With ticketed events, the convention is that the Church takes half of the entrance fees collected, with the other half constituting the medium's fee.

³² For a fee of £20 per half-hour sitting paid to the Church, not the medium.

³³ Usually the third or fourth Saturday in the month.

display setting out the history of the Church, with photographs of Pastor and Mrs Bisset and other past leaders of the Church, all helping to reinforce a sense of participation in Portobello's history and tradition. As part of the celebrations, invitations were issued to leaders of other Spiritualist churches across Scotland, with visitors arriving from churches such as Stirling and Dundee. Such activities support both the social relationships Church members maintain with one another and the wider 'presence' and standing of the Church within the movement.

4.3 The Church within the British Spiritualist movement

The purpose of this Section is to give a brief outline of where Portobello Church sits within the wider Spiritualist movement. This amplifies the description of Portobello but also demonstrates the extent to which Spiritualism comprises networks of relationships developed by mediums in acquiring and maintaining their personal ‘circuits’ of churches at which they work.

4.3.1 Association with the Spiritualists’ National Union

Portobello Spiritualist Church is a Christian Spiritualist church, although this is not expressly stated in its title or constitution. The Church is associated with the Spiritualists’ National Union but is not fully affiliated.³⁴ Some individual Church members (including myself) are members of the SNU. As mentioned, the SNU is based at Stansted in Essex, where the Arthur Findlay College offers residential courses in various aspects of Spiritualism and mediumship. The SNU undertakes various activities, including the ordination of ministers, and offers home study courses leading to various grades of membership within the organization. The SNU Yearbook³⁵ for 2010 gives details of 344 fully affiliated churches in the United Kingdom (including 23 in Scotland), with a further eight ‘kindred’ or ‘associated’ bodies in the UK (three in Scotland, including Portobello Church).³⁶ As to the Spiritualist movement generally in Scotland, I have gathered information on a further 70 churches or other centres, giving a total of 93.³⁷

Portobello was a fully-affiliated SNU church until the mid-1970s but the members of the Church voted almost unanimously to withdraw from full affiliation in favour of the slightly looser status of ‘Associated Body’. This was despite a personal appeal

³⁴ The SNU is an association of individual members, to which Spiritualist churches may choose to affiliate themselves. Affiliation involves accepting a degree of SNU control over the affairs of an affiliated church, and a requirement to conform to various SNU guidelines. Association allows a church to remain independent while identifying with the SNU, rather than any other Spiritualist organization.

³⁵ An annual almanac of information relating to the SNU and SNU churches, incorporating a diary.

³⁶ In addition, there are nine kindred and associated bodies overseas: Australia (3), Canada (1), Eire (1), New Zealand (1), Spain (1), and the USA (2, both in New Jersey).

³⁷ See Appendix 7.

from Gordon Higginson (then President of the SNU) during the general meeting of the church at which the vote was held. The full history of this period is not relevant but it was, in essence, a theological dispute: the trigger for the vote was an attempt by the SNU to require affiliated churches to remove Christian symbols (crosses, pictures of Jesus etc.). Many SNU churches in fact still retain obvious Christian trappings (such as copies of the Bible, pictures of The Last Supper, or images of Jesus Christ).³⁸

Apart from the SNU, the other organization that has been particularly influential within British Spiritualism is the Greater World Christian Spiritualist Association (GWA). The GWA was founded in 1931 for the purpose of bringing together Christian Spiritualist churches and, 'by 1935, had 580 affiliated churches and 20,000 individual members.'³⁹ In the same year, the SNU had 501 affiliated churches and a membership of approximately 14,000.

Gilbert also notes the Christian and 'non-Christian' distinction within British Spiritualism, calling it the 'one main split' between Spiritualist churches.⁴⁰ Despite Gilbert's comment and the Portobello experience during the 1970s, this is a dividing line that rarely gives rise to active dispute,⁴¹ and which most mediums negotiate with relative ease because of the commonality across the Spiritualist movement of (i) the format of Spiritualist services, (ii) the conventions of platform demonstrations, and (iii) the mediumistic tradition maintained in development circles.

At the time of its dissatisfaction with the SNU in the mid-1970s, Portobello Spiritualist Church briefly considered affiliating to the GWA, but decided against. It is clear that the Spiritualist movement as a whole has experienced a decline in Christian Spiritualism over the past fifty years. It is not immediately apparent why

³⁸ I have also noted that the shared recitation of the Lord's Prayer continues to be a feature of the order of service in many English and Welsh churches. I am told by Rev. Winstanley that this used also to be common in Scotland but it is a practice that I have rarely encountered in Scottish churches. The reasons behind the change in Scottish practice are unclear.

³⁹ Nelson, 1969, p.150

⁴⁰ 2008, p.33

⁴¹ Very occasionally, I have heard objections to the use of addresses to promote Christian teachings, or the priority of Jesus Christ as a spiritual teacher.

this should be so in terms of the Spiritualist discourse and it may be that this is simply a particular example of the wider decline in Christian discourse that Callum Brown has documented.⁴² The past strength of Christian Spiritualism and the timing of its decline both support Brown's finding that Christianity characterised British public discourse well into the 1960s, much later than it has always been fashionable to acknowledge.

4.3.2 Informal relationships and the 'circuit'

In practice, the organizational affiliation of a church may reveal little about its position and standing within the movement. The reason for this has much to do with the Spiritualist tradition of inviting mediums from other churches, so that there is a 'circuit' of churches maintained by mediums willing to work away from their home church. Nelson reminds us that this was a deliberate adoption from Methodism to overcome the limited number of competent mediums.⁴³ Although it is possible this was only intended as a temporary expedient, this arrangement has been crucial in the development and maintenance of a uniform mediumistic tradition across British Spiritualism.

Once a developing medium is regarded by their circle leader or tutor as being ready to give public demonstrations of mediumship,⁴⁴ he will effect introductions to other churches that might be willing to give bookings to that new medium. Having other churches available to contact depends upon there being a relationship to draw upon. In theory, churches within the same organization should be free to draw upon one another for this purpose but the circle leader's choice of churches to contact is, in practice, much more likely to be made on the basis of personal relationships, regardless of organizational boundaries. I deal with this more fully in Section 4.4.3 but the point I wish to highlight here is that each medium develops a personal

⁴² 2001

⁴³ Nelson, 1969, p.117

⁴⁴ At Portobello, there are opportunities to work within the Church which I detail below, hence the circle leader is able to assess the progress of circle members. From the insider perspective, it would also be said that the circle leader is guided by spirit, or 'given the thought' as to when an apprentice should be put forward for public demonstrations.

‘circuit’ of churches at which he works.⁴⁵ In this way, new mediums coming onto the circuit can affect the reputation of the church at which he has developed. Indeed, a church that becomes known as a consistent source of competent mediums can come to enjoy high status within the movement regardless of organizational affiliation. Thus working relationships are handed down within Portobello Church over the decades, from medium to medium, in a way that is capable of disregarding organizational boundaries and which readily overcomes changes of organizational affiliation, or even a complete lack of formal affiliation.

The mechanism of the circuit means that the movement’s many independent churches are integrated into the ongoing practice of the Spiritualist tradition of mediumship. The high degree of organizational independence enjoyed by many Spiritualist churches such as Portobello, and which has led Nelson and others to comment on this apparent weakness of the Spiritualist movement,⁴⁶ masks an almost complete dependence on those churches that maintain productive development circles.⁴⁷ The ‘hold’ that the mediumistic tradition has over Spiritualist churches is extremely strong. In addition, the circuit system leads (and arguably requires) the Spiritualist mediumistic tradition to achieve a high degree of uniformity across the movement.

⁴⁵ The network of overlapping circuits within Spiritualism is collectively referred to as ‘the circuit’: thus a medium might be referred to as being ‘on the circuit’.

⁴⁶ Nelson, 1969, Chapter 14, *passim*

⁴⁷ Productive, that is, in terms of producing mediums willing and able to ‘go onto’ the circuit.

4.4 The Portobello apprenticeship

In this Section, I adopt the mediumistic apprenticeship structure identified in Chapter 3 (as comprising initiatory experiences, tutoring and recognition) as a framework for organizing my material. I begin with an illustrative account of my own beginnings as an apprentice but broaden this out to give a general description of the progress of a typical apprenticeship.⁴⁸

I began visiting Portobello Church in November 2001, about eighteen months after its new church hall was opened (an extension to the original building). I recall one visit to the old Church about three years previously, when I squeezed myself into one of its recycled cinema seats. In January 2002, I joined the Church as an Associate Member, began attending more regularly (initially the Tuesday evening services) and began assisting with small tasks such as making teas after services. The President of the Church, June Herraghty, was occasionally available to answer questions after the services, although I did find it frustrating that there were not more opportunities to ask questions. The people I encountered were perfectly welcoming and friendly but, rather than seeking to draw me in and make me one of their own, I was encouraged by Mrs Herraghty to ‘Have a look around at the other churches in Edinburgh and just see how you feel.’ I was treated with a degree of wariness,⁴⁹ despite which, like the poor researcher I was, I made no attempt to visit other churches, simply because I was happy where I was. In November and December 2002, I expressed an interest in joining the development circle. The initial response was ‘Just let me have a wee think about it, David.’ In January 2003 I applied for, and was granted, full membership of the Church. A week or two later, after an evening service, Mrs Herraghty came over to me and said, ‘Just to let you know, the circle’s going to be starting again on the

⁴⁸ Spiritualists often refer to ‘developing’ mediums, with the common proviso that a medium never stops developing, or gaining in experience. Where developing mediums reach the point where they can begin to gain experience of public demonstrations, they are sometimes referred to as ‘fledglings’. I have tended to use the term apprentice in order to reinforce the argument of the thesis but I consider that it is a term that faithfully reflects the Spiritualist dialogue: I have often heard mediums speak of development as an apprenticeship, or of their having ‘served’ their ‘apprenticeship’.

⁴⁹ There is a deliberate approach evident at Portobello, of being open to newcomers and being willing to answer questions but also of leaving it to attendees to decide for themselves whether Portobello is the church they wish to join or attend. Even at this very preliminary stage, the (potential) apprentice must be the one to choose.

first Monday in February, if you're still interested.' So far as I can recall, I was not actually told I should attend. The decision had to be mine.

4.4.1 Initiatory experiences

In Section 3.3.1, I reviewed the three categories of initiatory experiences related by mediums: childhood experiences, adulthood experiences and identification or selection by an existing medium. Although there are childhood experiences of my own I could relate to but (as with many other mediums) they did not lead directly to my mediumistic apprenticeship and do not add to the Portobello case study.

By contrast, the following account is of an experience that I now look back on as an adult initiatory experience of my own, and which did form part of my growing awareness of my deep-seated unhappiness in the latter stages of my career as a solicitor. This is not an interpretation I placed upon it at the time when it happened (in truth, I was able to make no particular sense of it) but it has come to have that meaning for me having undergone my mediumistic apprenticeship at Portobello.⁵⁰ The following account was originally written as a (slightly hurried) e-mail to a friend and without any intention of drawing upon it for academic purposes. I use it not only because the content is of interest but also because I find it instructive to re-examine my own past attempts to articulate the Spiritualist perspective I now inhabit.⁵¹ The experience described took place around Easter (March/April) 2001,⁵² eight months prior to my visiting Portobello on a regular basis, and almost two years before commencing my mediumistic training in the development circle.

One of the first adult experiences that formed part of my 'awakening' (for want of a better word)⁵³ was waking up early one bright morning (I was living in Cairo at the time, so lots of sunshine!) and being aware of two

⁵⁰ This interpretation (or reinterpretation) of past experience is itself a consequence of the self-reconstruction that forms part of mediumistic training.

⁵¹ I have corrected five minor misspellings but the text is otherwise uncorrected. This account was written some years later, after I had completed my circle training.

⁵² At this point I was living in a top floor apartment in Mohandesseen, Cairo.

⁵³ An aside that is itself a reminder of the lack of a Spiritualist collective term for initiatory experiences, consequent upon the failure to identify them as a distinct developmental phase, although they are commonly referenced as significant in mediums' (auto)biographies.

figures standing at the bottom of my bed,⁵⁴ and of the room being suffused with a bright white light - the two people, the walls, furniture, everything was shining is the best way I can put it. Then very gradually, comfortably and without any effort on my part, I felt myself rising or being lifted out of my body, feet first until I was entirely free of it - just floating upwards until I was out of it. Once I realized I was out of my body, I was like Bambi bouncing around just for the sheer joy of it & revelling in that sense of freedom - passing through walls, up on the roof of the building, you name it. And everything was shining, like I could see directly the energy that all physical matter is made from - I could actually see the dynamic nature of physical objects. I was having great fun but very quickly over & very gently back in my body again, awake & back to normal, but still aware of the two people in my bedroom even though not able to see them objectively any more because back looking with the physical eyes again. Once I was over a momentary flash of disappointment at being encased in flesh once again, I was left with an amazing sense of excitement, and sheer joy at being alive.

Clearly, this is a 'travelling' or 'journeying' experience, rather than one of being 'possessed', but it was also still very much the experience of something outside my control, rather than being controlled by me (albeit a very pleasant and fascinating 'something'). This was not a possessory or incarnatory experience, let alone an unaware trance experience. It was, so far as I am able to tell, the experience of being freed from the physical body. Although I was aware of being watched by others, what I did once free was not controlled or managed by anyone else. I was entirely free (in both senses) to go wherever I liked.

It is primarily because of this experience, and the frequency with which similar initiatory or other journeying experiences are reported by Spiritualist mediums, that I am puzzled by the claims of scholars⁵⁵ and neo-shamanic practitioners⁵⁶ that mediums do not travel or, at least, do not typically do so. The traditional typology of mediums being possessed and shamans being the ones who travel might be simple and convenient, perhaps even commercially valuable, but is quickly revealed as an

⁵⁴ A man and a woman.

⁵⁵ Harvey & Wallis, 2010, pp.135-6

⁵⁶ Drury, 1987

obvious misinterpretation of the material when set against the variety and complexity of experiences that are actually undergone by mediumistic practitioners.⁵⁷

Another, quite different, example from Portobello is given by the Rev. Winstanley in her autobiography, where she states that she and her husband Jack,

were having a chat one night in bed with the light out when I noticed a complete circular ball of light on the corner of the ceiling at my side of the bed. I drew Jack's attention to this and he said that he had already noticed it. Apart from the ball of light, the room was in complete darkness as the shutters were closed so there was no explanation for this. Jack said that he had a feeling that his granddad was there and I immediately said: if it's him, tell him to take this light to your side of the bed. As soon as I said this the light disappeared and immediately showed itself at Jack's side of the bed. I was petrified and said for God's sake take it away – it went out at once.⁵⁸

In her autobiography, the Rev. Winstanley also tells of the experience in the years before she developed, of being identified as psychic by a medium giving a public demonstration, and of being so terrified as to be unable to respond to the medium.⁵⁹ I also underwent the process of identification by an existing medium. In December 2002, I had a private sitting with Mrs Herraghty, during which she stated that I had had various 'psychic experiences' in the course of my life and that I 'might be sitting doing this' one day. I felt highly sceptical. The following month, I was told by a medium from the platform during a Sunday service that I would go on to become a medium and that there was 'a certain impatience in spirit for you to be getting on with what you ought to be doing'.⁶⁰ This was shortly before I was 'told' I was in the circle. On Monday, 3rd February 2003, came my first evening in the circle.

⁵⁷ This is not simply to make a plea for a better appreciation of the full range of skills claimed by mediums. I make the same point in relation to the range of skills (particularly possessory skills) that should properly be recognized as being at the disposal of other traditional shamans.

⁵⁸ Winstanley, 2003, p.11

⁵⁹ *ibid.*, p.9

⁶⁰ I have been present in the Church when similar statements have been made to other congregants; this is not, of itself, an unusual message but can carry an obvious significance when made.

4.4.2 Developing

The principal objective of Portobello's development circle, like any other, is to produce mediums but there is no expectation that everyone who joins the circle will necessarily become a platform demonstrator or healer. When new members of the circle join, they are welcomed, told that it may take some weeks for them to decide whether this is the circle for them and that, if they choose to leave, they will do so with the good wishes of the circle for their future. What might be achieved in the circle is left open-ended; no promises as to anyone's personal development are made, and there is a reminder that our development is ultimately our own responsibility. Mediumistic ability or other spiritual gifts are said to be assisted by a loving attitude to life and the development offered in the circle is said to be a wider 'spiritual' development, as part of which mediumistic gifts may develop.

Meetings of the circle begin at 7.30pm, are held without lighting,⁶¹ and last for one hour. At that time, the circle had two dozen members, of whom eight (including myself) were men, with eighteen to twenty turning up on any given evening.⁶² The Church doors are locked to avoid any disturbance, one of the members opens in prayer, and the meeting begins with the circle leader encouraging everyone to relax and to sit quietly. The meeting begins with a meditation akin to that used in the Wednesday healing service,⁶³ with members of the circle encouraged to take the focus of their attention inwards. Some meetings of the circle are an hour-long meditation, the exercise being to learn to maintain one's focus for that length of time, despite physical discomfort or noises in the room from other sitters, or from outside, in what is a dense residential area. Other meetings of the circle are more actively structured, examples of which I give below. At the end of the hour, the circle leader tells the sitters firmly that 'our time with spirit' is over, and that we should bring our

⁶¹ There is a certain amount of natural light in the upstairs room where the circle meets, despite curtains being closed over the windows. A small lamp with a blue bulb is lit in one corner, so that there is some light to see by. Blue light is said to be an energy associated with mental or verbal mediumship, red with physical phenomena (reflecting perceived connections with bodily energy points or chakras).

⁶² The Portobello circle is the largest closed circle I have come across in Scotland; its numbers have remained fairly constant since 2003.

⁶³ See Appendix 1

attention back into the room. The circle members then join hands for a closing prayer, during which each person in turn names people for whom healing is requested, and which finishes with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer in which everyone joins.⁶⁴

At this point, the lights are put on in the room and there follows a clockwise debriefing, beginning with the person to the circle leader's left and concluding with her general observations as to what happened during the meeting. This is the opportunity for members of the circle to relate such things as visualizations, mental images, words and ideas that came to mind, and physical sensations experienced while sitting. This stage is also an opportunity to ask questions of the circle leader, and for her to remind members of the circle of upcoming duties in the Church and attend to any additional housekeeping.

In articulating the Spiritualist tradition of mental mediumship evidencing personal survival beyond death, it is necessary to attend to the understanding that is implicitly expressed by a circle leader in selecting some experiences for validation as signifying the presence of spirit, and the ways in which those signals are taken, interpreted and used as the basis for developed messages from spirit that would be recognized as evidential by a member of the Church congregation. The remainder of this Section 4.4.2 represents my own, admittedly preliminary, attempt to do this.

4.4.2.1 Training by spirit: the tradition of spirit guides

The process of mediumistic development is facilitated by the circle leader but is taught of as a process whereby the apprentice learns to focus so as to become aware of spirit, meaning spirit people.⁶⁵ In the course of developing as a medium, the emphasis is upon becoming aware of one's spirit guides. During my first three meetings of the circle, we simply sat for the hour, maintaining our meditative focus.

⁶⁴ Portobello has its own version of the Lord's Prayer, which I set out in Appendix 5.

⁶⁵ In saying spirit people, I do not intend only to indicate human spirits. Although the Spiritualist focus is predominantly on human spirits, reference to spirits can extend also to animal or elemental spirits and, more rarely, to spirits whose place of origin is somewhere other than this planet; see Porter, 1996.

This was a difficult exercise in itself as I was unused to meditating for more than fifteen minutes. This was a habit I had built up through attendance at the Wednesday evening healing services but attempting to maintain that focus for a full hour was a challenge. In the Wednesday healing service, music is used to assist the meditation. This was occasionally done in the circle meetings but the vast majority of them were held in silence and without the use of any guiding imagery. At the end of those first few meetings, the de-briefing followed, with more experienced members of the circle reporting often quite detailed visualizations. My experience was of brief visual ‘snatches’ – my notes from one early meeting simply record, ‘camp fire, desert, under the stars, camel, plodding over the sand dunes, aware of different blues, the name Christine.’ I shared this and, beyond a simple nod from the circle leader, no validation or interpretation was offered.

Subsequent meetings began more strongly to reinforce the teaching that while developing, apprentices are assisted by spirit guides. A typical meeting begins with the circle leader talking us through the initial relaxation into the meditation and then affirming the meditative focus as follows:

You should now be feeling completely relaxed, at one with everyone else in the circle and with spirit. Tonight the guides are going to be working very closely with us and I just want you to be aware that your doorkeeper⁶⁶ is working with you. Just maintain your focus and be open to that influence making itself felt, standing behind you and just coming in over the right shoulder. Now your doorkeeper is going to make you aware of them by showing you something of themselves: it might be a memory from their life, they might show you what they look like, they might speak to you, you might hear the words, they might come to mind as a thought. Each one of them will make him or herself known to you in their own way, so be alert and observe.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ At Portobello, reference is often made to a medium’s ‘doorkeeper’. As I understand it, this is a reference to a guide who has principal responsibility for assisting the medium when making the ‘link’ to spirit, ‘opening the door’ etc. Part of a doorkeeper’s responsibility is to organize other spirits who wish to communicate with the medium, including discriminating between those who should and should not be allowed to connect with the medium. Thus the doorkeeper is partly a protector, or guardsman at the gate. Here we begin to become aware of the body of knowledge that exists within the Spiritualist dialogue as to spirits whose nature is evil, dangerous or potentially harmful (a body of knowledge that is only rarely and carefully articulated, on the basis that, as the Rev. Winstanley once put it to me, ‘we strengthen that which we think of’). A doorkeeper thus combines the roles of teacher, protector, supporter and assistant, and is viewed by most mediums as present with them throughout their mediumistic career, if not life.

⁶⁷ This is an illustrative account, not a transcript from any actual meeting.

During the debriefing, each of us was, as usual, invited to say something of what we had experienced. Accounts varied widely and many were extremely sketchy but in each case, the circle leader simply accepted what was shared; no interpretation was made by the circle leader but she would sometimes share similar experiences of her own by way of illustration. The only way in which apprentices were pushed was by being encouraged to ask for more: ‘Why do you think they showed you that? What else did you get?’ Sometimes the questions would be slightly more leading, carrying the suggestion that the circle leader had seen something the apprentice should be aware of: ‘Were you aware of your guide holding something?’ ‘Were you aware of a headdress of any sort?’

In this way, apprentices are encouraged to build up an awareness of a number of distinct identities, understood as being one’s guides. Many mediums regard themselves as having a number of guides but are more fully aware of a particular one, or perhaps two, rather than all of them. Thus Rev. Winstanley speaks regularly of her principal guide Cabaneamba, an Arab Egyptian, but has others, including a Japanese guide known as ‘Little Flower’. Rev. Herraghty speaks consistently of her guide Cornelius, a Roman eagle-bearer, her others going unnamed. My own include White Cloud, a native American, together with Pietr, a Catholic priest, and a Chinaman, Xin Shi Huang. This is too small a sample to support any general comments, but these examples are consistent with the Spiritualist tradition of guides from other cultures (particularly native North Americans and Chinese), rather than family members or past mediums from Western culture.

Constantly the members of the circle are encouraged to trust in the reality of such impressions and to use them as the basis for a conversation; for example, by accepting symbolic meanings attaching to images or colours. Awareness of colours is taught of as significant in healing but also as a symbolic language that can be used in constructing mediumistic messages. One exercise undertaken in the circle was introduced as follows:

Now, we are going to work this evening. The guides are going to stand back slightly, not leaving us but just standing back a little, so just send the thought to your guide to stand back and bring your awareness back into the Church and open your eyes. Now, you are just going to take a moment to see who else in the circle you are drawn to, and try to sense the colours you are aware of with that person. Now, James,⁶⁸ you're going to begin. Who do you feel drawn to first of all?⁶⁹

Upon indicating someone, the apprentice is then invited to say what colour or colours he is aware of with the person indicated, and then to go on to say what he thinks those colours indicate; for example, as to physical health, mood or state of mind, or things that person might be going through or having to deal with. The person 'receiving' the message is invited to say whether or not they felt that what was being said was relevant. A tendency to affirm each others' efforts might be expected but my impression is that other circle members were quite willing to say 'no', and this was reinforced by the circle leader's repeated instruction, 'Don't make it fit. You've all got to learn to take no's. Go back to spirit and ask for more.' In this way, apprentices begin to gain experience of giving messages based upon what they visualize or are otherwise aware of in the circle.

A distinction is then drawn between psychic awareness and spiritual awareness. A direct colour awareness of others is explained as being one's perception of their spiritual body or aura. This can extend over time to a fuller psychic awareness of the tone of a person's thoughts, moods and so on. Spiritual awareness is taught of as an awareness of spirit people, developing over time into an ability to communicate with them. Psychic awareness is understood as marking the initial phase of development and forms the basis of a distinction between psychics and mediums. I have often heard it said in Portobello that mediums can work psychically and spiritually, but psychics only work psychically (that is, do not communicate with spirits). In order to develop the kind of dialogue to be expected of a Spiritualist medium, circle members are constantly told to go back to their guides for answers. Typical instructions or questions would include the following:

⁶⁸ A fictional name.

⁶⁹ Again, an illustrative text only.

Ask your guides.
Go back to Spirit and get an answer.
What are you feeling/seeing/hearing/sensing?
What comes to mind?
What was the impression you had?
Why do you think they were showing you that?
Why do you think they might have been putting that on you?
What do you associate with that?
How does your guide make him/herself known to you? What's their calling card?
Which guide have you got with you?⁷⁰

One point repeatedly made in the circle is that a medium must make the effort to communicate with spirit. One medium at the Church expressed this, during her address one Sunday, by explaining that when she works, 'I raise the vibration of my thoughts so as to be able to communicate with spirit'. Communication with people in spirit is often spoken of as requiring the medium to raise his or her vibration, just as people in spirit lower theirs, so as to meet, or make a connection. Apprentices are repeatedly taught that they must maintain their focus, be aware and be attentive; only then can a link be made. Thus one often hears language such as 'making the connection' or 'getting the link', and of reminders to make sure of this before attempting to discern information to pass on.

This was sometimes summarized by the circle leader using the acronym 'FAME': focus, awareness, merge, express. Part of the reason for using this acronym is to emphasise that mediumship as demonstrated publicly is a single process that should flow quickly. As soon as one's focus has been achieved, the awareness heightened, and the 'merge' or connection made, what comes to mind should be trusted in as coming from spirit and expressed promptly. It is not for the medium to interpret or add, as this is understood as the medium 'getting in the way'. In fact, there may be times when it is appropriate for a medium to 'get in the way' or censor; for example,

⁷⁰ Portobello teaches that an apprentice is given five principal guides, attending to different aspects of one's development. As a medium develops, an existing guide may depart, to be replaced by another with skills more relevant to what the medium needs to learn from that point on. A parallel is sometimes drawn with the experience of different teachers at school as one moves up through the years. In addition to the five principal guides, it is taught that other guides may attend from time to time to assist with particular matters arising in the course of development. The guides, in turn, have their own guides.

the gory details of a tragic death in a car accident or suicide might be considered good ‘evidence’ but are obviously inappropriate for a public service of worship. A medium might therefore simply say, for example, ‘I have the impression of someone who was killed quickly in a car accident’.

The principle of personal responsibility⁷¹ is also taught as being applicable to what is said by a medium while working. Again, this goes against suggestions that mediums work in trance, with no awareness of what they do. Most mediums I have discussed this with acknowledge some degree of ‘overshadowing’ but that this is something they are aware of because their awareness is heightened, not diminished. This is how I would characterize my own experience. In interview, one apprentice medium (who has since gone on to do platform work) said firmly that she had no sense of altered consciousness: ‘No, I’m just me.’ The circle leader put this down to the early stage of this apprentice’s development at the time of the interview, suggesting that the apprentice had not yet developed the ability to heighten her awareness so as to be ‘aware of spirit’ and to know when she was being ‘overshadowed’.

These can, at first seem to be contradictory instructions, and the task of achieving a balance is a highly personal challenge for the apprentice. To the extent that apprentices are helped to resolve this tension, they are repeatedly reminded that they are the ones in control. ‘The medium is always stronger than spirit’ was a frequent refrain by the circle leader during my apprenticeship. An apprentice who allows himself to be overshadowed to the extent that he is no longer in control has failed. This can be a safe practice where a medium has consciously chosen to work in this way in co-operation with a guide who is known to and trusted by the medium but, if a medium simply allows it to happen, he has failed, revealing himself as an unaware instrument or channel. In this situation, the risk is of a possession where the one being possessed has no control over who does the possessing and does not have the skills needed to end the possession, or to prevent a recurrence.

⁷¹ Of the Church’s Seven Principles – see Appendix 2.

That there will be many challenges along the way is a repeated refrain among mediums. One particular challenge for apprentices is the heightened sensitivity that is an acknowledged stage in the process of development. New apprentices are warned of this in advance, including in the written handout given when joining the circle.⁷² From my own experience, there came a stage when I felt almost physically exposed to the personal energy of others, and hugely sensitive to even the slightest passing comment. A deep, deep sense of hurt was felt on occasion, even as a result of comments that were, with hindsight, either accurate, reasonable or intended as constructive criticism. There was a strong feeling of exposure, of having been pulled apart. Even being reassured and told that this was a normal aspect of development did not help. When I discussed this with the Rev. Winstanley later in my development, she smiled, nodded enthusiastically and said vigorously ‘You feel as if your nerves are on the outside of your skin!’

By the time this conversation took place, I was through the worst. I describe this process as feeling as though I had been pulled apart and reassembled, and I have heard other mediums describe this phase in similar terms.⁷³ Although this is a figurative description, it can form the basis of mediumistic visions during circle meetings and describes a period at times characterised by intense feelings of distress, which had a real effect upon my general sense of well-being. For a time, the circle was a place of trial and testing, not enjoyment. Maintaining the relationships I had built up with others in the circle became a burden, not a pleasure, and it was very much the weekly routine of church services that saw me through.⁷⁴ During my time in the circle, it was at this point in their development that I saw a number of other apprentices withdraw. The reasons given varied but generally expressed deep feelings of unhappiness, either with themselves or with others in the circle, or a more general but definite feeling that ‘It’s just not for me.’ Withdrawal at this point can be temporary: it is acknowledged that one way for an apprentice to deal with this phase is to withdraw from the circle for a time and return when feeling stronger. This was

⁷² This is set out in Appendix 5. This is the version I was given in 2003.

⁷³ This experience of dismembering and reassembly is a classic shamanic motif, often characteristic of initiatory experiences

⁷⁴ A reminder that the ritual elements of a religious tradition, the forms, can be crucial in terms of the maintenance of content.

the approach adopted by two fellow circle members, both men, each of whom has since gone on to develop a good reputation for his mediumship on the circuit. One of them has since acknowledged to me in conversation that it was precisely these feelings, and the difficulty in coping they brought, that led to him missing out one circle semester. Despite being a member of a class, the process of development is highly personal and can feel tremendously isolating. For this reason, some apprentices adopt a period of self-imposed withdrawal or isolation as part of their process of development. This is understood and accommodated at Portobello in that apprentices who feel the need to withdraw for a time are reassured that they are nevertheless still members of the circle, and that they should simply advise the circle leader when they feel ready to resume.⁷⁵

I have described this phase partly because it was a significant and difficult phase in my own development but also because it appears to be a consistent feature in the development of others.⁷⁶ The attitude among mediums in the Church is that everyone must find their own way of resolving this stage with their own spirit guides; there are repeated injunctions to ‘Trust they are with you’. Apprentices are reassured that ‘They will see you through’, and that ‘We’ve all been through it but you’re never alone’. The implicit teaching is that there is no earthly relationship that can see an apprentice through this phase. The way through is to consolidate one’s sense of joining with spirit, of drawing upon the strength, power and wisdom of one’s guides. Earthly relationships might be problematic, even burdensome, but one’s spirit helpers offer an understanding, a loyalty and a love that few embodied souls are likely to be able to offer. What is held out to apprentices is the possibility of perfect relationship, not only as something to be enjoyed with one’s guides, but also as something to aspire to in the conduct of one’s other relationships, whether in the Church, at home, or in society at large. I tend to describe this as a process of reconstruction but many of the Church mediums I have spoken to speak of it as a process of personal healing, during which all past hurts and psychological or

⁷⁵ An apprentice who joins another circle rather than simply withdrawing for a time, is regarded as having left permanently and will be refused subsequent readmission to Portobello’s circle. I saw this illustrated in practice.

⁷⁶ It appears to have been at this point that Burke Forrest decided to end her own circle participation; 1986, p.447

emotional obstacles must be acknowledged and put aside. Personal psychological obstacles are also obstacles to the clear expression of spirit, a reminder of the close connection between mediumship and consciousness. It is this process that appears to me to underlie the express teaching at Portobello that mediumistic development, to be done properly, must form part of a wider process of 'spiritual' development.

Over time, an increasing number of circle evenings were given over to the business of communicating with spirit so as to give messages to other circle members. As the relationship with one's guides becomes more firmly established, the next stage is to be able to maintain a similar focus so as to be able to discern spirit people who are not known to the apprentice but who are known to the person to whom a message is to be given. This begins gradually, with basic information such as whether the person the apprentice has with them is male or female, old or young, but extends, over time to encompass a much wider range of information intended to give sufficient evidence of that person being 'with' the medium, so as to demonstrate their survival or continuing life to the one receiving the message. Skultans reported that members of the circle she attended were encouraged to interpret symptoms of illness as signs of spirit,⁷⁷ but this is only one example of a much wider range of possibilities. An illustrative list might include a description of relationship (mother, father etc.), personality type or character, physical description, age, name, occupations, shared memories of places or countries visited, or other events, personal habits, where and when married/born/died, clothing or food preferences, house addresses, model of car owned, personal achievements, reading habits or other hobbies/sports, time in the armed forces, role or name of regiment, pet hates, personal possessions, details of funeral arrangements, where and when buried, and so on. In this way, the apprentice very gradually begins to give communications that will, in time, enable them to work on a church platform for the purpose of giving a public demonstration.

At Portobello, I have often heard the Minister, the Rev. Herraghty, refer to a good message as having had 'real meat' in it, meaning that the medium gave good 'evidence of spirit'. This is a reference to the Spiritualist objective of demonstrating

⁷⁷ 1974, pp.48-9

personal survival beyond death by giving descriptions of deceased individuals. The more detailed and accurate the descriptions, the more ‘meat’ the message will be regarded as having contained. In practice, however, messages also serve to maintain relationships with the deceased⁷⁸ and, in some cases, to enable those relationships to develop. Once a medium has established a connection and demonstrated the presence of a spirit person sufficiently for that person to be identified, and for the recipient to be accepting of that presence, the medium may go on to indicate a reason why that person has ‘come forward’ at that particular point in time. The medium may go on to describe current events in the life of the recipient, so as to show continuing interest, love and affection on the part of the spirit person towards the recipient.⁷⁹ A medium may also describe illness, offering reassurance that ‘spirit are doing what they can’. Another form of healing that can take place is the healing of past hurts: apologies for past wrongs or abusive relationships are a recurrent feature of mediumistic messages.

Although a great deal of the Portobello apprenticeship is given over to acquiring the skills needed to give platform demonstrations of mediumship, some time is given to passing on the knowledge of other forms of mediumship. Healing (including distance and absent healing)⁸⁰ has been mentioned but travelling with the guides in order to explore the spirit world(s) was also dealt with during my apprenticeship. At first, it would be made clear that this was the purpose of the evening but, over time, it was more often left to the apprentice to determine whether the evening was to be used for this or some other form of communication. On such occasions, the debriefing at the end of the circle meeting would be used to describe what the apprentice saw by travelling elsewhere and seeing for himself, rather than describing things perceived having been shown them mentally by the guides.

In Spiritualist thought, travelling is presented as something not to be undertaken lightly because the soul or spirit is separated from the body, and is therefore

⁷⁸ Wallis, 2001

⁷⁹ A message consisting solely of information of this nature is in danger of being dismissed as psychic, rather than mediumistic. The identification of the communicator is important for this reason.

⁸⁰ In the Spiritualist tradition, healing is essentially by thought; hands-on healing is regarded as enabling a close connection with the patient or client, partly in that it assists the healer in maintaining an appropriate focus.

vulnerable. The traditional teaching is that the soul remains connected to the body by a white or silver ‘cord’ which, although physical,⁸¹ can be extended without limit but which, if broken, causes death. If the connection with the body is lost, it is no longer possible for the soul to re-enter it. The protection of the guides is crucial in ensuring protection against anything (or anyone) causing any kind of trauma that might break the connection. Although initiatory experiences might be journeying ones, travelling as a consciously chosen practice is the mark of a more experienced practitioner. Any loss of consciousness risks rendering the medium ‘lost’ or unaware of where he is and, therefore, vulnerable.

At Portobello, as mentioned, the circle functions in two parts, with a smaller ‘downstairs’ circle led by another experienced Church medium,⁸² so as to provide more intensive training to a smaller group. I joined this part of the circle in February 2005 and remained there until ‘graduating’ in June 2006. The downstairs circle is more expressly a preparation for being recognized as a platform demonstrator, and journeying was a less frequent activity during my time in that part of the circle. It is therefore a little misleading to represent the downstairs circle simply as comprising those whose mediumship generally is more advanced. This part of the circle is better understood as having a particular focus upon one application of mediumistic awareness, which I now proceed to detail as the next phase of the apprenticeship.

4.4.2.2 Training in tradition: church services and the demonstration of personal survival

Although the substantive information given in mediumistic messages is regarded as given by spirit, a great deal of training given in circle attends to the practicalities of giving a platform demonstration. Once the circle leader felt that a reasonable number within the circle had reached the point of being able to give reliable information consistently, some circle meetings were used to give apprentices a first taste of

⁸¹ The cord is generally understood as an extrusion of the aura, so as to maintain a connection to the physical body. It is taught of as happening naturally upon leaving the body and functions like a cord or piece of string with which to pull oneself back to a starting-point.

⁸² Also a Committee member, who has served as Vice-President of the Church.

working on the platform. On these evenings, the circle spent all or part of its time in the Church hall, with some of its members working from the platform, the remainder providing a 'congregation'. Criticisms are then made as to manner and presentation, as well as content.

Apprentices are encouraged to reflect on what makes for a effective message, not just in terms of whether they give good 'evidence' but also in terms of whether the message given is likely to uplift and encourage the person receiving it. Thus apprentices are encouraged to remind others that the fact that someone has 'made the effort to come forward from spirit' should be presented as being of itself a wonderful thing; in addition, the tone and content of messages should inspire, and give hope. A positive tone is regarded not simply as a good thing in itself but is valued as likely to enhance the success of a meeting.

A number of other conventions or protocols surround platform demonstrations, and are taught on an ad hoc basis during circle meetings. These are a mixture of the practical and theological (in the sense of being recognisably Spiritualist teachings). On a practical level, there are conventions relating to the taking of circuit bookings. For example, it is the convention that when a medium is booked, the booking church contacts the medium a week or a few days beforehand to confirm arrangements; if the medium does not hear, he is not expected to travel and is under no obligation to make contact. Booking secretaries come and go, churches open and close; it is not for the medium to keep track of this.⁸³

Other conventions include limits on what may or may not be spoken of during platform addresses to Spiritualist congregations. Broadly, it is expected that a medium will speak to one or more of the Principles of Spiritualism; for example, the Seven Principles of the SNU when speaking in an SNU church. By contrast, teachings that are not of themselves part of Spiritualism are to be avoided, even

⁸³ This convention is still taught and adhered to at Portobello (and other long-established churches) but was established in the days when communicating and travelling were less convenient than they are now, so as to avoid the risk of a medium travelling and finding that no meeting is in fact being held, or that a church has accidentally double-booked.

where they are topics that may be of interest to individual Spiritualists, such as reincarnation or UFOs.⁸⁴ Other conventions attach to the content of messages during platform demonstrations; for example, apprentices are taught that they must not make a medical diagnosis from the platform, or encourage someone to stop taking prescribed medication, even if sure that the information is from spirit. The concern here is not only the reputation (and legal liability) of the medium but also that of the church where the medium happens to be working. We are often reminded that a congregant may not remember the medium who gives a message but will almost certainly remember the church where it is given.⁸⁵ The circuit tradition is of significant value to the movement but it has the potential to expose churches to risk at the hands of a stranger; for example, where a medium is booked on the basis of reputation.

Not all meetings of the development circle are for the purpose of ‘sitting for spirit’; some are used as an opportunity to lecture, discuss, or relate the history and experience of leading mediums. One such circle meeting I attended early in 2006 was held for the purpose of giving developers an opportunity to put questions to the previous Minister of the Church, the Rev. Winstanley. We were often encouraged to refer back to our own guides, to ask them the same questions, reiterating the need to develop our relationship with them. In her autobiography, the Rev. Winstanley speaks at length of her own doorkeeper, Cabaneamba, whom she describes as,

my dearest friend and mentor ... He has opened up much of the spiritual spectrum and taken me on many journeys through astral travel to various parts of his world.⁸⁶

⁸⁴ Not all mediums always adhere to such conventions but frequent and blatant breaches can jeopardise a medium’s chances of obtaining future bookings.

⁸⁵ In one of the interviews I conducted, a Portobello medium stated that one of the most striking messages she remembered from her years as a child visiting Portobello with her mother during the 1940s, and which had much to do with sparking her interest in mediumship, was the diagnosis from the platform of her brother having a hole in the heart. No symptoms had manifested, and the message naturally caused considerable worry, but the diagnosis was subsequently confirmed with the brother undergoing an operation to correct the condition. I find it hard to contemplate such a message being given by a contemporary medium, a point on which the interviewee agreed with me.

⁸⁶ 2003, p.10

Clearer answers came when questions were put as to the Minister's own experience, including things that she had witnessed, events she had been part of, and mediums in the movement whom she had known and worked with. Part of the purpose of such sessions is to reaffirm the full range, and the potentially extraordinary nature, of mediumistic abilities that is held before developers as a reminder of things we ourselves might go on to do. On this occasion, spiritual healing formed a significant part of the discussion, and the Minister took the opportunity to relate an account of a specially-convened healing circle. The account is one told to the Rev. Winstanley by her own tutor, Jimmy Swanson, in whose development circle she sat for five years, and is related in her autobiography. The account is of a healing that was conducted by,

the leader of his [i.e. Mr Swanson's] own developing class, a lady named Louise Ray, (a medium of outstanding ability). One day a young woman came to Louise with a terrible problem, she was 8 months pregnant and has been told that she had a large tapeworm inside her. According to her, the doctors couldn't do anything because she was pregnant. Louise said that she would do her best to help. She arranged for the girl to sit in the centre of a group of dedicated healers and asked that a large jar with a lid be placed on the mantel piece and filled with water (as her guide had instructed her to do). She commenced the healing and asked someone to remove the lid from the jar as she placed her hands over the jar and the tapeworm plopped into it, she then quickly closed the lid of the jar. According to Jimmy, Louise took the jar to the Royal Infirmary⁸⁷ and advised them what had taken place before witnesses.⁸⁸

There is much that can be drawn out of this account. I relate this tale partly because of its striking (and strikingly shamanic) nature,⁸⁹ and partly to demonstrate another aspect of the tutoring that takes place within the circle, which is for the teaching mediums of today to retell the experiences of their teachers and predecessors, overtly maintaining the core lineage relevant to this particular Church. I heard this tale (and much else) by learning in the Portobello circle led by the Rev. Herraghty, who learned in that same circle when it was led by the Rev. Winstanley, who learned her

⁸⁷ A reference to the original Royal Infirmary at Lauriston Place, Edinburgh.

⁸⁸ 2003, pp.22-3

⁸⁹ This account is almost identical to some accounts of shamanic healings involving extractions; see, for example, Eliade, 1989, pp.215ff. Such accounts are dramatic but are firmly within the Spiritualist tradition; see, for example, Jesse Thomas's *Psychic Surgeon*, 1957. Psychic 'operations' are often understood as being carried out on the 'spiritual body' or aura, rather than the physical body.

craft in the circle led by Mr. Swanson, who was tutored by Louise Ray, the healer in the story.⁹⁰ Thus learning and retelling the body of mediumistic knowledge, including the knowledge of other mediums, is itself part of a medium's function. Further, this is a function undertaken not only for the benefit of apprentice mediums but for Spiritualists more widely, in that this is the material drawn upon for the public addresses (or sermons) that form part of a 'divine' service. Mediums may be travellers in spirit but they are also storytellers, relating what has been learned for the benefit of their successors.

If we think in terms of a core lineage of authoritative practitioners around which the tradition is maintained, we have the particular lineage relevant to Portobello *as well as* the lineage of mediums who achieve prominence in the wider movement. One of the movement's most famous mediums of the post-war era was Gordon Higginson. Although Gordon Higginson did not tutor anyone connected with Portobello, he did demonstrate in the Church and, to this day, is spoken of as one who demonstrated a standard of mediumship to be aspired to. In this way, his example and memory are employed locally. Therefore, when thinking in terms of a core lineage, we perceive not a single line of practitioners (such as that of apostolic succession from Pope to Pope) but something more akin to a family tree, the branches of which refer back to a central core of particularly prominent mediums (Helen Duncan, Estelle Roberts, Maurice Barbanell, Harry Edwards, Gordon Higginson, Gordon Smith⁹¹), who embody 'mediumship' as a concept, and which branches may themselves produce the occasional medium who progresses from standing in a local core lineage to being a member of the wider movement's core lineage. In addition, members of the central core lineage connect with local lineages by being active on the circuit, and forming friendships in the process. Although Portobello has its own local lineage of embodied belief, it also has among its members a medium who sat in Helen Duncan's circle, another (Eileen Winkworth) who has produced a book presented as Sir Arthur Findlay's initial experience of life after death, communicated by him to the

⁹⁰ One Spiritualist church at which I work semi-annually, the Church of the Spirit in Dundee, has an annual 'Founders' Day', when the Sunday morning service is used to retell the story of those who have been prominent in Spiritualism, and in establishing and running the church itself.

⁹¹ A popular contemporary medium in Britain, originally from Glasgow and now based in London, who has also made appearances in North America. See, for example, Smith, 2004, 2006 and 2009.

medium,⁹² and both Gordon Higginson and Gordon Smith have served Portobello Church in their time by giving demonstrations of mediumship.

Membership of the circle can, for many apprentices, come to seem like membership of a second family. During my time in the circle, a number of the other members described their participation in exactly those terms. In *The Social Frameworks of Memory*,⁹³ Maurice Halbwachs develops a number of models designed to assist in understanding the social scaffolding or frameworks that enable the construction and maintenance of memory. Among the models he develops is one that seeks to illustrate the ways in which the collective memory of the family is maintained, and another concerned with collective religious memory.⁹⁴ It is striking that the ways in which Portobello maintains its local version of the larger Spiritualist mediumistic tradition are far more akin to Halbwachs understanding of the ways in which ‘family memory’ is maintained:

Each family ends up with its own logic and traditions, which resemble those of the general society in that they derive from it and continue to regulate the family’s relations with general society. But this logic and these traditions are nevertheless distinct because they are little by little pervaded by the family’s particular experiences and because their role is increasingly to insure the family’s cohesion and to guarantee its continuity.⁹⁵

Similarly, Portobello’s particular tradition, although drawn from the wider Spiritualist movement and its understanding of mediumship (including conventions or protocols applicable to mediumistic demonstrations, upon which the circuit tradition relies), is also the product of local experience. The use of circle teaching is principally aimed at training mediums in ways that provide for continuity, so as to ensure the cohesion of the Church itself. In turn, this protects the ‘Portobello’ tradition and safeguards the future of the Church. This is significant in that Halbwachs’ demonstration of the ways in which collective memory is maintained

⁹² *More Truth*, Harmony Press, Reading, 1985; her other work is *A Philosophy of Life: A spirit communication through the mediumship of Eileen Winkworth*, Harmony Press, Reading, 1986.

⁹³ *On Collective Memory*, 1992

⁹⁴ Halbwachs, 1992, Chapters 5 and 6 respectively.

⁹⁵ 1992, p.83

forms a central component of Hervieu-Legér's model of religion as the remembrance of tradition.⁹⁶

Nelson is correct to note that Spiritualism has struggled to develop strong organizations but misses the point that it is, strictly, a movement that does not need them (although they can and do play an important supporting role). Containing mediumistic charisma is not the problem, as the movement has developed protocols that achieve this perfectly well and passes them on during apprenticeship. Instead, tensions arise in Spiritualism when its organizations seek to control its mediums, rather than accepting a supporting role as facilitator in maintaining the tradition of mediumistic apprenticeship, and valuing the local variability inherent in such a tradition. The applicability of Halbwachs' 'family' model highlights the need to attend to relationship-based structures that underlie or operate alongside organizational ones.

4.4.3 Recognition as a medium: going on the platform

At Portobello, recognition as a medium proceeds in stages as follows: (i) membership of the circle, (ii) membership of the downstairs circle, (iii) working on the Church platform during the after-circle (see below), (iv) accompanying another medium to other churches, and (v) taking one's own bookings. There is usually some overlap between these stages, such as still being a circle member while beginning to work away at other churches, but each of these five stages is nevertheless a step towards being recognized as a working medium 'on the circuit'. As mentioned, many find that membership of the circle comes to feel like belonging to another family and, although the Rev. Herraghty might 'plant the seed' (as she put it recently in conversation with me),⁹⁷ it is her firm view that each apprentice must make the decision to leave in his own time, in consultation with his own guides. This attitude highlights the central element in the mediumistic apprenticeship. The circle leader may act overtly as teacher in the early stages but, over time, comes to take on the role of facilitator enabling an apprenticeship to the spirit guides.

⁹⁶ 2000, pp.125-30

⁹⁷ 18 July 2010, although she has expressed this point in similar terms on several previous occasions.

The key aspect of a medium's development is the ability to establish, develop and utilize a connection with or 'link to' spirit. It is through this engagement with spirit that the circle member acquires the skills needed to manage his psychic experiences. In this way, the circle member's earlier uncontrolled, sometimes disruptive initiatory experiences become productive, consequent upon the apprentice's having developed his awareness of spirit. Having developed an enhanced awareness of spirit, and being able to demonstrate that awareness by working mediumistically, the circle member will be accepted as being able to discern, in consultation with his guides, when it is appropriate to leave the circle.

4.4.3.1 Achieving recognition

On Sunday evenings, after the evening divine and healing services, the Church holds a third service, which is referred to as the 'after-circle'. This is unusual among Scottish churches but at Portobello it plays an important part in mediumistic development, and in maintaining a sense of community within the Church. The after-circle is a public service at which the Church's developing mediums take the platform, and can gain experience of working in public. The congregation is generally made up of people who have remained behind after the earlier service for tea, but occasionally there are new arrivals. The service is usually taken by the circle leader but sometimes by another Church medium, begins with an opening hymn and prayer, after which the first developing medium is invited to give one or two messages. The service lasts for forty-five minutes and there are usually between four and six developing mediums taking the chance to work. The mediums are expressly introduced as apprentices. The after-circle is not only a valuable opportunity for apprentices to gain experience of working in public while remaining in a familiar environment; it is also an opportunity for Church members outside the circle to see and participate in the development of the Church's up and coming mediums. Another opportunity for developing mediums to work is available during the Friday afternoon service and, over time, there comes the opportunity to take the platform with other Church mediums for the Tuesday service, usually the Church's busiest.

In addition to working as a medium during the after-circle, apprentices are given experience of being on the platform in other capacities. The first stage in this process is to be asked to give the reading at a Sunday divine service. This is an opportunity to think about self-presentation. The second stage is to be asked to chair a service, to act as the master of ceremonies for an experienced medium, with responsibility for setting the tone of the meeting, and dealing with unexpected problems that might jeopardise or interrupt the meeting. Thus apprentices gain an understanding of the roles of others in meetings at which, in time, they may be the centre of attention, as well as gaining confidence in making public appearances without the weight of expectation that a recognized medium carries.

Not only do these opportunities to work within the Church foster a sense of community, with congregants following the progress of the apprentice mediums, it also means that when the time comes for an apprentice's name to be put forward to other churches, he can step out onto the circuit already having secured recognition at home. Some mediums prefer to remain as Church mediums, but for those who wish to go out onto the circuit, the next stage is for the circle leader to call upon a circuit medium whom the apprentice can begin to accompany. The existing medium then takes over as additional tutor to the apprentice, introducing them to the circuit and giving the opportunity to gain experience of other churches, leading congregations in prayer, giving addresses and taking on part of the demonstration of mediumship. In time, the apprentice builds up his or her own relationships and begins to take solo bookings, with their name being passed around between church booking secretaries.⁹⁸

4.4.3.2 Maintaining recognition

Acquiring bookings is one thing but acquiring repeat bookings is another. Bookings might initially be given on the basis of a recommendation from a trusted medium or church but building and maintaining a circuit requires a medium to demonstrate

⁹⁸ A listing of my bookings from 2004 to date, and existing future bookings, is set out in Appendix 6; this gives one example of the development of a personal circuit in Scotland.

continually: not only to turn up as agreed but also to give a sufficiently evidential demonstration as to justify being booked again. Personal loyalties on the basis of past work can carry a medium through periods when their work is not quite as good as it might once have been but, if a medium's work deteriorates over an extended period, there eventually comes a point when the bookings begin to dry up. This can also happen if a medium disregards the conventions applicable to platform demonstrations, such that host churches perceive themselves to be at risk of their own reputations suffering (with obvious consequences for their own levels of attendance). It is for this reason that some churches will not give bookings without having seen a medium work. All of which is simply to make the point that initial recognition as a platform demonstrator does not mean that ongoing recognition can be assumed: as it is often expressed in Portobello by the Rev. Winstanley, 'You're only as good as your last service'.

4.5 Conclusions

In this Chapter, I have detailed an apprenticeship that comprises both a specific structure and a very particular content. The circle-based format of mediumistic apprenticeship is widespread across the movement. We also saw in Chapter 3 that the structure or sequence of initiatory experience, training and public recognition is representative of the apprenticeship undergone by Spiritualist mediums. As to content, the Portobello apprenticeship can only be illustrative, simply because there are various forms of mediumship not actively taught in its circle because of the focus upon equipping mediums as platform demonstrators and healers. That said, I submit that this ethnography of Portobello offers a valuable insight into the structure of those apprenticeships that lead to public demonstrations of mediumship.

I do not have the opportunity in this thesis to undertake a systematic analysis as to which thoughts, ideas or impressions are acknowledged and validated by the circle leader during apprenticeship, and which therefore become the basis for the student's further development, but this is ultimately where the Spiritualist tradition, its dialogue and 'theology' (cosmology and ethical teachings etc.) lies. I have prioritized the role of spirit guides and descriptions of the deceased because these are the key parts of the tradition, but there is much more that could be related. In order to articulate the Spiritualist tradition fully, what are needed are not only analyses of conversations between mediums and their clients but, more crucially, analyses of the circle dialogues taking place between apprentices and their circle leaders. In practice, it is precisely these dialogues that are most inaccessible to researchers and, even when accessible, the extent of the fieldwork such a project would entail is daunting to say the least.

Although individual apprentices may not stay the course, and many do not, the Spiritualist apprenticeship makes use of hidden, highly personal, experiential teaching to provide a mechanism for the non-prescriptive, undogmatic (but nevertheless guiding) external validation (by existing holders of traditional authority) of apprentices' subjective realities. Undertaking this apprenticeship leads, in turn, to

their recognition as practitioners and demonstrators of the tradition, ensuring their future recognition as the embodiment of that which is regarded as authoritative within the tradition. We have here a well-structured, highly-disciplined approach to the maintenance of a core lineage, a succession of practitioner authority figures, through a highly sophisticated use of ‘belief’ to reinforce a religious tradition.

In maintaining a focus upon mediumistic apprenticeship, I have identified what Hervieu-Légér refers to as the ‘processes of belief’ that underpin Spiritualism. The model of religion as a chain of memory was developed by Hervieu-Légér in order to comprehend the processes at work in modernity that enable religion’s survival, even its prospering, in the modern world. Her model seeks to identify the processes of change that lead to an increasing variety of religious practices. Jean Seguy’s concept of the metaphorization of belief identifies one such process. But Spiritualism has not only survived into the modern era, it only ever existed in the modern era. Spiritualism is a modern religion and can, in addition, be seen as an example of the rationalization of belief; but it is a religious movement that institutionalizes resistance to metaphorization. Spiritualism is a potent reminder that religious traditions are not obliged to mutate significantly in order to survive in the modern era, and that sometimes they survive because collective memory can be highly stable. This has obvious implications for the application of Hervieu-Légér’s model. The attempt to comprehend processes of change must, even if inadvertently, assist in identifying those factors that enable resistance to change. Spiritualism is striking as a modern example of pre-modern religion, by which I mean, a religion that still insists on maintaining a relationship between the natural and the supernatural.⁹⁹ Spiritualism is a deeply conservative tradition within modern British society, with Portobello a particular example of a church that prospers within Spiritualism because of its locally conservative approach in prioritizing apprenticeship and the need to keep producing mediums.

Comparative analysis is a very traditional but, I argue, still a very valuable methodology in comprehending a religious tradition that has hitherto been subjected

⁹⁹ Or, as Stringer puts it, engaging with the ‘non-empirical’; 2008, pp.99-101

to limited analysis. Nelson's frequent references to Spiritualism as a form of shamanism have already been referenced. Writing shortly after Nelson, about her observations of a number of Spiritualist meetings in England, Bernice Martin tells us that her declared purpose is,

to describe the main features of the Spiritualist religious service and to suggest that its most appropriate analogues are to be found ... in shamanism, spirit possession and divination.¹⁰⁰

Skultans is one of the few other scholars to have undertaken participant-observation of Spiritualism through membership of a Spiritualist development circle (the movement's traditional teaching forums). For Skultans, one of the issues raised by Spiritualism is what she calls the 'lowest common denominator problem;' by which she means the task

of establishing whether spirit possession has a core of critical characteristics, on the basis of which one can compare, for example, spirit possession cults in South Wales with spirit possession cults in Africa.¹⁰¹

More recently, Roger Walsh has treated the role of medium as simply one of a number of roles undertaken by a shaman,¹⁰² at points using the terms medium and shaman interchangeably.¹⁰³ Forrest suggested a comparison with 'cultural groups such as the Australian aborigines',¹⁰⁴ on the basis of their 'dreaming' or willingness to inhabit a subjective reality¹⁰⁵ but she attempts no detailed comparison. Walsh asserts that mediumship indicates 'capacities of mind' that shamans were the first to explore¹⁰⁶ but his characterization of mediumship as a form of shamanism is implicit and appears to be based upon the view that shamans are simply people who

¹⁰⁰ 1970, p.146

¹⁰¹ 1974, p.5

¹⁰² Walsh, Roger: *The World of Shamanism: new views of an ancient tradition*; Llewellyn, Woodbury, Minnesota, 2007, p.137

¹⁰³ For example, p.143. A relevant factor may be slightly divergent models of shamanism as between Britain and North America, and a less distinct boundary between Spiritualism and New Age practices in the US than there is in Britain. Walsh explains channelling as simply a more popular name for mediumship, a claim I would contest on the basis of my knowledge of British Spiritualism, where channelling is more generally regarded as simply one particular way in which a medium might work.

¹⁰⁴ 1986, p.448

¹⁰⁵ Citing Stanner, 1972

¹⁰⁶ 2007, p.149

communicate with spirits.¹⁰⁷ By contrast, Thomas DuBois's recent *An Introduction to Shamanism*,¹⁰⁸ makes no mention of either Spiritualism or mediumship. For all that there have been periodic suggestions that mediumship might bear comparison with shamanism, its characterization as a traditional form of shamanism is still not widely obvious to scholars of religion.

One factor I feel it appropriate to take account of is Spiritualist resistance to the language of possession. For Spiritualists, possession is the unmanaged control of an embodied person by someone in spirit. This is seen as an undesirable and potentially damaging occurrence for which a cure or remedy is needed, and indicates an absence of mediumistic awareness or capability. Another factor is the complex and often negative connotations the word possession can carry in western culture;¹⁰⁹ for a movement that was persecuted in Britain as recently as the 1950s, and which can still attract opposition from the more orthodox churches, the language of possession is deeply unhelpful. Insider concerns need not stand in the way of using a scholarly model of possession but the model that is, to my mind, more immediately applicable is that of the shaman as apprenticed practitioner versed in the skills needed to interact with the spirit world in a controlled manner. There may be a broader argument that shamanism constitutes a particular category of managed possession practice but that is well beyond the scope of this thesis and, even if true, would still require an answer to the question of whether Spiritualist mediumship is properly located within a shamanic 'subset' of possession traditions.

The language of possession has not always seemed to obstruct a comparison between shamanism and Spiritualism. Peter Knecht reminds us that Nelson was not the first to suggest this approach, drawing attention to the work of Hans Findeisen, whose

analysis of the vernacular Russian literature on Siberian shamanism, and his fieldwork experience among the Ket, made him conclude that the shaman

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*, pp.143-9

¹⁰⁸ Cambridge UP, 2009

¹⁰⁹ Sluhovsky, 2007

was a “possessed priest” (or a “possessed medium”) whom he compared with the mediums of European spiritism (1957, 13-17).¹¹⁰

It is possible that Nelson’s suggestion has already had an influence beyond the academic world. Nelson is cited by Georgess McHargue in her semi-popular work, *Facts, Frauds and Phantasms: a survey of the spiritualist movement*,¹¹¹ in which she references ‘the Siberian Tungus’,¹¹² and describes Siberian shamans as ‘the truest forerunners of modern spiritualists’.¹¹³ I am inclined to agree. The second half of this thesis shows why.

¹¹⁰ 2003, p.6. I take the reference to spiritism as a reference to Spiritualism (the terms were often used interchangeably until the middle of the twentieth century). Anderson, 2005, is a recent example of one who writes about Spiritualism but employs the term ‘Spiritism’ (without explanation).

¹¹¹ 1972

¹¹² *ibid.*, p.18

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.14.

Chapter Five

Shamanism and Eliade

5.1 Introduction

The Shorter OED provides the following definition of ‘shaman’: ‘A priest or priest-doctor among various northern tribes of Asia. Hence applied to similar personages in other parts, esp. a medicine-man of some of the north-west American Indians.’¹ It goes on to give 1698 as the year of the term’s earliest usage in English and offers the German *schamane*, the Russian *shaman*, and the Tungus *samán* as possible sources. The earliest example of the term ‘shamanism’ being used, to indicate ‘the primitive religion of the Ural-Altai peoples of Siberia,’ is given as 1780.

The word ‘shaman’ is widely regarded as having come into Russian from Tungus, and then into other European languages in the seventeenth century.² The Evenki were for long the most numerous of the Tungus-speaking peoples of Siberia and, until the Soviet era, were often known simply as the Tungus. Although the term Evenki is preferred in modern scholarship, the term Tungus continues in use to indicate the language group to which the Evenki belong.³ There appears to be a consensus that the word shaman is not itself a Tungus word and Jean Mottin draws attention to the hypothesis that it was originally a Sanskrit word that travelled northwards into Tungus through Lamaism.⁴ Andrei Znamenski tells us that the native Buryat scholar Dordzhi Banzarov, writing in 1891, holds to the view that the word derives from the

¹ Guild Publishing/Oxford UP, 1983, p.1964

² Peter Jordan: 2001, p.87

³ The Evenki are usually referred to as the Tungus in the older literature (including Shirokogoroff). The name comes from the Tunguska River, which flows through the area traditionally occupied by the Evenki. Their traditional lands also extend across the Lena River to the Amur River, marking the edge of the Manchu lands, with some Evenki living in what is today northern China. James Forsyth explains that ‘The name by which the Siberian Tungus call themselves is Ewenki west and south-east of the Lena, and Ewen to the east, and these terms are now used as official designations in Soviet Russian writings, in the forms *Evenk* and *Even*.’ Forsyth, J., *A History of the Peoples of Siberia*, Cambridge UP, 1992, p.49. Although the form *Evenk* is indicated by contemporary Russian usage, I have adhered to the more common *Evenki* as being closer to the chosen form of the Evenki themselves. Given that there are other Tungus-speaking peoples (such as the Even to the north-east of the Evenki), care is needed before simply substituting ‘Evenki’ for ‘Tungus’ in the older literature.

⁴ Jean Mottin, 2003, p.88.

Manchu ‘saman’, meaning an agitated, excited or ecstatic person.⁵ Peter Jordan tells us that the Tungus meaning of the word approximates to ‘person with supranormal skills’.⁶ Attempts to determine the etymology of the word shaman itself have been used by Sergei Shirokogoroff and Mircea Eliade as the basis of preliminary conclusions as to the history and nature of shamanism itself.⁷ Graham Harvey,⁸ in his reader on shamanism, draws attention to Shirokogoroff’s definition of the word ‘shaman’:

In all Tungus languages this term refers to persons of both sexes who have mastered spirits, who at will can introduce these spirits into themselves and use their power over the spirits in their own interests, particularly helping other people, who suffer from the spirits; in such a capacity they may possess a complex of special methods for dealing with the spirits.⁹

When Eliade published his seminal work *Shamanism: archaic techniques of ecstasy* in 1951, he was able to draw upon various anthropological accounts, largely dating from the 1880s onwards, of examples of shamans and their practices as identified in various locations across the world, but still confined to ‘archaic’ or ‘primitive’ societies. A principal purpose of Eliade’s work was to attempt to identify a common thread running through the many examples of shamanism, and to do so by situating shamanism within ‘the general history of religions.’¹⁰

Eliade argued strongly that there is indeed an identifiable underlying religious phenomenon properly termed shamanism but which is archetypically located in Siberia and Central Asia.¹¹ Shirokogoroff’s work, together with Eliade’s influential interpretation of it, continues to underpin the development of cross-cultural models of shamanism, even as the use of the word has spread to other cultural contexts and the concept it indicates has widened accordingly.¹²

⁵ Andrei Znamenski, 2003, p.69

⁶ Peter Jordan in Price, Neil: 2001, p.87

⁷ See Eliade, 1989, Chap. 14, drawing upon Shirokogoroff, 1999

⁸ 2003

⁹ *ibid.*, p.29

¹⁰ Eliade, 1989, p.xi

¹¹ Eliade, 1989, p.4.

¹² Illustrated by Znamenski’s three-volume work, *Shamanism: Critical Concepts in Sociology*: Routledge, London, 2004, which includes essays on shamanisms across the world as well modern appropriations of shamanic practices (neo-shamanisms).

There are now few parts of the globe where an example of shamanism has not been discerned, and inevitable variations in shamanic practices have led us to the point where there are those who feel that terms shaman and shamanism are now significantly overworked because it is no longer clear which practices (if any) a researcher may expect to encounter across shamanisms. Jones' review of the use of shamanism as a model in twentieth-century North American scholarship leads him to indicate the commonality of healing but without being able to maintain any consistency as to the practices indicated.¹³ The concept of shaman has over a century of use in relation to native North Americans but has, in Lewis's opinion, been asked to do too much in that the content has become too varied for a clear definition to emerge from that content.¹⁴ This complaint is a clear indication that we have crammed so much into the box labelled 'shamanism' that it has burst; our existing definition (whatever it might have been) no longer 'holds'. Although Piers Vitebsky is among those who have attempted a cross-cultural presentation of shamanism, he acknowledges that,

There is no agreed cross-cultural definition of 'shamanism' ... Indeed, it is characterized by a chameleon-like elusiveness. Shamanic thinking is fluid rather than doctrinal, so that it is questionable whether the practices surrounding shamans should be seen as an 'ism' at all.¹⁵

Eliade's work can in fact be seen as an attempt to respond to this concern, the seriousness of which has increased since he wrote. This suggests that Eliade's attempt did not succeed. Eliade's focus upon ecstasy, upon an altered, heightened or unusual state of consciousness or awareness, was the common element that he identified across shamanic practices. Of itself, this opens the door to any 'ecstatic' practice being indicative of shamanism. However, Eliade did seek to restrict the application of this characteristic by making reference to 'journeying' or 'travelling' as the particular skill that typically indicates the experienced or able shamanic practitioner. The practice of travelling involves either an ascent or a descent to the upper or lower worlds. In this way, Eliade shows the relevance of shamanic

¹³ Peter Jones, 2006

¹⁴ Lewis, p.43

¹⁵ Piers Vitebsky in Harvey, 2003, p.278

cosmologies to shamanic practice, even as he excludes possessory or incarnatory practices. Also implicit in Eliade's account are an awareness of the natural world in the form of animal or other natural or elemental spirits, and an expectation that examples of shamanism are to be found in so-called primitive or indigenous (typically rural) societies. Despite the work of scholars such as Carmen Blacker,¹⁶ Laura Kendal¹⁷ and Caroline Humphrey,¹⁸ the idea that shamanisms can be found in contemporary urban settings remains controversial.

In this way, Eliade suggests techniques of ecstasy or the management of consciousness as the basis of a definition of shamanism, at the same time seeking to limit its application by making reference to the typicality of travelling and by setting shamanism in primitive or rural societies. As the course of subsequent scholarship has shown, these have not proved to be effective limitations. Eliade identified healing as significant in shamanism, particularly with the concept of soul-healing or travelling to recover 'lost parts' of the human soul, allowing the idea of shaman as medicine-man to continue to seem relevant. For various reasons, reference to travelling has not proved an effective definitional boundary: travelling of itself opens the door to an extremely wide range of particular practices. Different shamanisms have different cosmologies and therefore different social expectations of their shamans: each shaman who travels encounters, potentially, his own unique reality.

There is one further difficulty: Eliade's exclusion of possessory or incarnatory practices is not justified by the fieldwork. His reasons for excluding such practices will be attended to below, but their inclusion threatens to render hopeless any attempt to define shamanism and might, on that ground alone, be expected to encounter resistance. But, as we shall see, there is no escaping the conclusion that possessory practices are often a time-honoured and authentic aspect of shamanic practice. In acknowledging past difficulties in developing a definition of shamanism, I add to them. My proposal for solving this difficulty is to allow Eliade's focus upon a

¹⁶ Blacker, Carmen: *The Catalpa Bow: A Study of Shamanistic Practices in Japan*, 2nd Edn., George Allen & Unwin, London, 1986 [1975]

¹⁷ Korean Shamans and the Spirits of Capitalism, *American Anthropologist*, N.S., 1996, Vol. 98(3), pp.512-527

¹⁸ Shamans in the City, *Anthropology Today*, 1999, Vol. 15(3), pp.3-10

characteristic ecstasy, consciousness or awareness to stand but to remove the focus from shamans recognized as already having learned how to achieve or manage that awareness.

I maintain that we will continue to fail to develop a general definition of shamanism if we persist in attending to and comparing ‘shamanic’ practices (the finished product) at the expense of understanding the social or other mechanisms whereby those practices are learned by practitioners, and valued by those whom they serve. In effect, this thesis offers an outline of how that might be done. In order to demonstrate how this might be done, I begin by remaining with Eliade.

Eliade uses Shirokogoroff’s etymology of the word ‘saman’¹⁹ in attempting to map the external religious influences on shamanic traditions, which in turn supports his perception of shamanism as having deteriorated from a belief in one ‘high god’, whom the shaman approaches by means of shamanic ‘journeying’ or ‘travelling’, to a lesser belief system based upon a cosmology involving a variety of spirits, which the shaman demonstrates by incarnating them. In proposing this hypothesis, Eliade draws upon Shirokogoroff’s comment that,

Shamanism has its very profound roots in the social system and psychology of animistic philosophy characteristic of the Tungus and other shamanists. But it is also true that shamanism in its present form is one of the consequences of the intrusion of Buddhism among the North-Asian ethnical groups.²⁰

Eliade attempts to identify a common practice (or set of practices) and related beliefs underlying particular examples of shamanism. Eliade acknowledges that shamanism can appear in different forms because it must necessarily appear in particular cultural settings: from this, he makes the attempt to strip away that which is cultural in order to identify an underlying phenomenon. Implicit in this approach is the conclusion

¹⁹ Eliade, 1989, p.495. Shirokogoroff’s work gives Eliade his central or classic location for shamanism, even as he seeks to widen the term so as to apply to recurring phenomena across the world (something Shirokogoroff was reluctant to do, arguing strongly for an appreciation of Evenki shamanism as a particular expression of Evenki society: see Shirokogoroff, 1999, p241).

²⁰ Eliade, 1989, 498. By contrast, Shirokogoroff does not suggest that the more complex cosmology resulting from Buddhist influence marks any form of deterioration in shamanic practice, noting both ‘journeying’ and incarnation or possession of spirits as characteristic of Evenki shamanism.

that any particular expression of shamanism is likely to be a modified version of the posited fundamental phenomenon; from this it is natural to conclude that any particular expression of shamanism is hybrid or impure. Thus Eliade tells us that,

Tungus shamanism as it exists today cannot be considered a ‘classic’ form of shamanism, precisely because of the predominant importance it accords to the incarnation of ‘spirits’ and the small role played by the ascent to the sky.²¹

This ‘version’ of shamanism, a hybrid form involving the ‘incarnation’ of lesser spirits, thus becomes a lesser shamanism, practised by less powerful shamans. This appears to be the basis of Eliade’s objection to possession practices as an aspect of ‘original’ or ‘true’ shamanism. The search for an ‘original’ or ‘true’ shamanism is coloured by the projection into the past of an original ‘monotheistic’ shamanism, an hypothesis Shirokogoroff felt could not be justified on the available evidence.²² One of the tasks ahead in this chapter is, therefore, to re-examine the place of possession practices (meaning incarnation of spirits) in shamanism.²³

Eliade begins his work by noting that, for much of the first half of the twentieth century, many scholars used the terms ‘medicine man,’ ‘shaman,’ ‘sorcerer,’ ‘magician’ and ‘spirit medium’, interchangeably.²⁴ The title of JL Maddox’s 1923 work *Medicine Man: A Sociological Study of the Character and Evolution of Shamanism*²⁵ gives us one example. This use of varied terminology (and the term shamanism itself) may have reflected an implicit assumption of underlying commonality, to which Eliade’s response was to accept that there are indeed many shamanic practices but that, in order to identify such examples reliably and usefully as examples of shamanism, there is a scholarly need for shamanism to be a more clearly-defined category. Only with a properly articulated model of shamanism will we be equipped to understand it as a phenomenon.²⁶

²¹ Eliade, 1989, 500

²² Shirokogoroff, 1999, pp.391-4

²³ I am conscious that Lewis has undertaken a similar exercise (2003, pp.43-58) but I have preferred to undertake my own re-examination of Shirokogoroff, partly because the apprenticeship model I perceive differs from that proposed by Lewis.

²⁴ 1989, p.3

²⁵ MacMillan, New York

²⁶ 1989, Foreword

Eliade's model of shamanism has commanded much attention, particularly his characterization of the shaman as a technician, as one who is proficient in the use of ecstatic techniques,²⁷ and who typically uses that ability in order to 'travel' to the spirit world, often for the purpose of achieving some form of personal or communal healing. Although many particular examples of 'shamanism' had been identified and documented, upon which work Eliade's naturally draws, his synthetic analysis of this material was the first to command widespread attention.

Much subsequent work on shamanism has been in response to Eliade or has, at least, been obliged to take his work into account. Accordingly, this chapter proceeds in Section 5.2 with a critical review of Eliade's synthesis of shamanism, concentrating upon two particular aspects of shamanism: apprenticeship and ecstasy (often referred to as trance). In that section, I argue against Eliade's interpretation of the material he presents, in addition to using him as a source.²⁸ An apprenticeship model of shamanism is implicit in Eliade's work but remains undeveloped, whereas I contend that the place of apprenticeship is crucial to an accurate understanding of shamanism because it is key to appreciating the context of the various shamanic practices (including so-called 'ecstatic' techniques) that have tended to be identified as the 'elements' of shamanism.

Section 5.3 proceeds with various responses to and criticisms of Eliade's work. A general review is, of course, out of the question and I therefore retain a focus upon the apprenticeship model of shamanism. Lewis is one of the few scholars to appreciate the importance of apprenticeship in shamanism²⁹ but, as I demonstrate, there are difficulties with the model he suggests.

Understandings of shamanic awareness are explored in reassessing Eliade's typification of the shaman as one who travels, in order to recover a more balanced view of the shaman as one whose core ability is the management of his awareness in

²⁷ 1989, p.4

²⁸ One of the reasons Eliade continues to be a valuable resource is his thorough referencing: whatever one thinks of his conclusions, he sets a good scholarly example in rendering his work readily falsifiable.

²⁹ Lewis, Ioan: *Religion in Context*, Cambridge UP, 1996, Chap. 6

order to employ a variety of methods of communication with the spirits. I dispute Eliade's contention that examples of possession in accounts of shamanic practice can be explained away as not being examples of possession or, alternatively, as aberrations or signs of deterioration within a tradition. Journeying safely and 'possessing' or 'incarnating' spirits safely (in a controlled manner) are both, I maintain, legitimate and traditional aspects of shamanism, and key indicators of shamanic ability. The failure to appreciate this is a failure to appreciate the full extent and richness of shamanic traditions.

My characterization of Spiritualist mediumship as encompassing a range of communicative skills, with both the active and passive aspects that all conversations have, with a variety of applications (including healing), and as being acquired through a process of apprenticeship, is what led me to explore the possibility that shamanism might best be understood as characterized by a similar process of apprenticeship. Appreciating shamanisms as apprenticeship traditions provides a framework with which to organize the varied elements of shamanic practice that might otherwise constitute a simple listing, without priority or inter-relation. I re-examine Eliade and Shirokogoroff, rather than relying upon the good work already done by Lewis, because the apprenticeship model I propose differs from his yet relies upon the work of those earlier scholars.

Finally, Section 5.4 provides a summary of the conclusions reached in this Chapter and acknowledges the need to test the model against a particular example of traditional shamanism, rather than against existing cross-cultural models of shamanism that it is intended to replace.

5.2 Eliade

In this Section, I undertake a critique of Eliade's model of shamanism, in the course of which I demonstrate that the elements of the apprenticeship model I propose are evident in the material he draws upon. Before going on to consider scholarly responses to Eliade in Section 5.3, I briefly return to his focus upon shamanic 'ecstasy' and raise the question of whether the shamanic craft entails control of spirits or of self.

5.2.1 Eliade's model of shamanism

As mentioned, Eliade characterizes the shaman as a technician of ecstatic techniques, who typically uses that ability in order to 'travel' to the spirit world and interact with spirits, generally for the purpose of achieving some form of personal or communal healing or other benefit. Eliade acknowledges that the shaman is also a magician and medicine man, psychopomp and priest, mystic and poet³⁰ but insists that each of these is not necessarily a shaman.³¹ Instead, Eliade argues that shamanism is a coherent, structured practice that properly belongs to what he terms the archaic societies of Siberia and Central Asia, in which 'the magico-religious life of the society centers on the shaman'.³²

For Eliade, the importance of this location lies in his claim that, across this region, 'the ecstatic experience is considered the religious experience par excellence' and 'the shaman, and he alone, is the great master of ecstasy.'³³ It is in Siberia and Central Asia that shamanism finds its most complete expression,³⁴ in the sense that it is found there not only as a coherent, clearly-defined religious phenomenon but as the pre-eminent traditional religious phenomenon in this region.³⁵ In other cultures, so Eliade maintains, shamanic practices have co-existed with other religions and do

³⁰ Eliade, 1989, p.4

³¹ *ibid.*, p.5

³² *ibid.*, p.4

³³ *ibid.*

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.6

³⁵ *ibid.*, p.4

not have the religious priority that characterizes shamanism in Asia. Even in Asia, Eliade cautions against regarding shamanism as the religion of this region:

The religions of Central and North Asia extend beyond shamanism in every direction, just as any religion extends beyond the mystical experience of its privileged adherents. Shamans are of the 'elect,' and as such they have access to a region of the sacred inaccessible to other members of the community.³⁶

Eliade distinguishes shamanism not as a religion but as a religious phenomenon that is typically marked, not simply by the use of ecstatic techniques, but by a particular use of trance:

... any ecstatic cannot be considered a shaman: the shaman specializes in a trance during which his soul is believed to leave his body and ascend to the sky or descend to the underworld.³⁷

During this journey, a shaman communicates with or is assisted by spirit helpers. Eliade notes that the idea of communication with spirits is widespread but again seeks to distinguish what is particular about shamanic communication: in this case, he maintains that the shaman typically controls his spirits, in the sense that he can communicate without becoming simply an instrument controlled by them.

The shaman is also identified by a clear sense of being socially 'set apart', or of vocation. As to what that vocation might be, Eliade proposes that the shaman is the guardian of the personal or collective soul: the one who sees a soul's fate, destiny or pathway; the one who heals the soul and prevents it from becoming or remaining lost.³⁸ Recruitment as a shaman is felt by Eliade to be beyond the control of the candidate and typically a matter either of inheritance or uninvited calling.³⁹ The selection of a shaman does not originate in the social expectations of this world but in the world beyond, with the selection of a candidate being made or revealed by the spirits.⁴⁰ Eliade does acknowledge that there are those who choose to become

³⁶ *ibid.*, p.7

³⁷ *ibid.*, p.5

³⁸ *ibid.*, p.8. Many shamanic cultures have a concept of the soul as having multiple parts or layers, one or more of which can become lost or detached, leading to physical or psychological illness.

³⁹ *ibid.*, p.13

⁴⁰ *ibid.*

shamans or who are chosen by the clan or community but he suggests that these ‘self-made’ shamans are considered less powerful than those who are chosen by the spirits.⁴¹ Thus, although shamanism can appear hereditary, there is generally still the expectation within the tradition that there will be indications or ‘signs’ that any given candidate is being chosen or ‘called’ in some way:

... as Karjalainen remarks, hereditary or spontaneous, shamanism is always a gift from the gods or spirits; viewed from a certain angle, it is hereditary only in appearance.⁴²

Eliade gives us examples of this from Shirokogoroff’s work on the Tungus and concludes that ‘there is always a hysterical or hysteroid crisis, followed by a period of instruction during which the postulant is initiated by an accredited shaman.’⁴³ What we have is the depiction of a process of breakdown or deconstruction followed by reconstruction. Among the Buryat and Altaians, Eliade tells us that this period of crisis is revealed when the young shaman

becomes absent-minded and dreamy, loves solitude, and has prophetic visions and sometimes seizures that make him unconscious. During this period, the Buryat believe, the soul is carried off by the spirits ...⁴⁴

But being ‘chosen’ is only the first phase in becoming a shaman, a precursor to the process of teaching or instruction.⁴⁵ Close reading of the material that Eliade presents indicates that the training of a shaman is twofold and comprises what I choose to term an inner and an outer (or traditional) aspect. The inner aspect of training I identify comprises the dreams, visions and trances that constitute the process of becoming familiar with, and practised in managing, the ecstatic state; the outer aspect I identify comprises the transmission of tradition by a master shaman acting as tutor, passing on understandings of shamanic techniques, names and functions of the spirits, and the clan mythology and genealogy.⁴⁶

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² *ibid.*, p.15

⁴³ *ibid.*, p.17

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.19

⁴⁵ The elements of the apprenticeship model I propose are, in fact, quite clear in Eliade’s work but his own terminology often obscures them: for example, Eliade often refers to ‘initiation’ when it is clear that he refers to some form of teaching or tutoring.

⁴⁶ *ibid.*, p.13. Eliade refers to these as the ecstatic and didactic aspects of a shaman’s training.

Although both of these aspects of the training process are present in Eliade's work, and examples of each are given, his presentation of them is unsystematic. For example, it is unhelpful that Eliade refers to both the initial 'choosing' of a shaman by the spirits, and his subsequent training, as initiation.⁴⁷ Only gradually does it become apparent from Eliade's treatment that 'initiation' is ongoing and comprises a number of different elements.⁴⁸

It is important to distinguish the inner and outer aspects of the process of training: the inner is understood to be given by the spirits, the outer by an existing shaman who acts as master or teacher to the apprentice. Although Eliade refers to this as an initiation, it is more usefully described as a process of apprenticeship: one that is a highly experiential but also a highly structured process of development, with distinct sequential phases. As regards the inner or ecstatic aspect of the training that follows the initial 'call,' Eliade tells us, 'the hallucinations and the *mise-en-scène* follow traditional modes that are perfectly consistent and possess an amazingly rich theoretical content.'⁴⁹

The didactic or traditional aspect of the process of apprenticeship provides a language, a culturally coherent context, in terms of which the inner experiential aspect of the process can be described, interpreted and applied. Not only does this support the apprentice in becoming familiar with ecstatic techniques and in making sense of his ecstatic experiences but it enables him to do so in a way that is culturally relevant, will be recognised, understood and valued by the community to which the shaman belongs, and will provide the basis for the pursuit of a shamanic career.

This 'traditional' aspect of apprenticeship renders socially relevant (and therefore manageable) various experiences that might otherwise be taken to indicate some form of mental illness or pathological condition, or at least of psychological crisis.

⁴⁷ For example, 1989, p.17 and Eliade's discussion of Shirokogoroff

⁴⁸ The inner and outer elements of the tradition are a little more clearly stated in Chapter 4 of Eliade's *Myths, Dreams and Mysteries*, Harvill Press, London, 1960

⁴⁹ 1989, p.14

Just as there have been attempts to posit a connection or relationship between Spiritualist mediumship and neurosis, epilepsy or other pathological conditions indicating illness, instability, lack of self-control and so on,⁵⁰ so too have comparisons been drawn between such conditions and the ecstatic techniques of shamanic practice.⁵¹ The tradition that is passed on is a crucial part of apprenticeship because it renders productive inner psychic or psychological experiences that, at best, would otherwise remain meaningless or, at worst, might undermine the ability to function effectively in society.

Although Eliade himself defines shamanism by maintaining a focus upon shamans as technicians of ecstasy (practitioners who are able to manage their consciousness so as to achieve an ecstatic state), in order to be able, typically, to travel to the spirit world, he nevertheless maintains that identifying this use of ecstatic technique, of itself, is not enough to maintain that an example of traditional shamanism has been identified. For Eliade, such a claim can only be maintained if such examples of ecstatic practices or techniques are identified *in the context of a coherent tradition* in terms of which such practices are culturally relevant, and therefore both personally and communally productive.

Eliade does not clearly articulate the criteria we might apply in order to determine whether a particular example of shamanic practice is properly regarded as contextualized in this way, so as to be demonstrably expressive of a wider society that values and sustains that practice. What question do we ask in order to be able to say that shamanic practice is socially embedded, that it is a focused, heightened or intensified expression of a world-view that is found more widely in that society? I argue that the key question is whether the society in question values shamanic practice sufficiently to support potential shamans through a period of training or apprenticeship and, thereafter, to provide the social space needed for there to be places where a shamanic career can be pursued, and the social capital needed for such a career to be worthwhile.

⁵⁰ See Section 3.2.3 above.

⁵¹ Hence Eliade's discussion of the 'psychopathology' of shamanism; see pp.23-32.

Apprenticeships of one form or another are, of course, to be found in many religious traditions: we need, therefore, to ask what kind or pattern of apprenticeship do we find in shamanism? Present in Eliade's examples and discussion are the following elements or stages: (i) an initiatory ordeal or other experience, interpreted (by the experiencer and/or by an existing shaman) as a 'call' to the shamanic vocation, (ii) a period of instruction (by both spirits and master shaman), and (iii) communal recognition as a shaman (with an element of ongoing social monitoring).

5.2.2 Indications of apprenticeship

Eliade does not present these elements as sequential stages in an apprenticeship. Further, his use of the term 'initiation' is often unclear and must often be inferred from the context. Eliade sometimes refers to this entire process as initiation, sometimes to the second stage as initiation, sometimes to the third stage of communal recognition as initiation and, on occasion, to the initial 'call' as the initiation. One reason for this seems to be Eliade's view that not all shamanic traditions reveal all of these stages,⁵² nevertheless, this variation in Eliade's usage somewhat obscures a pattern that is clearly discernible in the material he draws on, and which he himself notes various examples of, but does not prioritise or develop.

In order to bring out more clearly the structure I have identified, I refer to the entire process of becoming a shaman as an apprenticeship comprising call, training and recognition. The process of training has two aspects: training by master shamans⁵³ and training by spirits, each reinforcing the other. The practitioner's belief, conviction or trust that there is some real ecstatic experience provides the inner, experiential basis that validates the tradition; at the same time, it is the tradition that provides the content of the master shaman's teaching, enabling the apprentice's subjective experience to be comprehended and, therefore, capable of being articulated to others and rendered socially useful. Because the practitioner's inner experience is interpreted in terms of traditional language and the concepts it

⁵² This may simply be due to limitations in the sources.

⁵³ i.e. a shaman acting as tutor to an apprentice.

expresses, the tradition is revalidated and maintained as a tradition in which the community as a whole participates.

That general framework enables me to consider Eliade's work under the following headings:

- (i) initiatory experiences or 'calls,'
- (ii) training by master shamans,
- (iii) training by spirit guides or teachers, and
- (iv) communal recognition as a shaman, and ongoing monitoring.

Within this framework, I organize a number of elements or characteristics frequently identified as shamanic:

- (i) initiatory experiences are often characterized as a form of illness, and the issue of shamanism and mental health is discussed in this context;
- (ii) training in tradition provides a context for matters such as cosmology, the nature and identity of spirit guides and other helpers (and the issue of who is in control), the nature of the soul and its relationship to the body, costume and traditional methods of accessing the ecstatic state (such as rhythmic drumming or other repetitive activities, meditation, use of tobacco, alcohol or other drugs);
- (iii) training in ecstatic technique is characterized by Eliade as enabling the shaman to 'travel' to meet the spirits, rather than being 'possessed' by them. This is a characterization that has been challenged and which, I argue, requires a more balanced treatment, placing the ability to 'possess' or incarnate spirits safely and at will firmly within the range of traditional shamanic skills;
- (iv) communal recognition requires examination of the process whereby a candidate gains access to the public status of shaman (often involving a formal ceremony or demonstration) and thereafter maintains that status.

5.2.2.1 'Call' or Initiatory Experience

Eliade describes the initiatory sickness, dream or ecstasy as being a sign of 'choice' by the spirits and as being in itself an event that changes the experiencer's religious status:⁵⁴ without it, the process of shamanic training cannot be embarked upon. For any particular candidate, there is the option to ignore the experience or its significance, but this tends to be something the tradition seeks to prevent, typically teaching that the call must be acknowledged and an attempt made to respond to it. That this initiatory event has occurred, of itself marks out the experiencer as different, in a way that is particular and socially valuable, in that it has significance in terms of the tradition. Although the initiatory event is an inner experience, the tradition has a normative effect as to its content:

The content of these first ecstatic experiences, although comparatively rich, almost always includes one or more of the following themes: dismemberment of the body,⁵⁵ followed by a renewal of the internal organs and viscera; ascent to the sky and dialogue with the gods or spirits; descent to the underworld and conversations with spirits and the souls of dead shamans; various revelations, both religious and shamanic (secrets of the profession).⁵⁶

The tradition has normative effect in that it will not recognise as a shamanic initiation, an experience that is entirely lacking in these themes. Eliade notes that initiatory calls may be less obvious: there may not be a clear illness,

but rather a progressive change in behaviour. The candidate becomes meditative, seeks solitude, sleeps a great deal, seems absent-minded, has prophetic dreams and sometimes seizures.⁵⁷

It may not, therefore, be appropriate to seek a one-off event in identifying an initiatory call; instead it may be necessary to attend to a wider range of experiences evidenced by changes in behaviour that, possibly in subtle ways, indicates a time or period of crisis (in the sense of a turning-point that calls for an appropriate action or response).

⁵⁴ 1989, p.33

⁵⁵ Dismemberment is understood as being by the spirits; for example, Eliade, 1989, pp.36, 76.

⁵⁶ 1989, p.34

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.35

Eliade presents us with various examples of initiatory calls, in all of which he identifies two principal forms: (i) a process he typifies as suffering, death & resurrection, often characterized by dismemberment (causing death) and reconstruction or reassembly (resurrection), after which the candidate ‘lives again’;⁵⁸ and (ii) a travelling experience during which tutelary spirits are met. Eliade typifies this as ascent to enable instruction by ‘celestial beings’ or, alternatively, a descent to the underworld. In some traditions both patterns are found, with Eliade characterizing the first (dismemberment etc.) as initiatory and the second a subsequent stage in the process of apprenticeship.⁵⁹

The sense of crisis that needs to be worked through, of healing following psychological or other illness, is so marked for Eliade that he regards it as crucial. Eliade makes no claim to be the first to emphasize the ‘psycho pathological phenomenology of Siberian shamanism’⁶⁰ but he takes issue with the simple equating of shamanism with mental disorder (although he notes many indications that shamanic apprenticeship involves periods or phases of psychological disorder or crisis).⁶¹ Eliade feels that simply to equate this process with illness does not assist in understanding shamanism as a coherent and widespread religious phenomenon.⁶² Those who become shamans are not regarded as ill by others in the community to which they belong, and the ability to cope with a process of apprenticeship that entails periodic challenges (and, indeed, is initiated by challenge) seems, in such societies, to be accepted as a sign of shamanic strength and capability.

I contend that this ability to cope is important in understanding shamanic practice. The ability to manage the challenge of inner, transformative experience and to demonstrate that this has been achieved are crucial to acceptance as a proficient, or simply competent, shaman. This is the confirmation of the shaman’s status as healer, above all as one who has healed himself, using the tools or techniques provided by

⁵⁸ Eliade frequently uses rebirth and resurrection terminology; for example, 1989, p.33

⁵⁹ 1989, p.76

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, p.24

⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp.24-5

⁶² *ibid.*, p.26

the shamanic tradition that he stands in. A shamanic tradition, properly identified, provides a coherent set of teachings and techniques, the use or practise of which enables a cure to be found for the shaman's initiatory illness⁶³, by achieving a state of equilibrium, control and spiritual power. To the extent that what is observed is indeed illness, it 'is only a sign of election, and proves to be temporary.'⁶⁴ it is emphatically not an attribute of the acknowledged shaman. As Eliade remarks,

it is quite possible that the assimilation of a neurotic subject to an individual possessed by spirits – an assimilation supposed to be quite frequent in the archaic world – is in many cases only the result of imperfect observations on the part of the earliest ethnologists.⁶⁵

Thus Eliade felt able to state that in general, 'the Siberian and North Asian Shaman shows no signs of mental disintegration',⁶⁶ and draws our attention to Chadwick's⁶⁷ work in Africa as indicating that,

The intellectual effort of the Dyak prophet-shaman is immense and denotes a mental capacity well above that of the collectivity. The same observation has been made concerning African shamans in general.⁶⁸

One who is accepted as a shaman by the community is one who has demonstrated the ability to practise as a shaman and, for Eliade, a crucial element in this is the shaman's ability to show that he is in control of both himself and of the spirits or, at least, that he has their power at his disposal. The shaman is accepted as proficient because he has succeeded in healing himself; it is the skills acquired in the process of doing so that enable him to function as a healer of others or, as Eliade puts it, a particular type of 'medicine man within society.'⁶⁹

In Australia matters are even clearer: medicine men are expected to be, usually are, perfectly healthy and normal.

And we must also consider the fact that the shamanic initiation proper includes not only an ecstatic experience but, as we shall soon see, a course of

⁶³ *ibid.*, p.29

⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.28

⁶⁵ *ibid.*, p.27

⁶⁶ *ibid.*, p.30

⁶⁷ The work cited is Chadwick, Nora K.: *Poetry and Prophecy*, Cambridge, 1942, pp.28ff

⁶⁸ 1989, p.31

⁶⁹ *ibid.*, p.31

theoretical and practical instruction too complicated to be within the grasp of a neurotic. Whether they still are or are not subject to real attacks of epilepsy or hysteria, shamans, sorcerers and medicine men in general cannot be regarded as merely sick; their psychopathic experience has a theoretical content. For if they have cured themselves and are able to cure others, it is, among other things, because they know the mechanism, or rather, the *theory* of illness.⁷⁰

I quote this paragraph at length because it highlights an important aspect of Eliade's presentation of shamanism: in terms of what shamans typically do (having learned traditional ecstatic techniques), he places healing very firmly at the centre of the shamanic role. This paragraph also shows the central importance of tradition in Eliade's synthesis of shamanism. It cannot be emphasized too strongly that it is the transmission of a coherent tradition that makes available the theoretical content an apprentice needs in order to comprehend and utilize the inner experiences that characterize a shamanic apprenticeship. Further, it is the ability to identify such a tradition that enables us to say that we have identified an example of shamanism rather than some other form of traditional spiritual practice such as healing. Shamans are healers but not all healers are shamans.

The precise nature of the shaman's role as healer often remains implicit in Eliade's work. It is Eliade's view that peculiarity conferred by special or unusual experience signifies the presence of the sacred.⁷¹ Just as things (physical objects) can be set apart because they are understood as containers or receptacles in which the sacred is manifest, so too can shamans. For Eliade, shamans are among those who

‘incarnate the sacred, because they live it abundantly, or rather “are lived” by the religious “form” that has chosen them (gods, spirits, ancestors etc.)’.⁷²

This in turn supports Eliade's desire to demonstrate that shamanism represents a widespread religious phenomenon worthy of the attention not only of anthropologists

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ This is akin to Shirokogoroff's description of the Evenki belief, discussed more fully in Chapter 6, that physical items and animals can act or be used as ‘placings’ for spirits, as (by extension) can the physical form of human being; hence the practice of shamans incarnating spirits. The item itself may be ordinary but is experienced as sacred or significant because of what is thought to be present in or with it.

⁷² 1989, p.32

but also scholars of religion, something that may seem obvious now but which was an important purpose prompting Eliade's synthesis.

5.2.2.2 Training and development

Although the dead are ultimately the ones who know everything,⁷³ the knowledge they impart remains contextualised in that,

... whatever the source of their revelation, all these shamans practice in accordance with the traditional norms of their tribe. 'In other words, they conform to rules and a technique that they can have acquired only by going to school to men of experience,' Métraux concludes. This is equally true of any other shamanism.⁷⁴

Thus the knowledge the dead impart to an apprentice shaman reflects earthly traditions and the cultural setting of the society or clan to which the shaman belongs. The kinds of spirits that exist, their respective powers or functions, the techniques for controlling or developing relationships with the spirits, the broader cosmology of the spirit world and so on, are all matters of tradition. It is the tradition that provides the apprentice with a language, a set of concepts, with which to interpret his experiences.

Death and resurrection form a marked theme in Eliade's writing.⁷⁵ The suggestion he makes is that the shaman is regarded as being the same as the spirits, as a 'dead' person and who therefore lives in both worlds. Just as the dead are resurrected, and can continue to be active in both worlds, so too shamans are those who have been resurrected. The 'death' a shaman undergoes is depicted as a process of dismemberment by the spirits, his 'resurrection' a process of rebuilding or reassembly. Thus the shaman is able to communicate with the spirits because he is, in effect, one of them.

The process of initiation or training by spirits generally reveals the involvement of the shaman's own ancestors, often as emissaries or agents of higher or 'celestial'

⁷³ *ibid.*, p.84

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.83

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, pp.84-8

beings. A hierarchical cosmology appears to be a widespread feature of shamanic traditions as also, so Eliade informs us, is a sense of deterioration in shamanic prowess, that the shamans of today are less powerful or proficient than those of the past.⁷⁶

Eliade gives examples of apprentice shamans being guided by ancestor (spirit) shamans, and introduced to other gods or celestial spirits from whom the shaman learns.⁷⁷ The role of the souls of the dead is significant, in that:

the souls of ancestors often take a sort of ‘possession’ of a young man and then initiate him. Resistance is unavailing. This phenomenon of pre-election is general in North and Arctic Asia.

Once he has been consecrated by this first ‘possession’ and the initiation that follows, the shaman becomes a receptacle that can be entered indefinitely by other spirits, too; but these are always the souls of dead shamans or other spirits who served the old shamans.⁷⁸

The role of ancestors in choosing future shamans is one that Eliade notes as being important for shamanic traditions elsewhere in the world, not always acting as guides themselves but often being present for the purpose of introducing the candidate to those who will act as his guides or teachers of shamanic knowledge. Eliade offers as one example the following quotation from Métraux:

‘In the Apapocuva Guarani tribe, the prerequisite for becoming a shaman is learning magical songs, which are taught by a dead relative in dreams’.⁷⁹

The quotation from Eliade is of interest for another reason. In both places where the word ‘possession’ is used, Eliade places it in quotation marks. In this way, Eliade ‘brackets out’ examples of possession that are evident in the examples that he himself uses but which he does not wish to acknowledge as actual possession because this tests or challenges his claim that, although there are examples of possession in shamanic practice, they always have particular explanations or are aberrations. There is a twofold strategy here: either to argue that particular examples

⁷⁶ *ibid.*, p.67

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.75

⁷⁸ *ibid.*, p.82

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, p.83. The work cited is Métraux, Alfred: *Le Shamanisme chez les Indiens de l’Amérique du Sud tropicale, Acta Americana* (Mexico), II, 3-4 (1944), pp.197-219, 320-41 at p.203

of possession are atypical or, alternatively, refuse to acknowledge them as examples of actual possession in the first place. This appears to be Eliade's way of maintaining that possession is not typical of shamanism but he gives no detailed justification for this position, merely making a preferential selection of journeying accounts in the anthropological material. Examples of shamanic journeying are always presented as typical of the shamanic tradition, whereas examples of shamanic possession are always presented as exceptional, odd or atypical, with no effort to analyze why they occur, let alone explore the possibility that they, too, are characteristic of the tradition. It is essentially this weakness in Eliade's position that is probed by Lewis.⁸⁰ The relevance of possession studies to shamanism is something that can only be indicated in this thesis, but is clearly a relevant avenue for further research and is returned to in Chapter Eight.

Before leaving the issue of shamanic training and proceeding to examine the process whereby shamans are recognized communally, I wish merely to indicate that attention has been drawn, by Eliade and others, to the use of repetitive actions to access the ecstatic state or to alter the shaman's consciousness or awareness in the desired manner. Drumming is the example to which Eliade draws particular attention, and seems fairly to represent many Siberian shamanic traditions. Drumming is not representative of all shamanic traditions, and Eliade draws attention to the North American use of meditative practices.⁸¹ Much of the literature on Siberian shamanisms devotes considerable space to detailed descriptions of the shaman's drum, its making and use. By extension, much tends also to be said about other shamanic accoutrements, such as costume and other paraphernalia. These are often of value because they contain representations of the cosmology maintained within a particular shamanic tradition. Anisimov has also drawn attention to the shaman's tent, the setting for shamanic scéances, as a physical representation of the cosmos.⁸² Such representations and records are, in effect, the literature of traditional Siberian shamanisms and are often the product not of the shaman's efforts but of

⁸⁰ 1996

⁸¹ 1989, pp.62-4

⁸² *The Shaman's Tent of the Evenks and the Origin of the Shamanistic Rite*, pp.84-123, in Michael, Henry N.: *Studies in Siberian Shamanism*, University of Toronto Press, 1963

other members of the community, gifted to the shaman in order to mark his recognition as an able practitioner.

5.2.2.3 Recognition as a shaman

The master shaman may have completed what he feels needs to be taught but that in itself is no guarantee of recognition of the apprentice as a shaman by the community, something that must follow on from the ability to demonstrate a sufficient degree of ability or proficiency as a shaman. Without a community to serve there can be no shamanic career and Eliade tells us that many candidates ‘renounce the profession if the clan does not recognize them as worthy to be shamans.’⁸³

Eliade devotes a chapter to rites of recognition,⁸⁴ in which he prioritizes rites involving ascent, reinforcing his characterization of the shaman as one who ‘travels’ or ‘journeys’ upwards, by emphasizing the ability to travel as the particular skill that must be demonstrated in order to achieve initial recognition as a shaman. Eliade attends to the details of enacted ascents, and characterizes the insensibility or trance state of a shaman as evidence of the shaman having gone ‘travelling’, emphasizing that, when we consider examples of shamanism across cultures, ‘in many cases, shamanic vocation or initiation is directly connected with an ascent to the sky’.⁸⁵

Although Eliade notes the extensive role played by spirits and spirit guides during rites of recognition, he is insistent that the key skill being tested is the shaman’s ability to travel at will. Even in cases where the sources indicate that the shaman has the impression of being pulled out of his body by the spirits, Eliade confidently asserts that ‘it may be assumed that “possession” finds expression in an ascensional trance’.⁸⁶ Again, we see the ‘bracketing-out’ of examples of possession in favour of Eliade’s preferred model.

⁸³ 1989, p.17

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, Chapter IV: *Shamanic Initiation*.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*, p.141

⁸⁶ *ibid.*

Eliade is useful to the extent that he presents sufficient material to establish that it is usual to find some formal process of recognition that marks an apprentice's induction or 'graduation' to the status of shaman. By contrast, Eliade's interpretation of such ceremonies often appears to be the result of an over-zealous application of his own model of the 'travelling' shaman than sensitivity to the content of the sources.

5.2.3 The shaman as (self-)healer: ecstasy, possession and the issue of shamanic consciousness

Eliade has a very clear sense of the central place of healing in shamanic practice and again there are two aspects to this: the shaman may function as healer of his client's physical body but illness is often explained or interpreted in terms of underlying spirit causes. Eliade's opinion is that a shaman is fundamentally a soul healer, who

performs the function of doctor and healer; he announces the diagnosis, goes in search of the patient's fugitive soul, captures it, and makes it return to animate the body that it has left. It is always the shaman who conducts the dead person's soul to the underworld, for he is the psychopomp par excellence.⁸⁷

The shaman is able to function as healer and psychopomp (conductor of souls safely to the underworld) because he has learned how to leave and return to his own body safely: it is possible for him to spend time in the spirit worlds and to function there effectively, knowing that he can return to his own body safely and at will. It is the shaman's proficiency at travelling and returning that gives strength and confidence in exploring the spirit worlds and in developing and maintaining relationships with spirit helpers (whether celestial, human or elemental). For this reason, the shaman's powers and abilities, his ability to offer remedies/healing or provide information or render assistance, particularly in his role as psychopomp, are all intimately connected to the cosmology maintained by the shaman's own tradition. Again, the language, customs and understanding of the shaman's own society or clan fundamentally shape both the training that is given by the master shaman and the training that is offered by the shaman's own guiding spirits. The earthly culture to which the shaman

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.182

belongs is the source of the 'map' the shaman is provided with so as to enable him to navigate the extraterrestrial realms.

The characterization of the shaman as healer, specifically as a practitioner of soul-healing, is reflected both in the shaman's role as psychopomp and in his/her role as a healer in a cultural context that sees physical ailment as a symptom of spiritual illness. Thus,

Disease is attributed to the soul's having strayed away or been stolen, and treatment is in principle reduced to finding it, capturing it, and obliging it to resume its place in the patient's body. In some parts of Asia the cause of illness can be the intrusion of a magical object into the patient's body or his 'possession'⁸⁸ by evil spirits; in this case, cure consists in extracting the harmful object or expelling the demons. Sometimes disease has a twofold cause – theft of the soul aggravated by 'possession' by evil spirits – and the shamanic cure includes both searching for the soul and expelling the demons.⁸⁹

Alternatively, the shaman may journey in search of information or particular remedies, rather than in search of the patient's soul.⁹⁰ Despite Eliade's attempt to maintain the priority of the travelling typology, examples of spirits taking possession of the shaman still recur because they are present in the material upon which Eliade draws.⁹¹ Eliade's objection to the idea of possession as an aspect of shamanic practice seems to be based on his perception of it as a 'symptom' of deterioration in belief in a 'high god',⁹² a position based ultimately on his claim that 'God' as ultimate creator has become more distant over time and more inaccessible to present-day shamans. Thus the objection to possession is that it represents a preoccupation with 'lesser' spirits by shamans whose travelling skills are poor compared with those of their forebears. Beyond general hints in the literature of people wistfully looking back to a golden age of shamanism when shamans 'actually' travelled, there seems precious little to support Eliade's view that shamanism is some kind of deteriorated or polluted version of an earlier monotheism. There is a clear need for a reassessment

⁸⁸ Another example of Eliade using inverted commas to imply that this is in some sense not possession as such.

⁸⁹ 1989, p.215

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, p.219

⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp.239-43. See also pp. 499-500.

⁹² *ibid.*, pp.505-7

of the place of mediumship (incarnation of spirits, on Eliade's terminology) in shamanic practice, without prior bias towards it as a 'lesser' practice. Even on the basis of Eliade's own material, possessory or incarnatory experiences strongly characterize the initiatory experiences leading to commencement of shamanic training.

Prominent in Eliade's presentation is the concept of an older 'original' shamanism that supported belief in a 'high god', and which was shaped by that belief to the extent that shamanic skill lay in the ability to 'travel' so as to approach that god. This appears to lead Eliade to regard the incarnation of lesser spirits as a diluted or diminished form of shamanism, hence his insistence that instances of 'possession' are not to be admitted as an authentic aspect of shamanic practice. Interestingly, this is a similar objection to that made to Spiritualist mediumistic practice by many Christians: that the focus on bringing forward individual spirits diminishes the focus on (worship or awareness of) God and that Spiritualism is therefore a distorted or deteriorated form of Christianity: in effect, a heresy to be resisted. This may add further support to those who feel that Eliade read a Christian cosmology into shamanism, resulting in a distortion of the material.

I proceed now to examine some of the responses to Eliade. I do so in order to work towards the position that shamans are practitioners who use their skills (principally the ability to manage their awareness) in order to enable a variety of communicative practices, active and passive, which are collaborative in nature.

5.3 Responses to Eliade

It is not possible to undertake a general review of scholarly responses to Eliade: a more restricted treatment is necessary. In this Section, my priorities are to develop my apprenticeship model and to support my contention that possessory experiences and skills such as the conscious incarnation of spirits should be recognized as traditional shamanic skills. That is not to make the claim that they should necessarily be anticipated as a significant feature in any particular example of shamanism: the precise mix or range of skills to be found in any given tradition is simply a question of fact to be determined through fieldwork. The danger to be avoided is that of distorting fieldwork with unwarranted *a priori* assumptions as to what should or should not be recognized as present. The issue of shamanic consciousness reappears below simply because skills enabling the management of consciousness are, broadly, what is learned during a shamanic apprenticeship. Attending to shamanic apprenticeship helps to identify and articulate what is meant by shamanic consciousness because the characteristics and parameters (including as to applications) of that consciousness are contained within the tradition passed on during the apprenticeship. Given my argument that shamanic consciousness (or ‘ecstasy’) is the outcome of apprenticeship, Eliade’s focus upon it is perfectly understandable to me but, in understanding any apprenticeship-based trade or craft, it is important not to be dazzled by the finished product if we are to understand what it is that the craftsman ‘does’.

5.3.1 Responses to the ‘journeying’ model

Although I go on to examine Shirokogoroff’s treatment of the Evenki in detailed in Chapter 6, it should be stated here that Eliade’s journeying model of shamanic practice is itself a response to prior material. My conclusions that Shirokogoroff details both journeying and possessory in Evenki shamanism (upon which material Eliade draws heavily) are detailed and supported below. That said, the obvious presence of descriptions of possessory practices in Shirokogoroff’s work helps us to understand why Eliade’s interpretation has attracted criticism.

As mentioned, Lewis is one of those who has chosen to revert to Shirokogoroff in attempting to unpick the distinctions drawn by Eliade and other scholars between shamanism and possessory practices.⁹³ Among those mentioned by Lewis are Raymond Firth,⁹⁴ who distinguishes between ‘spirit possession’ (control of the person’s body by a spirit), ‘spirit mediumship’ (where the emphasis is upon communication), and ‘shamanism’ (where the practitioner ‘is regarded as controlling spirits, exercising his mastery over them in socially recognised ways.’⁹⁵). For Firth, the crucial difference between possession and shamanism is the issue of who is in control. On this basis, as we have seen, mediums are often placed in the ‘possession’ category but the implication here is that possession and shamanism (unlike mediumship) are not primarily about communication. That seems difficult to sustain, and Lewis clearly feels that the investing of such distinctions with significance owes much to Eliade’s influence.

Lewis reminds us that Eliade saw himself as an historian of religions, and that the presence of possession phenomena in shamanic practice was explained by Eliade as the outcome of an historical process: a deterioration in ‘original’ shamanism. Despite this context to Eliade’s presentation, later scholars have often taken Eliade’s distinctions and dehistoricized them, presenting or using them as absolute distinctions in the attempt to comprehend different states of shamanic or other practitioner awareness.

Given the familiarity of American scholars with examples of North American shamanism, ‘the term “shaman” enjoys a secure position in American cultural anthropology’.⁹⁶ By contrast, the conceptual model among British anthropologists has tended to be one of spirit-possession and has led to a tendency to assume that shamanism is a different phenomenon. For Lewis, distinctions such as these are at

⁹³ 1996, Chapter 6: *The Shaman’s Career*

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, p.107

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.107, quoting Firth, 1967, p.296

⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.106. A recent example is Robert Walsh’s 2007 introductory work on shamanism, which draws heavily on Rasmussen for its discussion of indigenous shamanism but includes a section on mediumship and channelling on the basis that mediumship is a shamanic role, with no sense that their inclusion is in any way controversial.

least partly attributable to Eliade's emphasis on shamanism as an ecstasy involving travel. Lewis's view is that carefully-crafted distinctions such as those of Firth owe less to the true nature of the phenomena under consideration and more to the ahistorical elaboration of Eliade's contrast between celestial shamanic flight and spirit-possession, disregarding Eliade's historical approach⁹⁷ and the (in my opinion) highly speculative origin of the evolutionary model behind the contrast that Eliade draws so sharply.

Lewis draws attention to the work of the Belgian anthropologist Luc de Heusch as an example of the tendency to make Eliade's contrast between celestial ascent and possession serve as the basis for often rather complex and rigid theories of religious phenomena. Thus Luc de Heusch presents shamanism as a 'de-possession' (or discarnation) and possession as incarnation, departure from and entry into a physical form, subsequently asserting authentic shamanic trance as lucid or clairvoyant, enabling the practitioner to see the spirits, 'know' their secrets and, where appropriate, exorcise them.⁹⁸ Obviously it is a very superficial objection to point out that 'clairvoyant' is a description often used in relation to Spiritualist mediums, particularly without determining whether the term is intended to indicate a similar practice, but I consider that it does represent another indication that not all is well with the travelling-possession dichotomy that has characterised so much scholarly work on shamanism.

Lewis also indicates Erica Bourguignon's work as another example of tendency to distinguish different trance states for different purposes, this time in the attempt to demonstrate that different ecstatic states characterise different societies.⁹⁹ This represents another example of the tendency to distinguish shamanism and mediumship/possession as fundamentally different practices rather than different uses of the trance state or, as Vincent Crapanzano puts it, 'modes of engagement' with the spirits¹⁰⁰. To Bourguignon's credit, as Lewis points out¹⁰¹, she correctly

⁹⁷ *ibid.*, p.108

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.109

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p.110, citing Bourguignon, 1976

¹⁰⁰ Crapanzano, Vincent: 'Postface', *Culture and Religion*, Vol. 7, No. 2, July 2006, pp.199-203 at p.200

distinguishes between trance and possession on the basis that one need not lead to the other. This is a point often still overlooked in possession studies and which Vincent Crapanzano has felt the need to reiterate.¹⁰² Lewis tells us that the two opposed phenomena Bourguignon identifies are possession without trance and possession with trance: in itself a useful distinction but misapplied in the attempt to demonstrate that only one or the other can characterise any particular society. In order to show that this is a misguided endeavour, Lewis takes us back to Shirokogoroff's work on the Tungus in order to demonstrate that, in this one cultural setting, not only do we find possession both with and without trance, we also find trance without possession.¹⁰³ The habit of attempting to associate different societies and religious traditions with different ecstatic states, a habit Lewis criticizes in the following terms:

... all the features that have been distinguished as signifying separate phenomena associated with contrasting social formations (past or present) actually regularly occur together within a single cultural context. ... I shall take ... the Tungus as the model here. Anyone who takes the trouble to read carefully Shirokogoroff's masterpiece on Tungus shamanism, *The Psychomental Complex of the Tungus* (1935), will discover how superficial and simplistic are these other treatments of shamanism and possession.¹⁰⁴

When we come to consider Lewis's *Ecstatic Religion*, it is perhaps no surprise to find a ready treatment of Spiritualist mediums as shamans. For Lewis, trance with possession, trance without possession, or possession and trance separately, do not provide distinct bases for different religious traditions ('self-sustaining styles of religiosity') but 'are in reality constituent elements in the composite shamanistic complex.'¹⁰⁵ Lewis's conclusion further tests the prospects for a cross-cultural definition of shamanism. Particular practices (applications of shamanic consciousness or awareness) cannot provide sustainable boundaries to the field because different states of consciousness or awareness are themselves found within single shamanic traditions.

¹⁰¹ 1996, p.110

¹⁰² Crapanzano, 2006, p.200

¹⁰³ 1996, p.112

¹⁰⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ *ibid.*, p.113

Lewis also draws attention to Shirokogoroff's statement that the word shaman is gender-neutral.¹⁰⁶ Barbara Tedlock suggests that gender issues in western society (prioritization of the masculine) lie behind the active, travelling characterization of the shaman made by Eliade, and that this has led to the misinterpretation of extensive available material as to the nature of shamanic practice. Tedlock points out that Basilov,

carefully distinguished between persons possessed by spirits and spirits possessed by shamans, but he did not assign women to one of these dimensions and men to the other. "No one is considered a shaman", he said, "unless that female or male person can control the spirits: take them into the body or expel them at will". He noted that in Siberia, as well as in most other areas, shamans of both sexes combine trance mediumship with ecstatic soul flight.¹⁰⁷

Frederick Smith has had occasion recently to consider the scholarly use of terms such as shamanism and possession in connection with South Asian traditions,¹⁰⁸ with reference to Shirokogoroff and Lewis. For Smith, 'shamanism in South Asia takes the form of spirit mediumship and oracular possession.'¹⁰⁹ For Smith, shamanism as a concept cannot be 'limited to a specific mode of contact'¹¹⁰ and, in reverting to Shirokogoroff (which I do more fully in Chapter 6), points out that a shaman's techniques and paraphernalia 'have been transmitted from elders' and that the knowledge transmitted includes 'a theoretical justification' for a tradition's practices.¹¹¹ It is essentially this process of transmission, and the knowledge transmitted or otherwise acquired, that I bring into focus in exploring the place of apprenticeship in shamanism.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.113

¹⁰⁷ 2003, p.301, citing Basilov 1976, p.149.

¹⁰⁸ Smith, Frederick M.: *The Self Possessed: Deity and Spirit Possession in South Asian Literature and Civilization*, Columbia UP, New York, 2006

¹⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.64

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, pp.63-4

5.3.2 Suggestions of apprenticeship

Lewis is significant not only for his willingness to accept mediumship as an example of shamanic practice but also for his appreciation of the importance of understanding shamanism as the outcome of a process of apprenticeship. Further, appreciation of shamanism as apprenticeship-based arises, for Lewis, very directly from his willingness to challenge the habit of reification that, he argues, has allowed Eliade's characterization of shamanism to be so influential, at least among British anthropologists.¹¹²

For Lewis, possession is properly understood as a possible aspect of shamanic practice and should not be excluded on the basis of an *a priori* assumption that shamanism and possession are mutually exclusive. Although this is what Lewis regards as the major point to come out of his analysis, it is, for my purposes, only a preliminary step in the characterization of Spiritualist mediumship as an example of traditional shamanism. I wish at this stage to look more closely at Lewis's suggestion that possession and 'travelling' are 'serial phases in the assumption of the shamanic career'.

Lewis notes that the shamanic career generally begins with an uninvited or spontaneous event, which he regards as an obvious example of 'uncontrolled possession'.¹¹³ The place of an initiatory experience in marking the beginning of the shamanic career is, as we have seen, well attested but what Lewis brings into focus is that the shamanic career typically springs from an experience that is almost universally characterized as an example of possession. If that is correct (which, following Lewis, I argue it is), it follows that the process of apprenticeship is one that sees the apprentice develop from an individual who is open to being possessed, overshadowed or impressed upon unwillingly, to one who has developed the ability to choose if and when this happens.

¹¹² For this and pages 194-5, see Chapter 6 of Lewis's *Religion in Context*.

¹¹³ 1996, p.113

This overlooks the possibility that initiatory experiences might involve flight or journeying. Such experiences might be characterized as possessory in nature (to the extent that they do not happen at the behest of the potential apprentice and might be regarded as prompted or caused by a spirit) even although they do not involve any kind of ‘incarnation’ or ‘embodiment’ of a spirit. In these cases, the ‘shaman’ is ‘lifted out’ of his body (discarnated) and taken somewhere, perhaps in order to be shown things. Thus journeying (which Eliade tells us is characteristic of shamanic activity) can be possessory or uncontrolled, suggesting that it might not even be possible to associate journeying with any particular state of consciousness or awareness (or, indeed, any other practice), let alone use it as the basis for an entire tradition.

Lewis goes on to develop a five-stage course of apprenticeship, showing a process of development from ‘spontaneous possession’ to ‘expert possession’. Prioritising journeying and the shaman as one who exercises control over others also leads to an overlooking of the crucial role that mediumistic, incarnatory and possessory phenomena play both in shamanic apprenticeship and in the ‘developed’ or recognized shaman’s practice. Eliade and others have been focused on the final stage, the outcome of the process, in developing their understanding of what shamanism ‘is’, which has led them to overlook shamanisms as learning outcomes. Eliade’s attempt at a cross-cultural presentation of shamanism is developed by maintaining a heavy emphasis upon shamanic scéances, thereby giving priority to the demonstrations of experienced practitioners. Other scholars have followed that lead and assumed that whatever it is that forms the ‘core’ of shamanism is to be found in its public demonstrations.¹¹⁴ In fact, there is no more reason to assume this than there is to assume that mediumship can be understood by watching the public demonstrations of experienced Spiritualist mediums. If we ignore the prior processes that lead, over a period of years, to that finished product, it will remain at best only partially comprehensible.

¹¹⁴ Balzer, 1990, p.x

Lewis suggests two possible processes of development with distinct phases, episodes and roles¹¹⁵ but neither gives an obvious place to the dual element of teaching (human teacher and spirits) and it is not clear how the particular phases he highlights arise directly from the shamanic material. The reason Lewis develops this ‘phased’ approach is because he seeks to match the phases to different levels of cult involvement as part of a discussion of shamanic traditions as cults, degree of involvement for a shamanic practitioner relating to the degree of connection he maintains with his audience. This is an approach that recalls discussions of Spiritualism as an example of a cult,¹¹⁶ perhaps prompted by the thought that the nature of Spiritualism could be ‘explained’ in terms of its organizational structure. Perhaps surprisingly for one who saw difficulties in the analyses of other scholars arising from the imposition of prior expectations on the material, Lewis arguably falls into a similar trap by seeking to connect a rigid apprenticeship schema with increasing levels of involvement in terms of a particular social structure. Again, this feels like an attempt to make variable processes of development within a network of relationships fit a more rigid sequence than is justified by the material. My suggestion is that any particular tradition’s process of apprenticeship is itself the social structure or mechanism we should be attending to.

I argue that we need to be open to the possibility of different shamanic traditions having slightly different processes of development but generally leading, through a process of traditional and spirit training, from an initial possessory experience or phase to a point where the shaman is recognised as having the ability to manage his psychic experiences, so that he is no longer personally at risk, and is able to use his spiritual skills in ways (e.g healing) that are recognised as being valuable to other members of the community. Rigid expectations as to how any given tradition gets from the beginning to the end of that process risk misinterpreting the material.

¹¹⁵ 1996, pp.118-9

¹¹⁶ See Chapter 3

5.4 Conclusions

I have pursued my apprenticeship for sixty-four years.
Matsúwa¹¹⁷

Once the importance of apprenticeship in shamanism is appreciated, it soon becomes apparent that there are many passing or incidental references to shamanism not only as the outcome of a process of apprenticeship but as an ongoing apprenticeship that continues for as long as a shaman wishes to practise.

The preceding Sections 5.2 and 5.3 demonstrate that a distinct apprenticeship model can be derived from an examination of indigenous shamanisms, comprising three distinct stages. First, one or more initiatory experiences, not initiated by the potential candidate and often possessory in nature,¹¹⁸ interpreted as indicating selection by the spirits. Secondly, a period of apprenticeship proper, during which the apprentice is tutored both by spirit guides, with an existing practitioner acting as tutor or facilitator. Thirdly, communal recognition as a practitioner (initially taking the form of a ceremony or other process whereby the candidate is recognized as a new shaman), and subsequently taking the form of ongoing monitoring (where the maintenance of recognition is in the hands of the shaman himself).

During the second phase (of apprenticeship proper), the apprentice may not simply enter upon his own exploration of his new-found access to 'spiritual' experiences but may also enter into training in the tradition, so as to be provided with a set of tools with which to shape and make sense of his psychic experiences. Thus the tradition is maintained because it is through the mechanism of apprenticeship that it is given a normative function. It is through the tradition as handed down that the spirits and the spirit world are experienced and known. The extent to which any particular shamanic tradition maintains its normative function in this way will directly affect its ability to persist. Some traditions are in this sense weak, e.g. with the Greenlandic *angakkoq*, among whom there seems to have been a very limited role for existing shamans to act as master shamans to apprentices, leading to a highly variable cosmology

¹¹⁷ Halifax, Joan; *Shamanic Voices: a survey of visionary narratives*, Arkana, London, 1991, p.250

¹¹⁸ The possessory nature of many initiatory experiences will be demonstrated more fully in Chapter 6.

(including as to description of spirits)¹¹⁹ and, consequently, a high degree of vulnerability or permeability to outside influences. By contrast, the Spiritualist tradition of Portobello Church offers an example of a highly normative, ‘strong’ local tradition.

General criticism of Eliade’s methodology might draw attention to the extent to which he draws on examples from around the world without giving a sense of what any particular shamanism is actually like, or of the wider cultural context within which it is situated (even as he argues for the Evenki (Tungus) as the archetypal shamanic society). In developing a cross-cultural model of shamanism, it is helpful to be able to demonstrate that the model can be discerned in reasonably complete form in particular examples of indigenous shamanism. The two being used for this exercise in this thesis are Spiritualist mediumship and Evenki shamanism. Eliade’s position that a cross-cultural model of shamanism need not be discernible in its entirety in any particular shamanic tradition has some persuasive weight, but the more completely a model can be identified in particular shamanisms, the better the evidence for that model.

In Chapter 6, I proceed to test my apprenticeship model of shamanism against the traditional shamanism of the Evenki. My reasons for selecting the Evenki are summarised in the introduction to Chapter 6, but Eliade’s presentation of Evenki society as that in which traditional shamanism is found in its most complete form is the principal reason. The purpose of this further exercise is to demonstrate the usefulness of the apprenticeship model for comprehending indigenous religious traditions that are already recognised as shamanic and that this is not simply a case of artificially ‘reading into’ Eliade’s work a model that supports the characterization of Spiritualism as a shamanism.

Being able to identify this model of apprenticeship in a recognized shamanic tradition supports the comparison between Spiritualism and shamanism, rather than neo-shamanism. Appreciation of shamanism as the outcome of a process of

¹¹⁹ Jakobsen, Merete Demant: *Shamanism: Traditional and Contemporary Approaches to the Mastery of Spirits and Healing*, Berghahn, New York, 1999, p.58

apprenticeship also assists in comprehending how shamanisms are structured, and how it is that the different elements in any given shamanism are related. It serves also to remind us that a simple checklist of common practices or other features cannot provide the basis for a detailed appreciation of any particular shamanism, nor can it answer the question ‘What is shamanism?’

Although I propose a model of shamanism that differs from Eliade’s, two points can be made in support of Eliade’s work. First, the apprenticeship model is derived from both my knowledge and experience of Spiritualist practice and aspects of shamanic practice described in Eliade’s work but not given priority in his model of shamanism. In this way I join a long line of scholars who have had their criticisms of Eliade but have nevertheless continued to find his work valuable. Secondly, this thesis builds upon Eliade’s argument that it is possible to identify, and therefore define, a religious phenomenon that is properly termed shamanism.

That particular shamanisms are examples of a single religious phenomenon incapable of definition in terms of the traditional ‘world religions’ paradigm is a highly significant point to be able to demonstrate. It might be possible to argue for Eliade as a pioneer in seeking to demonstrate that the various acknowledged examples of ‘world religions’ fail to accord a place for shamanism because it is not a single religion (and therefore cannot be a ‘world religion’) but is instead a single type of religious tradition, of which there can only ever be distinct culturally-specific examples (manifestations). Seeking to understand religious activity in terms of world religions fails appropriately to recognize what is, both synchronically and diachronically, one of the most persistent and widespread religious traditions.

Arguably, Eliade did himself no favours by suggesting that shamanism should be placed among the mysticisms rather than among the religions.¹²⁰ This suggestion of itself obscures what could have been an even more valuable contribution than the one

¹²⁰ 1989, p.xix. It does seem to be true that drawing connections between mediumship, spirit possession and mysticism is a persistent western habit; see, for example, Sluhovsky, Moshe: *Believe Not Every Spirit: Possession, Mysticism, & Discernment in Early Modern Catholicism*, University of Chicago Press, 2007

he is recognized for. In this particularly, Eliade's focus on ecstasy and issues of consciousness perhaps misled him, by diverting his attention from the social mechanisms whereby traditions are maintained. In comprehending shamanism, we must attend to social mechanisms because it is these that embody, and allow the transmission of, accumulated knowledge in the management of personal awareness so as to allow engagement with the spirits, with a distinct, perceptible and identifiable 'other'. It is, I argue, the social mechanism of apprenticeship that properly enables us to identify (and define) the type of religious tradition that shamanism is. I do not simply make the point that shamanism is an apprenticeship tradition (this may also be true of many other religions) but that shamanism is a tradition characterized by a specific apprenticeship, one that follows a distinct pattern in utilizing psychic experiences as the raw material of mature spiritual capability.

Before proposing the definition of shamanism that I consider to be indicated by my apprenticeship model, I use the following Chapter to test and refine the model with reference to Evenki shamanism.

Chapter Six

Case Study II: The Evenki

6.1 Introduction

For my second case study, I remove the reader from the setting of a Spiritualist Church in a British seaside town in the first decade of the twenty-first century in order to examine the shamanic tradition of the reindeer-herding Evenki of Siberia, principally during the early decades of the twentieth century. Superficially, this is a significant cultural shift. I assume in this thesis that the wider cultural setting of Portobello Spiritualist Church is likely to be reasonably familiar to the reader but that Evenki society in the early twentieth-century is likely to be less so.

Section 6.2 presents a portrait of Evenki society generally, showing the fundamental importance for the Evenki of their relationship to the land and the extent to which that relationship anchors their cosmology. This approach reveals shamans among the Evenki as advanced practitioners of a spiritual awareness that is found more widely among the Evenki people. The Evenki have traditionally exhibited a wider spiritual or animistic perspective on the world and those who follow a shaman's career path do not seem to show an awareness that is fundamentally different from that of the Evenki generally, but simply one which is heightened as a result of undergoing a sustained and sometimes intense process of training. Section 6.3 goes on to look more closely at Evenki shamanism as a particular expression of the traditional spiritual or animistic awareness of the Evenki before proceeding, in Section 6.4, to examine the Evenki shamanic apprenticeship.

Inevitably, I revert significantly to Shirokogoroff's material in this Chapter, although I do make a deliberate effort to draw upon other scholars. I broaden the range of sources not only to test Eliade's model of shamanism but to assist in developing a model that overcomes its weaknesses. To this end I apply the apprenticeship model already developed, using it as a lens through which to examine Evenki shamanism. In this way, I seek to avoid one criticism made of Eliade, that his model is not based

upon any particular example of shamanism. Further, I seek to demonstrate that the apprenticeship model I have identified as a key feature of Spiritualism (the elements of which are often evident in cross cultural descriptions of shamanism), is applicable to a particular example of traditional shamanism. If the particular apprenticeship structure I have identified is indeed characteristic of traditional shamanisms, it is to be expected that it will be found in particular examples of tradition shamanism, but will not necessarily be found in complete form (unless incidentally) in cross-cultural models of shamanism that have been developed without reference to that apprenticeship. That the elements of shamanic apprenticeship should be noticeable even to scholars who have not explored its full significance is, I suggest, testament to its importance in traditional shamanism.

The Evenki have long occupied a central place in scholarship on shamanism, not least because of Eliade's own reliance upon Shirokogoroff, and their respective etymological discussions as to the origin of the word itself.¹ Although Shirokogoroff wrote in English, it was the publication of the English translation of Eliade's *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* that brought attention to Shirokogoroff's work among English-speaking scholars.² Shirokogoroff ranks as one of Eliade's principal sources on Siberian shamanism and a number of scholars (principally Lewis) have made criticisms of Eliade based in part upon a rereading of Shirokogoroff. Shirokogoroff's work remains valuable for his detailed accounts of shamanic practices that were to undergo various attempts by the Soviet authorities to eradicate them. The indigenous peoples of Siberia were also to experience large-scale immigration from Russia, resulting in various forms of exclusion.

The extent to which contemporary scholarship on both the Evenki and shamanism continues to draw upon Shirokogoroff's work is striking, and underscores the extent to which knowledge of shamanism among the Evenki has shaped more general

¹ See Section 5.1 above.

² Znamenski suggests that a principal reason for Shirokogoroff's unpopularity lay in the fact that his 1935 work, *Psychomental Complex*, 'was the only major contemporary work that contained a critique of the view of shamanism as neurosis ... and went against the dominant psychiatric interpretation of shamanism ...': Znamenski, 2007, p.419. Shirokogoroff's work is, in broad terms, still a psychological interpretation of shamanism but he is dismissive of any interpretation of shamanism as neurosis or other illness.

understandings of shamanism. Shirokogoroff's work offers access to a way of life that has changed markedly in the decades since and is, arguably, no longer to be found as the socially integrated traditional shamanic practice he describes.³ Shamanic practices were heavily suppressed in the Soviet era on ideological grounds, particularly from the late 1930s, and Shirokogoroff's fieldwork (largely undertaken during the period 1912 to 1918)⁴ remains the best available source on traditional shamanism among the Evenki.⁵

Znamenski notes that Shirokogoroff has remained less well known among Russian scholars⁶ but his availability (if distorted by the Eliadean lens) to English-speaking scholars has given him an influence on the development of western concepts of shamanism.⁷ Znamenski points out that some of the very earliest accounts of shamanism in Siberia are in German, the Russian Tsarist Government having engaged German scholars from the eighteenth century onwards to document the newly-conquered peoples of the east, lacking a sufficiently large pool of educated Russian civil-servants who could undertake the work.⁸ It is also thanks to Znamenski⁹ that we now have access to a significant amount of English-language summaries of material relating to shamanism and the Evenki that, even a decade ago, was only available in Russian.

³ Shirokogoroff's discussion of shamanism arises in the context of a work that seeks to understand the cultural concepts and psychomental complex (the broader psychological outlook) of the Evenki people as a whole. Shamanism is understood by Shirokogoroff to be an intensified expression of wider cultural concepts and practices, and unintelligible if considered in isolation from the wider culture in which it arises.

⁴ See pp. 364-6 of *Social Organization*. Shirokogoroff's opportunities for fieldwork among Siberian Evenki came to an end in 1917 because of the Russian Revolutions of that year but he was able to undertake some fieldwork among Evenki in northern China during 1918.

⁵ There are, of course, others such as Anisimov and Suslov, who undertook fieldwork among the Evenki during the 1920s and 1930s but Znamenski notes that accounts of shamanism became increasingly critical of the tradition from the 1920s onwards: 2003, p.23

⁶ 2003, p.19; 2007, p.114

⁷ Znamenski suggests that Shirokogoroff's work remained unpopular among English-speaking scholars until the 1960s because his critique of shamanism as neurosis 'went against the dominant psychiatric interpretation of shamanism'; 2007, p.419

⁸ 2003, p.1

⁹ 2003

6.2 Evenki Lands and Society

The Evenki are traditionally a nomadic, hunting, reindeer-herding and forest-dwelling people, whose traditional homelands lie in Siberia and for whom the clan is the basic social unit.¹⁰ The nomadic lifestyle enjoyed in the past has become a more settled one over the course of the twentieth century as central Tsarist and Soviet authorities sought to exert control. The traditional activities of hunting and keeping reindeer have been maintained up to a point but Gail Fondahl,¹¹ writing of her visits to Northern Transbaykalia (south-east Siberia) from 1992, speaks of reindeer herding having suffered a ‘precipitous decline in recent years’.¹²

The parts of Siberia traditionally regarded as Evenki homelands comprise a crescent-shaped area to the west, south and east of the Sakha homeland in north-eastern Siberia, with the Buryat and Altaian peoples to the south-west, Manchu China to the south-east and the related Even people to the north-east.¹³ The Evenki lands cover an extremely large area, which is now shared by them with a much larger population who have migrated from the west from the seventeenth century onwards. In the early years of the twentieth century, the Evenki were the most populous of the northern indigenous peoples, although today they are outnumbered by the Nentsy.¹⁴ Fondahl quotes figures giving an Evenki population of 38,805 in 1926, falling to 24,151 in 1959 and gradually recovering since then to a figure of 30,163 in 1989.¹⁵

During her time among the Evenki, Fondahl was struck by the extent to which land rights preoccupied them and formed the topic of conversation, especially in the context of attempts to reinvigorate traditional activities, particularly reindeer-

¹⁰ Shirokogoroff, 1966, p.189

¹¹ 1998

¹² *ibid.*, p.x. See also Jordan, 2001, pp.6, 38, 40-1; and Anderson, 2000, pp.7-9, 218.

¹³ An ethnological map of Siberia is shown in Znamenski 2003, facing p.1. See also Fondahl, 1998, p.135

¹⁴ Fondahl, 1998

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.136

herding.¹⁶ Fondahl tells us that, in Northern Transbaykalia, the Evenki refer to themselves as the *Orochëny*, meaning ‘reindeer people,’¹⁷ and goes on to note that:

Two oft-repeated comments summarize many Evenkis’ concerns: ‘Without rights to land there will be no reindeer husbandry,’ and ‘Without reindeer, there can be no Evenkis.’¹⁸

Fondahl notes that, for the Evenki, land provides physical sustenance in the form of food (by hunting, trapping and fishing) and medicinal plants for humans, together with foraging for reindeer herds, but also that the land has ‘symbolic’ value:

The Evenki landscape inculcates spiritual meaning, as the homeland of generations past and those still to come, and as the earthly nexus between other strata of their cosmology.¹⁹

Fondahl is very clear that, for the Evenki, the ability to maintain their cultural identity is intimately bound up with ways of protecting their ability to maintain control of their traditional homelands in the face of ongoing immigration by a ‘nonindigenous population’²⁰ that neither shares nor seeks to understand the Evenki relationship to the land and its resources. In the pre-Soviet era, the Evenki were classified as a ‘wandering’ people²¹: nomadic in the sense that they migrated from one camp site to another throughout the course of the year. From the 1920s, the Evenki were regarded by Soviet officials as exhibiting ‘extreme backwardness,’²² requiring a programme of settlement, formal education and encouragement to take up more progressive occupations. Such programmes intensified from the 1930s and resulted in the repression of many religious and other traditional beliefs and practices, including those maintained by Evenki shamans. Shamans were regarded as enemies of the people and specifically excluded from joining collective farms because, on the secular Soviet view, they were regarded as religious leaders.²³

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.x, 1.

¹⁷ *ibid.*, p.2

¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.3

¹⁹ *ibid.*

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*, p.4

²² *ibid.*, p.5

²³ *ibid.*, p.59. The process of collectivization in the Soviet era aimed at ending (or at least restricting) private ownership in favour of collectives or communal forms of ownership. The traditional Evenki

Fondahl portrays a traditional Evenki political structure that gives place to tribal elders who are not shamans, indicating a distinction between political and spiritual or religious leadership.²⁴ Whatever the social position of the shaman may have been in the past, it is clear that from the 1920s onwards, Soviet officials regarded them as primarily responsible for the ‘overall cultural backwardness’ of the people.²⁵ Although some policies attempted to outmanoeuvre shamans so as to render them irrelevant, forms of coercion such as confiscation of regalia and exile were also employed.²⁶

In mapping out changing entitlements to land rights, Fondahl particularly draws attention to the process of collectivization from the late 1930s onwards, which involved repeated attempts to eradicate ‘primitive’ aboriginal practices. In addition to the spiritual leadership of Evenki shamans, tribal elders also found their influence diminished through being accorded low priority for grants of land use, preference being given to collective farms and poorer individuals who had not yet joined a collective. The rationale for this order of priority was that those Evenki with the largest herds had tended to be hirers of other Evenki and, therefore, ‘kulaks’ or exploiters of the people. Choices as to where to hunt became collectivized, rather than being left to experienced individuals who enjoyed a traditional familiarity with the land. Soviet processes of collectivization thus rendered traditional knowledge less valuable, particularly in that it ceases to be relevant to an individual’s social standing. Fondahl is quite clear that, although the pretext for Soviet programmes was the perceived backwardness of the Evenki, such programmes involved clear repression of the culturally literate, including Evenki shamans.²⁷ That said, Fondahl

relationship to the land was disrupted by such programmes and were often responsible for them being required to think in terms of ownership of land for the first time. Shamans as religious leaders with a degree of social influence were seen as obstacles to such programmes from the Soviet perspective. See also Willerslev, 2007, p.10; Anderson, 2000, p.47.

²⁴ This distinction is also evident in Shirokogroff, although there are hints that shamans enjoyed a degree of social leadership in time past and it is clear that they retained a degree of influence as a result of their continuing special social standing. See also Willerslev, 2007, pp.134, 200.

²⁵ Slezkine 1994, p.226

²⁶ *ibid.*, p.227

²⁷ Fondahl, 1998, 81

does find evidence of the persistence of the traditional Evenki lifestyle through the 1940s and 1950s,²⁸ concluding that,

The wiser officials, charged with reconstructing aboriginal economies, abolished the elements which they deemed most abhorrent to Soviet ideology, and tried to leave the management of what remained to be guided by aboriginal knowledge of the land and its resources.²⁹

Fondahl also highlights a deterioration in the social and economic standing of women because of land allocations to men; traditionally both men and women were reindeer herders (and shamans).³⁰ But it is clear that shamans were valued by their communities:

Time after time the native northerners refused to testify against shamans in court or to attend meetings without them. Often whole communities followed their shamans into expulsion. In more places still, shamanism became secret: the shamans retained their right to vote by surrendering their tambourines [drums] but continued to practice outside the reach of the Russian administrators.³¹

With the collapse of communism from the 1980s and the uneven transition to a market economy that has followed, the position relating to land rights has been subject to conflicting political and legislative aims. Although there has been greater openness in discussing the issue of indigenous land rights, a higher incidence of private landownership has restricted the uninterrupted land tracts available for allocation to indigenous groups.³² Fondahl's account of attempts to reclaim space for traditional activities makes no mention of the recovery of shamanic activity, suggesting that the loss of the traditional way of life of the Evenki led also to the loss of the spirit-aware or animistic world view that found expression in the apprenticeship and career of the shaman.

Given the decline in social scope for the maintenance of shamanic activity, it comes as little surprise to find that attempts to describe shamanism among the Evenki

²⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 60-3

²⁹ *ibid.*, p.63

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp.62, 83, 107-8

³¹ Slezkine, 1994, p.228

³² See Fondahl, 1998, Chapters 5 & 6.

continue to rely upon older ethnographic studies (particularly the work of Shirokogoroff) and upon brief mentions of shamanism in studies such as Fondahl's, which may be relevant to understanding aspects of Evenki society more widely but in which shamanism itself is not the primary concern. Fondahl, for example, while noting that knowledge of the land is relevant in both a physical and a spiritual sense, simply refers to an Evenki awareness of the 'forces or spirits which populated it.'³³ That apart, Fondahl gives us only brief mention of food and drink being offered to local spirits in order to ensure safe travelling,³⁴ the use of amulets on new-born children to ward off evil spirits³⁵ and the need to maintain a 'favorable relation with the spirits of the animals and their keepers'³⁶ by adhering to rules governing the killing of animals and 'the disposition of their bones and other remains.'³⁷

Such hints may be tantalising but they do at least alert us a clear awareness among the Evenki of spirits that are in some way present in, or otherwise able to interact with, this physical world, and some of which may be connected with a particular place. David Anderson³⁸ devotes a whole chapter in his study of the Evenki to what he terms their 'Sentient Ecology',³⁹ by which he means an ability or skill-based competence in or awareness of the natural world:

Knowing ... is a concept which is not codified but is demonstrated by example. Rarely, elders might talk of the old man who 'could fly like a ptarmigan' or the old woman who 'knew thunder'. These examples of the *hamanil* [shamans; knowing-ones] are both distant in time and in relevance to everyday life in the brigade. However the concept of knowing persists in stories of people being able to rescue themselves from impossible circumstances...⁴⁰

The sentient ecology Anderson describes extends beyond the Evenki to the land itself and its animals. Deer are said to be aware when a hunter intends to hunt and

³³ *ibid.*, p.37

³⁴ *ibid.*, p.91. See also Heyne, 2003, p.31

³⁵ Fondahl, 1998, p.19. Shirokogoroff discusses the use of amulets for the protection of newborns in some detail; see 1966, pp.280-1

³⁶ Fondahl, 1998, p.32

³⁷ *ibid.*

³⁸ *Identity and Ecology in Arctic Siberia*, 2000

³⁹ *ibid.*, Chapter 6

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, pp.117-8

apprentices are taught various ways of avoiding disclosure of their intentions. The land is thanked when a kill is made and the site of the kill acknowledged, especially if it is the known place of a spirit.⁴¹ Among the resources the land offers are both knowledge and opportunity, which are legitimately taken provided the relationship with the land is honoured: thus animals that may be taken might be signified in a dream before the hunt and, once taken, rules as to their consumption and disposal must be followed.⁴² For example, the ‘proper way to treat a fish after it has been consumed is to break the skeleton into pieces “so that the fish come back”’.⁴³ The reason the skeleton is broken reflects the belief that everything in this world has its counterpart in the spirit world but that things are reversed as between that world and this. The breaking of the fish skeleton maintains the balance by re-creating the fish in the spirit world, so that it may re-enter this world, preserving the resources of the land. In this context, Anderson describes a wider practice of giving and taking with the land, one of ongoing relationship:

Any object which snapped or cracked would be placed up in a tree for the land since the fact that it broke was seen as a sign that the land demanded it.⁴⁴

The Evenki relationship with the land reflects an awareness of a spirit world that connects to the land and interacts with it. The relationship is therefore not simply with the land but with what might be called an extended environment, to which a proper awareness of the land or ‘knowing’ gives access. This is not the knowing of facts but the knowing of another by being in relationship with them:

Evenki notions of appropriation suggest that in order to understand the legitimate entitlement of a person to land, one must consider how that person attends to the landscape. A proper Evenki entitlement reflects not only a lifetime of contact with a territory but a proper way of knowing all the sentient persons on that landscape. This relational idea encourages anthropologists ... to consider property in an ecological frame which recognizes the agency of other than human persons.⁴⁵

⁴¹ *ibid.*, pp.126-7

⁴² *ibid.*, p.128

⁴³ *ibid.*

⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.127

⁴⁵ Anderson, 1998, p.82

This is a knowing that extends beyond spirits of the land to human, especially ancestor, spirits. Anderson tells us that, among the Evenki of Lake Khantaika,

On the Orthodox All Souls' Day and on the anniversaries of the deaths of individuals, mourning relatives ... visit those who have passed on to the 'other settlement'. By the grave sites they gather to drink with the dead and to bring them their clothing, food, and personal items – all of which are ritually broken and left by the graveside – before ... retracing their steps ...⁴⁶

Among the Evenki, the spirits of the dead continue to seek involvement in this world:

According to Evenki cosmology, the spirits of those in either the Upper World or the Lower World remain close by graves. If one circles a grave, the 'shadow' of the dead person will be able to 'catch' your trail, causing illness or death. Dead souls are notoriously greedy for company and will stop at nothing to take the living with them. Graveyards are best avoided, but if entered, one is advised to always trace one's journey back the way one came.⁴⁷

Shirokogoroff was acutely aware of the importance of ancestor spirits for the Evenki, highlighting 'ancestral worship' as an important practice.⁴⁸ The word 'worship' is perhaps slightly misleading in this context because what Shirokogoroff actually describes is the practice of keeping alive or 'feeding' the memory of deceased clan members, rather than any form of worship as such. There is also a clear belief that each clan has its own spirits (both ancestor and other), which 'must be mastered by clan members.'⁴⁹ The members of other clans have no relationship with those spirits. This gives rise to the need for what might be termed protocols⁵⁰ in order to deal with the 'incoming' spirits that follow a new clan member who has not been born into the clan. The commonest reason for this was marriage, as the Evenki practised a system of exogamy, prohibiting marriage within the clan.⁵¹

⁴⁶ Anderson, 2000, p.65

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, fn.10

⁴⁸ Shirokogoroff, 1966, p.193

⁴⁹ *ibid.*

⁵⁰ Not a term that the cited authors use but it does capture the understanding that there are established procedures or formulas for dealing with certain recurrent situations that give rise to the need to deal with (whether to integrate or repel) non-clan or alien spirits which the clan encounters.

⁵¹ Shirokogoroff, 1966, p.210

Upon marriage, a woman was ‘adopted’ by her husband’s clan, and the spirits accompanying her represent a source of possible complication. The reasons why bring out two interesting aspects of the Evenki understanding of spirits. First, spirits are not necessarily benevolent and may instead be a source of trouble or difficulty.⁵² When a married woman’s spirits are introduced into the clan, it may not even be clear whose spirits are giving rise to the problem. In principle, any person has the potential to ‘carry’ spirits with him or her.⁵³ Awareness of this uncertainty underlies the choice of an appropriate response or remedy. The second reason concerns the Evenki concept of the ‘placing’ of spirits. The natural world is one part of a wider cosmology within which spirits are ‘placed,’ meaning that there is somewhere, someone or something to which they ‘belong’ to, are connected to, or may be introduced into. We have noted that spirits may be connected to a particular place (hence the practice of offering to the spirits of a place in order to ensure safe travels), or to a person (hence the care with which a new clan member is treated), but they may also be ‘placed’ with an item or an animal, which acts as a ‘carrier’ or acknowledged place of connection with the spirit.⁵⁴ For the Evenki, the reindeer (or horse, for those Evenki clans who use them) is the most important animal placing: an awareness of this aspect of Evenki awareness helps to amplify our understanding of the Evenki feeling that without reindeer there can be no Evenki. The importance of the concept of placing also helps to understand practices such as the use of amulets to ward off evil (for example, to protect ‘unaware’ newborns): it is not the amulet itself that protects but the spirits placed with it.

In the Evenki attitude to the spirits of the dead, the concept of ‘placing,’ and mention of Upper and Lower Worlds, we begin to see hints of a wider cosmology, which has been explored and articulated more fully in accounts of the Evenki that have focused more particularly on shamanic practice and belief. In Section 6.3, I go on to explore the institution of shamanism within Evenki society but this short description of the traditional Evenki relationship to the land, and how crucial that relationship is to the

⁵² *ibid.*, p.261

⁵³ *ibid.*, p.262

⁵⁴ *ibid.*, pp.260-2 In the case of animals, its role as a placing for the spirits includes the sense that it can act as a messenger to the spirits; see p.261

Evenki sense of 'knowing', enables us to grasp the social context within which the shaman is accepted as one who 'knows'.⁵⁵ The point I seek to emphasise is that shamans are not regarded as people who 'know' in a fundamentally different way, but that their 'knowing' is a fuller or more highly developed form of a spiritual or animistic awareness that, for the Evenki, is a normal part of life. Knecht makes the point that a wider belief in spirits serves as a general foundation for shamanism,⁵⁶ and gives shamanism an unusual adaptive capability⁵⁷ but, in looking more widely at traditional Evenki society, we see that their belief in spirits does not simply just happen to be there: that wider belief arises, in turn, out of the Evenki relationship with the land to which they belong.

⁵⁵ Knecht, 2003, p.13

⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.24

⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.2

6.3 Shamanism among the Evenki

Evenki shamanism illustrates Eliade's characterization of shamanism as an integrated, contextualised religious practice. Shamanism, correctly identified, does not simply occur: it belongs to and expresses a wider cultural awareness. In this, Eliade follows Shirokogoroff. The great value of Shirokogoroff's work on the Evenki lies not only in his record of a traditional shamanism but also in his desire to record and understand the language and culture of the Evenki out of which shamanism arises. Shirokogoroff provides us with an account of a culture that finds particular expression in its shamans and their practices. Shirokogoroff felt shamanism among the Evenki worth examining because he came to realise that it relied upon, embodied and sustained wider Evenki cultural concepts. This is the basis of Shirokogoroff's insistence that extracting the sections of his work specifically examining shamanism would lead to a distorted understanding of Evenki shamanism because the social context giving rise to it would be overlooked.⁵⁸ Although it is now too late to adhere to Shirokogoroff's view that shamanism is properly an Evenki tradition, his plea for attention to social context is one that is still worth attending to. For Shirokogoroff, shamanism is a particular form of social or cultural intensification of widely-held beliefs in the person of a specialist, again supporting Douglas Davies' suggestion that religion can be understood as a form of cultural intensification.⁵⁹ On this model, shamanic scéances held to test and, if successful, recognize a new shaman, can be understood as rites of intensification: namely, rituals whose purpose is to validate beliefs and related practices held more widely in Evenki society by intensifying them or bringing them sharply into focus at a particular point in time and space by embodying them in the person of a dedicated practitioner who will apply them for the benefit of the community.

6.3.1 Shirokogoroff's preliminary model of shamanism

Before proceeding specifically to examine apprenticeship in Evenki shamanism, I wish to examine the development of Shirokogoroff's understanding. His first attempt

⁵⁸ 1999, p.241

⁵⁹ 2008

to develop a model of shamanism is set out in an article in Russian in 1919,⁶⁰ the conclusions from which were first published in English translation in 1923⁶¹ and are reproduced in a supplementary note to *Social Organization of the Northern Tungus*.⁶² Shirokogoroff offers eight preliminary conclusions, from which I draw attention to the following extracts:

1. Animism forms the *milieu* of shamanism and also provides the basis for the special shamanist system of ghosts. ... *Animism, being a universal philosophical system, is among the Tungus tribes a primary condition for the existence of shamanism.*
2. The principal characteristics of shamanism consist in the *recognition on the part of some persons of their ability to possess spirits whenever they desire to do so, and, by the aid of these spirits, using particular methods unknown to other men, to know phenomena of a supernatural order.* The characteristic peculiar to shamanism consists in the *recognition of the special rites, clothing, instruments, and the peculiar social position of the shaman.*
3. During the shamanist performance, the shaman must always fall into ecstasies so that the control of his consciousness would be as insignificant as possible, and his logical processes would not be regulated by the ordinary principles... the shaman obtains new possibilities of conscious and unconscious influence over the people. The practical methods of acquiring this influence are not yet known to us, ...
4. The shaman uses some special artificial methods of falling into ecstasies and of maintaining this state throughout his operations. Therefore, *the shaman knows the methods of falling into ecstatic states and, the maintenance of which illness and infirmity considerably obstruct.*
5. [The shaman is] “the safety valve” of the clan.
6. The influence of the shaman is especially effective in the presence of a great crowd, ...

⁶⁰ 1966, p.364

⁶¹ In the *Journal of the North China Branch of the Royal Asiatic Society*.

⁶² 1966, pp.364-6

7. [If] the shaman falls under the influence of his own spirits and becomes their instrument ... his ability of self-control decreases and he loses his quality as physician or “safety valve” of the clan, ...
8. Shamanism ... cannot be considered as a religion in the ordinary sense of the word. It may be practised at the same time with religions such as Buddhism, Christianity etc., and can exist simultaneously with other *animistic* systems. *The theory of ghosts or spirits, their relations to men, are only the forms that in the mind of the shamanist generalize all the phenomena of normal and pathological psychic life. The shaman and shamanism are the organs and system regulating these phenomena and have for their principal concern the hygienic and preventive quality par excellence.*

For Shirokogoroff, shamanism arises from a wider social setting that is marked by animism, and is a possession practice that enables the knowledge of supernatural phenomena. This possession practice is characterized by an unusual state of consciousness, resulting from the ability to achieve and maintain a state of equilibrium between consciousness and unconsciousness, and which Shirokogoroff refers to as a form of elevated awareness or ‘ecstasy’. Thus Evenki shamanism is a controlled possession practice requiring self-control during the ecstatic state, a form of competency that requires the practitioner to be in a state of physical and mental health. When the shaman’s health and self-control deteriorate, so too does shamanic capability. We also have Shirokogoroff’s observation that shamanism is not a world religion in terms of the ‘world religions’ paradigm that still characterizes religious studies, but is instead a traditional practice that can be bundled together with other forms of religious observance.

Shirokogoroff’s initial thoughts on shamanism are also striking for three particular omissions. First, there is no mention of shamanic journeying or travelling. Shamanism is characterized as a form of possession, with the self-control or self-possession of the shaman enabling him to possess spirits, both in the sense of having them (or their support) at his disposal, and in the sense of being able to incarnate them safely.

Secondly, it is not at all obvious that Shirokogoroff thought animal or nature spirits as the most significant; at this stage, the only spirits he specifies are human spirits or ghosts. The mention of an underlying ‘animist’ perspective might be taken as indicating non-human spirits (which are clearly present in Evenki shamanism) but if we take this to mean only non-human spirits, we miss Shirokogoroff’s meaning. Stringer has recently reminded us that modern uses of the term ‘animism’ can differ markedly from the use made of the term by earlier scholars such as Tylor.⁶³ This is not a debate I need to engage with in detail but I need to refer to it in order to articulate what Shirokogoroff says. Harvey’s contemporary reference to spirits as ‘other-than-human-persons’⁶⁴ is clearly not what Shirokogoroff means; along with other spirits, human persons are clearly indicated (albeit it discarnate or disembodied ones). The use of the term ‘persons’ can help to indicate the closeness of the relationship and the perception of awareness on the part of the ‘non-empirical other’ (to use Stringer’s phrase),⁶⁵ but it is a usage that, in the current context, risks obscuring Shirokogoroff’s principal reference to human persons who are now in the spirit worlds. Further, a lack of awareness of an older understanding of animism as a reference to people (possibly together with animals, plants and perhaps some inanimate objects), as having a soul or ‘spirit’ part that continues in disembodied form, can lead to an over-emphasis on non-human spirits.⁶⁶ As we shall see below, Eliade’s passing comment that Evenki shamanism appears to be ‘dominated’ by spirit guides, appears to be prompted by Shirokogoroff’s detailed descriptions of human guides.

Thirdly, Shirokogoroff omits any mention of apprenticeship. At this stage, he simply acknowledges that he is unaware of the means whereby a shaman comes to be recognized and acknowledged as a shaman.⁶⁷ This comment, in particular, reveals

⁶³ Stringer, 2008, pp.107-9

⁶⁴ Harvey, 2005, pp.196-7

⁶⁵ I prefer the phrase ‘non-physical other’. As a practising medium, I regard myself as having an empirical awareness of spirits. That which I am aware of through my physical senses, I regard as mediated and, therefore, non-empirical.

⁶⁶ The term ‘animism’ derives from the concept of ‘animus’, classically an attribute of the human psyche; Stringer, p.9

⁶⁷ 1966, p.365

Shirokogoroff's description as a preliminary one, in that it is formulated by considering the final shamanic 'product', as it were, rather than by attending to the processes whereby that product is achieved. Indeed, I argue that any attempt to comprehend shamanisms without attending to those underlying processes can only be preliminary. Shirokogoroff, to his credit, acknowledges this limitation and attends to it, as is evident from the more developed understanding of shamanism presented in *Psychomental Complex*. It must, however, be acknowledged that Shirokogoroff never reaches the point where he is able to describe the shamanic apprenticeship in its entirety.

In the following parts of this Section, I go on to examine particular aspects of Evenki shamanism, such as clothing and other equipment, the social role of the shaman as healer (or 'safety valve'), ending with Shirokogoroff's developed understanding of shamanic consciousness. I do this so as to offer a more complete understanding of Evenki shamanism, as a foundation for the comparison with Spiritualist mediumship in its developed form that I set out in next Chapter. I then proceed in Section 6.4 to focus more closely upon Evenki shamanic apprenticeship.

6.3.2 Social identity and role of the shaman

We have noted that, among the Evenki, each clan has its own spirits, connected to the people and places of that clan. It comes, therefore, as no great surprise to find that each clan has its own shaman (or shamans), usually drawn from among its own ranks.⁶⁸ This practice seems to derive from the Evenki sense that only people from the clan can properly relate to the clan's spirits. Shirokogoroff draws attention to the understanding that some clan spirits are too powerful to be mastered but may be managed by experienced individuals.⁶⁹ Heyne⁷⁰ makes the point that the clan spirits include the spirits of past shamans, who continue to be interested in clan affairs.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Shirokogoroff, 1966, p.193. Shirokogoroff does also note that there can be independent shamans who are not connected with a particular clan (1999, p.344) but maintains that there is a tendency to keep transmission within the clan of the previous shaman, 1999, p.346

⁶⁹ *ibid.* It seems clear that this is a reference to the clan shaman(s).

⁷⁰ 2003

⁷¹ *ibid.*, p.32

Knecht notes that ‘the shaman is expected to fulfil a social role and to respond to the expectations of society’.⁷² Scholars such as Fondahl make only occasional reference to the role of shaman in Evenki society, which is frustrating in terms of building up a picture of shamanism but supports the understanding of the Evenki shaman as a specialist brought in when the knowledge and skills shared generally among the Evenki people require to be supplemented. The role of the shaman as healer is, nevertheless, soon apparent. In relating the hypothetical but typical tale of an Evenki woman (‘Basuk’) born around 1900,⁷³ Fondahl relates the tale from Basuk’s childhood of her cousin suffering too serious a burn to be healed by the usual medicinal plants:

Luckily a local shaman had been nomadizing nearby. He treated the burn with a bear-paw, which covered the niece’s hand for a day and a night. When he removed it, what had appeared to be a nasty scorch left almost no scar.⁷⁴

Fondahl also makes mention of a female shaman being sent for in order to assist Basuk with a difficult labour, the prescribed remedies comprising various herbal medicines, some to be consumed, some applied topically.⁷⁵

Just as spirits can be unpredictable, in that they or their influence can be good or bad, shamans too, taken individually, can be good or bad. Some shamans use their abilities productively, whereas others might be willing to use their ability to heal so as to cause harm instead. In the context of disputes between clans, or between shamans of different clans, a willingness to use shamanic ability to gain advantage over the other, from the point of view of the shaman’s own clan, render the shaman even more valuable. The test here is very much a social one, as to whether the shaman is acting out of personal self-interest or the perceived self-interest of the shaman’s clan.

⁷² 2003, p.13

⁷³ Fondahl, 1998, pp.18-19

⁷⁴ *ibid.*, p.21

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, p.23

Vitebsky reproduces Anisimov's account of an attack, cure and counter-attack between clans, represented pictorially.⁷⁶ The initial attack takes the form of a spirit sent by an opposing shaman and his assistants to attack a member of another clan, taking away the victim's soul. The shaman of the victim's clan then has the task of diagnosing the problem with the assistance of his own spirits, recovering the stolen soul and subsequently attacking a member of the opposing clan. The clan's standing spirit defences are strengthened in order to prevent further attack by the same route. Vitebsky concludes that the healing side of shamanism 'appears inseparable from what we must call sorcery'⁷⁷ but it seems clear that, although the purpose to which they are put is different, the skills involved remain the same and are classically shamanic. The use of terms such as sorcery is therefore potentially unhelpful if used in order to suggest some distinction from shamanism: if the term sorcery is used to indicate a morally dubious application of shamanic skills, it is still shamanism. It is more useful to acknowledge that part of the traditional role of the shaman is to diagnose and protect against attack by spirits (which may or may not be prompted by other shamans) and to be able to initiate such attacks.

In the above account from Anisimov, the opposing shaman is not attacked directly but the possibility is not ruled out. Shirokogoroff gives the example of a man who was in dispute with a shaman and chose to make a placing into which he called the shaman's soul, subsequently blowing up the placing with gunpowder. The account relates that the man was lucky in his hunting the next day and visited the shaman, only to find the shaman's home partly destroyed and the shaman badly burnt on the same side as the partially-destroyed placing.⁷⁸ Shirokogoroff tells us that such events were rare, and in this case prompted (and justified) by the shaman's willingness to use his abilities for his own purposes, but it reinforces the view of shamanic awareness (or of a spiritual or animistic awareness of the world) as present widely in Evenki society. The man who was in dispute with the shaman was not himself a shaman but understood enough about shamanic practice to be able to create a placing, in order to counter the shaman's use (or misuse) of his abilities.

⁷⁶ Vitebsky, 2001, pp.112-3. This account is taken from Anisimov, 1964

⁷⁷ *ibid.*, p.113

⁷⁸ Shirokogoroff, 1966, p.328

The social role of the Evenki shaman reflects this wider awareness. Eliade tells us that it is the shaman's responsibility to maintain 'the spiritual equilibrium of the entire society.'⁷⁹ Thus it falls to the shaman to maintain that equilibrium in the world beyond as well as in the natural world:

The Tungus shamans also take part in a certain number of sacrifices. In addition, the annual sacrifice offered to a shaman's spirits is also a great religious event for the entire tribe. And, of course, shamans are indispensable in hunting and fishing rites.

Séances that include a descent to the world below may be undertaken for the following reasons: (1) sacrifices to be conveyed to ancestors and the dead in the nether regions; (2) search for the soul of a patient and its return; (3) escorting the dead who are unwilling to leave this world and settling them in the land of shades.⁸⁰

The role of psychopomp, or conductor of the dead (usually to the Lower World),⁸¹ falls to the shaman because a shaman is concerned with the proper placing of spirits. Shamanic diagnoses are often concerned with the presence or location of spirits, or with soul retrieval, which involves finding or locating a person's soul and retrieving it, which simply means relocating it in its proper place in time and space.⁸² On the Evenki world-view, the possibility of no longer being alive at all, anywhere, seemingly does not arise. The natural or physical world is part of a larger cosmology or reality within which the difference between a person being dead or alive is instead a question of where that soul or spirit properly belongs, or is appropriately located, at any given point in time. Correct location is a matter of correct relationship. The death of an Evenk is accompanied by various rites, often including reindeer sacrifice, intended to ensure that the soul of the deceased finds its way to its new home.⁸³ If, upon leaving the natural world, a soul is unable to find its way to its proper place, it is the shaman's task to take that soul in hand and to lead it there, or relocate it. This is an important part of the shaman's responsibility for the natural order: Stutley

⁷⁹ Eliade, 1989, p.237

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.238. Eliade relies heavily on Shirokogoroff, 1999, pp. 306-7, and 322ff for this summary.

⁸¹ Usually, but not always. It is clear from Shirokogoroff that the soul of the deceased may merit a place in the upper world; quite why is not entirely clear but the point is that it remains the shaman's task to conduct the soul as appropriate.

⁸² Shirokogoroff gives the example of a shaman predicting a woman's time of death. 1966, p.321

⁸³ Stutley, 2003, pp.104-5

reminds us that lost souls can become demons or ghosts who present a danger to the living.⁸⁴ Inappropriate location leads to (or may arise from) inappropriate relationship.

The Russian ethnographer, Viktor Vasiliev, gives what Znamenski described as a 'semi-fictional' account of a shaman's journey to the underworld⁸⁵ to rescue an 'imprisoned' soul and deliver it safely to the 'nine heavenly spheres, the domain of Ai-toion, the creator of the world, where the tortured soul would be "treated and taken care of."'⁸⁶ The underworld is presented as a place of danger, the upper world as a place of safety and healing. We are also told that 'Only great shamans could reach the last ninth sky, where Ai-toion lived.'⁸⁷

It is the ability of the shaman to act as psychopomp (conductor), and in this sense to control or manage spirits (including the souls of the deceased), that renders it safe for the shaman to interact with spirits when it would be unsafe for others to do so. Knecht⁸⁸ points out that Shirokogoroff reported that common people may be able to call or identify a soul from the other world but that it may not wish to return there,⁸⁹ with the risk that it would subsequently become a *nuié* or a danger. Restricting such activity to the shaman helps to ensure that this risk is avoided.

It follows, then, that the role of psychopomp also extends to births as well as deaths: within a world view that understands souls as existing prior to their appearance in the natural world, a birth represents simply another repositioning or relocating. Eliade notes that 'the Tungus say that, before birth, the souls of children perch like little birds on the branches of the Cosmic Tree and the shamans go there to find them.'⁹⁰ Eliade also notes the Cosmic Tree as a frequent motif in the initiatory dreams of

⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.101; also p.104

⁸⁵ Vasiliev, Viktor N., 'Shaman kamlait [A Shaman Performs]', *Yunnaiia Rossia*, 2 (February 1910), pp.191-210, summarized in Znamenski, 2003, pp.120-3.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.122

⁸⁷ *ibid.*, p.123

⁸⁸ 2003

⁸⁹ *ibid.*, p.17

⁹⁰ Eliade, 1989, p.272

future shamans, perhaps implying a connection with psychological, as well as physical, birth.⁹¹

A shaman's own passing to the world of spirit represents another kind of birth, or transfer to a new environment, with great significance for the clan. Heyne draws attention to Shirokogoroff's account of what happened to an Evenki clan after the death of its shaman,⁹² with the spirits of the clan being 'let loose', with resulting illnesses and crimes, to the extent that 'the group may be in danger of ruin'. Although the shaman becomes one of the clan spirits, the loss of his physical body is understood also to result in his loss of control over other spirits. Exactly why this should be so is not entirely clear but it is confirmed by Anatolij Kajgorodov's work⁹³ among a group of Chinese reindeer-Evenki,⁹⁴ whose sole surviving shaman (female) died in 1944:

Deprived of its security valve, the group was now left without protection against the spirits and experienced a catastrophic period without a shaman. The spiritual safeguards the deceased shaman had erected while alive broke down; abnormal states of mind became frequent; illness, accidents, suicides, and other misfortunes increased; between the clans cruel excesses and some terrible murders prompted by desires for blood revenge occurred.⁹⁵

A number of points are evident from this account. Although the reason or mechanism for this may not be fully explained, it is clear that the death of a shaman (and the loss of his own physical connection with the natural world) results in the release or 'letting loose' of the spirits that had previously been under his control. Both here and in Anisimov's account given above of an inter-clan attack and counter-attack there is mention of safeguards or protections put in place by the shaman. In the Vitebsky account, these include the placing of spirits in larch poles, which poles are then placed as a protective boundary. The suggestion then, is that shamanic control over spirits is not simply a matter of ongoing direct, personal control by the shaman but is effected (at least in part) by arrangements, of one sort or another, made by the

⁹¹ *ibid.*, pp. 39f and 272

⁹² 2003, p.32. Heyne quotes Shirokogoroff, 1999, pp.79-80

⁹³ Heyne, 2003, p.32

⁹⁴ Thought to be the descendants of three clans who migrated across the Amur River into north-eastern China in the late 1820s.

⁹⁵ Heyne, 2003, p.33

shaman while alive, and in some way broken or disrupted by the shaman's death, or departure from this world.

It is also clear that the consequences of that loss of control over the clan spirits can be severe, even to the extent of endangering the survival of the clan because of the disruption the spirits are now free to cause.⁹⁶ Thus it becomes crucial to ensure that someone succeeds a previous shaman, and the processes involved in selecting and training future shamans are the focus of the next section of this chapter. Before proceeding with that particular examination, however, I wish to examine various ways in which a shaman's clothing and other accoutrements reflect and reinforce the shamanic role that I have outlined, and the wider spirit cosmology that they reference.

6.3.3 The concepts of soul and spirit

Shirokogoroff tells us that the Evenki concept of spirit arises from recognition of an 'immaterial substance' comprising the life force of a person, or animal, which has objective existence and thus may be 'exteriated'.⁹⁷ The possibility of exteriation means that any particular physical or material form is (potentially) simply a temporary housing or placing for that spirit. A spirit 'is like the human being, only it cannot be perceived with sight, touch, smell and taste.'⁹⁸ There is variation in detail among the Evenki as to which particular spirits exist and how they inter-relate but the concept of the soul or human spirit as being three-fold is widespread. Shirokogoroff proposes the following summary as representative: (i) the principal soul is the individual consciousness, (ii) the second part of the soul is the part responsible for the higher physiological functions, including reproduction, and (iii) the third part of the soul Shirokogoroff refers to as the 'migrating' part or 'external soul'.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ A shaman may also have left behind non-clan spirits which he had brought under his personal control.

⁹⁷ Shirokogoroff, 1999, p.54

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, p.55

⁹⁹ *ibid.* Shirokogoroff describes the external or migrating soul as the one familiar to Europeans but it is not clear why he says this. This general schema is described by Shirokogoroff as being Manchu in

The presence of a soul distinguishes humans and animals from plants; the presence of the principal soul distinguishes humans from other animals.¹⁰⁰ The three parts of the human soul must be maintained in balance for good health and proper functioning: each part is capable of being exteriorised separately, hence the possibility of ‘soul loss’ without death occurring. As we have seen, one of the functions of a shaman is to diagnose illness and, in the event of a diagnosis of soul loss, to locate the lost (part of the) soul and relocate it in its proper place (i.e. return it to its proper placing, the patient’s body). Following death, according to the original Manchu understanding, the first and second souls are said to return to *ongos* ‘i *mama*, the spirit of the upper world, (the second soul for being given to other children), and the third soul is said to return to *ilmunxan*, the spirit of the lower world, after which it may be reincarnated into other people and animals. Disposition of the soul on death is one area where there is a high degree of variation as between different Evenki peoples but, as a general comment, it seems from Shirokogoroff that most Evenki have a multiple concept of soul, with an aspect that is common to humans and other animals (and which remains close to this world, possibly reincarnating in a new placing) and an aspect that is peculiar to humans (and which may move on from this world, possibly after remaining close to it for a time).

The concept of exterioration is important for two reasons: first, it underlies the concept of soul, which is a particular case of the general concept that things have both a material and an immaterial substance and, secondly, the ability to exteriorate the immaterial substance of a thing underlies the idea that the soul can ‘travel’.¹⁰¹

origin and as having found its way to the Evenki from China, being found in its most complete form among the Evenki of Manchuria.

¹⁰⁰ *ibid.*

¹⁰¹ *ibid.*, p.117

6.3.4 Clothing (including worn ‘placings’)

The use of amulets (being placings for helping spirits), to protect against evil spirits who cause illness, has already been mentioned. Shirokogoroff gives an example that helps to connect this practice with the Evenki understanding of soul:

If the child is weak and inclined to sickness the Tungus sometimes invite a good shaman who takes the soul of the child and keeps it till the child’s recovery, sometimes even up to the age of thirteen. The shaman leaves the child a small ball bell and a brass mirror – *tōli* – largely used in shamanism. ... the bell and the mirror are placings for the shaman’s spirits, which are charged with looking after the child without a soul.¹⁰²

Although Shirokogoroff speaks of the child’s soul as being taken, he explains that, in Evenki thought, each person has three souls,¹⁰³ which each have different functions, and it is one of these souls that the shamans takes for safekeeping. Too great a degree of soul loss (for example, two or all three) leads to death, and this is said to be one of the ways in which a bad shaman can kill.

Amulets are generally worn or carried and the shamanic costume includes many examples of placings. Eliade tells us that shamans might wear ‘costumes that carry more than thirty pounds of iron in the form of discs and other objects’.¹⁰⁴ Gemuev¹⁰⁵ mentions copper bear paws as being among the equipment of an Evenki shaman, noting that one of the toes is intentionally broken off.¹⁰⁶ The reason given lies in the ancient belief that bears could be the souls of dead ancestors: in the case of a great shaman, the process of becoming a bear involved cutting off the shaman’s thumb, understood as the repository of a man’s strength. Being broken in this world, the shaman’s strength in the spirit world is assured. The copper bear paws thus represent a placing for the spirit of one of the clan’s previous shamans, now one of the helping spirits of the shaman who wears the placing.

¹⁰² 1966, p.291

¹⁰³ Or three aspects to the soul; see 1966, p.291, fn. 3

¹⁰⁴ Eliade, 1989, p.29

¹⁰⁵ 1989

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, p.183

My purpose in detailing this example is to demonstrate that items that can appear as symbolic or decorative accoutrements have, from the perspective of the shaman, real practical value and reference the wider cosmological context within which the shaman functions. This is important, and clearly matters to the shaman and his audience, for a shaman expressly does not shamanize in his everyday dress, and does not wear his shamanic clothes unless shamanizing.¹⁰⁷ As Eliade points out:

In itself, the [shamanic] costume represents a religious microcosm qualitatively different from the surrounding profane space. For one thing, it constitutes an almost complete symbolic system; for another, its consecration has impregnated it with various spiritual forces and especially with “spirits.” By the mere fact of donning it – or manipulating the objects that deputize for it – the shaman transcends profane space and prepares to enter into contact with the spiritual world.¹⁰⁸

We might query whether Eliade is correct to draw such a clear sense of difference between the natural (physical) world and the spiritual world. From the Evenki perspective, the natural world is simply one particular part of, or place within, a wider realm of existence. It is at least clear that there is a very close relationship between the natural and spiritual worlds, so close that it is possible for someone (or something) present in one, to cross over and become active in the other. The ability to ‘place’ spirits demonstrates that they are understood as being very much *in* this world, even though they may not be *of* it. Further, a shaman still needs to function as a normal member of society during most of his or her waking hours. Shamans marry, have children and wider families of their own: shamans are not just shamans. One function of the costume may be to preserve boundaries that enable the shaman to lead the sufficiently ‘normal’ life that any human being needs, by limiting the times when a shaman is seen to be active as a shaman. It matters also to other members of the community that they can tell when a shaman is being a shaman, because a different way of approaching or behaving towards the shaman may follow from that. We need to be careful about the wider conclusions we draw from the fact that there is such a thing as specifically shamanic garb.

¹⁰⁷ Eliade, 1989, p.146

¹⁰⁸ *ibid.*, p.147

Eliade¹⁰⁹ tells us of two main types of costume found among the Evenki: one resembling a duck and the other a reindeer, both of which are said to assist the shaman in his journeys to the underworld.¹¹⁰ The reindeer costume is recorded as including a cap decorated with iron antlers, representing stag antlers.¹¹¹ The use of a reindeer spirit as a spiritual steed may seem natural enough among a people who ride them but the duck only comes to make sense in the context of the Evenki creation myth that teaches of a duck diving to the bottom of the primordial ocean, and returning with soil from which earth was created.¹¹² The bird costume includes boots made to resemble a bird's feet.¹¹³ This description also alerts us to the possibility that the shaman's costume might itself be a placing for one of the shaman's helping spirits.

The use of masks among the Evenki has been noted but accounts of their use are not common and the practice has generally been regarded as rare.¹¹⁴ This leads Eliade to suggest, following Harva, that the costume itself functions as a mask, so that an actual face mask is unnecessary.¹¹⁵ The one use of a mask Shirokogoroff cites concerns an improvised mask, intended to show the presence of the spirit being incarnated.¹¹⁶ The improvised nature of the mask suggests that it was not a standard part of the shaman's costume.

Where shamans do make use of masks, it has been suggested that they help the shaman to concentrate or focus,¹¹⁷ by obscuring physical sight and making the natural world less of a distraction when trying to 'see' the spiritual world. It is, of course, possible that different masks serve different purposes but there is physical

¹⁰⁹ Referencing Shirokogoroff, 1999, pp.288-97

¹¹⁰ Eliade, 1989, p.149 Elsewhere (p.156) Eliade mentions the use of bird, reindeer and bear costumes as being the three chief types of costume among shamans generally. The use of bear costumes among the Evenki may be suggested by the bear paw placings mentioned above.

¹¹¹ *ibid.*, p.155

¹¹² *ibid.*, pp.105-6. Napolskikh points out, referencing Vasilevič, that this myth was common among the Evenki. The main purpose of the article is to demonstrate that this myth is widespread across northern Eurasia, involving a duck or other water bird.

¹¹³ *ibid.*, p.156, referencing Harva, *Die religiösen Vorstellungen*

¹¹⁴ *ibid.*, p.165

¹¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.167

¹¹⁶ Shirokogoroff, 1999, p.152, n.2 (cited by Eliade, 1989, p.165)

¹¹⁷ Eliade, 1989, p.167

evidence (in museum collections) of the use by Evenki shamans of caps with fringes that hang down to cover the face.¹¹⁸

6.3.5 Other shamanic equipment

Stutley tells us that Evenki shamans use a staff that may be horse-headed or reindeer-headed, with various metal rings attached (purpose unexplained), and which is used by the shaman when travelling to the upper world.¹¹⁹ By contrast, Eliade tells us that the staff is used by the shaman when travelling to the lower world (underworld).¹²⁰ Among the Yakut, the shamanic costume includes iron rings (or pierced discs), which ‘represent the earth with its central opening, through which the shaman enters the underworld.’¹²¹ The relevance of this lies in Shirokogoroff’s opinion that the various iron objects used by the Evenki are cultural imports from the Yakut.¹²²

Another metal item in use among Evenki shamans, in common with those of other peoples, and which may also provide an aid to focusing, is a copper mirror. Eliade suggests its purpose as follows:

Diószegi has shown that the Manchu-Tungusic term designating the mirror, *pañaptu*, is derived from *paña*, “soul, spirit,” more precisely the “soul-shade.” Looking into the mirror, the shaman is able to see the dead person’s soul.¹²³

We have also already seen Shirokogoroff’s suggestion, in the discussion of amulets above, that the mirror can function as a placing for a shaman’s helping spirit.

The piece of shamanic equipment *par excellence* is the shaman’s drum; indeed, Chapter V in Eliade’s *Shamanism* is entitled *Symbolism of the Shaman’s Costume and Drum*. The use of drums, decorated with representations of animals, is recorded

¹¹⁸ See Oakes & Riewe, 1998, p.89 and Gorbacheva & Federova, 2008, pp.188, 217

¹¹⁹ 2003, p.47

¹²⁰ 1989, p.149

¹²¹ *ibid.*, p.148

¹²² *ibid.*, p.149 (see references to Shirokogoroff, 1999)

¹²³ *ibid.*, p.154

among the Evenki as far back as the 1770s¹²⁴ and is a symbol of the earth, often decorated with eight pairs of lines representing the four pairs of feet that hold the earth above the sea.¹²⁵ That there are four pairs of feet is significant, representing the belief that the world (and many of the things in it) can be divided into four parts, having four corners or four ways.¹²⁶ Evenki shamans were also able to orient their drums to the north, allowing them to function as compasses.¹²⁷ Thus the drum is a tool which the shaman can use to find his way in this world as well as the upper and lower worlds.

Eliade suggests that the drum, like the shaman's costume generally, represents the earth plane, through which the shaman must pass in order to travel to the upper or lower worlds.¹²⁸ Stutley tells us that the centre of an Evenki drum is always marked and 'is called the "road" and the hole in the middle "the navel of the world"'.¹²⁹ The drum as an item symbolizes the ecstatic journey a shaman makes and is also used as a piece of equipment (for drumming) in making that journey, the noise helping the shaman to enter the ecstatic state. Further, the drumstick is reported as occasionally being used by the Evenki for divining, with the stick being thrown into the air and its position on landing interpreted to provide the answer to a question.¹³⁰

One other item that seems characteristic of the Evenki is the use of placings in the form of bird statuettes, usually carved from wood and shown perched atop long poles. We have already noted the belief that the souls of children yet to be born perch on the branches of the Cosmic Tree, the shaman's role as psychopomp extending to the task of conducting souls into their appropriate place in the natural world by assisting in childbirth. Also, the healing spirits in the shamanic battle account we

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, p.172

¹²⁵ Shirokogoroff, 1999, p.297

¹²⁶ Gračeva, G.N: *Nganasan Shamans' Ways and Worldview*, pp.233-8 in Hoppál & Pentikäinen, 1989, p.235

¹²⁷ Stutley, 2003, p.44. Stutley does not explain exactly how this was achieved by Evenki shamans but goes on to explain that 'The Pleiades are represented on Nganasan drums in the form of holes, which when looked through served as orientation.'

¹²⁸ Eliade, 1989, p.173

¹²⁹ 2003, p.44

¹³⁰ Eliade, 1989, p.176

looked at from Anisimov were bird spirits: goose, snipe and owl.¹³¹ Vitebsky also gives us the example of four wooden birds used by an Evenki shaman: an eagle to protect his soul from evil spirits, a raven to guard his soul during trance, a swan to carry his soul on its journey and a woodpecker, which acts as a healer of both humans and animals.¹³²

For Shirokogoroff, the costume and other shamanic accoutrements are together regarded as a shaman's paraphernalia, the principal elements being costume, drum and mirrors or other spirit placings.¹³³ Interestingly, Shirokogoroff gives limited attention to shamanic equipment; it is exotic and interesting but it is not where shamanic ability lies.

One item of shamanic equipment often overlooked is the shaman's tent itself but its importance as the setting for shamanic scéances is highlighted by Anisimov in a valuable monograph detailing the cosmology that is physically represented in the tent's construction and decoration.¹³⁴ As a practical matter, items of personal costume are more easily housed and preserved than entire tents.

6.3.6 Cosmology

Before we go on to examine apprenticeship in Evenki shamanism, we need to look briefly at the spiritual cosmology that is referenced and reflected in Evenki shamanic practice. My purpose is not to undertake a detailed examination of that cosmology for its own sake but merely to sketch in a sufficiently detailed picture to allow the process of apprenticeship to be articulated. For that reason, I pull together a number of points that have already been drawn out.

For the Evenki, the world is inhabited not only by people, other animals and plants but is also inhabited by spirits or, if not inhabited by them, is at least a place where

¹³¹ Vitebsky, 1995, pp.112-3

¹³² *ibid.*, p.73

¹³³ Sh. 1999, Chapter XXIV

¹³⁴ 1963.

they can be active. Such spirits include the spirits or souls of deceased humans (with particular importance attached to the spirits of ancestors or those who were members of the same clan), and animals. We have seen that a sense of unpredictability can be evident in dealing with spirits, particularly unknown or alien (i.e. non-clan) ones: the important point here is not that they are necessarily hostile but that they can have their own perspective, agenda or intentions. We have also drawn a connection between the correct placing of spirits and a sense of right relationship towards them: co-operation between people (especially shamans) and known spirits is widespread, generally for the purpose of protecting against spiritual attack or helping with success in everyday life, such as hunting. There are various ways in which unpredictable spirits can be managed, principally by the clan shaman(s) but we have also seen that the practice of ‘placing’ spirits was understood (and practised) more widely among the Evenki. In the context of healing, we have also seen that at least some of the Evenki understand humans to have three souls or, perhaps, three parts or aspects to the soul. Thus healing can take the form of the shaman finding a lost part of a person’s soul¹³⁵ and bringing it back, or returning it to its proper location.

This awareness of spirits underlies the Evenki sense of what it is to be aware of, or to ‘know’ the world in which they live. Further, we have seen that this awareness or knowing extends to spirit worlds or planes above and below the earth, with the lower world often being portrayed as the world of the ancestors.¹³⁶ These other worlds are the proper homes or places of spirits although, as we have noted, it is possible for them to be active in this (earthly) world and, in the short term, the spirits of the dead may linger before moving on.¹³⁷ In this context, an important role of the shaman as psychopomp is to ensure that order is maintained, things (spirits) remain in their proper ‘place’ and that right relationships between things are maintained. There is, therefore, a relationship between the three levels or worlds: they may be distinct (capable of being distinguished) from one another but they are not separate in the sense of being unconnected. Although there is clear evidence for inversion as

¹³⁵ That is to say, exteriorated by one lacking the skill to recover it.

¹³⁶ Anderson appears to suggest that the dead may be spirits of the upper or the lower world; see 2000, p.65, fn.10

¹³⁷ Eliade, 1989, p.209

between the spirit worlds¹³⁸ and the earth,¹³⁹ Drury restricts that sense of inversion to the lower world¹⁴⁰ and the sense of inherent difference introduced by Eliade's oppositional categories of sacred and profane seems at odds with the Evenki shaman's 'knowing' of both the spirit worlds and this one: this world does not stand apart from the others but anchors them and stands at the centre of the Evenki cosmological hierarchy.¹⁴¹ The shaman's special responsibility for supporting social order in this world is simply a particular aspect of his responsibility for helping to maintain order more widely in the Evenki cosmos. As Shirokogoroff frequently expresses it, the shaman is the 'safety valve' of society, releasing pressures that build up when society is not properly ordered.

This is the wider context for particular myths or themes that we find among the Evenki. For example, the creation myth that tells of a spirit (the water bird) bringing soil from the primordial deep, with which the earth is created, is a myth in terms of which this world is a particular work of creation that represents an addition to what was already there. Themes such as the fourfold nature of things refers back to the Evenki sense of how things are built and properly placed or oriented, not only in this world but in all worlds. On this perspective, it makes obvious sense that the shaman's drum should be constructed in such a way that it serves to orient the traveller in this world and the spirit worlds. It is also possible to see that themes such as that of the Cosmic Tree, which Eliade notes as widespread, reference the hierarchy of the worlds, with ascent and descent between the worlds likened to climbing up and down the branches of the tree. The Cosmic Tree thus provides a vertical axis linking the three worlds.¹⁴²

It is tempting to assume that it is in relation to this (middle) world that the upper and lower worlds are upper and lower but the literature often gives the impression that

¹³⁸ That is to say, things in this world have their opposite in the spirit worlds, e.g., that which is broken in this world is whole in the other.

¹³⁹ Eliade, 1989, p.205

¹⁴⁰ 1987, p.6

¹⁴¹ Fondahl, 1998, p.18

¹⁴² Stutley suggests that the three worlds are sometimes depicted as being linked by a river; 2003, p.57. Drury, relying on Vasilevich [details], states that rivers are a significant feature of Evenki mythology; 1987, p.6

there is a contrast between them and that they are upper and lower in relation to each other. Relying upon Vasilevic, Drury tells us that,

The Evenk lives in the middle world. His options are upwards towards the benevolent sky dwellers, or downwards to the world of the dead, the spirit ancestors and the mistress of the Underworld. This dualism is reinforced by the fact that the term for the upper world (*uga buga*) has a linguistic origin in a phrase meaning 'toward morning' while that of the lower world (*khergu-ergu buga*) means 'towards night'.¹⁴³

The residents of the upper world (sky dwellers) are said to lead a more exalted version of life on the earth and can include ancestors who have made their way there: indeed, helping them to do so may be an aspect of the shaman's role as healer.¹⁴⁴ By contrast, the underworld is the place where things have their opposite: 'living things become dead there, and the dead come alive';¹⁴⁵ the underworld is inhabited by 'deceased kinsmen and the spirits of evil and illness'.¹⁴⁶

6.3.7 Stimulants/entheogens

Eliade notes the use of alcohol and tobacco by Evenki shamans but whether this tells us very much about Evenki shamanism is a moot point. Shirokogoroff states that, among the Chinese Evenki, the 'most important custom of welcome is that of smoking'¹⁴⁷ but that among the more northerly Evenki such customs are less well developed. The use of tobacco is thus assumed to be an import from the south but is described as familiar in Evenki society generally. Wine, where available, also formed part of everyday hospitality.¹⁴⁸ Shirokogoroff mentions of a widespread perception of the Evenki as having a predisposition to intoxication, and as spending much of their income on wine, but also having various customs designed to restrain consumption.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴³ 1987, p.6

¹⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.7

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.*, p.6 - relying on Anisimov, 1963

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Shirokogoroff, 1966, p.332

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.333

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.*, pp.320-1

Against this background, it is perhaps no great surprise to find tobacco and alcohol in use at shamanic séances but, for both Shirokogoroff and Eliade, dancing and singing (including drumming) are the methods typically used to induce ecstatic trance,¹⁵⁰ with alcohol and tobacco present simply because of their wider social use. The place of stimulants in classic Evenki shamanism appears slight and Eliade implies that their use, if relied upon to induce the ecstatic trance, represents a deterioration in shamanic practice.¹⁵¹ The use of other stimulants seems not to be commonly observed in traditional Evenki shamanism.

6.3.8 Consciousness

Following Eliade, it became commonplace to regard shamanic consciousness as characteristically ecstatic. In this he follows Shirokogoroff, who also highlights shamanic ‘ecstasy’ as indicting an able practitioner, but who also points out that shamans do not immediately resort to their shamanic ability in order to analyze and diagnose problems. For the most part, shamans are ordinary in that, in the course of their daily practice, they tend first to have recourse to the same habits of observation and inference that are present in wider society.¹⁵² Proposed remedies may, for example, draw upon herbal lore widely known and accepted in Evenki society and even in cases where the shaman’s diagnosis is that the patient is being influenced by a spirit, the making of that diagnosis need not require the shaman to call upon his own spirits for assistance.¹⁵³ What is distinctive about the shaman is that, where necessary, he is able to make use of his ability to communicate with his spirits in a safe and controlled manner.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁰ Eliade, 1989, p.243

¹⁵¹ *ibid.*, p.254

¹⁵² 1999, pp.358-9

¹⁵³ *ibid.*, p.359

¹⁵⁴ Again we see Shirokogoroff’s insistence that shamanic awareness is contextualised; that it is a complex within a complex, as he puts it: a concentrated or intensified form of the wider cultural (social and psychological) concepts and outlook of the Evenki. For Shirokogoroff, the shaman is a specialist in utilising a particular state of consciousness that falls within the range of what is normal among the Evenki but which is experienced only occasionally and in an uncontrolled manner by those who are not shamans.

Thus Shirokogoroff proposes that shamans have recourse to both common and special methods of working, and identifies four special methods:

reading of thoughts, communication at a distance, auto-suggestive regulation of dreams, and extasy. All these methods in a lesser or greater degree are used by common people as well, but among the shamans these methods have become an essential condition of their art.¹⁵⁵

Thus even a shaman's special methods are not in themselves special to shamans; it is simply that the shaman perfects them so as to make a specialty of them. The four special methods indicated by Shirokogoroff are described by him as each representing 'a perfection of means of cognition'.¹⁵⁶ It is clear also that, although Shirokogoroff views the spirits themselves as articulations of psychological (psychomental) complexes,¹⁵⁷ the four special shamanic methods he describes are regarded by him as observable phenomena: 'The nature of these phenomena is not clear, but I do not venture to deny them and to reject them under the pretext of lack of "rationalization"'.¹⁵⁸

The four special shamanic methods appear to be inter-related, rather than being four distinct skills; with the reading of thoughts and communication at a distance achieved by shamans in their dreams or during an intended shamanic ecstasy or in a normal but focused state of awareness.¹⁵⁹ On this basis, Eliade's focus upon ecstasy as characteristic of shamanic awareness appears sound, but it may pay to look more closely at what Shirokogoroff means by ecstasy in the context of Evenki shamanism.

The shamanic state of consciousness that Shirokogoroff describes ranges from fully aware but focused, through dreaming sleep ('the reaching of ecstasy in a half-conscious state'¹⁶⁰), to what we might term full or complete ecstasy or trance. Shamanic performances are often preceded by a period of semi-conscious sleep, during which the shaman alters or shifts his normal state of consciousness so that,

¹⁵⁵ 1999, p.361

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *ibid.*, p.366

¹⁵⁸ *ibid.*, p.361

¹⁵⁹ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *ibid.*

... there occurs a partial elimination of perception ... so that the intuition and imaginative thinking meet with no hindrance, or this hindrance is reduced to the possible minimum'.¹⁶¹

'In this condition the *shaman believes that the spirit is in him* and he acts and thinks as though the spirits are acting.'¹⁶² Thus the state of ecstasy that allows the controlled incarnation of spirits is achieved and carried forward into the public demonstration. Shirokogoroff is clear that there can be 'no absolute elimination of all elements of consciousness and perception' if the shaman is to maintain control.¹⁶³ Shamanic ecstasy is, therefore, something of a balancing act between consciousness and unconsciousness, consisting in the ability to maintain a state of equilibrium appropriate to the task in hand. Moving forward into the public demonstration, the shaman may maintain the shamanic ecstasy by performing rhythmic drumming or dancing,¹⁶⁴ and may be further assisted by his audience by their 'impressing him with their singing'¹⁶⁵ (another form of rhythmic sound).

Shirokogoroff tells us that the shamanic performances he observed displayed different degrees of ecstasy, falling broadly into three categories: (i) performances which seemed simply to be some form of hysterical fit,¹⁶⁶ (ii) those where the shaman is simply performing a ritual and his awareness is simply his normal awareness,¹⁶⁷ and (iii) those marked by the apparent presence of spirits with the shaman, where the behaviour and speech of the shaman remain intelligible but are sufficiently different from the shaman's normal behaviour to be attributed to other entities acting through or in collaboration with him.¹⁶⁸ Properly speaking, it is only in this third category of performances that a true shamanic ecstasy is present. Thus shamanic ecstasy might be described as trance, so long as it is understood that this

¹⁶¹ *ibid.*, p.362. The possible minimum is, as we have seen, the possible minimum consistent with maintaining control of oneself (and, therefore, of the spirits).

¹⁶² *ibid.*

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, p.363

¹⁶⁴ *ibid.*, p.364

¹⁶⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁶⁶ In such cases, the shaman may have lost control or may have failed to achieve shamanic ecstasy in the first place.

¹⁶⁷ Here there is minimal evidence of shamanic awareness or ecstasy, again suggestive of inability to achieve it.

¹⁶⁸ 1999, p.362-3

does not mean trance in the sense of a total lack of consciousness but indicates instead a point of equilibrium somewhere on a spectrum between consciousness and unconsciousness. The deeper the degree of trance (i.e., the closer to unconsciousness the point of equilibrium being maintained lies), the more skilled or powerful the shaman must be in order to stay there safely (i.e. without losing control). Hoppál's account of a shamanic performance involving a female Evenki shaman¹⁶⁹ also supports the conclusion that this form of trance is characteristic of traditional Evenki shamanism.

The general discussion of shamanism in Chapter 5 highlighted the influence of Eliade's characterisation of the shaman as typically one who journeys or travels; which is to say the shaman's soul leaves his body and goes somewhere else (typically in order to undertake a particular task, such as performing healing by recovering (a lost part of) a patient's soul). We also considered and critiqued Eliade's insistence that possession, the incarnation of spirits, is not typical of shamanism and, at best, represents a debased version of it.

What is striking from reading Shirokogoroff is it is apparent that the typical shamanic performance is one during which the shaman maintains shamanic equilibrium (ecstasy) so as to give a visible demonstration of the presence of spirits, usually by incarnating them, so that they speak or act through him, sometimes in response to questions put by the shaman's assistants or by members of the audience. The practice of travelling is clearly present in shamanic demonstrations but, in the examples Shirokogoroff describes, there is a striking preponderance of performances involving controlled incarnation. Performances where the shaman is understood to have gone travelling tend to be those where the shaman falls down unconscious but rigid.¹⁷⁰ The rigidity of the shaman's body and his unresponsiveness to questions or other stimuli are taken as evidence that the shaman is not there but, equally importantly, that no spirits are being incarnated at that particular point in time. The

¹⁶⁹ Hoppál, 2007, p.119-132

¹⁷⁰ The rigidity described by Shirokogoroff is not simply the kind of stiffness or resistance to movement that can be imitated but is said to be more akin to the kind of stiffness associated with *rigor mortis*, i.e., a genuine rigidity of the body, such that the limbs are like sticks; 1999, p.357

rigidity is taken as a sign that the shaman retains control of the body, preventing uncontrolled possession of his body by a spirit during his absence which, in turn, makes it possible for the shaman to return to the body when he wishes to do so. The rigidity is valued as the sign of shamanic ecstasy: if the shaman simply seems to be imitating rigidity, he is assumed to be present and having failed to achieve the looked-for ecstasy. In particular cases, this can be an important aspect of the shamanic performance: indeed, Shirokogoroff describes a recognition ceremony in which the candidate proved unconvincing when incarnating spirits but, on the final day, fell down absolutely rigid, a demonstration of shamanic prowess that proved convincing and swung the mood of the clan in favour of recognising the candidate.¹⁷¹

DuBois relates an account given by Anisimov of an Evenki scéance observed in 1931,¹⁷² in which the shaman worked himself into ‘the highest pitch of ecstasy, and fell ... on the rug which had been spread out.’¹⁷³ The shaman is described as ‘stiffened, lifeless’,¹⁷⁴ prior to spirits speaking through him but, re-entering his body in response to his assistant’s drumming, ‘able to relate the advice he had received from ancestors’.¹⁷⁵ Not only do we have conscious travelling and incarnation of spirits within the same tradition and as aspects of the one shaman’s practice, we appear to have them occurring contemporaneously in the same demonstration.

Although the shaman appears unconscious when travelling, continuing connection with and control of the body are crucial so as to make it possible to return. The sign of the shaman’s soul returning is, naturally enough, returning consciousness. Among the Evenki it is said that other spirits (or even other shamans) may try to prevent the shaman from returning, and it is therefore their view that shamanic travelling is not to be undertaken lightly because ‘the death of the shaman may suddenly occur’.¹⁷⁶ Travelling is said to take a degree of power or proficiency that is not commonly found among shamans because of the risks it involves: indeed,

¹⁷¹ 1999, pp.352-8

¹⁷² DuBois, pp.110-2

¹⁷³ *ibid.*, p.111

¹⁷⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁷⁶ 1999, p.365

Among the Reindeer Tungus of Transbaikalia this form of shamanizing is believed to be so dangerous that there are very few shamans who perform it, and only once in three years or so.¹⁷⁷

Given the explanation as to why shamanic journeying is undertaken so rarely, and its description as a practice undertaken only by powerful shamans, it seems reasonable to propose that it represents the apogee of the shaman's craft, a mark of excellence on the part of those who achieve it.

To maintain that journeying alone typifies the shaman's craft is, on the basis of Shirokogoroff's fieldwork, clearly not true of Evenki shamanism. Instead it seems reasonable to maintain that journeying at will indicates a more experienced and able practitioner but the foundation from which that skill is developed appears to be the ability to incarnate spirits, to begin to know them and, over time, to develop a working relationship with them.

Thus the essence of the shamanic apprenticeship lies in the transformation of susceptibility into capability, a point perhaps not fully appreciated by Eliade because of his perception that possession was not an authentic or significant part of traditional shamanic practice. It is in order to understand more fully how a shaman progresses from psychic susceptibility to publicly acknowledged capability that I turn now to the process of shamanic apprenticeship.

¹⁷⁷ 1999, p.365

6.4 Apprenticeship in Evenki Shamanic

The purpose of this chapter is to determine whether the pattern of apprenticeship discernible I propose, is characteristic of Evenki shamanism. This means adhering strictly to material that relates to the Evenki. I give a brief reminder of the model, followed by an outline of Eliade's limited mention of the elements of apprenticeship. I then draw upon Shirokogoroff's work in order to examine more closely the place of apprenticeship in Eliade's principal source on the Evenki.

6.4.1 The apprenticeship model

First, there is the question of selection of the candidate, which may be partly a matter of tradition when the selection is made by an existing shaman but typically involves some form of initiatory psychic experience, which alerts the individual to a shamanic calling. This may be the experience of having travelled somewhere, but remains possessory in the sense that it is not initiated by the potential candidate and is instead an intrusion by the spirits.¹⁷⁸ We have also seen that the initiatory experience need not be a sudden or brief single event but may instead be a more prolonged experience of not being in this world, or of standing apart from it in some way, which the potential apprentice or others come to recognise as a shamanic calling.

Secondly, there is a period of tutoring, arguably the apprenticeship proper, and which comprises both training in shamanic tradition by an existing shaman (who acts as 'master' to the apprentice) and training by spirits (who act as guides to the apprentice) in mastering or dealing with spirits (possibly including the guides themselves). Thus shamanism is a discipline arising from an initial possessory experience that alerts the candidate to his selection, followed by a period of apprenticeship involving the acquisition of skills (including skill in self-control) that enable the practitioner to master, manage or otherwise relate to or co-operate with spirits (or spiritual forces) perceived by the practitioner as being distinct from himself.

¹⁷⁸ There is no suggestion that any form of bodily possession need be present, the point is that the potential candidate is being influenced or affected by the spirits in some way so as to attract attention.

Thirdly, there is some event or process whereby the candidate is tested and initiated or, more properly, publicly admitted to the status of shaman. In addition, public recognition must be maintained. Although a shaman may go through some ceremony of admission or induction (or other procedure), ongoing recognition and acceptance relies upon a continuing ability to demonstrate shamanic capability.

6.4.2 Apprenticeship in Eliade

An outline of this model is discernible (but not properly articulated) in Eliade's treatment of how Evenki shamans are recruited and recognised. Eliade tells us that the shamanic vocation begins with 'a hysterical or hysteroid crisis, followed by a period of instruction during which the postulant is initiated by an accredited shaman'.¹⁷⁹ The crisis event generally occurs at maturity, rather than childhood, and a period of years must follow before recognition as a shaman is accorded by the community. Failure to be recognised often results in the profession being abandoned. The crisis event is important because it must precede any instruction: from what Eliade tells us, the crisis event appears to be looked for as a sign that instruction is appropriate, even with children who are brought up in the expectation that they will become shamans.¹⁸⁰

The character of the initiatory experience varies. Eliade gives a number of examples, including one candidate who withdrew from the community and lived wild for a time, speaking incoherently under the influence of spirits upon his return;¹⁸¹ another who fell ill and experienced himself as being 'cut in pieces and his blood drunk by the evil spirits (*saargi*);¹⁸² and a third who fell ill for a year, during which time,

His shaman ancestors came and initiated him. They pierced him with arrows until he lost consciousness and fell to the ground; they cut off his flesh, tore out his bones and counted them; if one had been missing, he could not have

¹⁷⁹ 1989, p.17

¹⁸⁰ *ibid.*, p.18

¹⁸¹ *ibid.*

¹⁸² *ibid.*, p.43. Eliade suggests that the 'evil spirits' are the souls of dead shamans.

become a shaman. During this operation he went for a whole summer without eating or drinking.¹⁸³

Although Eliade mentions a process of instruction following the crisis experience, he tells us little about it and merely notes that ‘the future shaman is supposed to master his mystical techniques and to learn the religious and mythological traditions of his tribe’.¹⁸⁴ This process is said to be ‘the work of the spirits (sicknesses, dreams etc.), completed by apprenticeship to a master shaman’.¹⁸⁵ Beyond this, we are told only that apprenticeship involves learning a ‘secret language’ that will be used in order to communicate with the spirits: during the shamanic trance, ‘the Tungus shaman is believed to understand the language of all nature’.¹⁸⁶

Although he chooses not to explore the role of the spirits and spirit guides in a candidate’s training and his admission to the status of shaman, it is clear from what Eliade tells us that their role is significant: indeed, he himself acknowledges that, ‘actually, Tungus shamanism appears to be dominated by spirit guides.’¹⁸⁷ Frustratingly, Eliade prefers to ‘leave aside’ the role of the spirits, preferring to consider the details of the ceremonies in support his characterisation of shamans as ones who travel and ascend to the sky, can walk over burning coals, or produce heat at will from their own bodies.¹⁸⁸

The final stage of ‘shamanic initiation’, by which Eliade means public acknowledgement of shamanhood,¹⁸⁹ is brought out more clearly. Eliade stresses that whatever the process of instruction may involve, the candidate’s ability to ‘shamanize’ must be demonstrated.¹⁹⁰ The demonstration differs between Evenki tribes and may take the form of dream interpretation, divination or description of the

¹⁸³ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁴ *ibid.*, p.110

¹⁸⁵ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁶ *ibid.*, p.96

¹⁸⁷ *ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ *ibid.*, pp.112-3

¹⁸⁹ Eliade does acknowledge that the term ‘initiation’ is problematic, noting that the ‘real’ initiation (crisis event and training) has already taken place; 1989, p.110

¹⁹⁰ 1989, p.111

spirits being encountered.¹⁹¹ Eliade gives a number of examples of initiation ceremonies from Shirokogoroff,¹⁹² noting that these can continue ‘for three, five, seven, or nine days. If the candidate succeeds, sacrifice is offered to the clan spirits.’¹⁹³ Such ceremonies are public tests of the shaman’s ability to demonstrate that he has become a practitioner. Whatever the details of the particular demonstration expected, an inability to shamanize cannot be made up for by any amount of schooling in tradition.

Although the model I propose is discernible in Eliade’s presentation, it is clear that a great deal more needs to be done in order to understand how an Evenki apprentice develops, transforms even, from one who is susceptible to the influence of the spirits into one who can manage or control those forces so as (i) no longer to be at personal risk and (ii) to be able to bring demonstrable benefit to the community (whether that be his clan or personal clients).

6.4.3 Apprenticeship in Shirokogoroff

6.4.3.1 Selection

Shirokogoroff discusses the inheritance of shamanic ability and status in the context of a wider discussion of inheritance in Evenki society.¹⁹⁴ In general, inheritance is justified not only by right of succession but also by a demonstrated willingness to care for those whom the deceased was responsible for,¹⁹⁵ and will vary according to the type of property. In some respects, the inheritance of shamanic status must be treated differently in that, natural aptitude notwithstanding, shamanic skills must be learned or acquired in some way by the (would-be) practitioner. Against this, the spirits the practitioner can expect to work with are largely (but not exclusively) those of his or her own clan and are therefore, in a very obvious way, ‘inherited’ and are not simply a matter of choice or chance. Shirokogoroff notes that shamanic status

¹⁹¹ *ibid.*

¹⁹² *ibid.*, pp.111-3

¹⁹³ *ibid.*, p.112

¹⁹⁴ 1966, pp.302ff

¹⁹⁵ *ibid.*, p.302, fn.4

often transmits within families,¹⁹⁶ but often by skipping a generation. The habit of transmission from grandparent to grandchild¹⁹⁷ may be explained by practical factors such as the length of apprenticeship and the need to acknowledge as an apprentice shaman one who has not yet taken up a different career. Shirokogoroff notes that shamans tend to become shamans early in life and that their activity can be expected to last longer than a single generation.¹⁹⁸ This is relevant to the inheritance of shamans:

The transmission of shamanism consists in a mastering of the spirits left by the deceased shaman. Therefore the spirits are also interested in the question as to who would be their master.¹⁹⁹

Although there may be practicalities behind the apparent inheritance of the shamanic calling, it is clear from Shirokogoroff's material that, while a shaman *may* come from a family of shamans, a shaman *must* be seen to have undergone an initiatory experience. The precise nature of that experience may vary, perhaps according to the individual's personality, but it is this experience that alerts both the individual and the clan to the possibility that this person may become a shaman. Thus the shamanic calling may be a matter of both inheritance and selection by the spirits but it cannot be a matter of inheritance alone: selection by the spirits must always be evident.

Shirokogoroff gives four examples of personal experiences indicating a shamanic calling. In the first, the spirits enter a woman causing trembling, and an existing shaman is called in to 'interview' them because (for reasons not given) the clan members were reluctant to begin 'making' a new shaman. The diagnosing shaman confirms that the spirits want a new shaman, the woman's father and grandfather (both shamans) having died, leaving their spirits unattended. The spirits insisted, re-entering the woman, taking her up into the mountains, where she climbs a tree, refusing to come down.²⁰⁰ The woman then disappears altogether for eight days,

¹⁹⁶ *ibid.*, p.302

¹⁹⁷ Both girls and boys become shamans. See also Fondahl, 1998, p.30 and Stutley, 2003, pp. 13 & 23

¹⁹⁸ 1999, p.345

¹⁹⁹ *ibid.* See also Vitebsky, 2000, pp.56-7

²⁰⁰ This seems not to be an example of shamanic travelling but simply an explanation of the woman's behaviour: Shirokogoroff, 1999, p.346

refusing to eat or drink upon her return, maintaining that she had been at home all this time.

What I wish to draw attention to here is that the initiatory experience is possessory in the sense that it involves the incarnation of spirits and is not initiated by the candidate: the candidate is expressly not in control and seems not even to be aware of what is happening. This possessory beginning to a shamanic career is observed, interpreted and acted upon by the community with the assistance or confirmation of an existing shaman.

The second case is the tale of a clan that failed successfully to elect a new shaman, either because the chosen individual failed to reach the point where he could master spirits effectively or simply did not wish to become a shaman. After ongoing unrest within the clan, various male representatives of the different classes within the clan each put on shaman's headdress, went out into the cold and waited to see if one of them was selected by the spirits. After a time, the spirits descended into one of them.²⁰¹ The initial choice of a candidate is expressly left to the spirits on each occasion: the potential candidates are passive so far as the initial selection is concerned.

The third case is one observed by Shirokogoroff over a period of two years. Although the background is complex, this case involved two competing candidates, a woman and her husband's brother. The woman showed obvious signs of being disturbed by spirits, including that of her father-in-law (who had been a shaman) but her brother-in-law was a more acceptable candidate for social reasons.²⁰² The symptoms, or evidence of spirit possession, involved what Shirokogoroff describes

²⁰¹ On this occasion the possessing spirit said only that the selection of a shaman should wait until the following season: 1999, p.347

²⁰² Shirokogoroff explains that 'The situation was complicated by the fact that the elder son's wife had been in intimate relations with the unfortunate shaman [her father-in-law] and had a son by him, while her husband was married to her, at the age of 11 or 12 years, when she had already been about twenty years old.' 1999, p.347. The deceased shaman is described as unfortunate, having been beheaded by the Chinese authorities on a charge of spying for the Russians (the clan residing in the Aigun district of northern China).

as ‘everything which happens to the candidates’.²⁰³ running away, climbing trees, refusing food, trembling, fits varying between extreme rigidity and relaxation, loss of sensitivity to needles, lack of awareness of her surroundings and failure to recognise people around her.²⁰⁴ These symptoms were exhibited over a period of about one year, whereupon a test or trial of the two candidates was organized to determine which showed greater shamanic ability.²⁰⁵

The fourth case Shirokogoroff provides also involves two potential candidates: the son and grandson of the previous clan shaman, who died many years before. The son, by now in his fifties, was not in good standing within the clan and also regarded as simply having left it too late to become a shaman. Further, Shirokogoroff tells us that, despite ‘a definite inclination for shamanship’, the son’s attempts to carry out shamanic performances were failures in that ‘no extasy could be produced’.²⁰⁶ The grandson, by contrast, showed clear signs of being affected by spirits:

From time to time he had sudden changes in his mood: he would become oppressed, very submissive and haunted by all kinds of visions. He complained of a feeling of heaviness in his heart, when the spirits of his grandfather entered him; but no extasy could be produced.²⁰⁷

Shirokogoroff also tells us that the old shaman’s grandson was in even poorer standing with the clan than was his father and that his father opposed his potential candidacy for shaman: it seems clear from the account that the grandson had never been able to commence any kind of shamanic training. Although this account is presented by Shirokogoroff as giving examples of failed shamanship, it is clear that the initiatory call experienced by the grandson fits the same pattern of a passive, possessory initial experience, where the potential candidate unwillingly (and often unexpectedly) incarnates the spirits. When I say unwillingly in this context, I mean both that the potential candidate is not in control of what is happening (regardless of

²⁰³ 1999, p.347

²⁰⁴ *ibid.*

²⁰⁵ 1999, p.348. Shirokogoroff detected a preference for a male shaman within this clan, the reason given being that male shamans know more than female. Whether this was a general perception within that clan or a reason adduced in support of existing opposition to this particular candidate is not clear.

²⁰⁶ *ibid.*

²⁰⁷ *ibid.*

whether the phenomena are welcome or not) and that the candidate, upon realising what is happening, may oppose the call. This lack of control is evidenced by the fact that there can be a continuation of the signs of possession even where the potential candidate wishes them to stop.

Shirokogoroff gives brief accounts of a number of other cases observed by him and characterizes the initiatory call as follows:

In a great number of cases when the spirits are free and there is no shaman, the Tungus and Manchus look for a candidate. A child who has dreams, different from ordinary ones, who is subject to strong emotions, change of mood, and in general, when his behaviour is not like that of other children, is supposed to be a candidate, especially if there had been some shaman in the direct lines of ancestors. Such a child may be told of the possibility of becoming a shaman and is gradually prepared. At the age from sixteen to twenty the first entering of the spirit occurs prior to this the youth refuses food, walks and wanders about aimlessly and without purpose, he or she may have changes of mood – sometimes being very gay and joyful, sometimes silent and depressed, sometimes sleeping too long, sometimes unable to sleep. After two weeks or more, during the sleep, usually at night, the youth jumps up of the bed and begins to sing like shamans do. If a real extasy occurs, the youth is considered as a future shaman.²⁰⁸

So far as Shirokogoroff is able to determine, the shamanic call is characteristically possessory in nature, in that it involves the entry of one or more spirits into the body of the potential candidate. In Evenki thinking, this is possible because the spirits are simply using the candidate's body as a placing and are able to 'introduce themselves even in the presence of all the components of the [candidate's] soul'.²⁰⁹ This initial possession does not depend upon invitation by the one being possessed, although the attitude of the individual (or of the clan towards the potential candidate) may prevent the call from being acknowledged or acted upon (in terms of beginning any kind of training).

From Shirokogoroff's work with the Evenki, the possessory, uncontrolled nature of the initiatory call of the shaman is clear. In order to become a shaman the potential

²⁰⁸ 1999, p.349. Typographical errors in the extract are original.

²⁰⁹ *ibid.*, p.243

candidate must become someone who experiences the spirits in quite a different way: Shirokogoroff reminds us that,

In the description of the history of shamans we have see that the shaman may begin his career with a psychosis,²¹⁰ but he cannot carry on his functions, if he does not master spirits, or, as has been shown, does not master himself.²¹¹

Shirokogoroff makes it clear that he regards self-mastery as crucial to shamanic ability, maintaining that, in response to the psychic troubles that mark the initiatory call,

... the shaman actually masters himself, regulates his own psychomental complex, after which he is no more affected by the condition which was the initial cause of his becoming a shaman. The more he practises his art of self-control, the more spirits he masters ...²¹²

In order to understand how it is that the potential candidate learns the skills of mastery of self and therefore of spirits, and in order to demonstrate the applicability of the apprenticeship model, I proceed now to examine the teaching that is given by both the spirits and existing shamans. I do this in order to answer the question of whether this teaching is in fact understood by the Evenki to take place and, if so, how. To some extent, these two aspects of the teaching process (which is at the heart of any apprenticeship) are interlinked, not least because a deceased shaman (often the one whom the apprentice will follow on from) may well be understood to be one of the spirits from whom the apprentice learns.²¹³

²¹⁰ Although Shirokogoroff uses the term 'psychosis', he expressly states that he does not mean simply to imply mental or psychological illness or weakness on the western model as characteristic of the able shaman. The shaman needs to be familiar with such problems in order to be an effective healer (and there are spirits to be overcome or 'mastered' that symbolise such problems) but it is the strength, insight and ability gained that are characteristic of shamanic ability. Theories of shamanic ability as itself characterised by psychological illness are quickly dismissed by Shirokogoroff as being 'of no interest, except that they depict the European complex' and as being 'mostly the result of aprioristic reasoning based on the principle of analogy.' 1999, p.366

²¹¹ 1935, p.366

²¹² *ibid.*, p.368

²¹³ As a slight aside, Shirokogoroff is clear that the concept of a guardian spirit based upon North American anthropology (and generalised to Siberian groups) is inapplicable to the Tungus; 1999, p.368, fn.

6.4.3.2 Apprenticeship proper

Shirokogoroff tells us little specifically about the transmission of knowledge to apprentice shamans but he does acknowledge the teaching of the younger generation of shamans as crucial to the ‘preservation of knowledge and tradition’,²¹⁴ and offers some observations on the transmission of knowledge more widely among shamans. Shamans are said to be characterised by curiosity and an inclination to share their understanding with those who appreciate the craft, at the same time being reluctant to discuss their work with those they deem ignorant or unknowing. The picture presented is of a willingness among most shamans (naturally subject to variation in personal motivation) to acquire new knowledge from each other as part of their ongoing development. Shirokogoroff is careful not to present this habit as itself a professional function of the shaman²¹⁵ but the presentation is of a more general process of discussion leading to ongoing development by individual shamans, which apprentices benefit from when under the guidance of an existing shaman. There is no suggestion of any formal, structured programme of apprenticeship; instead we have a gradual sharing of the personal experience and understanding of the master shaman.²¹⁶ In some clans, an element of formality is introduced by the practice of maintaining lists of recognised spirits, which appear (from Shirokogoroff’s account) to remain stable (but not necessarily absolutely fixed) over time.²¹⁷ Such lists are not secret to shamans but are a record of the clan’s acknowledged spirits, again reinforcing the point that Evenki shamanism is a particular expression of a body of knowledge held more widely within the community.

In the first case given above illustrating the nature of initiatory experiences, Shirokogoroff tells us that in the course of the year following her initiatory experience, the candidate’s costume will be made for her and she will be attended by

²¹⁴ 1999, p.375

²¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.376

²¹⁶ I use the term ‘master’ shaman simply to indicate one who acts as master to an apprentice. Shirokogoroff draws a distinction between formal and informal aspects of the transmission of shamanism: the various conventions as to succession being the formal aspect and the transmission of an existing shaman’s knowledge to a new candidate being the informal aspect; 1999, p.346

²¹⁷ 1999, p.369

an old shaman who will act as her teacher. At the end of her apprenticeship, there will be a sacrifice (of a pig and Chinese bread) to what will by then be her spirits.²¹⁸

One point highlighted by Shirokogoroff is that the passing on of knowledge from shaman to shaman may take place before or after identification of a new shaman. An existing shaman may select a successor, regardless of whether there has been any initiatory experience, and he will undertake the task of tutoring him in the craft, possibly over a period of years. The other sequence Shirokogoroff notes is where a potential candidate shows potential shamanic ability independently of any selection by the existing clan shaman: in this case, the existing shaman is expected to teach the candidate.²¹⁹ The apprenticeship model must therefore allow for an element of tutoring preceding or following the candidate's initiatory experience.

Although the tutoring may seem informal, Shirokogoroff's examples leave us in no doubt that apprenticeship forms a regular part of the process of becoming a shaman. The relationship between apprentice and existing practitioner can be invaluable in enabling the apprentice to acquire the necessary skills of self-mastery needed before the apprentice can acquire the skills needed to master the spirits. However, prolonged teaching by single master shaman is not necessarily the social form shamanic apprenticeship takes:

The transmission of knowledge may happen independently, when the potential candidate is a clever person, a good observer, who accumulates facts and forms of them a more or less accomplished system of theory and practice. Such occurrences are common.²²⁰

This is not to say that there is no apprenticeship, because clearly there is still a process of learning under way; it is simply to say that there is no one acknowledged human teacher, and that the apprentice learns by observing and interpreting such examples of shamanship as are available to him. In this way, the apprentice learns about the social roles expected of a shaman and the range of problems brought to

²¹⁸ *ibid.*, p.346

²¹⁹ *ibid.*

²²⁰ *ibid.*

(and remedies expected of) a shaman, but this is not, fundamentally, how a shaman becomes a shaman.

While the model anticipates an observable, normative social process whereby some traditional knowledge of the spirits is acquired, the key factor in the development of shamanic ability is the establishment, development and utilization of a relationship to the spirits. The knowledge of existing shamans may only be of limited assistance. An experienced practitioner may be able to show how he manages his relationships with his spirits but, ultimately, the apprentice must find his own way of managing his spirit relationships. Thus Shirokogoroff regards the transmission of knowledge from existing shamans as less important than a willingness to respond to the initiatory call by engaging with the spirits, and a state of physical and mental health that enables the candidate to learn from and master the spirits.²²¹ The inner process of learning and self-mastery is the real key to future shamanic ability because it is only if this process is successful that the disruption of the initiatory experience can be overcome. This suggests both a degree of existing maturity²²² but also a process that is measured in years, rather than weeks or months.²²³

As has been noted, Shirokogoroff expressly rejects the concept of guardian spirits, in the sense of spirits who are responsible for, or charged with watching over, a shaman or other individual, irrespective of their charge's behaviour. Instead it is clear that the shamanic apprentice learns from the spirits by engaging with them, learning how to deal with them, to manage them and, in some cases, to overcome them. The experience of becoming a shaman is particular to each apprentice because it is akin to entering a new workplace, peopled with a wide range of personality types, each of whom the apprentice must engage with.²²⁴

²²¹ *ibid.*

²²² Shirokogoroff tells us that he is unaware of any example of an apprenticeship commencing prior to the age of fifteen: 1999, p.349

²²³ *ibid.*

²²⁴ 1999, p.368

Shirokogoroff is clear that shamans often ‘transfer human relations to those between themselves and the spirits’²²⁵ and that the relationship is not simply one of controller and controlled. Shirokogoroff describes a much more complex picture, made up of as many relationships as there are spirits, each taking account of the characteristics of the spirit: rather than the ‘mastery’ of spirits being characterised uniformly, there is a network of varied relationships at the centre of which stands the figure of the shaman. For the Evenki shaman, the process of mastering spirits is a process of familiarization with individual personalities: some good, some bad; some trustworthy in certain respects but not others; some requiring a gentle hand, others a firm one. In some cases, the shaman’s strategy may be one of ‘divide and rule’, where some of his spirits are set against others, so that the shaman himself is not their target, but this is acknowledged as a risky strategy generally resorted to of necessity by a weak shaman who cannot maintain the network by any other means.²²⁶

Such descriptions do not address the underlying technical ability of the shaman to initiate (and terminate) at will the state of mind that enables communication with the spirits; or, as Shirokogoroff puts it, to ‘produce an extasy (sic)’. The development of this ability is crucial to recognition as a shaman but a detailed description of what is taught and how it is learned lies beyond what Shirokogoroff can offer us. That it merits examination, he clearly acknowledges, but this is the point at which he encounters obstacles comparable to those that have kept Spiritualist circle dialogues largely hidden:

Regarding the degree of development of the theoretical part of shamanism in ethnical groups I must point out that the finding of it is not easy at all, for this presumes great familiarity with the people and language and such relations between the people and the investigators which would not hinder a friendly attitude of both sides.²²⁷

Although the full details of traditional Evenki apprenticeships may not be accessible through Shirokogoroff’s fieldwork, I submit that there is ample evidence in his work to support the claim that shamanic ability was understood by the Evenki as the

²²⁵ *ibid.*, p.369

²²⁶ *ibid.*

²²⁷ 1999, p.275, fn.

outcome of a process of apprenticeship. Further, that apprenticeship is understood as one whereby susceptibility to the spirits is deconstructed and redeveloped by the apprentice as a form of self-control, one that enables him to manage his consciousness (maintain equilibrium) so as to be sufficiently aware of the spirits (ecstatic) as to know and understand them sufficiently well as to maintain effective working relationships with them. This, I argue, justifies Shirokogoroff's description of shamanic ability as originating in an 'adaptive instability',²²⁸ rendered productive by the transmission of traditional knowledge enabling the 'regulation of the psychomental equilibrium',²²⁹ thereby transforming susceptibility into developed shamanic ability.

6.4.3.3 Recognition of a shaman

Recognition of a shaman has two aspects: initial recognition of a candidate as a shaman and ongoing recognition of an already-acknowledged shaman. Initial recognition of a shaman is often referred to as 'initiation' but Shirokogoroff was an early objector to such terms as value-laden to the point of being misleading, feeling that it is simply inappropriate to interpret the shaman and shamanism in terms 'of "sacred" phenomena of the European complex.'²³⁰ In a twenty-first century world that speaks readily of non-religious initiations or rites of passage, this particular objection is less relevant but by referring to the event that marks the 'social act of making a person a clan shaman'²³¹ as the 'formal recognition' of a shaman, Shirokogoroff at least avoids the unsystematic references to initiation we find in Eliade. The initial recognition of a shaman is described as formal because it is usually attended by established ritual, varying across different Evenki peoples but often involving the sacrifice of animals (such as reindeer, horses or pigs²³²) to mark a successful recognition by giving thanks to the spirits. By contrast, the ongoing communal recognition of a shaman, which provides the long-term social space within which a shaman operates, has less to do with any particular shamanic

²²⁸ *ibid.*, p.274

²²⁹ *ibid.*, p.276

²³⁰ *ibid.*, p.351

²³¹ *ibid.*

²³² 1999, p.358

performance and is more a matter of maintaining a reputation as an effective practitioner.

Shirokogoroff provides various examples of ceremonies at which a new shaman is formally recognised²³³ and, although there may be personal or social objections to any particular candidate, the one common requirement for recognition is the ability to show ‘mastery’ of the spirits, the ability to deal with them in order to achieve a valued outcome (whether healing, divination, interpretation of dreams or other diagnosis²³⁴). Shirokogoroff describes this mastery as being demonstrated by the production of shamanic ‘extasy (sic)’,²³⁵ a recurrent feature of which is the introduction of one or more spirits into the shaman. The significance of the ability to demonstrate the presence of the spirits during the ceremony is twofold. First, a shaman must be able to show that he ‘knows’ the clan spirits, meaning he has a relationship with them. This is demonstrated by the shaman either describing them in sufficient detail to convince those watching that they are present or incarnating them so as to allow them to speak through him and be perceived by others directly. Secondly, this demonstrates shows that the shaman is now in control of both himself and his spirits to the extent that the shamanic ecstasy during which communication is possible is achieved or entered into by the shaman when he chooses to demonstrate, and not simply when the spirits choose to make themselves known. The spirits are contained in that communication occurs when the shaman wills it, and he is able to protect himself from being influenced at other times.

In some cases, there may be a lengthy and direct verbal examination of the spirit who has been introduced into the shaman in order to convince the audience that the spirit is truly present.²³⁶ Other demonstrations may involve feats such as walking on hot coals or ashes as a way of showing the presence in the shaman of a spirit who can handle heat, or diving below ice as a way of showing the presence of a spirit who makes the shaman impervious to cold.²³⁷ It is evident from the examples given by

²³³ *ibid.*, pp. 350-8

²³⁴ *ibid.*, p.351

²³⁵ *ibid.*

²³⁶ 1999, p.352

²³⁷ *ibid.*, p.353

Shirokogoroff that even if the relationship is not understood as one of direct control, the expectation is that the spirits are at least helping the shaman (perhaps literally undertaking errands for him) and that he can rely upon them to give the support, power or information that he needs.²³⁸ What the shaman must demonstrate is that he has developed a relationship with the spirits that renders the attributes of his various spirits available to him at will, at a time and for a purpose of his own choosing.

Despite this network of working relationships, the expected demonstration that will justify recognition remains possessory in the sense that what is looked for is the presence of the spirits in the shaman together with clear signs that the shaman is not controlled by the spirits, and can both initiate and bring the demonstration to an end at a time of his choosing. The shaman must give his audience a clear sense of being able to manage the proceedings. If it appears that the candidate is controlled by the spirits, the requisite control or mastery on the part of the shaman is lacking and the candidate will not be recognised at that point in time.²³⁹

What is striking when reading Shirokogoroff is the extent to which formal recognition of shamanic ability relies upon the demonstration of controlled 'extasy', evidenced by the managed presence of a spirit in the shaman. The physical actions and utterances of the shaman must be perceived to be those of the spirits, and the more evident the spirits are, the more likely it is that the candidate will be recognised as a shaman. The holding of a formal, ritualistic event is in itself a test of a candidate's ability to remain in control. In some degree, the details of the particular ceremony are secondary: the substance of the test being whether the spirits can be self-introduced by the shaman at that particular point in time, at that particular place, for the particular purpose intended.²⁴⁰

²³⁸ *ibid.*, p.368

²³⁹ *ibid.*, p.352 Rejection may not be final: it is possible that the candidate will continue with his apprenticeship and be reassessed at a later date.

²⁴⁰ In some ceremonies, the presence of the spirits is itself serves the purpose of determining whether the candidate should be recognized; in others, a particular demonstration of healing, divination etc. may form part of the ceremony. See, for example, 1999, p.351.

Although Shirokogoroff acknowledged the difficulty of obtaining detailed information about the shamanic apprenticeship because of its hidden nature, he is frequently conscious of the degree of training that must have taken place to enable the candidate to complete the recognition ceremony. For example, among the Manchurian Evenki, the recognition ceremony described can take up to nine days:

Such a performance requires a rather long technical training of the candidate, which is done by the 'teacher' who explains everything concerning the spirits and ritualism.²⁴¹

Ongoing communal recognition of a shaman can have an element of periodic ritual but is largely secured by a shaman's continuing ability to demonstrate shamanic capability: A shaman must continue demonstrating effective mastery of his spirits (in the sense discussed), so as to be able to diagnose and resolve personal and communal illnesses or other difficulties. More broadly, a shaman must continue to maintain the balance of the natural and spiritual worlds. One who fails to demonstrate effectively may come to be ignored by his clan, and face (for example) the possibility that a new candidate will come forward who is not of his choosing.²⁴²

At the beginning of a shaman's career, the number of spirits mastered may be small and the first may (but need not) come to occupy a special position in the shaman's network of spiritual relationships.²⁴³ Over time, the number of spirits mastered can be expected to increase, and will be reflected by an increase in the shaman's personal competence, power and authority. In those tribes or clans with formal list of the spirits,²⁴⁴ it is expected that a great shaman will, in time, master them all. In practice, there is no uniformity to be expected and the progress of a shaman's career remains as individual as the details of its commencement.

Against that background of variability in the progress of individual careers, the practice of periodic communal sacrifices of animals to the spirits is widespread. Such

²⁴¹ 1999, p.352

²⁴² *ibid.*, p.382

²⁴³ *ibid.*, p.369

²⁴⁴ *ibid.*, p.352

sacrifices take place when the shaman feels them appropriate,²⁴⁵ and they generally follow the format of the shamanic ceremonies used when first recognising the shaman. In effect, Shirokogoroff describes repeat performances: such sacrifices may, therefore, be regarded as reaffirmations of the shaman's status in that they recognise (that is, are appropriate following) a successful demonstration of shamanizing. With a shaman whose power increases over time, the periodic sacrifices offer an opportunity to show that the shaman has a greater number of spirits available to him.²⁴⁶

Just as the presence of incarnated spirits is a marked feature of the ceremony of initial recognition of a new shaman, so this is a marked feature of the periodic sacrifices. During the course of the ceremony, the shaman may be expected to call into himself all his spirits, one after another, so as to demonstrate to the clan that he maintains his mastery over them.²⁴⁷

The shamanism Shirokogoroff describes is highly circumscribed. Although the shaman is the one who is in communication with the spirits, he is not free simply to declare anything as being what the spirits say. The spirits must say that which meets the expectations of those for whose benefit they are being drawn upon. Like the shaman, the spirits must meet social expectations. As Shirokogoroff puts it:

In the choice of methods, the shaman is greatly handicapped by the theoretical considerations concerning the spirits and methods of diagnosis, so he must perform what is required. ... The shaman's diagnosis may be made only in special terms and according to the conceptions as to the nature of the troubles which exist among the ethnical groups.²⁴⁸

One consequence of this is that there are limits to the range of maladies that shamanic ability offers a solution to. As Shirokogoroff puts it, 'the shaman is not a medicine man who must treat everything'.²⁴⁹ Shirokogoroff suggests that this was

²⁴⁵ Shirokogoroff relates that among the Tungus of Manchuria the tradition was that the sacrifice be offered not less than once every three years: 1999, p.370

²⁴⁶ 1999, pp.370-1

²⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p.370

²⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p.359

²⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p.359

always true, because he observes shamans making use of diagnostic methods recognizable to the western mind before resorting to any form of shamanizing. He does also note, however, that western medicine was having an increasing influence, further constraining the social space available to shamanic practitioners.²⁵⁰

We may, however, question the characterization of social expectations as a ‘handicap’. The understanding of the Evenki as to what their shamans are or are not capable of, and what may or may not reasonably be expected of them, certainly constrain the social space within which a shaman operates but, conversely, it is precisely that understanding and the expectations it leads to that ‘carve out’ and maintain that social space in the first place. Boundaries limit but they do so by making clear the full extent of that which is bounded. The animist perspective (or psychomental complex, to use Shirokogoroff’s phrase) of the Evenki generally, is expressed in heightened or intensified form in their shamanic tradition of specialist practitioners. For that intensified form to exist, there must be ways of distinguishing it from the more diffuse form that is ‘normal’, in the sense of being found widely across Evenki society; without limits, there can be no specialists.

6.4.4 Apprenticeship: a developing theme

Shirokogoroff is far from being the only scholar to have conducted fieldwork among the Evenki. An example of earlier work by the ethnographer Viktor Vasiliev²⁵¹ from the first decade of twentieth century is summarized by Znamienski.²⁵² Although the description given is largely of the career of the shaman, Darkha, a period of prolonged illness is described. This illness is interpreted by the clan as marking him out as one ‘called in’ by spirits, ‘who sent the ailment to prepare him for the shamanic vocation’.²⁵³ There is limited detail on the process whereby he recovers but it involves a period of interaction with the spirits. There is no mention of a human tutor or of any process or ceremony of formal recognition and the account proceeds

²⁵⁰ *ibid.*, pp.358-361

²⁵¹ Vasiliev, Viktor N.: Shaman Darkha, *Pedagogicheskii listok* 1 (1910), 34-53

²⁵² 2003, pp.123-5

²⁵³ *ibid.*, p.124

immediately to a description of Darkha's healing practice and spreading fame. There are, however, hints that particular ceremonies are held, including one for the animation of the shaman's drum.²⁵⁴ The drum, along with the rest of the shaman's equipment, is made for him by other members of the clan, indicating that there are others around the shaman by whom the tradition is remembered.

More recent scholarship can show some awareness of the importance of attending to the process of becoming a shaman. Georg Heyne provides an essay analyzing the social role of the shaman²⁵⁵ and, although he expressly states that the process of becoming a shaman is 'beyond the purpose of this article',²⁵⁶ his account of a visit to the Chinese Reindeer-Evenki in 1993 is of interest. Heyne encountered a female shaman born around 1912, Njura Kaltakun, who took over the spirits of her predecessor, Olga Dmitrievna, who died in 1944. Njura experienced her calling by the spirits when she was around sixteen,²⁵⁷ following which 'she became, as Olga before her, the disciple of a powerful shaman of the neighbouring Kumarčen in order to acquire the esoteric tools necessary for her difficult task among the people.'²⁵⁸ The details of the training must remain unknown but it is clear that the process of becoming a shaman is protracted: although her predecessor Olga died in 1944, and Njura is described as having taken over her spirits, she is described as enjoying recognition among her people from the 1950s.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁴ *ibid.*, p.125

²⁵⁵ 2003, 31-50. Despite Heyne's own fieldwork, this article relies heavily upon Shirokogoroff.

²⁵⁶ *ibid.*, p.34. Heyne indicates his intention to undertake this exercise but, so far as I have been able to ascertain, sadly has not done so.

²⁵⁷ The precise nature of the calling is not detailed.

²⁵⁸ 2003, p.47

²⁵⁹ *ibid.*

6.5 Conclusions

We have, I hope, spent enough time with the Evenki and their shamans for them to seem a little less the 'exotic other'. The Evenki are a people whose way of life was born of the land they inhabited, and of their perception of that land as a place in which the souls of those who inhabited it before them were, at times, still active. Further, the land is animated by a range of other spirits, some animal or elemental, and others properly placed in spirit lands forming part of a wider cosmology than is perceived by looking only at this world. Sometimes those spirits intrude into daily life and, over time, a tradition is built up that embodies conventions or protocols for dealing with the spirits. A body of knowledge is built up as to how the spirits are best handled. In this way the natural order is maintained and protected against disturbance. This is the setting of the apprentice shaman, the one who recovers her poise after being called upon by the spirits, uses the accumulated body of traditional knowledge to achieve control over her own consciousness and develop different ways of interacting with the spirits. In time, she becomes proficient in her ability to communicate, is able to learn from the spirits and, over time, to visit their world, as they visit hers. This is the pathway of the apprentice who comes to be recognized as a clan's shaman when able to demonstrate these skills for the benefit of her clan.

How well has this tradition been preserved? From his observations during the second decade of the twentieth century, Shirokogoroff felt the tradition already under threat. He identifies three distinct (if inter-related) factors: (i) pressure from other ethnic groups and the breakdown of the clan system according to which traditional Evenki shamanism is organized, (ii) conflict with other complexes, such as Christianity and modern rationalism, and (iii) opposition from the Evenki.²⁶⁰ This last is interesting because Shirokogoroff warns against assuming that the Evenki blindly accept shamanism: many do not, regarding the spirit world as best left alone and shamans themselves as the source of the trouble. Many Evenki speak of the shamans of the past as being the ones who were strong, and have a lesser regard for those of

²⁶⁰ 1999, p.389

‘today’.²⁶¹ The idea of a traditional people living at one with the land, enjoying aspects of experience that are difficult of access in the west, might appeal to the western imagination but we do well to remember that a century or more ago, shamanism could be a controversial practice among the Evenki themselves.

Nadezhda Bulatova, writing in 1992, describes the social basis of Evenki ritual folklore as ‘largely destroyed’, with much of the folklore itself lost as a result.²⁶² We are left with ritual relics of the tradition. Bulatova tells of her work with colleagues in the summer of 1987, recording the songs of an Evenki shaman, Matriona Petrovna Kurbeltinova, who is described as today being ‘the only Evenki shaman able to present such valuable material.’²⁶³ Reading Vitebsky’s *Reindeer People*,²⁶⁴ his account of nearly twenty years visiting and living with the Even,²⁶⁵ it is noticeable that there is very little mention of shamanism by an ethnographer who is recognized for an influential introduction to shamanism as a cross-cultural phenomenon.²⁶⁶

There is now little opportunity to go back and re-examine the Evenki apprenticeship, so as to explore the detailed content of the tradition as to how communication with the spirits was achieved. Nevertheless, I submit that there is sufficient in the accounts we have to be confident in seeing that skill as the outcome of a process of apprenticeship. Further, that apprenticeship reveals itself to have the same structure as was previously identified: (i) initiatory experience, (ii) training (or apprenticeship proper) by existing practitioners and spirit guides, (iii) recognition by the practitioner’s community. Specifically, what is looked for, and recognized if demonstrated, is the candidate’s ability to communicate with the spirits.

This may be evidenced by various forms of communication both active and receptive. The shaman may be in trance (ecstasy) and incarnating the spirits so as to allow them to speak through her; she may be in trance and have gone travelling to

²⁶¹ *ibid.*, pp.391-4

²⁶² Balzer, 1997, p.237

²⁶³ *ibid.*

²⁶⁴ 2005

²⁶⁵ After the Evenki, the most numerous of the Tungus-speaking peoples, with a very similar reindeer-herding lifestyle.

²⁶⁶ *The Shaman*, 2001

visit them; she may be closer to normal consciousness but be sufficiently removed from it so as to perceive and describe the spirits to the satisfaction of her listeners. In each case, the underlying skill that has been acquired during the apprenticeship is the ability to maintain equilibrium at whatever point on the spectrum of consciousness enables that particular form of communication to be practised. What the shaman demonstrates is the ability to do this *at will*.

In recognizing shamanism as the outcome of this process of apprenticeship, we allow the Evenki shamans of the past to make a further contribution to our understanding of shamanism. In identifying shamanism as the outcome of this apprenticeship, we are able to move beyond the Evenki towards a general definition of shamanism that is not prescriptive of the cultural setting or content of any particular tradition and which therefore not only accommodates but anticipates a high degree of local variability. This is a model of shamanism that relies upon strong local traditions with their own identities that both constitute and draw upon central traditions that embody and bound wider expectations as to what may typically be expected of a practising shaman. Without strong local traditions, maintained more widely within society, shamanic apprenticeships cannot be offered.

Chapter Seven

Spiritualist Mediums as Traditional Shamans

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter I undertake a comparative assessment of Spiritualist mediumship as an example of traditional shamanism. In Section 7.2 I set out a comparison of Spiritualist mediumship and Evenki shamanism by showing that aspects of Spiritualist mediumistic practice are to be found in understandings of traditional shamanism and vice-versa. In essence, this is an exercise in comparing and contrasting two traditions in order to amplify our understanding of them.

This is, in part, to assess the extent to which a shamanic characterization of mediumship is justified but it is also to demonstrate the limitations of a comparative approach that focuses upon visible (and therefore culturally conditioned) manifestations of practitioner consciousness, the nature of which is commonly regarded as significant (despite disagreement both as to its nature and significance). The traditional comparative approach to identifying shamanisms has enabled scholars to identify traditions as having shamanic characteristics but a tendency to focus on the finished product has not enabled us to identify what shamanic traditions have in common, let alone why they recur so widely across the world and across human history. It is one thing to identify corresponding phenomena but it is quite another to be able to demonstrate a common mechanism or cause giving rise to those phenomena. If there is indeed a common mechanism or cause, such that shamanisms are correctly understood as particular manifestations of something properly called shamanism, it follows that shamanism must be defined with reference to that mechanism or cause and not with reference to the particular manifestations (shamanic abilities or consciousness etc.) to which it gives rise. My methodology remains comparative but the ethnography with which it is combined alerted me to the importance of comparing underlying causes as well as outcomes.

It is for this reason that I maintain a focus upon the apprenticeship structure identified in Spiritualist mediumship in Britain and which, I argue, is characteristic of traditional Evenki shamanism. Apprenticeship has not only been one of the methodologies I have employed, it has itself become the model for comprehending the phenomena under examination. The proposed model is articulated in Section 7.3.

The model of shamanic apprenticeship I identify as the appropriate basis for a definition of shamanism shows how shamanisms recur in human culture. Identifying the reason why shamanisms recur in human culture (if indeed there is one single reason), is beyond the scope of this thesis, although it is arguably the more interesting task. It is nevertheless possible that a clearer answer as to ‘how’ will clarify or affirm an understanding as to which aspects of the shamanic phenomenon should be focused upon in order to determine ‘why’. This brings us back once again to the study of consciousness, which (as we have seen) shamanic scholars often naturally gravitate towards without necessarily articulating clearly that the question they are pursuing is ‘why’ rather than (or as well as) ‘how’. To the extent that I discuss mediumistic or shamanic consciousness, I do so primarily in order to demonstrate that existing typologies of mediumistic or shamanic consciousness are often lamentably simplistic and fail properly to acknowledge the full range of practices and understandings that go to make up shamanic traditions, including both the Siberian Evenki and the Anglo-American Spiritualist traditions. I do this also in acknowledgment of that fact that a heightened, raised or developed form of awareness that can be employed by the practitioner at will is, broadly, the outcome of the shamanic apprenticeship. To the extent that this is what Eliade intended by reference to shamans as technicians of ecstasy, this study reaffirms the importance of that focus in his work, even as it offers a slightly different understanding as to why shamanic practitioners are to be understood as craftsmen in consciousness.

A useful definition must not only be clear as to what it includes but must be equally clear as to what is excluded: further, inclusions and exclusions must be demonstrably appropriate, in the sense that they bring a greater degree of clarity. If the apprenticeship model accurately shows the boundaries of traditional shamanism, we

should expect it to help us see when we have moved beyond traditional shamanism. Accordingly, I use Section 7.4 to illustrate briefly some of the ways in which my apprenticeship model of shamanism helps to clarify a number of hitherto indistinct boundaries, such as that between traditional shamanisms (including Spiritualism) on the one hand, and neo-shamanisms (and New Age practices such as channelling) on the other. More specifically with reference to Spiritualism, the proposed apprenticeship model helps to distinguish it from its own offshoots such as Brazilian Spiritism (with which it retains a close relationship), even as it seems possible also to identify the shamanic apprenticeship in other, more obviously indigenous, South American traditions.

One further, obvious task follows, which is that of using my apprenticeship model as the basis of an express definition of shamanism. For this task, and the task of indicating how that definition might usefully be tested by further research, I reserve my final chapter.

7.2 Spiritualism as shamanism

The aim in this section is to demonstrate that it is possible to identify in Spiritualism, and specifically in the Portobello tradition of mediumship, recognized aspects of shamanic practice. Having selected the Evenki as the second case study for this thesis, it is appropriate that the principal comparison be between British mediumship exemplified by Portobello and the Evenki, with reference to other examples of Siberian shamanism where appropriate. It has to be acknowledged that this is not a direct comparison of like for like, in that Portobello is the home of, in effect, one specific shamanic clan within traditional British shamanism. Ideally, it would have been possible to undertake a similar ethnographic study of an Evenki clan as was undertaken at Portobello. There is, sadly, no option but to accept that such an exercise is almost certainly now impossible, given the effective loss of traditional Evenki shamanism. It would, in any event, have encountered the difficulties of language and relationship Shirokogoroff was conscious of eighty years ago.¹ Even the difficulties of extended access for western researchers to Spiritualist circles in their own culture are serious enough to have kept all but a few at bay.

This issue of accessibility matters a great deal. Marjorie Balzer describes the shamanic séance as the ‘very core of shamanism’² but that is no more true than it would be to claim that the Spiritualist church service is the very core of Spiritualism. The shamanic séance and the Spiritualist church service may well be the typical public demonstrations found within each tradition, and therefore constitute a significant component of what is readily accessible, but they can only offer indirect access to that which enables them. If we fail to attend to the processes of learning that lead to proficient practitioners, the public demonstrations will remain, at best, only partially comprehensible or, perhaps more likely, open to misinterpretation. One cannot criticize scholars for working with such material as is available to them but it is important to be conscious as to the questions that material is capable of answering.

¹ 1999, p.275, fn

² Balzer, 1990, p.x

I do not propose to list in this and the following Section every last possible point of comparison between shamanism and Spiritualism: such an exercise would be tedious. I have chosen to group a number of points of comparison under the headings of equipment, social roles, cosmologies and consciousness. The issue of shamanic or mediumistic consciousness then leads into Section 7.4 on apprenticeship as that which enables the acquisition of the skills needed to manage shamanic (including mediumistic) consciousness.

7.2.1 Equipment

It is easy to assume that contemporary Spiritualist mediums do not make heavy use of equipment or props but a number of parallels can be drawn with traditional Evenki shamanism. The setting of mediumistic demonstrations tends to be the kind of physical space recognized in Western society as indicating a church: namely, a large room or hall that allows people to congregate in order to participate in a religious ritual, performance or demonstration. The space is decorated in various ways that indicate a spiritual belief system, cosmology or ancestor spirit(s). In the Spiritualist setting, we noted representations of spirit guides such as Jesus Christ and White Eagle, the presence of religious symbols such as crosses and Bibles, all of which are regarded as mnemonic symbols referencing a wider spiritual reality. Anisimov's reminder apart,³ it is often overlooked that the detailed construction and decoration of the shaman's tent serves a similar purpose. Church halls and shamanic tents are not fundamentally different structures from those found more widely in the societies that construct them but there are physical details indicating a special purpose.

Shamanic clothing has tended to be discussed far more, partly perhaps because personal clothing is more easily preserved than entire structures, leading to a greater number and variety of examples being available for examination. In this respect there are apparent differences between Spiritualist mediums and other traditional shamans, simply because mediums tend not to adopt any form of religious garb. It is, however, expected that a medium giving a platform demonstration should present himself well.

³ 1963

In most Spiritualist churches, a suit and tie is expected of male mediums and female mediums are expected to present themselves equally well. Mediums are expected to self-present in a way that can be regarded as respectable, in the sense of encouraging others to respect them. It is expressly taught at Portobello that a medium is an ambassador for the spirit world. Occasionally, mediums will wear, for example, lapel badges indicating membership of a Spiritualist organization and I have observed mediums (both male and female) wearing crystal pendants around the neck, indicating a frequent belief among Spiritualists that crystals can be used as some form of focal point for spiritual energy.⁴ There are slight (but only slight) indications of personal accoutrements being used in a way that suggests a symbolic or functional connection with mediumship. I also noted earlier that the use of devices is generally characteristic of an earlier Spiritualism, but less so of the contemporary movement.

To this extent, mediums simply reflect wider social expectations as to what constitutes respectable or appropriate dress; reminding us that although the external signifiers, or forms of expression of mediumistic activity may have changed, the underlying apprenticeship remains constant. Shirokogoroff, as we have seen, also accepted that Evenki society changed over time and so, therefore, did the particular understandings and practices that constituted its shamanic tradition.⁵ Similarly, shamanic robes and other items of attire may look exotic to Western eyes, but are presumably markedly less so to Evenki eyes: they are instead special versions of more common items. Again, we see that it can be misleading to assume a fundamental difference between the everyday and the significant or, as Durkheim and Eliade would have it, the sacred and the profane. One of the interesting aspects of Swatos & Gissurason's work on Icelandic Spiritualism lies in their conclusion that Durkheim's distinction was, ultimately, unhelpful:

We do not think that sacredness lies in being set apart, but in penetration. The sacred takes meaning precisely as it runs in and through the everyday life-world in constant dialogue with the mundane demands of day-to-day

⁴ Portobello Spiritualist Church maintains a stock of crystals and polished stones for sale, partly as the result of a personal enthusiasm on the part of one particular Church medium. I have also seen mediums, both male and female, wear crystal pendants while working; reasons given tend to suggest some form of focus for spiritual energy but there is no consistent or clear teaching.

⁵ Shirokogoroff, 1999, pp.391-402

existence. The duality of matter and spirit – of this world and the next – is the dynamic that lies close to whatever “essence” one may claim is religious.⁶

There is no doubt that Evenki shamans carry on their person many items of both symbolic and functional importance, such as mirrors and metal bear paws that function as placings for spirits, or otherwise help the shaman to maintain his connection or relationship with his spirit helpers. In fact, such accoutrements are to be found in the Spiritualist tradition but not in the form of items of personal attire. In saying this, I make reference to the use of crystal balls or other items (such as crystals or stones) as a focal point, the practice of psychometry (‘reading’ or perceiving information related to a physical item), the use of Ouija boards, planchettes, trumpets or other physical items enabling communication with spirits, including the construction of special ‘cabinets’ within which the medium sits in order to produce physical materializations.⁷ It has to be said that I have seen very little in the way of such accoutrements during my own involvement in Spiritualism and that the use of such items does not seem to characterize contemporary Spiritualist mediumship but there is little doubt that their use is indicated in Spiritualist literature describing the history of the movement.

One point of commonality is indicated by the Evenki use of headdresses with fringes of the type illustrated in both & Oakes & Riewe⁸ and Gorbatcheva Federova,⁹ the purpose of which is to occlude the shaman’s physical vision, thus helping to maintain a focus upon the spirits. The use of such headdresses is not to be found in Spiritualist demonstrations but I have witnessed demonstrations during which the medium has been blindfolded, with the intention of demonstrating that information being conveyed is ‘from spirit’, rather than being derived from, for example, an ability to read body language. I have also encountered short-sighted mediums who prefer to remove their spectacles so as to assist their focus on spirit, as well as mediums who choose to work with their eyes closed.

⁶ Swatos & Gissurason, 1997, p.235

⁷ Leaf, 1976, pp.127-9

⁸ 1998, p.89

⁹ 2008, pp.188, 217

Music and singing form part of both traditions. At Portobello, the singing of hymns is explained as an important stage in a demonstration in that it is a communal activity that creates a positive vibration or energy that the medium is said to work with. Indeed, some mediums insist upon particular hymns, the hearing of which forms part of their personal technique for accessing the mediumistic state of awareness or consciousness in which they work. Further, some mediums insist upon different hymns for different forms of mediumship.¹⁰ This might seem far removed from shamanic drumming among the Evenki but, again, we find wider cultural norms given particular expression in the context of a shamanic performance. It is, perhaps, worth bearing in mind that not all traditional shamanisms make use of drumming but that the use of music in some form is widespread.¹¹ In his consideration of *What Mediumship Is: A Practical Treatise on How to Develop Mediumship*,¹² Horace Leaf includes a chapter on the 'Importance of Music'.¹³

One other method of accessing mediumistic or shamanic awareness often mentioned in studies of shamanism is the use of alcohol, tobacco and other entheogens. Resort to such tools appears to be discouraged in Spiritualism on the ground that it results in a lesser degree of (self-)control on the part of the medium. What is acknowledged is that the ingestion of such substances results in a loosening of the connection between the soul and the body. In Spiritualism, the loss of control is regarded as a negative consequence that outweighs the benefit of greater ease of spiritual perception but it is acknowledged that there is a relevant and perceptible effect on practitioner awareness, and I have had related to me a number of anecdotes about mediums giving particularly convincing demonstrations when 'under the influence' of alcohol, as well as their communicating spirits. It is likely that social context plays a significant part in Spiritualism's general resistance to the use of awareness-altering

¹⁰ For example, Rev. Bernice Winstanley at Portobello Spiritualist Church insists upon the 23rd psalm sung to Crimond prior to her demonstrations of mediumship. Other mediums at Portobello have their own favourites, which then become known as 'X's hymn', with the result that developing mediums aware of such niceties know not to adopt the hymn as their own.

¹¹ Examination of the use of music in shamanic traditions can be extremely fruitful: see, for example, Barley Norton's recent study *Songs for the Spirits: Music and Mediums in Modern Vietnam*, University of Illinois Press, 2009, in which the author examines the use of music and dance in the management of demonstrations involving the incarnation of spirits. See also Basso, R.: *Music, Possession and Shamanism among Khond Tribes*, Culture and Religion, 2006, Vol. 7(2), 177-197

¹² 1976

¹³ *ibid.*, pp.159-64

substances; a medium who is not in control of himself presents a risk to churches, and to the movement's understanding of its services as retaining an element of worship. In Protestant and Protestant-influenced cultures, it is simply not appropriate to be inebriated in church.

7.2.2 Social roles

When we come to compare the social roles of mediums and Evenki shamans, both can be said to be normal members of society to the extent that they marry, raise families, and are not fundamentally set apart from other members of the clan or community. Evenki shamans do seem to have been more fully supported as shamans, in that it was possible for them to make a viable living as a shaman. By contrast, very few contemporary Spiritualist mediums are able to do this, undertaking their mediumship as a form of voluntary activity while maintaining some other occupation from which they derive an income. At Portobello Church, for example, there are no paid positions, and the Church runs entirely on a volunteer basis. Again, this is a difference attributable to the wider society within which each tradition arises, rather than a difference in what shamans and mediums do.

An important point of comparison lies in the essential nature of the role of Evenki shamans and Spiritualist mediums in their respective traditions' demonstrations or public scéances. Just as there can be no shamanic demonstration or performance without a shaman being present, so too there is no Spiritualist demonstration or service without a medium being present. In practical demonstration of this, I have seen Spiritualist meetings cancelled because the booked medium either did not or was unable to attend and no other medium was available to step in.¹⁴ Although I have argued that a scholarly focus on public scéances will not of itself give access to a comprehensive understanding of the craft, it is understandable that there should be such a focus; not only are public demonstrations accessible but services at which a

¹⁴ On one such occasion the decision was taken to hold a discussion group rather than simply turn everyone away but the point is that without a medium there can be no 'mediumizing', and that the intended event cannot happen.

medium is present and demonstrating do represent the point at which the Spirituaist tradition is most strongly articulated and reaffirmed.

In both the Spiritualist and Evenki traditions, the practitioner is principally a healer or spiritual leader, not a political one, the only caveat here being that there are hints that Evenki shamans may have enjoyed some form of political standing in time past. We saw that both shaman and medium act as psychopomp, rescuing souls who end up in the ‘wrong place’ in the spirit worlds, including those who attempt to use another person’s physical form as a ‘placing’ in order to remain in the natural world, rather than moving on to their appropriate place in the next. The convening of Spiritualist ‘rescue circles’ mirrors shamanic accounts of soul healing or rescue. The ‘tapeworm healing’ related in Chapter 4 reads like a classic shamanic healing of the kind found in certain Asian traditions as involving the removal of an unwanted physical item from the patient’s body¹⁵ and, more generally, we saw various examples of healing as central to the community benefit derived from shamanic traditions. In Spiritualism, healing has tended to go unexamined because there is, superficially, little to write about but there is little doubting the importance of this form of mediumship for Spiritualists or its importance in terms of what mediums actually do, and why they are valued by the communities they serve. Further, an interest in healing readily extends in both traditions to an appreciation of the natural world and its resources, including herbal lore.

7.2.3 Cosmologies

When I speak of the cosmologies of shamanism and Spiritualism, I refer not only to their particular beliefs as to the existence, structure and inhabitants of the spirit world but also to the belief common to Spiritualism and the Evenki that the natural world is itself a spirit world. As we have seen, both Spiritualism and the Evenki widely regard the natural world as having a place in a wider cosmic order, rather than being a world that stands apart from it. One consequence of this view is that we are all spirit beings

¹⁵ Eliade, 1989, pp.215ff. Interestingly, such physical extractions seem not to be a significant feature of Evenki shamanism and are wholly lacking in Shirokogoroff’s section dealing with the ‘Treatment of Persons’, (1999, pp.317-9).

while we are in the natural world and that we therefore have at least some awareness of the wider spiritual environment we inhabit. This is evident in the very ordinary, day-to-day use of what might be termed spiritual awareness, intuition or natural psychic ability that is found among non-medium Spiritualists and non-shaman Evenki. It seems reasonable to suppose that it is this widely diffused spiritual awareness, evident in some degree in the general membership of Spiritualist and Evenki communities, that forms the basis for the view in both societies that anyone has the potential to develop as a medium or shaman, even though in practice only a minority of individuals will ever do so. Among the Evenki, there is an observable tendency for the spirits' choice of candidate to reflect family lines of succession. This does not commonly happen in Spiritualism but is not unknown (my own family being a case in point) but Spiritualism exists in a society that does not exhibit the traditional clan structure of the Evenki and, in both cultures, family lineage is no substitute for shamanic ability.

Evenki cosmology reflects a wider relationship with the natural world, in which humans and animals have souls or spirits (sometimes more than one) and inanimate objects can be 'placings' for spirits. As we saw in Section 6.2, the Evenki have traditionally enjoyed a very close relationship with and awareness of the land, arguably even a preoccupation with it. By contrast, Spiritualists inhabit a much more urban environment but often show a preoccupation with the natural world in various ways. Flowers are widely used in Spiritualist meetings, partly for the usual decorative reasons but also because even in the case of cut flowers they are said to be 'alive', to have a 'vibration', meaning that they embody and express spirit in some way. Spiritualist healers can display an interest in homeopathic or natural plant remedies because they offer a way in which the particular 'vibration' or energy of different plants can be used for healing purposes. Like the Evenki, I have not come across the suggestion in Spiritualism that plants can be said to have a soul as such. Similarly, I have not come across a Spiritualist concept offering a direct counterpart to the Evenki understanding of placing. That said, the practice of psychometry¹⁶ does

¹⁶ Psychometry is the practice of a medium giving a message or 'reading' from a physical item such as a piece of clothing or other article. At Portobello, there is a generally dismissive attitude to such practices, as resorting to 'props' (something a competent medium should not need to do).

rely upon the notion that spirits may leave some form of imprint upon a thing. Also, I frequently hear others at Portobello speak of the ‘energy’ that has built up in the Church. Indeed, there was some opposition to the building of the new church hall on the basis that it would lack the ‘vibration’ that had been built up over the years in the existing one, an argument that was overcome by the then Minister, the Rev. Winstanley, on the basis that a similar energy would soon be built up in the new one.

Spiritualists appear to agree that animals exist in the spirit world as well as in the natural world, although there is disagreement as to whether they have souls akin to human souls. There appears to be a contemporary weighting in favour of the view that animals are indeed embodied souls but the older view within the movement was more firmly in accordance with the traditional Roman Catholic teaching that animals do not have souls. But even among Spiritualists who subscribe to the view that animals are (or have) souls, there is general acceptance that there is some qualitative difference between human and animal souls.¹⁷ Shirokogoroff found a very similar position among the Evenki, who showed a very extensive awareness of animal spirits: as we have seen, the mastery or management of animal spirits was a central aspect of shamanic ability. Nevertheless, animal spirits were regarded by the Evenki as different from human ones: the multiple or layered structure of human souls is not found in connection with animal souls, which are regarded more as tools to be used by an able shaman.

Although the details are markedly different, both Spiritualists and Evenki posit the existence of spirit worlds beyond this one. The Evenki commonly describe upper and lower worlds, with the souls of the deceased largely inhabiting the lower worlds, at least initially. Spiritualists are more likely to think in terms of multiple realms, levels or spheres, seven or more, but these too speak to a hierarchy in which the lower levels are those closest to the earth, and are the ones to which the recently departed are likely to migrate, progressing to others over time.

¹⁷ Some Spiritualists assert that animal souls are capable of progressing to human ‘status’, a position that often forms an adjunct belief for Spiritualists who adhere to some doctrine of reincarnation.

Finally, fundamental to both the Evenki and Spiritualist world-views is the idea that those in the spirit worlds may be active in this world, and that communication with the spirits is possible for designated practitioners with the requisite skills. This brings us to the slightly more central issue of whether the requisite skills of Evenki shamans and Spiritualist mediums are at all similar.

7.2.4 Consciousness

In Chapters Five and Six, I demonstrated the extent to which controlled possession practices (that is, practices involving the incarnation of spirits) are properly recognized as central to the traditional shamanic repertoire. Of itself, this is a correction to the frequently expressed view that a shaman is typically one who ‘travels’, a correction made principally by re-examining Shirokogoroff’s work on the Evenki, as a result of which they have often been regarded as the archetypal shamanic people. The counterpart to this correction has been the demonstration, at various points in this thesis, that ‘astral travelling’ or ‘journeying’ has long been accepted as just one skill among others in the mediumistic repertoire, although perhaps not that of the beginner. I do not go so far as Lewis does in suggesting that shamanism is fundamentally a possession career;¹⁸ this is to overcorrect.¹⁹ Shamanic practice clearly includes journeying but so does mediumistic.

The point is simply that in both Spiritualist mediumship and Evenki shamanism, the core skill is managed possession which, over time, develops into a wide range of communicative skills that include journeying (astral travel), incarnation of spirits, and the ability to perceive spirits so that communication may be maintained without the need to incarnate spirits or to go travelling. In both traditions, spirit communication is participatory, a combination of spirit and practitioner activity. As with any conversation, communication with the spirits is of itself neither passive nor active, but both. It is high time we discarded the passive, receptive, ‘feminine’ typology of the Spiritualist medium and that of the active, travelling, ‘masculine’

¹⁸ 1996; also Knecht, 2003, p.3

¹⁹ Also the view of Peter Knecht in *Aspects of Shamanism: An Introduction*, pp.1-30 in Chilson, Clark and Peter Knecht: *Shamans in Asia*, RoutledgeCurzon, London, 2003, p.3

shaman as some kind of spiritual hunter-gatherer. Such a contrast might be convenient and easy to grasp but these are poor reasons to accord it scholarly credibility.

Eliade's focus upon shamanic ecstasy (originally Shirokogoroff's term), and the ability to manage it, is appropriate in that the practitioner's ability to manage his awareness is, broadly, the intended outcome of the shamanic apprenticeship but, as Chapter 6 demonstrated, a close reading of Shirokogoroff makes it clear that an important and typical use of shamanic poise or equilibrium is to enable a managed possession or incarnation of spirits for the purpose of giving a public demonstration of their presence. Much more rarely but still appropriately (in the sense of remaining true to the tradition), it is used to allow the shaman to travel or journey (the soul leaving the body and travelling to the spirit worlds).

In relation to Spiritualist mediumship, we saw that the term 'trance' tends to be used to describe the medium's state of consciousness when incarnating spirits, whereas Shirokogoroff (and others following him) have tended to use the word 'trance' to describe the particular shamanic ecstasy evident when travelling (the visible sign of which is the shaman's unconsciousness or rigidity). Thus the appearance of difference and the perception of a contrast has arisen. In fact what we see from Shirokogoroff's fieldwork (and which seems to be confirmed by the other accounts available in English) is that the shamanic ecstasy can be applied to different purposes, possession (incarnation of spirits) being the commonest, and that the incarnation of spirits is just as much dependent upon the shaman maintaining his equilibrium or poise as is the ability to travel.

The contrast often drawn between the passive medium who gives up control in order to allow himself to be used or impressed upon by spirits, as against the active shaman who is able to journey because he maintains control, comes to seem misconceived. Just as journeying is regarded by the Evenki as rare (a minority of shamans are capable of it) and risky (not to be undertaken lightly), so too we find in Spiritualism the view that this practice (usually called astral travel) is rare (a minority of mediums

are capable of it) and risky (not to be undertaken lightly) because of the risk of the soul's connection with the body being broken (in which case death results).

On the basis of Evenki shamanism, Eliade's focus upon 'ecstasy' as key to understanding shamanic practice is, I submit, correct but his thesis that the ecstasy is typically used to journey is not borne out by Shirokogoroff's fieldwork. The suggestion that the incarnation of spirits is either a lesser or debased form of shamanism or that it requires an abandonment of control is unjustified. The lesson to be drawn from the Evenki is that communication with the spirits requires the shaman to maintain his ecstasy (his balance, focus or self-control) and that as soon as he loses it, the connection with the spirits is lost. The contrast between passive incarnation and active journeying is ultimately a false one. These are simply particular applications of the ability to maintain shamanic ecstasy, with journeying a much rarer practice.

I argue that discussion of shamanic or mediumistic awareness should properly be undertaken in the context of the apprenticeship model because the development of shamanic consciousness or awareness is fundamentally what shamanic apprenticeship is concerned with. Accordingly, it is only by examining the topic of shamanic consciousness in this context that we are able to reach more reliable conclusions as to the range and nature of practitioner consciousnesses, by understanding more fully how they are achieved and maintained. That particular project lies beyond the scope of the current thesis but represents an obvious development arising from an apprenticeship-based definition of shamanism.

7.3 Spiritualism and shamanism: a common apprenticeship model

I submit that the comparison undertaken in the previous section is sufficient to demonstrate that Spiritualist mediumship is properly characterized as an example of shamanism: however, it is telling that a comparison of this nature does not, of itself, explain how two different examples of the same phenomenon should have arisen in such markedly different cultural settings.

Other studies examine initiatory experiences, training by the spirits or by existing shamans/mediums, and the ways in which apprentices achieve public recognition, but will tend to do so simply on the basis that these are assorted, recognised aspects of shamanism among others, and not on the basis that they are the constituents of a specific pattern of apprenticeship consistently found across shamanisms. The argument I make is not simply that both Spiritualism and shamanism are apprenticeship-based traditions; clearly the same might also be said of other religious traditions. Obvious examples include the training of Roman Catholic priests, or of Presbyterian ministers of the Church of Scotland, both of which, however, lack the consciously-recognized and required element of extended personal engagement with particular, identified spirits. In the shamanic apprenticeship, this is the means whereby the apprentice recovers from (by utilizing) initiatory psychic experiences so as to develop his awareness for the purpose of communicating with those and other spirits. The point I draw attention to is that the peculiarly shamanic pattern of apprenticeship is the apprenticeship found in Spiritualism, albeit with a clearer element of training by existing practitioners.

Spiritualism has formal organizations not because these are a critical requirement of its mediumistic tradition but because they are a feature of the wider society in which Spiritualism subsists. Spiritualist organizations may therefore be regarded as being in large part a culturally specific feature of Spiritualism. This observation provides one example of the usefulness of shamanic apprenticeship as the basis of the cross-cultural definition of shamanism that has so often been sought. That shamanisms are apprenticeship outcomes is an important point in relation to shamanic traditions

because it represents the identification of the institution that enables them to cohere and to be maintained effectively, with less need for formal religious bodies or rationalized organizations. Indeed, the presence of formal organizations in Spiritualism may have distracted Nelson by obscuring mediumship as itself the defining institution within the movement, leading him to attempt an analysis of the movement in terms of the strength or weakness of bodies such as the Spiritualists' National Union or The Greater World Association.

I proceed now to draw together the elements of apprenticeship that have been identified so as to set out the basic structure of the shamanic apprenticeship.

7.3.1 Selection of the candidate: the call to the tradition

First, there is the question of selection of the candidate, which in shamanism may be partly a matter of tradition or perceived inheritance but typically involves some form of initiatory experience, often of a possessory nature, which alerts the individual to a shamanic calling. This initiatory experience may, variously, be the brief but vivid experience of having travelled somewhere, of being directly possessed by a particular spirit, of feeling different or disconnected from society over a (possibly prolonged) period, or otherwise of not being in this world. Whatever the description of the particular experience, the shamanic tradition provides for its interpretation as a call issued by the spirits to the one 'hearing' it, to begin training as a shaman. Such experiences are both possessory and uncontrolled in nature: the experience involves one or more spirits intruding into the awareness of the potential candidate, is neither initiated nor ended by the potential candidate. Needless to say, such an intrusion may or may not be welcome and, as we have seen, examples of resistance or even outright refusal on the part of potential candidates have been widely noted.

Similarly, in Spiritualism, although mediumistic ability may seem to run in families, there is certainly no guarantee or even real expectation that all members of a family, or indeed any of the next generation, will necessarily develop any significant mediumistic ability, let alone pursue a mediumistic career. Regardless of earthly

connection or background, each apprentice medium is seen as someone who must be chosen or 'touched' by spirit.

7.3.2 Training the apprentice: renewing the tradition

Should the shamanic 'call' be acknowledged and accepted, the period of training, the apprenticeship proper, can begin. This period allows both for training in shamanic tradition by an earthly teacher, an existing shaman (who act as master to the apprentice) and training by spirit guides in mastering or dealing with human, animal or other spirits. Thus the initial possessory experience leads to training in particular skills, including skill in self-control, that enable the practitioner to control/master/manage (or productively relate to) spirits (or spiritual forces) perceived by the practitioner as being distinct from himself. As previously stated, the essence of the shamanic apprenticeship lies in the transformation of susceptibility into capability.

The training period may involve either formal or informal teaching methods on the part of the human teacher, according to the particular tradition. Examination of the Evenki illustrates that the precise role of the human teacher may vary significantly according to setting and available social resources. Thus the shamanic apprenticeship may be a highly structured programme of teaching in traditional cosmology and techniques of managing or relating to the spirits; equally, a human teacher may undertake the more limited role of facilitator, encouraging the apprentice to pursue a highly personal exploration of his relationship with the spirits. In principle, there would seem to be no objection to the possibility of an apprentice having more than one teacher or even a succession of teachers. In Spiritualism, at least in the Portobello case study, we saw a highly structured course of development, but Spiritualist mediumship is a tradition maintained in a society with ample material resources. Once again, attending to wider social context may help to explain why some traditions are able to maintain more formal or structured learning processes. A society whose members are struggling to survive in a difficult environment may have a strong tradition of teaching by the spirits but which may be weak in terms of the

normative strength of its human teaching tradition, simply because of difficulties in allocating appropriate time and material resources.²⁰ Yet even here, some form of tutoring is to be expected simply because the understanding and attitudes that lead to shamanic practitioners being recognized and valued must themselves be socially transmitted.

The element of social transmission predicted by the model is important but should not be prioritized over the element of tutoring by the spirits found in traditional shamanisms. Within the Portobello circle, much of the teaching in terms of the development of mediumistic ability was understood as taking place between circle members and their guides, not by the circle leader. So far as teaching by the spirits is concerned, the circle leader becomes a facilitator, and is not understood as being responsible for or in charge of what spirit guides might show the apprentices they work with. A tradition that displays only a slight element of teaching by, or involvement with, spirits but which has a strong element of formal, normative teaching by human teachers might be socially strong and durable but would nevertheless, I argue, be only weakly shamanic.

7.3.3 Recognition of a shaman: reaffirming the tradition

Finally, there is an event or series of events to mark the apprentice's initiation or, more properly, publicly recognised admission to the status of shaman and membership of the line of shamans constituting the tradition's core lineage. However, that status and membership must be maintained: as already noted, although a shaman may be initiated (given initial recognition), continuing recognition relies upon the continuing demonstration of shamanic capability. If the wider shamanic community is to provide a social space where a shamanic career can be pursued, its willingness to do so will inevitably rely upon the ongoing availability of individuals willing and able to be shamans.

²⁰ The harsh environment of the Inuit comes to mind here, as does Daniel Merkur's work *Becoming Half Hidden*, 1985. Merkur's presentation of initiation patterns in Chapter 5 offers the beginnings of another possible case study.

As noted in relation to Spiritualist mediums, wider belief in mediumship as a practice protects that institution from the inadequacies of individual mediums. A medium may not be highly regarded but their failure to demonstrate effectively is unlikely to shake the underlying belief in a spirit world and the possibility of communication with those who inhabit it. Similarly, an individual shaman who proves ineffective need be no bar to the shared belief in the possibility of working effectively with spirits: it is simply that this particular practitioner is not effective and therefore unlikely to be of value to the community. Thus the standing and authority of (or as Nelson would have it, the charisma attaching to) practitioners partly attaches to them collectively, as members of the tradition's core lineage.

The need to maintain ongoing communal recognition is clearly acknowledged in Spiritualism. Indeed, I have often heard it repeated by the leaders of Portobello and other churches that there is no such thing as a 'developed' medium. That is to say, an apprentice may reach the point where he achieves a sufficient degree of proficiency to merit public recognition or acceptance by a Spiritualist community but the expectation is that a medium will continue to become more proficient over time, and that the process of development will continue throughout a medium's career. This expectation is an aspect of the public monitoring that congregational expectations bring to Spiritualist meetings. The conventions surrounding platform demonstrations in the Spiritualist tradition are a communal articulation of the expectations maintained by the tradition. This enables Spiritualist communities to falsify demonstrations of mediumship as being (or failing to be) appropriate, correct or even qualitatively of a high standard, in terms of whether or not they reaffirm the tradition.

As we have seen, there are similar expectations in other shamanic traditions. Over the course of their careers, shamans are expected gradually to acquire a greater number of helping spirits and to become more powerful in consequence.²¹ Further, an acknowledged shaman is one who not only learns and, in turn, transmits an existing body of knowledge but is expected also to acquire and share new knowledge

²¹ Shirokogoroff, 1999, pp. 366-70

that will benefit the community.²² Thus with each generation, the tradition is renewed in ways that allow it to evolve. A shaman who fails to continue developing in this way may well find his credibility undermined, even without any actual deterioration in his proficiency as compared with his performances justifying initial recognition.

I argue that shamanisms are particular apprenticeship outcomes. I argue for an understanding of shamanism as a learned craft, which provides practitioners with the skills needed to manage their awareness so as to conduct, at will, a process of communication with the spirits, which is itself made possible by an existing network of relationships. We need to be open to shamanic traditions having slightly different processes of development but generally leading, through a process of training by existing practitioners and spirit guides, from an initial uncontrolled (often possessory) experience or phase to a point where the apprentice is recognized as having the ability to manage his awareness (and the psychic experiences that form part of his reality) so that he is no longer personally at risk, and is able to use his spiritual skills, at will, in ways that are recognized as being useful to other members of the community.

²² *ibid.*, pp.375-6

7.4 Testing the model: clarifying boundaries

A useful model or definition is clear as to the boundaries of that which it defines, and is effective both as to what it includes and what it excludes. In this section I briefly indicate the usefulness of the model in clarifying some of the problematic boundaries relevant to Spiritualism and shamanism more widely. These include the boundaries between Spiritualism and other traditional shamanisms on the one hand and New Age practices including neo-shamanism on the other. The proposed apprenticeship model clarifies those boundaries in a way that positions traditional shamanisms and Spiritualist mediumship together, but which tends to distinguish neo-shamanisms and other New Age interests from that locus, thereby supporting the categorization of Spiritualist mediumship as a shamanism.

A major impetus behind Eliade's work was his strong sense that in order to be useful shamanism needs to be a clearly-defined category, and that it is not good enough simply to say²³ that shamans are everything from medicine-men to mediums to sorcerers. The only result such an approach can lead to is that 'we arrive at a notion at once extremely complex and extremely vague', that 'seems, furthermore, to serve no purpose'.²⁴

Attending to the history of Spiritualism highlights the fact that, as part of the modern historical record (and therefore falsifiable), the Spiritualist tradition can be distinguished from New Age and neo-shamanic 'recreated' histories, as can other traditional examples of shamanism. Although Spiritualists often make the claim that various forms of mediumship are to be found across human cultures and history,²⁵ there is a clear awareness of (and, indeed, celebration of) Spiritualism as a modern movement. Although the human phenomenon or craft of mediumship might be perceived to be as old as humanity, Spiritualist mediums self-identify as standing in a particular lineage of practitioners within a particular lineage of belief.

²³ As, for example, Nelson does; 1969, p.247

²⁴ 1989, p.3

²⁵ See, for example, Joyce Cooper's *Psychic Healing Through the Ages*, 1993

It is possible, therefore, to employ the apprenticeship model historically. Apprenticeship is a social institution, which takes time to become established. This in turn, alerts us to the possibility that attending to the role of shamanic apprenticeship will assist in understanding why neo-shamanisms, and other New Age interests, have not coalesced or developed into authoritative, coherent traditions to the extent that practitioners might have hoped. That failure is, I submit, in large part a failure to develop an authoritative tradition of apprenticeship or, at least, a replicable and falsifiable mode or conduit for the transmission of authority (a core lineage). It is possible that, even for insiders, non-falsifiable histories are capable of carrying only limited authority. We are more likely to think in terms of the New Age ‘seeker’, collating a personal understanding from a variety of sources (including techniques or strategies for learning),²⁶ rather than the New Age apprentice, responding to a ‘spirit call’ by being tutored in a specific tradition over a number of years so as to achieve recognition by (and within) a self-identified, bounded community that exists independently of the practitioner. That is not to say such a tradition cannot yet come through, but acknowledging the fact that it has not done so could help significantly to direct further enquiry into relevant differences between the religious milieu in Anglo-American society during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and that of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

This is not to try to exclude apprenticeship *per se* from applicability to New Age practices but to propose the particular apprenticeship identified in Spiritualism and Evenki shamanism as characteristic of traditional, culturally contextualized shamanisms but not of cross-cultural bundling of particular shamanic practices. Neo-shamans may well regard themselves as having undergone some form of apprenticeship in learning how to acquire knowledge but, as a general comment, it is unlikely to be one that involves (i) the passing on of a body of traditional spiritual knowledge subscribed to by a wider community that exists independently of the

²⁶ Sutcliffe, 2003, pp.200-8. Sutcliffe distinguishes between ‘serial’ and ‘multiple’ seekership, the latter often disregarding of context. By contrast, serial seekership appears to be (or, at least, capable of being) more structured and is, I anticipate, where a New Age apprenticeship would be more likely to emerge. The learning career of Deborah, the British medium working in Iceland (see Section 3.3 above), is not dissimilar to serial seekership, save that her ‘seekership’ took the form of serial apprenticeships and took place entirely within the Spiritualist tradition of mediumship.

practitioner, or (ii) the use of shamanic skills and knowledge by the practitioner (as a recognized specialist) for the benefit of that community.

Carlos Castenada's works sparked considerable modern interest in shamanism, criticisms of the authenticity of their content notwithstanding. One factor that may offer indirect support for Castenada's claims to authenticity is that the accounts he presents are fundamentally descriptions of an apprenticeship extending over a period of years.²⁷ Some attempts to recover traditional shamanic practices demonstrate an awareness of the importance of apprenticeship to an existing practitioner. Znamienski summarizes a recent work by the Russian writer Yuri Zakharov entitled *Sistema shamana-tselitelia*,²⁸ a self-help manual that claims to be based on knowledge learned directly from Siberian shamans.²⁹ It is the claim to have been 'an apprentice to "genuine Altaian shamans, only a few of whom remain alive"'³⁰ that supports the claim to authenticity. It is stated that Zakharov's apprenticeship was primarily to one particular Siberian shaman, who is described as having 'shamanized as early as pre-Revolutionary Russia.'³¹ The course of the apprenticeship follows a now-familiar pattern of a resisted call, accepted following identification by an existing practitioner, followed by the apprenticeship proper. Such examples illustrate the difference between traditional and neo-shamanisms but they also demonstrate how it might be possible for new 'traditional' shamanisms to emerge.

I return to this point in Chapter 8, where I outline proposals for further research in testing and consolidating the model. Before doing that, it is appropriate that I now summarize the apprenticeship model that has been identified in order to propose an express definition of shamanism.

²⁷ Castenada 1969, 1971

²⁸ Translated as *The System of the Shaman-Healer*, Moskva, Iauza, 1998

²⁹ Znamienski, 2003, pp.354-6

³⁰ *ibid.*, p.355

³¹ *ibid.*

Chapter Eight

Thesis Conclusions

8.1 Defining shamanism

Testing the categorization of Spiritualism as a form of shamanism proceeded through a number of stages, with the following preliminary conclusions relating to Spiritualism itself. First, there was the identification of the institution of mediumship as that which maintains and allows the transmission of an authoritative tradition within the Spiritualist movement. Secondly, it was concluded that it is through adherence to the concept and practice of mediumship as a taught craft, specifically as the outcome of apprenticeship to an existing medium, that mediumistic authority is maintained within the Spiritualist movement. Thirdly, the apprenticeship pattern identified in Spiritualism has a particular structure, namely: (i) an initial, prompting ‘call’, followed by (ii) a period of training taking place over a number of years, during which the apprentice is tutored by an existing medium and by his spirit guides, leading to (iii) public recognition by Spiritualist churches and congregations.

Within these three stages of apprenticeship, there are other elements that go to make up a consistent pattern: (a) the initial ‘call’ varies in its details but can generally be characterized as uncontrolled possession, which is often disruptive of the apprentice’s psychological well-being or peace of mind and can therefore be unwelcome or even lead to the ‘call’ being actively resisted by the potential apprentice: this can be paralleled or reinforced by some form of identification by an existing practitioner (on the basis of perceived mediumistic potential) (b) the training is intended to develop the apprentice’s awareness for the purpose of communicating with people ‘in spirit’ (so as to be able to give evidence of personal survival beyond death), by managing an ongoing dialectic between possession and control (both of self and others); and (c) public recognition is itself an ongoing process that continues throughout the mediumistic career, requiring the medium constantly to maintain such recognition as has already been achieved at any given point in time and, hopefully, to

build upon it. I identify this pattern of apprenticeship as the structural ‘core’ of mediumship, and therefore of Spiritualism.

The possibility that Spiritualist mediumship might be a form of shamanism has been raised in passing by a number of scholars, on the basis of apparent similarities in mediumistic and shamanic practice, and on the basis of apparent similarities in the nature of mediumistic and shamanic consciousness. This in itself is a controversial thesis, which contradicts traditional typologies, particularly that of the active, travelling shaman and the passive, receiving medium (a typology that has, in some degree, been subscribed to by both practitioner and scholars). The full extent of the correspondence between mediumistic and shamanic practice has been demonstrated by showing that the full range of traditional practices of both mediums and shamans has been underappreciated, with ‘shamanic’ skills (such as journeying) shown as a long-established practice among mediums, and the use of ‘mediumistic’ skills (such as the use of possession practices to demonstrate the presence of the deceased or other spirits) shown as a long-established practice among shamans. This has been done not only with reference to existing general models of shamanism but specifically with reference to the Evenki, in order to demonstrate the similarity with a particular example of traditional shamanism.

The demonstration of a correspondence does not, however, establish of itself a common cause. This is, I submit, established by identifying the same mediumistic apprenticeship structure found in Spiritualism as also present in Evenki shamanism, and implied more widely in cross-cultural models of shamanism.

The review of existing models of shamanism brought out once again that there continue to be difficulties in establishing a single, durable, widely-accepted model of shamanism. If we return to Peter Jones’s¹ review of the difficulties with definitions of shamanism in the North-American, English-speaking context, he notes that shamanism ‘is not the result of specific cultural settings *per se*’,² but that shamanic consciousness (which continues to underpin his own preliminary definition of the

¹ 2006

² *ibid.*, p.22

phenomenon) only arises in specific cultural settings: therefore, cross-cultural discussions of shamanism are constrained. The difficulties that have been experienced in defining shamanism have arisen because attempts to develop cross-cultural models have been based upon the culturally specific.

The nominal definition of shamanism proposed by Jones is as follows:

shamanism is a phenomenon consisting of an individual who has voluntary access to, and control of, more aspects of their consciousness than other individuals, however the components of that consciousness are emically understood, and that this voluntary access is recognized by other members of the “shaman’s” culture as an essential component of that culture.³

I query whether the shaman’s voluntary access to that consciousness need be recognized as an essential component of the culture; I suggest instead that it need only be recognized as essential by the shamanic community within which the tradition subsists, recognizing that such a community may itself subsist within a wider culture that may not recognize shamanic consciousness at all, let alone regard it as essential. That point apart, we see the familiar desire to add something culturally specific (perhaps a particular application of the shamanic consciousness) in order to anchor the definition. As ever, this simply begs the question, ‘What do we mean by shamanic consciousness, or ‘aspects’ of consciousness, as opposed to any other understanding of consciousness?’ My proposal is that this question is at least partly answered by attending to the processes involved in acquiring shamanic skills, particularly the ability of the medium or shaman to manage his own awareness.

This thesis was originally intended as a work in which the characterization of Spiritualist mediumship as an example of shamanism would be tested, using Portobello Spiritualist Church in Edinburgh, Scotland as a case study. My methodology for that case study was Forrest’s ‘apprentice-participation’. I undertook the mediumistic apprenticeship offered at Portobello. In the course of testing that initial thesis as an apprentice, it became clear to me not only that mediumship is that which characterizes the Spiritualist movement but that the apprenticeship I was

³ *ibid.*, p.21

undergoing was the mechanism whereby Spiritualism maintains its defining institution. The particular apprenticeship found in Spiritualism can therefore be said to define that movement. The methodology had become the model. This led me to ask the following question: if my characterization of Spiritualism as an example of shamanism is correct, and Spiritualism is defined by a very particular apprenticeship, might that model of apprenticeship also define other shamanisms? At the suggestion of Professor James L. Cox, Evenki shamanism was chosen as a second case study. I conclude that the same apprenticeship structure is indeed present in the Evenki tradition.

I submit that the apprenticeship model of shamanism I propose allows us to anchor definitions of shamanism (such as that proposed by Jones) by providing a distinct, readily-comprehensible definition that accommodates the variety of cultural phenomena regarded as shamanic, without being culturally specific. As suggested at the end of Chapter 5, the shamanic apprenticeship follows a distinct pattern in utilizing psychic experiences as the raw material of mature spiritual capability. I therefore propose this model, developed initially as an analysis of Spiritualist mediumship, as the basis of the following general definition of shamanism:

Shamanism is an academic category, developed in order to draw together a wide range of traditions recognized as being shamanic in character. The category shamanism therefore comprises particular shamanisms. Shamanisms are culturally contextualized apprenticeship outcomes in the management of personal awareness so as to engage with additional realities. The shamanic apprenticeship comprises a process of learning achieved by communicating and developing relationships with spirit guides or helpers, facilitated by an existing practitioner, who usually also undertakes responsibility for passing on a body of accumulated traditional knowledge. The shamanic apprenticeship typically proceeds from an initial uncontrolled (often possessory and/or unwelcome) psychic experience or phase to a point where the apprentice is granted communal recognition as having the ability to manage his awareness so that he is no longer personally at risk from uncontrolled spiritual forces, and is able to use his spiritual skills to communicate, at will, in ways that are recognized as being beneficial to other members of the community.

8.2 Proposals for further research

As mentioned, there is a need to evaluate further the usefulness of the apprenticeship model I propose by testing it against additional religious traditions that have already been accepted as shamanic, and to test it more fully against Spiritualism itself. The use of this model to further examination of Spiritualism in the United States of America, where the Spiritualist movement began, could be productive for a number of reasons.

One aspect of Portobello Spiritualist Church that makes it a valuable case study is its conservatism in adhering to a traditional apprenticeship pattern of mediumistic development, enabling the authoritative transmission of Spiritualist tradition. I have heard some anecdotal evidence (generally from US and Canadian visitors to Britain) to the effect that North American mediums show less of a focus upon demonstrating personal survival by giving descriptions of the deceased, and that the Spiritualist identity is much more difficult to distinguish from other interests that tend to be brought together under the heading of 'New Age'.⁴ A good test of the apprenticeship model would be to examine contemporary Spiritualist practice in North America so as to investigate whether this perception of North-American mediumship is correct, and whether it is reasonable to conclude that any deterioration of mediumistic protocols or blurring of the Spiritualist identity in North America is due to a failure to maintain the tradition of mediumistic apprenticeship.

As I have sought to demonstrate, part of the value of the apprenticeship model is that it helps to clarify a hitherto problematic boundary between Spiritualism and other traditional shamanisms on the one hand, and neo-shamanism and New Age interests on the other. It is also possible to see Spiritualism in 1850s and 1860s America as an equivalent to more recent forms of neo-shamanism in that early Spiritualism is not obviously characterized by apprenticeship. It is only gradually that Spiritualism develops into a coherent movement: the few mediums available in its early years were at best self-taught or regarded (by themselves and others) as having some form

⁴ This was also Burke Forrest's conclusion from time spent in Spiritualist development circles in England; 1986, p.445

of natural gift, and it is only over time that a tradition of apprenticeship-based teaching develops so as to enable the development and maintenance through transmission of an authoritative tradition, that then becomes perceptible as an enduring religious movement. One of those to examine pre-Civil War US Spiritualism is Bret Carroll,⁵ who also draws attention to the suggestion that mediums were modern shamans. Although he makes no mention of apprenticeship, Carroll suggests that the similarity of the medium to the shaman lay, first, in asserting mastery over the ‘mysteriousness of spirit’, and secondly, ‘by developing repeatable procedures by which the medium could bring the spirits into their presence at will’.⁶ Focusing upon the social mechanism of apprenticeship might also assist in determining why Spiritualism became more successful when transplanted to Britain than it did in its country of origin.

Here we see the predictive strength of the apprenticeship model. In developing mediumship as an institution through the use of apprenticeship, Spiritualism regularizes more spontaneously charismatic and, therefore, like the spirits themselves, evanescent displays of mediumship. Examining the early history of the Spiritualist movement so as to map its emergence as an apprenticeship-based tradition could offer extremely valuable insights not only into Spiritualism itself but into the society in which it arose, and the wider social norms upon which it drew in order to ensure its continued existence. Further, if it is indeed the case that Spiritualist churches such as Portobello are valuable to the movement precisely because of their adherence to the tradition of apprenticeship, this may offer an important reminder that success in western modernity may have less to do with the ability to accommodate mutation in a rapidly changing context,⁷ and more to do with the ability to adhere to (that is, identify and utilize) the genuinely durable.

It is easy to be drawn into characterizations of western modernity as a constant process of metamorphosis, as having as its distinctive trait ‘that of being governed by

⁵ 1997

⁶ *ibid.*, p.145

⁷ Davie, Grace: *Religion in Britain since 1945*, 1994, pp.10-28

an “imperative to change”⁸, but the modern west provides a surprisingly stable environment in which to live, compared both with many other parts of the world, and with its own past. Certain aspects of our collective memory, particularly the forms we use to express it, very obviously mutate, but the social processes that constitute the underpinning institutions of western modernity, and which bound (that is, enable and contain) those mutating forms, may themselves endure in ways that are less easy to identify and articulate.

There are, of course, many other cultures that have been able to develop stable environments in which to live out our span upon this earth. Since the late nineteenth century,⁹ shamanic models have been drawn upon in North American scholarship in order to categorize and interpret native North American traditions, and a useful test of the apprenticeship model as a cross-cultural definition of shamanism would be to apply it in order to determine whether it significantly reinforces the use of a shamanic model in the context of traditional religious practices among native North American peoples. This could also be a valuable exercise in enhancing our understanding of mid-nineteenth century Spiritualism in the US: another of Nelson’s passing suggestions is that Spiritualism may have started in the US partly because of European settlers’ familiarity with native North American beliefs.¹⁰ If the same apprenticeship model can be discerned in both traditional religious practices and nineteenth-century Spiritualism in North America, it may be possible to identify the structures that enabled an apparently new religious tradition (Spiritualism) to develop and be maintained, given that mediumistic apprenticeship itself provides the basis for the authoritative transmission of tradition, which in turn becomes the basis for formal organizational structures.

The possibility of connections between native North American religious traditions and Spiritualist beliefs is not a new suggestion. As noted above, the Spiritualist tradition of spirit guides is marked by the presence of native North American guides, and the use of concepts familiar to Spiritualists to describe native North American

⁸ Hervieu-Léger, Danièle: *Religion as Memory*, 1999, p.90

⁹ Jones, 2006

¹⁰ Nelson, pp.55-8

beliefs has a long history. A good example is Lewis Spence's *Myths and Legends of the North-American Indians*,¹¹ a semi-popular reference work but one which draws upon an impressive list of respectable scholarly sources from the nineteenth century (and earlier). Spence asserts that 'belief in the resurrection of the soul after death'¹² is widespread, and that burial practices, such as placing objects of practical utility with the body of the deceased, need to be understood in this context because of the belief that,

inanimate objects possess doubles, or, as spiritualists would say, 'astral bodies,' or souls, and some Indian tribes supposed that unless such objects were broken or mutilated – that is to say, 'killed' – their doubles would not accompany the spirit of the deceased on its journey.¹³

As we have seen, Shirokogoroff would go on within the following decade to note a similar belief among the Evenki that physical objects have a spiritual 'essence' beyond their physical form, and that objects broken in this world are complete in the spirit world. Spence's overt use of Spiritualist terminology is interesting. Not only that but Spence draws attention to a number of other native North-American beliefs that correspond to beliefs Shirokogoroff noted among the Evenki, including the concept of multiple souls, the existence of different levels or regions within the afterlife, the importance of the number four and the four points of the compass, and the ways in which a wider spirit-oriented cosmology is expressed in the buffalo dances (including the importance of these ceremonies in maintaining spiritual order by driving away 'evil' spirits and recognizing the good clan spirits). For Spence, these practices all come together in the figure of the shaman or medicine-man, who is variously wizard, physician and prophet, who is 'skilled in the handling of occult forces' and speaks with other shamans 'in a secret tongue.' The selection of shamans is variously a matter of heredity or 'natural fitness or revelation in dreams', a similar pattern to that noted in Spiritualism and among the Evenki.

Spence emphasises the role of the shaman as healer, in which a practical knowledge of natural remedies is combined with resort to the management of spirits if it is

¹¹ London, 1914. The following two paragraphs draw upon pp.128-139 of Spence.

¹² *ibid.*, p.128

¹³ p.128

determined that there is a spiritual cause to the illness. The particular skill Spence describes is the ability of the shamans to travel to the spirit lands,

either to search for the souls of those who are ill, but not yet dead, or to seek advice from supernatural beings... Falling into a trance, in which their souls were supposed to become temporarily disunited from their bodies, they would follow the track of the sick man's spirit into the spirit-world.¹⁴

Not only is Eliade's shamanic model in danger of looking distinctly unoriginal, but again we see recourse to Spiritualist terminology (the shaman is described as having 'clairvoyant gifts', a 'guardian spirit', and an 'astral body') in order to articulate the shamanic craft. One issue that arises therefore, is the extent to which this terminology is properly understood as Spiritualist, and to what extent it might be Spiritualists articulating their own craft by borrowing terminology developed more widely in North American literature in the attempt to understand traditional North-American shamanism. Exploring the possibility of a symbiotic relationship here could be very productive in mapping the early development of a shamanic model in North-American scholarship and the popularization of native North-American beliefs and, further, the extent to which North-American models of shamanism may have influenced the work of scholars such as Shirokogoroff and Eliade.

One consequence of defining in this way is that it becomes impossible to maintain that shamanism is necessarily found in any particular social or physical setting, let alone that it is properly applied only to a finite group of Siberian traditions. In this I differ from Shirokogoroff and follow Eliade in comprehending shamanism as a cross-cultural phenomenon. I do have reservations about Eliade's willingness to decontextualize examples in order to establish his case but I see no fundamental obstacle to following his lead in regarding traditions across the globe as potentially shamanic. Indeed, this is not a trend Eliade initiated, although it is certainly one he did much to encourage.

¹⁴ p.139

I have mentioned North America but here is also the Southern continent, which is potentially of interest as containing both shamanic and non-shamanic spiritual traditions. First, Brazilian Spiritism, as an offshoot of European Spiritualism, can be difficult to distinguish clearly from Spiritualism but the apprenticeship model again appears to help. Spiritism has developed into a reincarnationist, healing movement that fosters the formal study of texts produced by Allan Kardec, regarded as the product of his mediumship. Although this might be regarded as a form of apprenticeship, it is not the shamanic apprenticeship (or is only weakly so, to the extent that the practice of spirit healing is maintained). By contrast, Donald Talyer's monograph on the Chocó Indians of Colombia¹⁵ contains a description of the shamanic apprenticeship (the author's term) that is encouragingly consistent with the definition offered in this thesis. The cultural context, ceremonies, accoutrements and traditional knowledge handed down are all markedly different from both the Evenki and Spiritualist traditions but the underlying structure of tutoring by the spirits, facilitated by an existing practitioner, and recognition accorded following a demonstration of the controlled incarnation of spirits, is clearly present.¹⁶ Like Shirokogoroff's study of the Evenki, the bulk of Talyer's monograph details the wider society of which this shamanic tradition is a particular expression, attending to the cultural context within which this particular shamanic tradition is comprehensible.¹⁷

¹⁵ *Embarkations: Ethnography and Shamanism of the Chocó Indians of Colombia*, Pitt Rivers Museum, University of Oxford, 1996

¹⁶ *ibid.*, pp.92-6

¹⁷ I have also benefited from reading an unpublished paper by Dr. Suzanne Owen (Leeds Trinity University) entitled *Blood of the Coancoan*, 2007, in which much of the same apprenticeship structure emerges (although this was not the main focus of the paper when written).

8.3 Defining traditional shamanism: why it matters

The identification of Spiritualist mediumship as a traditional shamanism, on the basis of a common apprenticeship structure, demonstrates that that structure can function as a new, working definition of shamanism, by offering a distinctive, clearly-structured approach to understanding the nature of shamanic skills, without being unduly prescriptive as to which particular shamanic skills should be anticipated in any given cultural setting. A particularly valuable aspect of the apprenticeship model is that it is not culturally defined, and is therefore potentially useful across a wide range of cultures. Although this model has been developed from a comparative analysis of particular cultural examples, it is not reducible to these examples. For this reason, the model can be used to categorise particular traditions as shamanic or non-shamanic independently of the presence or absence of particular adjunct practices, or of particular understandings of shamanic consciousness. This apprenticeship model therefore offers a solution to the definitional failure of the ‘family of shamanisms’ model, while remaining open not only to the recognition of additional shamanic practices, but also to the recognition of additional shamanisms.

I propose my definition in the knowledge that there are many more shamanisms against which it needs to be tested before it can properly be regarded as having been established but I am encouraged by various hints that apprenticeship has long been observed as characteristic of shamanism, even if the significance of this observation has not been fully appreciated. One example would be Fr. Beliavskii’s accounts published in 1833 of his travels among the Khanty and the Nentsy,¹⁸ in which he writes that,

when they feel “slight sparks of shamanic abilities,” these “native geniuses” *train* their minds and spirits by fasting. *Through constant replication and perfection of the behaviour of old shamans, young apprentices develop their sensitivity* to such an extreme that they are capable of quickly immersing

¹⁸ The traditional lands of the Nentsy are immediately to the west of the Evenki, with the Khanty immediately to the west of the Nentsy. These peoples were therefore encountered before the Evenki by European scholars travelling east from European Russia.

themselves into the state of a “dream-like ecstasy” *upon necessity* (emphasis added).¹⁹

Our appreciation of the range of shamanic skills needs to be widened so as to include controlled possession but not uncontrolled (the mark of a failed or non-shaman). Shamanism and possession are differently constructed, non-serial categories: one is constructed with reference to management of awareness, the other with reference to the types of practice encountered (some of which are found in shamanism and some of which are not). Eliade himself confused these two in developing his presentation of shamanism, compounding the error by downplaying the extent to which controlled possession practices are traditional shamanic practices, because of his insistence that they represent a deterioration of his posited classic or original ‘high’ shamanism.

The perception of mediumship as possession-based and of shamanism as not being possession-based is a confusion of differently-constructed categories that has led to a failure to appreciate Spiritualist mediumship as a shamanic tradition, quite possibly together with other traditions characterized as mediumistic. This represents a failure to appreciate the full range of shamanic repertoires.

Appreciating shamanism as the outcome of a particular apprenticeship provides a clear, coherent basis on which to establish a definition of traditional forms of shamanism (including Spiritualist mediumship); one that is properly supported by relevant fieldwork, and which is not unduly prescriptive as to which particular practices are to be found in any given shamanic tradition. In this way it is hoped that the definition offered will allow scholars to avoid the uncertain conclusions often produced by comparisons of shamanic practices, by allowing the category shamanism to be defined independently of cultural context, even as it is acknowledged that attending to cultural context is crucial to a comprehensive and sensitive understanding of particular shamanic traditions. Further, the focus upon apprenticeship I propose, rather than directly upon shamanic consciousness itself, allows the category to be defined without the need to answer the vexed question of the nature of shamanic consciousness. That is not to say this is not an interesting and

¹⁹ Znamienski, 2003, p.5

worthwhile question to explore, it is simply that it is not necessary to answer it in order properly to define our category. Indeed, it is to be hoped that by delimiting clearly the range of traditions properly included in the category, the definition itself might assist further inquiry into the nature of shamanic (including mediumistic) awareness.

Nelson felt that Spiritualism would necessarily struggle to develop strong organizations, because 'spirit' is the ultimate authority within the movement, and is embodied (individually and collectively) in the movement's mediums. Although Nelson does not perceive apprenticeship as one of the structures or institutions within Spiritualism, and instead draws his comparison between medium and shaman on the basis of practitioner roles (and an unhelpfully wide definition of shamanism), it is significant that his characterization of mediums as shamans takes place in the context of his analysis of authority and leadership within the Spiritualist movement.²⁰ While Nelson's wide definition of shamanism might have limited value, it may nevertheless reflect a 'sense', or unarticulated perception, that that which justifies the categorization of Spiritualism as a shamanic tradition is closely bound up with the maintenance of that which is recognised as authoritative within the Spiritualist tradition. I maintain that what Nelson missed, but perhaps came close to, is that the tradition of mediumistic apprenticeship is the particular mechanism that enables the authoritative transmission of the Spiritualist tradition.

One strength of Spiritualism is the circuit system and the high degree of consistency across the movement that it requires. Also, in Spiritualism, one practitioner can teach many because of the circle tradition. One weakness of traditional Evenki shamanism (and perhaps others) might be the traditional perception that shamans belong to their tribe, and that shamans from other tribes are not expected to be as effective outside their 'home' setting. This seems likely to lead to a higher degree of variability as between Evenki shamans in terms of personal practice. This is to describe a less coherent or consistent tradition that is perhaps, therefore, more vulnerable to outside pressure such as the persecution it endured from the 1930s onwards.

²⁰ 1969, pp.238-55

While commonalities of particular practitioner skills do much to support the characterization of mediumship as a form of shamanism, this thesis maintains that that characterization is properly based upon the identification of an apprenticeship common to both Spiritualism and shamanism, and which is the traditional and tradition-based mechanism leading to those common outcomes. For this reason, we might expect it to follow that apprenticeship is similarly important in maintaining the cultural identity of traditional shamanic societies, something that may only become evident when the distinct identity of those societies come under pressure from contact with different cultures. The difficulty with apprenticeships, especially those of long duration, is that they need a particular social space within which to operate; the investment of personal time and energy must be seen as worthwhile by both existing practitioners and by their potential apprentices. During the course of the twentieth century, the Evenki found themselves, like Spiritualists, attempting to maintain their identity as a shamanic sub-culture within a larger non-shamanic culture. For Spiritualists this was nothing new and, by the middle of the twentieth century, Spiritualism had achieved a popularity and cultural relevance its Evenki counterpart could only dream of, and which has enabled it to maintain an unbroken tradition of mediumistic apprenticeship into the early twenty-first century, thereby maintaining its core lineage of authoritative practitioners.

Although British Spiritualists are inclined to make much of the ad hoc persecution of both churches and individual mediums into (and particularly during) the 1940s,²¹ it was not in any way comparable to the systematic programme of eradication implemented in Soviet Russia against traditional shamanic practitioners. Unlike Spiritualism, Evenki shamanism has suffered a break in the apprenticeship tradition, the significant consequence of which is that recent attempts to recover traditional shamanic practices risk being instead another adoption of a cross-cultural synthetic neo-shamanism. I maintain that this risk might be mitigated by an awareness of the key role of apprenticeship in maintaining shamanic traditions; however, given the inability of Evenki shamanism to maintain its core lineage, its succession of

²¹ Nelson, 1969, pp. 162-70

traditional practitioners able to take on apprentices, it may be that the institution of a new apprenticeship tradition is necessary. Such a tradition might not embody the particular teachings of past Evenki shamans but would nevertheless be capable, over time, of becoming an authentically shamanic tradition.

However, there is a metatheoretical reason why defining shamanism matters. The definition I propose begins by acknowledging that shamanism is an academic category, but it must also be acknowledged that this is an academic category that has both responded to, and been adduced in support of, insider claims that shamanism is a widespread or even universal phenomenon, of which shamanic traditions are, individually, particular examples. The same might be said of other, acknowledged 'world' religions, such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, and so on. One book I thoroughly enjoyed reading is John Binns' *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches*,²² a book which might just as accurately be titled *An Introduction to Orthodox Christianities*. The 'world religions' are western academic categories containing particular examples of Christianities, Islams etc., but which have been developed in response, most particularly, to insider Christian aspirations for the unity of the wider 'Church', and an ongoing emotional loyalty to the notion that there is such a thing as 'Christianity'. Although particular Christianities share a common founder, and may conform in some degree to Halbwachs' model of religion, collectively they inter-relate in ways that are much more reminiscent of his 'family' model.

The study of religions in the western academic tradition, is to a significant degree, an offshoot of the scholarly study of the history of Christianity. It is a discipline that was developed by scholars who were themselves Christian, or and whose outlook derived from (or in reaction to) a Christian culture. Hervieu-Léger provides an extremely valuable overview of the French struggle to develop the study of religion as a discipline independent of the study of Christianity, particularly Roman Catholic Christianity.²³ To this day, religious studies departments in Britain can struggle to be recognized as representing a discipline distinct from theological colleges or

²² Cambridge UP, 2002

²³ 2000, p.9-13

departments. The implicit assumption that there is such a thing as a Christian 'world' lay in the background of attempts to explore the religious landscape of the non-western world, and found expression in the additional assumption that there are such things as other 'world' religions. A persistent Christian perspective leads to the presumptive recognition of unity as a characteristic of other religious traditions that group together around a common founder. Thus Islam and Buddhism are readily recognized as additional 'world' religions, even though these represent additional academic categories, each comprising a 'family' of related traditions. By contrast, western scholarship has tended to emphasise the local variability of Hinduism, readily recognizing the members of the Hindu family, but struggling to identify the family 'name', or point of origin, despite insider claims to the unity of Hinduism. It was, nevertheless, possible to speak of 'Hinduism', simply because the members of the Hindu family identified by western scholarship were located in the Indian subcontinent, shared geographical belonging lending an implicit unity to the category, supported by the concept of indigeneity as geographically local.

Eliade sought to bring unity to the members of the shamanic family, so that we might speak of 'shamanism' as an academic category; a family of particular, located, religious traditions, many members of which have been identified, but whose 'family name' has thus far proved elusive. Although I argue that Eliade (by characterizing its members as 'ecstatic', or as ecstatic travellers) did not correctly identify or 'name' the shamanic clan, his attempt to do so is the aspect of his work that I have endeavoured to progress in this thesis. Eliade can be seen as a scholar who did not insist upon characterizing religious traditions in terms of the 'world religions' paradigm, and as a forerunner of those who appreciate 'world' religions as academic categories comprising families of related traditions, the members of which have been seen as worldwide simply because they became geographically and historically widespread. It is possible that, despite the diversity of shamanisms, Shamanism might yet come to be seen as having a sufficiently strong claim to synchronic and diachronic universality as to justify its inclusion in our listing of significant religious clans.

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www.greaterworld.com

www.paranthropology.weebly.com

www.portobellosc.org.uk

www.snu.org.uk

Appendix 1

Description of Portobello Spiritualist Church and Services

Location and Physical Description

PSC is located in Bath Street, Portobello. Portobello was originally laid out as Edinburgh's seaside town – its version of Brighton, hence names such as Brighton Place, Bath Street, Wellington Street etc. Portobello also has a manufacturing history, mainly glassworks, potteries and salt production from coastal salt pans. The housing reflects this mix, ranging from grand houses for visiting gentry and traditional Georgian and Victorian villas for middle-class residents to more cramped working-class accommodation. The more recent housing stock mainly comprises council housing from the 1960s and 1970s. Although incorporated within Edinburgh at the end of the nineteenth century, the area retains a strong community feel with its own police station, post office, town hall and a good selection of small, locally-owned shops. Local opposition during 2005-6 halted plans for a large supermarket because of fears for the effect on local shops.

PSC was established in 1946 by Walter Bisset, a minister ordained by the Spiritualists' National Union. The church was originally housed at 25c Bath Street (owned by Rev. Bisset) in a pre-fabricated hut, with room for about thirty people. The present minister, Bernice Winstanley, took over the running of the church in 1961, shortly before Rev. Bisset's death later that year. In 1974, the existing property was sold and the church moved to a larger building (a former bakery) across the road at 20a Bath Street, where it remains. The building has since been extended to provide a modern church hall with room for a congregation of 90-100 people.

The church hall is octagonal, with a raised platform (three steps up) on the side opposite the main entrance doors. At the centre of the platform is a lectern, with an organ (rarely used) to one side. A large wooden cross is mounted on the front of the lectern and a large brass cross hangs on the wall behind the platform. That apart, the

main visual decoration comprises three large, traditional, gold-framed prints of Jesus with groups of children. Flowers are usually displayed at the front of the platform and on the floor of the church immediately in front of the platform. Seating takes the form of single chairs that can be readily rearranged, dependent upon the purpose for which the main hall is being used.

The church has a small tearoom on the ground floor, with storage and cooking facilities, and a disabled toilet. A stairway gives access to a larger tearoom on the first floor, together with an office, two further toilets and storage areas. To the rear (accessed via Pitt Street) is a small garden area and car park with three disabled spaces.

Church Services and other Activities

The regular public services conducted at PSC are as follows:

Sunday: Divine Service at 6.30pm
 Healing Service at 7.45pm
 After-circle at 8.15pm (until approx. 9.00pm)

Tuesday: Clairvoyant service at 7.30pm
 Healing Service at 9.00pm

Wednesday: Meditation & Healing Service at 7.30pm

Friday: Clairvoyant Service at 2.30pm

I will begin the description of a 'typical' service with reference to a Tuesday evening clairvoyant service, as this is the kind of service that seems most commonly to be found at spiritualist meetings and might, in that sense, be regarded as a 'standard' meeting. I will then deal with the additional elements that distinguish the Sunday 'divine' service.

Tuesday Service

For the Tuesday service, the doors open a little before 7.00pm and those attending as members of the congregation take their seats, having been handed a hymn book at the door. The hymn book used at PSC is that issued by the SNU. Those participating in the service meet upstairs. At 7.30pm, the person chairing the meeting leads the other mediums up the central aisle and they take their positions upon the platform. The chairperson (usually the President) opens the meeting with a general welcome and a request that mobile telephones be switched off. There is an expectation that food and drink not be taken into the church hall, and this will sometimes be mentioned. The mediums for the evening are introduced. On a Tuesday, the mediums working are all drawn from the church's own membership and usually include the Minister and President, whom failing, one of the vice-Presidents. There will be from three to five mediums on the platform on a Tuesday.

An opening hymn is then announced; usually all verses of the opening hymn are sung. Although the church does have an organ (electronic), it is rarely used (usually only at the Christmas carol service) and there is a preference for plainsong. The congregation stands for the opening hymn and sits again upon completing it. The chairperson then reads out names that have been entered in the church's healing register since the last service and then goes on to open the service in prayer. The prayer is formal but inspirational.

Following the opening prayer, the chairperson will then invite the congregation to sing a further hymn to welcome the first medium. Usually, only the first verse of the hymn is sung and the congregation remains seated. The Minister is an exception to this, invariably working to verses 1, 2 and 5 of the 23rd psalm. If the Minister is present, she will be the first to work, proceeding to give three or four personal clairvoyant messages to members of the congregation. When she has finished working, the chairperson will then invite the congregation to sing the first verse of

the chosen hymn of the next medium, and so on. The chairperson usually brings up the rear.

Upon completion of the clairvoyant demonstrations (approximately 8.35pm), one or two members will nip out to boil the kettle and the chairperson will make routine church announcements: times of other services, name of the visiting medium the following Sunday, workshops in the church etc. There is then a collection, followed by a final hymn (usually 'Praise God, from whom all blessings flow' but sometimes the first verse of 'The day Thou gavest, Lord, has ended') and closing prayer, usually led by the Minister. The congregation stands for the final hymn and remains standing for the closing prayer, before being invited to sit while the mediums leave the platform. Tea, coffee, biscuits and whatever baking has been brought in are then served in the large tearoom upstairs (the Tuesday evening congregation tends to be the largest of the week). A charge of 20p per person is made.

After the tea-break, a healing service commences in the church hall at approximately 9.00pm. For this service, a number of chairs are placed in the space immediately in front of the platform, according to the number of healers present (or the number of patients, if fewer). One of the healers will then open the service in prayer from the floor of the church before inviting the healers forward; each healer then takes a position at each chair and anyone wanting healing simply comes forward and takes a seat before being given hands-on healing. A CD-player provides relaxing, background music. Softer lighting is achieved by switching off the brighter lights in the church hall.

PSC healers are required to be members of SASH; membership certificates are displayed in the church foyer. Probationers (apprentice healers) may work but SASH requires that at least one fully certificated healer participate in the service as supervisor. Again in accordance with SASH rules, patients are asked to enter their names in the church's healing register, giving the date of the healing and name of the healer. There is room for comments, which most patients make use of. When all

those seeking healing have had access to a healer, one of the healers will close the service in prayer.

The description given below of the Wednesday healing service gives more detail on healing practices and the place of healing in mediumship.

Friday Service

The Friday service is a slightly informal version of the Tuesday service. The Friday service is generally taken by the Minister, with one other church medium, but there are a number of differences. Attendance on a Friday afternoon tends to be less, and the practice is to ask everyone to sit to one side of the church, rather than being spread out across the whole floor.

The welcome, opening hymn and reading of the healing list are conducted by the Minister from the platform. The accompanying medium is then invited to open in prayer, after which she leaves the platform and takes a seat at the back of the church. The Minister then invites the congregation to sing her hymn; as the hymn nears its end, the Minister then comes down from the platform and works from the floor in giving the clairvoyant demonstration. All of this gives the service a much more intimate feel than with the Sunday and Tuesday services. About 3.00pm, the Minister will draw to a close and invite the congregation to sing the chosen hymn of the other medium working that day. The second medium will then work until roughly 3.20pm.

At that point, one or two developing mediums from the church development circle will generally be invited forward to give one or two messages. This is entirely at the discretion of the Minister and is dependent on whether or not any 'developers' are attending that particular service. If a developer is invited to work, the congregation is reminded that they are 'only developing' and their sympathy and support invited. The developer is invited forward by the singing of the first verse of a hymn, chosen by the Minister.

Towards 3.30pm, a collection is taken, followed by a closing hymn and prayer according to the Tuesday format. Tea & coffee are not offered after Friday services, with the congregation dispersing directly after the service.

Attendance tends to be less on a Friday, presumably because the service is held during working hours. The purpose of the service was originally to enable attendance by the elderly, who might be reluctant to stand and wait for buses in the late evening. There is certainly a more obvious (but not universal) 'older and/or female' element among those attending than with other services. There may also be those with working partners or children who might find it easier to absent themselves from the family home in the daytime than in the late afternoon or evening.

Sunday (Divine) Service

The main Sunday service is known as a divine service because there is a greater emphasis on worship. The basic format is (i) opening hymn, (ii) reading of the healing list, (iii) opening prayer, (iv) hymn followed by reading, (v) hymn followed by address (sermon), (vi) hymn followed by clairvoyant demonstration, (vii) church announcements, (viii) collection, (ix) closing hymn and closing prayer. The reference to this format as a divine service is not peculiar to PSC and is the 'Sunday' format found across Scotland, with minor variations. As will be seen, the reading and the address are the two things that particularly distinguish a divine service from the more standard meeting for the purpose of a clairvoyant demonstration. The other element that distinguishes a Sunday service at PSC is that this is the evening generally reserved for a visiting medium.

At PSC, the doors of the church open at approximately 5.45pm and those attending start taking their seats in the usual way. The service is usually chaired by the President, who will arrive in time to welcome the visiting medium, who will be shown to the upstairs office and offered a drink and given time to compose herself. The reading is generally given by one of the developing mediums of the church, who is also responsible for preparing a tea (sandwiches, cakes, fruit etc.) for the medium

to enjoy after the service. The reader will generally arrive in time also to welcome and be introduced to the medium. The President will then go through the order of service with the medium and reader, making a note of their preferred hymns (many mediums have a particular hymn that they work to). The modern approach is for one medium to give both the address and the clairvoyant demonstration (partly for reasons of economy) but it has been common in the past for there to be two mediums working at a full divine service – one to give the address and one to demonstrate clairvoyance. This tends only to happen now with husband & wife teams.

Towards 6.30pm, the chairperson will lead the medium, speaker (if separate) and reader to the platform and proceed to welcome the congregation, as on a Tuesday. After the opening hymn and reading of the healing list, the medium (or speaker) is invited to open in prayer. The hymn to welcome the reader is then sung, with the reader standing and moving towards the lectern as the final line of the hymn is sung. The reading is selected by the reader, subject to approval of the chairperson. The reading may be taken from the Bible (usually New Testament) but is more often a piece of verse or prose generated within the spiritualist movement, albeit with a 'religious' tone. The purpose of the reading is to offer some form of 'inspiration' to the congregation but, more importantly, to the speaker by suggesting a possible topic for the address. The usual form is not to forewarn the speaker but simply to let Spirit speak on the night. Once the reading has been given, the chairperson will thank the reader, possibly commenting on why they thought the reading particularly beautiful, or the thoughts expressed in it important etc.

The chairperson then invites the congregation to welcome the medium (or speaker) by singing the next hymn, following which the address is given. The purpose of an address is generally to say something about the spiritualist understanding of Spirit and will last from five to ten minutes. Some few speakers will give the address by allowing a 'guide' to 'overshadow' them, so that Spirit speak directly through the medium in a (partial) trance state.

Following the address, the chairperson will invite the congregation to sing the next hymn to welcome the medium for the clairvoyant demonstration, which comprises individual messages from Spirit to members of the congregation. The demonstration draws to a close between 7.35 and 7.40pm, at which point the medium (and speaker) and reader are thanked by the chairperson. Church announcements and collection follow as on a Tuesday, with the medium being asked to give a closing prayer of thanks after the closing hymn. Again, as on a Tuesday, the congregation is then asked to be seated until the mediums leave the platform, prior to tea & coffee etc. being offered upstairs. The chairperson and reader will then spend some time with the medium, who will either stay for the ‘after-circle’ at 8.15pm (see below) or depart prior to its commencement. The medium’s fee and expenses will be met from the collection at this point.

At 7.45pm, a healing service commences, usually chaired by the Secretary. The present Secretary is the President’s husband and is generally in charge of organising healing activities in the church (although this is not linked to his role as Secretary). Those church healers present for the main service stay behind in the church hall, along with those seeking healing. The chairperson will stand at the platform lectern for a brief opening prayer and then ask (usually three) healers to come forward. The healing service then proceeds much in the same way as on a Tuesday evening, save that the closing prayer is also given from the platform. The other slight variation is that, on a Sunday, it is acceptable for those who have had their healing to leave the church hall and go upstairs for tea or coffee before the service concludes (given that tea & coffee are already being served).

The final part of the Sunday programme is the ‘after-circle’, which commences at 8.15pm. The after-circle is actually a service of clairvoyant demonstration but is so called because it takes place after the main service and is given by developing mediums (in some churches referred to as ‘fledglings’) from the church’s development circle. This is a more formal version of the opportunity given on a Friday for developers to work, the idea being to introduce them to platform work in a friendly environment.

This service is usually chaired by the chairperson, but sometimes by one of the other church officers or, possibly, by one of the developers themselves, in order to give experience of chairing. There can be anything from three to seven developers, simply depending upon who has remained from the main service. The congregation is also made up of those who have chosen to stay behind from the main service and tends to be those who are more frequently present in the church.

The after-circle opens with one or two verses from a hymn (standing), followed by prayer (led by the chairperson or one of the developers on the platform), after which the chairperson will invite one of the developers forward to give one or two messages. If the developer struggles, the chairperson may stand and assist with the message, but will generally try to avoid this. The after-circle closes towards 9.00pm, possibly with the chairperson giving the final one or two messages if there is time remaining. The service then closes in prayer, standing. The chairperson may draw one or two developers aside to give criticism or explain something the developer was not able to make sense of in giving a message.

Wednesday Meditation & Healing Service

The Wednesday service is devoted to meditation and healing; there is no clairvoyant demonstration. As with the Tuesday service, it begins at 7.30pm, with the doors of the church open from approximately 6.45pm. This service is usually taken by the Minister, occasionally by one of the other church healers (current practice is for me to take the service on the evenings when I am present to work as a healer).

At 7.30 the Minister takes the platform and welcomes everyone; the service then proceeds with an opening hymn (sung standing), the reading of the healing list, an opening prayer and the 'healing hymn' (sung sitting). The so-called healing hymn is hymn number three in the SNU hymn book and seems to be widely recognised in the movement as the appropriate hymn for healing services. The text of the hymn is given in an appendix to this paper. While the healing hymn is being sung, a member

of the congregation nips out of the church hall to lock the outer doors of the church, so that the meditation is not disturbed by latecomers (people are routinely reminded at other services that the doors for this one are locked for this purpose and that, if they intend to be present, they need to be timeous).

Following the healing hymn, the Minister comes down off the platform and stands on the floor of the church to conduct a guided meditation. This begins with congregants being encouraged to make themselves comfortable, take off coats, shoes etc., make sure they are not touching anyone else so as not to be distracted, to sit supported by the back of their chair with feet firmly on the floor, eyes closed and with hands either face down or face up in their laps but not crossed. Congregants are then encouraged to ‘take three of the deepest breaths you possibly can’ and to begin to relax.

The Minister will then begin an unscripted narrative as a way of beginning the meditation. This may encourage congregants to picture a golden circle filled with white light, to picture a flower and its colours, to picture a country lane filled with the sights and sounds of the wild. Broadly, the aim is to give those meditating an image to focus upon in assisting them to relax and ‘go within’. The narrative may simply remind that ‘it is good to give time to ourselves’, of the importance of ‘making a connection with divine love’ or ‘with the love that comes only from the Father’ – often the kind of language that has overt and traditional Christian overtones. It is made clear to congregants that it is not necessary to listen to the narrative if they have their own preferred method of meditating or are happy simply to ‘let the words flow over them’ – the gentle, loving tone is said to be as much part of the message as the meaning of the words.

After a time, the narratives ends and gentle, melodic music is brought in (a CD player is started using a remote control). For the remainder of the session, the music will play and will be brought to an end around 8.00pm. At this point, the healers who are working that evening will be introduced, the congregants are asked to keep their peaceful frame of mind and send out as much love as they can while the healers are working, and a word or two is said as to what is involved in spiritual healing. If some

of those present are ‘first-timers’, they will be told that the healers of the church are all certificated members of (or probationers with) SASH, that it is only hands-on healing that is practised (i.e. there is no manipulation) and that the purpose of spiritual healing is to use the power of Spirit to assist and support the body’s energies for healing purposes. There is also a reminder that spiritual healing is ‘complementary’ not ‘alternative’, that existing medication must be continued (or not discontinued without medical advice) and that healers do not diagnose, so that if there is uncertainty as to a condition, medical advice must be sought. Finally, there is a reminder that patients should sign the healing register in accordance with SASH guidelines, which require that churches or other healing centres keep a record of the dates when healings are given, by and to whom, along with any comments that the patient wishes to make. This full explanation is not always given, particularly if all of those present are regular or previous attendees.

The healers working that evening are then introduced by name and asked to come forward to one of the seats set out at the front of the church; those wishing a healing are asked to come forward and take a seat whenever one is free. Congregants are discouraged from waiting for a particular healer.

After a healing, the patient returns to their seat in the church and a member of the congregation will bring the healing record book over for them to sign, together with a small glass of water. When all healings have been completed, the Minister takes the platform again and delivers any church notices or other announcements (including mention that tea and coffee will be served after the service); there is then a closing prayer (seated). There is no closing hymn. Tea and coffee are then served in the small downstairs tearoom, usually with cakes that have been brought in. No charge is made for tea and coffee on a Wednesday evening (consistent with the church’s general policy of not charging for healing). People tend to make their way home towards 9.00pm, depending on how many have sought healing.

The nature of the congregation on a Wednesday is markedly different – it tends to be a smaller group (12-20) on average, with a slightly higher proportion of men. Many

of those attending on a Wednesday tend not to attend clairvoyant services in the church – it is surprising how little overlap there can be. As a general comment, Wednesday attendees seem to be those for whom spiritualism is more a way of life than simply an opportunity to contact people in Spirit – even many of the healers show limited interest in clairvoyance (my own father being an example of this attitude).

Healers in the church are organised on a six-weekly roster for the Wednesday service, with three being lined up for each service. This is shortly to be increased to a seven-weekly roster because of the gradually increasing number of healers associated with the church. Other healers who happen to be attending may be pressed into service if the congregation is larger than expected on a particular evening. This is in distinction to the healing services on Sundays and Tuesdays, where the chairperson simply makes use of the healers who happen to be attending.

Appendix 2

Principles of Selected Spiritualist organizations

Most Spiritualist churches and organizations adopt a number of ‘principles’ that, in practice, function as a basic creed. The largest Spiritualist organization in Britain is the Spiritualists’ National Union, and its ‘Seven Principles’ have widespread influence, well beyond SNU churches. Many churches that have disaffiliated from the SNU continue to use the SNU’s principles or a close variant thereof, Portobello Spiritualist Church being an example of this. In addition, churches that have never had any formal connection with the SNU may, nevertheless, use the SNU principles as a useful indicator of their Spiritualist identity. This extends to churches overseas; Burlington Church near Toronto, being one example.¹ I set out below the principles used by the SNU, Portobello Church, the Greater World Christian Spiritualist Association and the White Eagle Lodge, being the principal organizations mentioned in the thesis. With the exception of the SNU, these are Christian Spiritualist organizations. A brief explanatory note follows each set of principles.

The Spiritualists’ National Union

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels.
4. The continuous existence of the human soul.
5. Personal responsibility
6. Compensation and retribution hereafter for all the good and evil deeds done on earth.
7. Eternal progress open to every human soul.

¹ I mention this church, having worked there in August 2010.

The SNU's Seven Principles are described in the SNU Yearbook (2010) as providing a 'definition' of Spiritualism. The Principles are also described as 'unalterable', having been given from spirit through the mediumship of Emma Hardinge Britten, but this has more to do with an attempt to close down discussion as to possible changes than historical fact. Mrs Britten is known to have written down six principles, the precise terms of which vary according to different accounts: the current wording was adopted as part of the constitution of the SNU in 1901.

Portobello Spiritualist Church

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Leadership of Christ and the Brotherhood of Man.
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels.
4. The continuous existence of the human soul.
5. Personal responsibility.
6. Compensation and retribution hereafter for all the good and evil deeds done on earth.
7. Eternal progress open to every human soul.

with liberty of individual interpretation.

The Seven Principles of Portobello Church are identical to those of the SNU with the exception of Principle 2, which has been amended to make reference to the 'Leadership of Christ'. This constitutes the only overt statement of Portobello's Christian identity. The final strapline allowing liberty of individual interpretation is a retention by Portobello Church, rather than an addition: this was also part of the SNU wording until 1987 when it was removed on the basis that it was being used by some members to introduce a Christian bias to SNU philosophy.² Some SNU churches regard this final provision as significant and still retain it.

² Bassett, J., *100 Years of National Spiritualism*, SNU, London, 1990, pp.89-90

The Greater World Christian Spiritualist Organisation

Belief and Pledge

I believe in one God who is Love.

I accept the leadership of Jesus the Christ

I believe that God manifests through the illimitable power of Holy Spirit

I believe in the survival of the soul and its individuality after physical death

I believe in Communion with God, with His angelic ministers, and with souls functioning in conditions other than the earth life.

I believe that all forms of life created by God intermingle, are interdependent, and evolve until perfection is attained.

I believe in the perfect justice of the Divine laws governing all life.

I believe that sins committed can only be rectified by the sinner himself or herself, through the redemptive power of Jesus the Christ, by repentance and service to others.

The Pledge

I will at all times endeavour to be guided in my thoughts, words and deeds by the teaching and example of Jesus the Christ.

The White Eagle Lodge

The White Eagle Lodge teaches:

1. That God, the Eternal Spirit, is both Father and Mother.
2. That the Son – the Cosmic Christ – is also the light which shines in the human heart. By reason of this divine sonship, are all brothers and sisters in spirit, a brotherhood which embraces all life, visible and invisible, including the elemental and angelic kingdom.
3. The expression of these principles in daily life, through service.
4. The awareness of the invisible world, which bridges separation and death and reveals the eternal unity of life.
5. That life is governed by five cosmic laws: Reincarnation; Cause and effect; Opportunity; Correspondences; Compensation (Equilibrium and balance).
6. The ultimate goal of humankind is that the inner light should become so strong and radiant that even the cells of the physical body are transmuted into finer substances which can overcome mortality. This is known as the Christing of the human being, or in the words of the Ancient Brotherhood, the blooming of the Rose upon the cross of matter.

So far as I have been able to ascertain, the White Eagle Lodge has little influence in Scotland except that the books of teachings presented as being from the spirit guide White Eagle remain popular, and a number of them are kept in stock at Portobello Church for reference and sale. The general tone of the White Eagle material is more esoteric than that of other Spiritualist organizations: in particular, the formal teaching of reincarnation in Teaching 5 places this organization at odds with much of the rest of the Spiritualist tradition.

Appendix 3

Two Portobello Spiritualist Church Leaflets outlining Christian Spiritualism and Spiritual Healing

Reproduced below is the text of a leaflet in use at Portobello Spiritualist Church, written by the now-retired Minister, Rev. Bernice Winstanley, giving a summary of the beliefs that constitute the Portobello tradition of Spiritualism. In this leaflet, the position of Portobello as a Christian Spiritualist church becomes clear. Some of the factual information as to healing associations is now out of date.

PORTOBELLO SPIRITUALIST CHURCH 20A Bath Street Edinburgh EH15 1HD

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALISM

The Way, the Truth and the Life ...

The Seven Principles

1. The Fatherhood of God
2. The Leadership of Christ and the Brotherhood of Man
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels
4. The continuous existence of the human soul.
5. Personal responsibility.
6. Compensation and retribution hereafter for all the good and evil deeds done on earth.
7. Eternal progress open to every human soul.

With individual liberty of interpretation.

These are the Principles on which the foundation of our Church stands.

Spiritualism basically means "Believer in Spirit" or, as the dictionary would put it, "Belief of Communication with Spirit" but, in actual fact, it means a great deal more.

It brings a closer understanding to the teachings of Jesus Christ in the Holy Bible as it is written today.

His example of loving and caring for His fellow man during His short stay on earth was outstanding. If it had not been, then we would not have had His written teachings, which have lasted all these years, and that is what our movement tries to do today, follow as well as we can in His footsteps. We know that life is eternal, did not Jesus himself prove this without a shadow of doubt.

He died before a great multitude of people and within three days, as He had previously proclaimed, He rose again and went among those who had given up their material gain to follow Him. He therefore satisfied them that life continued and they then went out to preach their understanding to the people, travelling far and wide.

But there is much more to the proof of the risen Christ than just the knowledge of Eternal Life, for we must say to ourselves “What are we doing here then?” and “What kind of life are we going to have after we die?”. These are two very important questions and are the basis of our way of life in Spiritualism.

This Earth of ours is a learning ground to the individual – God has given us a free will to make our own choices. Sometimes we have to face and overcome many burdens which are not always of our own making but, I can tell you, that if you face up to these difficulties and try to make the right decisions, then your life will blossom and you will become one of God’s Beautiful Children.

“How is that?” you say. Well, when we are faced with decisions in life, many times they can affect and rebound on others – so we must be very careful that, whatever we do in this life, our thoughts and actions must be governed by our unselfish love for our fellow man so that no hurt befalls him. In this way our Spiritual Garment becomes brighter and, with the efforts we make, we begin to feel God’s love grow inside and this is the greatest beauty of all, for then we know that we are all one on Christ.

We must remember, especially when we have to face difficulties, that our lifespan here on Earth is very short in comparison to Eternity which is forever.

The loss of a dear loved one can be lessened somewhat by this knowledge and also that there will be a great joy when we meet again, as we surely will, for love knows no barriers either here or there.

There is no real gratification in hoarding cash or material things but there is in sharing what you have with others who are less fortunate. We must therefore learn to give more of ourselves and our time and make the effort to do things for others – not just our immediate family – but for all who are in need.

The fundamental basic foundation of Spiritualism is Communication to prove survival. This is achieved by someone who has strong mediumistic qualities with the ability to transfer “messages” from the Spirit World to the Earth plane. Most

mediums require to sit in a Developing Circle and learn to become attuned to the Spirit World and thereby be able to use their gifts truly and wisely, for it is understood that all gifts come from the Father God and should not be abused in any manner or form.

Now there are various gifts which can be read about more fully in the Bible in St Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians, Chapter 23. The ones most used today are Clairvoyance (clear seeing), Clair-audience (clear hearing) and Healing (the laying on of hands). It is important that each of the first two gifts are interpreted correctly by the medium, hence the need to sit in a developing class.

Besides healing in the Church, most healers belong to a larger organisation. For instance, those in our Church are Members of S.A.S.H. (Scottish Association of Spiritual Healers) which is a member of B.A.H.A (British Alliance of Healing Associations) which in turn represents C.H.O. (Confederation of Healing Associations).

The Church in its truest sense is something which is born of the Spirit and its object is worship and service to God. Churches are meeting places of the Spirit and their Services constitute a bridge which links this world to higher realms. They are instruments of the Divine Will. We do not criticise those of other beliefs but rather extend to them that love and friendship which our Saviour exemplified.

The information in this leaflet gives only a very small basic outline of our great truth.

For further information on this subject, there are many books in the public libraries or in the Church that you can read (in the latter the books can only be lent to members of the Church), or you can talk to members of the Church Committee who will be only too willing to assist you.

Love and blessings.

Bernice A. Winstanley
Minister

SERVICES

Sunday	6.30 pm 8.15 pm	Address and Clairvoyance After Circle Service
Tuesday	7.30 pm 9.00 pm	Clairvoyance Healing
Wednesday	7.30 pm	Mediation and Healing
Friday	2.30 pm	Clairvoyance

The Spiritualist Church is a recognised Church of the Realm and has been since 1951.

Appendix 4

Sample Prayers used at Portobello Spiritualist Church

The opening and closing prayers used during divine services and demonstrations of mediumship are almost always extempore but some of the prayers used for the Wednesday meditation and healing service have been written down. The Wednesday meditation (see Appendix 1 for details) is a guided meditation and the second extract below gives a short example, although the meditations vary enormously in terms of the imagery used. The second closing prayer set out below is for use following a service that includes a demonstration of mediumship. The following prayers are not significantly different in tone from those used by church mediums during other services but the precise wording is variable; the following prayers (while typical) can only serve as illustrative examples.

The healing list mentioned in the opening prayer is a book of names entered by congregants of family members, friends, colleagues and sometimes pets known to be ill; the most recent names are read out at the beginning of each service and a request for help included in the opening prayer that follows.

Opening Prayer

Heavenly Father, we give our grateful thanks to you tonight for this opportunity to gather here together in your beautiful sanctuary of light. We know that if we can go into the silence and put aside all the trials and tribulations of the past day and week and open our hearts unto you, we shall feel the joy of your presence with us. We pray that you will touch each child tonight with your divine light so that that vacuum within us may be filled with abounding joy.

We are all victims one way or another of the stresses and strains of our material lives and we therefore forget sometimes to seek you through prayer and meditation, but we pray that from now on you will not find us wanting.

Help us Father to realise that each day gives us the opportunity to be of service to you through the thoughtful word or kindly action given to our fellow man.

We ask that your healing angels of light go forth from this sanctuary with thy wonderful love and power and touch one of thy children mentioned on our healing list so that they be made well again, if it be thy will.

And now as always Father, we leave this service in your care and keeping, and at the close shall render unto you all honour, praise and glory, which are all yours, now and for evermore. Amen.

Guided Meditation

We are going into the stillness within, giving no thought to anyone or anything outwith ourselves, just learning to relax with every breath that we take, allowing peace to reach every part of our body and mind. We are putting all thought of trial and tribulation away from us. Just thinking inwardly and enjoying being here as one little family, learning to balance our material and our spiritual being, bringing both into perfect harmony with each other.

Let us now focus our thoughts on creating within our mind's eye a beautiful golden circle filled in the centre with pure white light. Just visualize this within you mind. Let us now ponder our own oneness with our Creator, knowing that our spirituality – our higher self – is linked to the Divine Light of our Heavenly Father. We can now reach a perfection of our own higher consciousness, and we know that the earth can wait for this short time as we give everything within us into our inner being. Let your body feel the essence of true peace, we should now be at one with all around us. At

this moment you are not just one person but are part of the whole of creation and in total harmony with life itself.

We should no longer have the need or physical thought, for we are at one with the Divine Source, feeling only that peace, love, light and joy harmonizing within body, mind and spirit. Resign all to the wisdom and love embodied in Divine Law, be true and loving in all parts of your material life with that sure and certain knowledge that by doing so, you have found the source of true unity with your higher and more perfected self.

Let us now breathe in the music and let it expand within to finally create total perfection in our time of meditation, uniting all that has gone before.

Closing Prayer I

As we come once again Father to the close of another service, we offer our grateful thanks unto you for the wonderful power and love each one of us has felt here tonight in this beautiful little church. It has indeed been a privilege to feel your Divine Presence with us and we give thanks for the healing that has been enjoyed here tonight. We ask always that the healing energy that has built up in this church be taken and used wherever it is needed. We ask now Father a special blessing on your children here assembled, as they make their way homeward; be with them now and forevermore. Amen.

Closing Prayer II (following a demonstration of mediumship)

As we come once again Father to the close of another service, we offer our grateful thanks unto you for the wonderful power and love each one of us has felt here tonight in this beautiful little church. It has indeed been a privilege to feel your Divine Presence with us and to have proof once again that there is no death, that life continues beyond this world and that in your love, there is the possibility of life eternal for every one of your children. This knowledge we know will help us to feel

closer to our loved ones who have gone before and give us the realization that death is only a temporary parting. We ask now Father a special blessing on your children here assembled as they make their way homeward: be with them now and forevermore. Amen.

Appendix 5

Portobello Spiritualist Church Development Circle Introductory Notes and Guidelines for Developers

WELCOME

Welcome to your Development Circle. These notes give you some guidelines on development. They will be added to throughout your time in the circle so you might find it useful to organise a storage system as you will probably want to refer to them from time to time.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON SPIRITUALISM

Spiritualism is an officially recognised religious movement with its own churches and Ministers who possess the same rights and privileges as other religions.

Spiritualism embodies the main ideas of all religions that there is life after death. The difference between Spiritualism and other religions is the ability through mediumship to prove that man survives death. Mediums do not call up the dead but can be used as channels of communication, when desired, by those who have passed over.

Spiritualism is a universal religion and recognises the contribution to the welfare of mankind made by such leaders as Jesus, Buddha and Mohammed. It is open to all colours, castes and creeds.

Spiritualism means 'Believer in Spirit'.

Spiritualists believe in free will and accept personal responsibility for all thoughts and actions. This world gives each one the opportunity to make Spiritual Progress as free will and personal responsibility will still be there in the next world.

INFORMATION FOR DEVELOPING I

These Principles are the foundation on which our Church stands.

CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALISM

The Way, the Truth and the Life

1. The Fatherhood of God.
2. The Leadership of Christ and the Brotherhood of Man
3. The Communion of Spirits and the Ministry of Angels
4. The Continuous Existence of the Human Soul
5. Personal Responsibility
6. Compensation and Retribution Hereafter for all the Good and Evil Deeds done on Earth.
7. Eternal Progress open to every Human Soul with individual liberty of interpretation.

Being able to communicate with the Spirit world is not just for a 'Gifted' few. It is the right of everyone. You have chosen to exercise this right. Think why you have made this choice. The answer is personal to you and it is the starting point of your development.

With Rights come Responsibilities. You have a responsibility to Spirit and all in your development circle. To join the circle you **MUST** be a member of the church. You **MUST** attend every week and you **MUST NOT join any other circle.**

In your quest for knowledge and understanding you will face many challenges but you will not be alone. Those in Spirit who have chosen to make this journey with you will help, as will your friends in the development circle. You will also find you will become super sensitive, seeing your faults and those of **OTHERS** in capital letters.

Judge not lest you be judged and don't over react! Watch out for the growth of your own EGO. Aspire to Spirituality at all times. NEVER compare yourself to others in your circle: that only leads to jealous thoughts, not development! Take every opportunity to work for Spirit by participating in the activities of the church. The church is what YOU make it. There are no full time, paid workers, only volunteers. Remember like calls to like. As you think so you are. Call to the highest levels of the God Force to help you in your development. Think love to each member of your circle. Speak in love. Act in love. Your gifts are there in perfection, be worthy of receiving them. Seek you first the Kingdom of God and the rest will follow.

Thoughts for those wishing to develop their gifts

Spiritualism is a unique way of life, it is not for everyone, but I consider it to be a very special way to God. Or I should say to feel the spirituality of almighty God within. This feeling is not easy to obtain, nor does it remain long in itself, but the memory of it does remain and it is this that continues to want you to carry on doing God's work, for it is the only real true and uplifting feeling that makes life for you in this world complete.

When I say it is not for everyone, I mean that those who harbour vindictive and bad thoughts within them and those who are unkind, jealous and mean, will be unable to penetrate the light barrier to their own spirituality within themselves.

I cannot express too strongly to those of you who wish to work for God, that you must give unstintingly of your time and love. There are no excuses, you will never be asked by spirit to do more than you are capable of, nor will you be asked to take anything away from your material work for which you are paid. Remember when Jesus said "Render unto Caesar that which is Caesar's and unto God that which is God's". This still applies today. If you feel that you cannot cope or do not have the time or energy to be enthusiastic, then there is an imbalance and you must take the time to look within yourself for the answer.

There is no greater way to live a complete and happy life than working in the spiritualist way, as long as you keep an even balance in your material life. An example of this is, if you have and family, it is your duty to love and care for them, as with your decision to work for God and spirit, you have taken upon yourself the responsibility of a family and you must not give more to one than the other, as this too would create an imbalance in your own spirituality.

Cabaneamba*

*Cabaneamba is the name given to one of the spirit guides of the Rev. Bernice Winstanley, now-retired minister of Portobello Spiritualist Church. The text immediately above is presented to members of the development circle as a communication directly from that guide.

Portobello Spiritualist Church uses a slightly amended version of the Lord's Prayer as follows (taken from Winstanley, 2003:84):

Our Father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name,
Thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth,
As it is in heaven,
Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses,
As we forgive those who trespass against us,
And leave us not when in temptation* but deliver us from evil,
For Thou art the kingdom, the power and the glory,
For ever and ever. Amen.

*The more familiar wording is 'leave us not in temptation'. The Rev. Winstanley explains the amendment on the basis that God tempts no-one, picking up on James 1:13-5.

Appendix 6

A Medium's Circuit: Author's Diary Bookings from 2004

This Appendix sets out bookings taken by the author to work as a demonstrating medium at churches in Scotland, and provide a snapshot of the development and maintenance of a new medium's personal circuit of churches.

2004

June

Friday, 25th – Tranent

August

Sunday, 8th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

November

Thursday, 18th – Bellshill Christian Spiritualist Church

2005

January

No bookings

February

Tuesday, 8th – Community Centre, Bellshill

Sunday, 13th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Thursday, 17th – Commercial Street, Arbroath (SNU)

March

No bookings

April

Monday, 11th – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Tuesday, 12th – Evanton

May

Friday, 6th – Tore, Black Isle

Sunday, 8th – Dundee Progressive (SNU)

Sunday, 15th – Stirling (SNU)

Wednesday, 25th – Renfrew

Thursday, 26th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

June

Wednesday, 29th – Stirling (SNU)

July

Tuesday, 12th – Community Centre, Bellshill

August

No bookings

September

Wednesday, 7th – Renfrew

October

No bookings

November

Sunday, 13th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

December

Saturday, 17th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

2006

January

Tuesday, 31st – Shettleston, Glasgow

February

Tuesday, 7th – Shettleston, Glasgow

Saturday, 18th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 19th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

March

No bookings

April

Tuesday, 18th – Shettleston, Glasgow

Monday, 24th – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Tuesday, 25th – Evanton

May

Thursday, 25th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

June

Sunday, 25th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

July

Sunday, 2nd – Tulloch, Perth

August

Sunday, 6th – Stirling (SNU)

Wednesday, 16th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

September

Friday, 22nd – Tore, Black Isle

October

Monday, 2nd – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Tuesday, 3rd – Evanton

Wednesday, 4th – Nairn

Sunday, 15th – Fintry, Dundee

Thursday, 19th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

Sunday, 22nd – New Row, Perth (SNU)

November

Wednesday, 15th – Stirling (SNU)

Sunday, 19th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

December

Sunday, 10th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

2007**January**

Tuesday, 16th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Wednesday, 24th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

February

Sunday, 18th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Thursday, 22nd – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

Monday, 26th – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

March

Thursday, 8th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

Sunday, 11th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Tuesday, 20th – Shettleston, Glasgow

Tuesday, 27th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Thursday, 29th – Alness

April

Sunday, 1st – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

Saturday, 7th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Sunday, 15th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 29th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

May

Wednesday, 2nd – Fells Rigg, Livingston

Friday, 4th – Tore, Black Isle

Sunday, 6th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Wednesday, 9th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Saturday, 19th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Monday, 21st – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

June

Sunday, 17th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

July

Sunday, 1st – Fintry, Dundee

Thursday, 4th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

Sunday, 29th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

August

Wednesday, 1st – Nairn

Sunday, 5th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 19th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

September

Sunday, 16th – Glencairn, Perth

Friday, 21st – Tore, Black Isle

Sunday, 23rd – Stirling (SNU)

Tuesday, 25th – Shettleston, Glasgow

Thursday, 27th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

October

Sunday, 14th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Tuesday, 16th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Sunday, 21st – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Friday, 26th – Links Street, Kirkcaldy

November

Saturday, 3rd – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

Sunday, 4th – Fintry, Dundee

Wednesday, 7th – Nairn

Sunday, 11th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 18th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

December

No bookings

2008

January

Sunday, 20th – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Monday, 21st – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Sunday, 27th – St. Clair St., Kirkcaldy

Tuesday, 29th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

February

Sunday, 10th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 17th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Sunday, 24th – Upper Largo

Thursday, 28th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

March

Sunday, 2nd – Glencairn, Perth

Sunday, 9th – Temple of Light, Methil Hill

Tuesday, 11th – Shettleston, Glasgow

Tuesday, 18th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Sunday, 23rd – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Monday, 24th – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Friday, 28th – Philp Hall, Kirkcaldy

April

Saturday, 5th – Angel Light Centre, Perth

Sunday, 6th – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Thursday, 10th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

Sunday, 13th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

Sunday, 20th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy

May

Wednesday, 7th – Nairn

Friday, 9th – Tore, Black Isle

Sunday, 25th – Upper Largo

Wednesday, 28th – New Row, Perth

Thursday, 29th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

Saturday, 31st – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

June

Sunday, 8th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Sunday, 15th – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

Monday, 16th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Monday, 23rd – Templehall, Kirkcaldy

Friday, 27th to Sunday, 29th – Somerset Place, Glasgow (SNU)

July

Wednesday, 23rd – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 27th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

August

Thursday, 28th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

September

Tuesday, 9th – Temple of Light, Methil

Wednesday, 17th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 21st – Stirling (SNU)

Thursday, 25th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

Saturday, 27th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

October

Friday, 3rd – Tore, Black Isle

Sunday, 5th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

Monday, 6th – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Tuesday, 7th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Sunday, 12th – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 19th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Sunday, 26th – Kilmarnock (SNU)

Thursday, 30th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

November

Saturday, 1st – Angel Light Centre, Perth

Saturday, 8th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

Sunday, 9th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Friday, 21st – Philp Hall, Kirkcaldy

December

Saturday, 6th – Burnhead lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Sunday, 7th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Monday, 15th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

2009

January

Tuesday, 20th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Friday, 23rd – Leslie

Thursday, 29th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

February

Sunday, 1st – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU), and New Row, Perth (SNU)

Thursday, 12th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

Sunday, 15th – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

Sunday, 22nd – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Thursday, 26th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

March

Sunday, 1st – Dunfermline ASK

Sunday, 8th – Stirling (SNU)

Sunday, 22nd – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Thursday, 26th – Portobello, Edinburgh (private sittings) (SNU)

April

Tuesday, 7th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Sunday, 12th – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 19th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

Sunday, 26th – St. Clair St., Kirkcaldy

May

Tuesday, 12th – Temple of Light, Methil

Sunday, 24th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Wednesday, 27th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Friday, 29th to Sunday, 31st – Somerset Place, Glasgow (SNU)

June

Monday, 1st to Tuesday, 2nd – Somerset Place, Glasgow (SNU)

Sunday, 7th – Alloa

Sunday, 14th – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

Wednesday, 17th – Fells Rigg, Livingston

Monday, 22nd – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Tuesday, 23rd – Dalneigh, Inverness

Sunday, 28th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

July

No bookings

August

Wednesday, 5th – Community Centre, Nairn

Friday, 7th – Edinburgh College of Parapsychology (SNU)

Sunday, 16th – Kilmarnock (SNU)

Friday, 21st – Leslie

September

Thursday, 10th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

October

Saturday, 17th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 18th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

November

Sunday, 1st – Kilmarnock (SNU)

Sunday, 8th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Tuesday, 10th – Temple of Light, Methil

Sunday, 15th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

Sunday, 22nd – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

December

No bookings

2010

January

Sunday, 17th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Sunday, 24th – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 31st – Dunfermline ASK

February

Sunday, 14th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Sunday, 28th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

March

Sunday, 14th – Stirling (SNU)

Sunday, 21st – Kilmarnock (SNU)

April

Sunday, 4th – Portobello, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 25th – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

May

Sunday, 2nd – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

June

Thursday, 3rd – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

July

Sunday, 4th – Dunfermline ASK

Tuesday, 20th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Monday, 26th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

August

Sunday, 1st – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Wednesday, 4th – Fells Rigg, Livingston

Thursday, 5th - Greenlaw

Monday, 9th – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Sunday, 22nd – Burlington, Toronto

September

Sunday, 12th – Bathgate Christian Spiritual Centre

Sunday 19th – Kilmarnock (SNU)

Sunday 26th – Alloa Spiritualist Church

October

Sunday 3rd – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

Sunday 10th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU) and Rannoch Moor Lodge, Dundee

Sunday 17th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

Tuesday 19th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Wednesday 20th – Alness

Friday, 22nd – Evanton

Friday, 29th – Edinburgh College of Parapsychology (SNU)

Saturday 30th – Burnhead Lane, Falkirk (SNU)

Sunday 31st – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

November

Sunday 7th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Thursday, 11th – Bo'ness

Monday 15th – Leven Valley Spiritualist Church, Dumbarton

Monday 22nd – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Thursday 25th – Rainbow Sanctuary, Arbroath

December

Thursday 2nd – Greenlaw

Sunday 5th - Alloa

Friday 10th to Tuesday 14th – Somerset Place, Glasgow (SNU)

2011

January

No bookings

February

Tuesday 8th – Falkirk (SNU)

Sunday 20th – Burlington, Ontario

Sunday 27th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

March

Thursday 3rd - Greenlaw

Sunday 6th – Stirling (SNU)

Wednesday, 16th – Fells Rigg, Livingston

Tuesday, 22nd – Jean Primrose Christian Spiritualist Church, Glasgow

Sunday 27th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

April

Wednesday 6th – New Row, Perth (SNU)

Thursday 7th – Albany Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday 17th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday, 24th – Portobello, Edinburgh

May

Sunday 1st – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

Monday, 2nd – Smithton, Inverness (SNU)

Friday 13th - Tranent

Tuesday, 17th – Dalneigh, Inverness

Wednesday 18th – Alness, Ross-shire

Sunday, 29th – Dunfermline ASK

June

Friday 3rd till Tuesday 7th – Somerset Place, Glasgow (SNU)

Friday 10th – Shining Light Spiritualist Church, Glasgow

Sunday, 12th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Sunday 26th – Falkirk (SNU)

July

Sunday 3rd – Kilmarnock (SNU)

Sunday 31st – New Row, Perth (SNU)

August

Tuesday 23rd – Dalneigh, Inverness

Wednesday 24th – Alness, Ross-shire

Sunday 28th – Rannoch Moor Lodge, Dundee

September

Sunday 18th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Sunday 18th – Glenrothes Spiritual Centre

October

Sunday 2nd – Kilmarnock (SNU)

Wednesday 5th – Fells Rigg, Livingston

Sunday 9th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Thursday 13th - Grangemouth

Sunday 16th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

November

Sunday 13th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

Sunday 27th – Morrison Street, Edinburgh

December

Sunday 4th – Albany Street, Edinburgh (SNU)

Friday 9th till Tuesday 13th – Somerset Place, Glasgow (SNU)

2012

January

Thursday 12th - Grangemouth

February

Sunday, 5th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

Sunday, 12th – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

March

Sunday, 4th – Stirling (SNU)

Sunday 11th – Rannoch Moor Lodge, Dundee

April

Sunday, 8th – Portobello Spiritualist Church (SNU)

Sunday 15th – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

June

Sunday, 3rd – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

July

Sunday, 1st – Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church

October

Sunday 21st – Church of the Spirit, Dundee (SNU)

November

Sunday, 4th – Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy (SNU)

2013**March**

Sunday 3rd – King Street, Stirling (SNU)

Appendix 7

Spiritualist Churches in Scotland

The following list includes all churches affiliated to (23), kindred bodies of (1), or associated with (2) the Spiritualists' National Union, together comprising 26 churches out of a total of 92 that I know of across Scotland. The information as to non-SNU churches has been gathered from various sources, including websites and author's contacts. The overall number of churches in Scotland has remained between 90 and 95 since 2001, despite various closures and new openings.

During the period November 2001 to date, a number of churches have closed for various reasons in East Lothian (Prestonpans), Fife (Upper Largo and Windygates), Glasgow (Shettleston) and the Inverness area (Evanton and Tore). The following list includes new churches opened during that same period in Edinburgh (St. Stephen St.), Midlothian (Bilston) and the Inverness area (Alness). There were short-lived attempts to establish churches in Beaully and Fort William during 2007, and in Thurso during 2008. A church that opened in Kirkcaldy in 2007 (a break-away from the Kirk Wynd church) moved to Leslie in January 2009 but has now closed. In May 2010 the Evanton church north of Inverness was reopened by new volunteers. A long-established church in Methil (Fife) moved to Leven in July 2010. The SNU has made a number of attempts to establish churches east and south of Edinburgh in the Scottish Borders by holding 'outreach' meetings in Haddington and Peebles, thus far without success. There is an informal group unconnected with the SNU meeting intermittently in Peebles. Monthly demonstrations are given by visiting mediums at Greenlaw but are entirely due to the enthusiasm of the owners of the small heritage theatre used as the venue.

Aberdeen

1. Aberdeen Spiritualist Centre (SNU)
Stephen House, 71 Dee Street, Aberdeen AB11 6EE
Tel. 01224 574 916

Times of services:	Sunday	11.15 am & 6.15 pm, 7.45 pm (Healing)
	Tuesday	10.00 am (Healing) & 7.30 pm (Awareness/meditation)
	Wednesday	2.30 pm & 6.30 pm (Healing)

2. Bon Accord Spiritualist Church (SNU)
37 Fraser Place, Aberdeen AB25 3TY
Tel. 01224 622 417

Times of services:	Sunday	11.15 am & 6.15 pm, 7.45 pm (Healing)
	Wednesday	1.00 pm (Healing)
	Thursday	7.00 pm (Healing)

Airdrie

1. Spiritual Church of Life & Light
Room 2, Airdrie Town Hall
Tel. 01236 767 007

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm

Alloa

1. Alloa Christian Spiritualist Church
Town Hall

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm

2. Alloa Spiritualist Church
Care Centre, Erskine Street, Alloa FK10 2AU

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm

Alness

1. Alness Spiritualist Church
Community Hall, Industrial Estate, Alness

Times of services: Thursday 7.30 pm

Arbroath

1. Arbroath Spiritualist Centre (SNU)
20-22 Commerce Street, Arbroath DD11 1NB
Tel. 01241 875 979

Times of services: Wednesday 2.30 pm (Healing)
Thursday 7.30 pm (Divine Service)

2. Rainbow Spiritual Centre
Community Centre, Marketgate
Tel. 01241 876 223

Times of services: Thursday 7.30 pm

Ayr

1. Church of Psychic Science (SNU)
10 Alloway Place, Ayr KA7 2AA
Tel. 01292 266 805

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm, 8.00 pm (Healing)
 Thursday 7.00 pm (Meditation)

2. Wallace Tower Spiritualist Church

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm

Barrhead

1. ASK Barrhead
Carlibar Primary School, Main Street, Barrhead

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm

Bathgate

1. Bathgate Christian Spiritualist Church
Acredale House, Mid Street, Bathgate
Tel. 01506 437566
www.spiritualism.scotland.com

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm

2. Light of the Spirit Church

Belfast

1. Belfast Spiritualist Church (SNU)
134 Malone Avenue, Lisburn Road, Belfast
Tel. 02890 662 731

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm (Divine Service)
 Monday 8.00 pm (Awareness Class)
 Tuesday 8.00 pm (Development Circle)
 Thursday 7.00 pm (Healing)
 Friday 8.00 (Development Circle)

Bellshill

1. Bellshill Spiritualist Church
Cultural Centre & Library, John Street

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm

2. Bellshill Christian Spiritualist Church
Gardenside, Bellshill

Times of services: Thursday 7.30 pm

Bilston

1. Angel Sanctuary

Times of services: Friday 7.30 pm

Carnoustie

1. The Spirit Lodge Sanctuary
Post Office House, Barry
Tel. 01241 855 269

Coatbridge

1. Coatbridge Spiritualist Church (Christian Independent)
135 Sunnyside Road, Coatbridge

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm
Tuesday 7.30 pm

Dreghorn (Nr. Saltcoats)

1. ASK Dreghorn
Townend Community Centre
Tel. 01294 211818

Times of services: Thursday 6.45 pm (healing)
7.30 pm (clairvoyance)

2. ASK Dunfermline
Touch Community Centre, 30 Mercer Place, Dunfermline
<http://groups.msn.com/DUNFERMLINEASK>

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm

Dunoon

1. Dunoon Spiritualist Church Centre
Old Men's Club, 18 McArthur Street, Dunoon PA23 7RA
www.carolstirling.co.uk
www.dunoonspiritualistchurchcentre.moonfruit.com

Times of services: Monday 7.30pm

East Kilbride

1. East Kilbride Spiritualist Church
Blacklaw Primary School & Community Centre
Glen Arroch, St. Leonard's, East Kilbride G74 2BP

Times of services: Tuesday 6.30 pm

Edinburgh

1. Edinburgh Association of Spiritualists (Gayfield Church) (SNU)
246 Morrison Street, Edinburgh EH3 8DT
Tel. 0131 228 9550
E-mail: info@edinburghspiritualists.com
www.edinburghspiritualists.com

Times of services: Sunday 11.00 am, 12.45 pm (healing)
Monday 7.30 pm (open awareness class)
Saturday 7.30 pm

2. Edinburgh Spiritualist Society (SNU)
34 Albany Street, Edinburgh EH1 3QH
Tel. 0131 556 1749

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm
Monday 7.00 pm (healing)
Thursday 7.30 pm
Friday 7.30 pm (open awareness circle)

3. Portobello Spiritualist Church (Christian Spiritualist)
20a Bath Street, Portobello, Edinburgh EH15 1HD
Tel. 0131 669 4780
E-mail: portobellosc@hotmail.com
www.portobellosc.org.uk

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm, 7.45 pm (healing),
 Tuesday 7.30 pm, 9.00 pm (healing)
 Wednesday 7.30 pm (meditation & healing)
 Friday 2.30 pm

4. Edinburgh College of Parapsychology
2 Melville Street, Edinburgh EH3 7NS
Tel. 0131 220 1433
E-mail: secretary@parapsychology.org.uk
www.parapsychology.org.uk

Times of services: Wednesday 2.30 pm
 Thursday 10.30 am
 Friday 6.30 pm (healing), 7.30 pm

Evanton

1. Evanton Spiritualist Church

Times of services: Friday 7.30pm

Falkirk

1. Falkirk Spiritualist Church (SNU)
8 Burnhead Lane, Falkirk FK1 1UG
Tel. 01324 557099
E-mail: wscs18315@blueyonder.co.uk

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm
 Tuesday 6.30 (healing), 8.00 pm
 Saturday 7.00 pm

2. Pleasance Spirit Church
Guide Hall, The Pleasance, Falkirk

Times of services: Sunday 7.00 pm

Ferniegair (Nr. Hamilton)

1. Community Centre

Times of services: Sunday (?)

Glasgow

1. Glasgow Association of Spiritualists (SNU)
6-7 Somerset Place, Glasgow G3 7JT
Tel. 0141 332 4626

Times of services:

Sunday	11.30 am & 6.30 pm (Divine Services)
Monday	7.30 pm
Tuesday	2.00 pm & 6.30 pm (healing)
Friday	7.30 pm (awareness group)
Saturday	10.00 am (healing)

2. Glasgow Central Association (SNU)
64 Berkeley Street, Glasgow G3 7DS
Tel. 0141 221 6201

Times of services:

Sunday	5.00 pm (healing) & 6.30 pm
Monday	7.30 pm
Tuesday	2.00 pm

3. Thistle Centre Spiritualist Church
15 St. Margaret's Place, Bridgegate, Glasgow G1 5JY

Times of services:

Sunday	6.30 pm
Wednesday	7.30 pm

4. The Jean Primrose Greater World Spiritualist Church (GWA)
Fred Paton Day Care Centre, 19 Carrington Street, Glasgow G4 9AJ
Tel. 0141 331 0054

Times of services:

Sunday	6.30 pm
Tuesday	7.30 pm

5. Old Rugged Cross Spirit Church
123 Main Street, **Bridgeton** G40

Times of services:

Sunday	6.30 pm
Thursday	7.00 pm

6. Angel Light Church
Daisy Community Centre, **Govanhill**

Times of services: Friday 7.30 pm
7. Maryhill Spiritualist Church
Community Centre, Shakespeare Street, **Maryhill**

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm
8. Parkhead Spirit Church
163 Helenvale Street, **Parkhead** G31

Times of services: Monday 7.30 pm
9. Partick Spiritualist Church
Burgh Halls, 9 Burgh Street, **Partick** G11 1AB

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30 pm
www.partickspiritualistchurch.webs.com
10. Pollock Spiritualist Church
Leithland Neighbourhood Centre, Kempsthorpe, **Pollock** G53 5SR

Times of services: Friday 7.30 pm
11. Love & Friendship Spiritualist Church
Langside Halls, 5 Langside Avenue, **Shawlands** G41 2QR

Times of services: Sunday 6.30pm
12. White Dove Spiritualist Church
Toryglen

Times of services: Thursday 7.30 pm
13. Cambuslang Greenlees Spiritualist Church
The Cambuslang Institute, Greenlees Road, **Cambuslang**
www.cambuslangspiritualistchurch.spiritualism.scotland.com

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm
14. Peace Haven Christian Spiritualist Church
Loran Street Community Centre, 201 Govan Road, Glasgow G51 1HS

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm

15. Paisley Spiritualist Church (SNU)
Glenburn Community Centre, Skye Crescent, **Paisley**

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30 pm & 9.00 pm (healing)
16. Friendship of Love & Light Spiritualist Church
Foxbar Community Centre, **Paisley**

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm & 8.30 (healing)
17. Renfrew Association of Spiritualists
McMaster Centre, Robertson Park, **Renfrew**
<http://groups.msn.com/ASKRenfrew>

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm

Glenrothes

1. Woodside Way Hall, Balbirnie Road

Times of services: Sunday 6.15 pm
2. Tenants Meeting Rooms
St. Regulus Gardens, Auchmuty, Glenrothes
Tel. 07796 684826

Times of services: Sunday 6.15 pm, 8.00 pm (healing)

Gourock

1. White Rose Fellowship
Gamble Halls, Shore Street, Gourock

Times of services: Thursday 7.15 pm
2. Gamble Halls, Shore Street, Gourock

Times of services: Wednesday 7.15 pm

Grangemouth

1. Grangemouth Christian Spiritualist Church (GWA)
Community Centre, Montgomery Street, Grangemouth FK3
Tel. 01324 870107

Times of services: (?)

Kilmarnock

1. Kilmarnock Spiritualist Church
30 Old Mill Road, Kilmarnock KA1 3AW
Tel. 01563 549175

Times of services:

Sunday	6.00 pm
Monday	7.30 pm
Tuesday	1.00 pm (healing)
Thursday	7.30 pm (healing)
Saturday	11.00 am (healing)

2. New Dawn Spiritualist Centre
Shortlees Community Centre, Blacksyke Avenue, Kilmarnock KA1 4SR
www.newdawnspiritualistcentre.org
Facebook group – Kerry New (Creator)

Times of services: Friday 7.30 pm

Kilwinning

1. Temple of Light
Blacklands Hall

Times of services: Wednesday 7.15 pm

Kinghorn

1. Guiding Light Spiritual Centre
Kinghorn Community Centre, Rosslan Place, Kinghorn

Times of services: Friday 7.15 pm

Kirkcaldy

1. Kirkcaldy Spiritual Centre (SNU)
Victoria House, 13 Kirk Wynd, Kirkcaldy KY1 1EH
Tel. 01592 643645
E-mail: ksc@ic24.net
www.Kdyisc.moonfruit.com

Times of services:

Sunday	6.00 pm
Monday	7.30 pm
Wednesday	12.00 noon

3. Healing Light Church
Craigshill

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm

Lochgelly

1. Lochgelly Spiritualist Church (SNU)
37-39 Bank Street, Lochgelly KY5 9QG

Times of services: Sunday 6.00 pm
Wednesday 7.15 pm (open development group)

Nairn

1. Community Centre

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30 pm (first of month)

Paisley

1. Paisley Spiritualist Church (SNU)
Glenburn Community Centre, Skye Crescent, Paisley PA2 8OX
Tel. 0141 884 3232

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30 pm, 9.00 pm (healing)

2. Friendship of Love & Light Spiritual Church
Foxbar Community Centre, Paisley

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm, 8.30 (healing)

3. Scottish Spiritual & Holistic Church
3 Argyle Street, Paisley PA1 2ET

Times of services: Sunday 6.30pm

Perth

1. Perth Spiritualist Church
Methven Buildngs, 40 New Row, Perth PH1 5QA
Tel. 07724 411922

Times of services: Sunday 6.30 pm, 8.30 pm (healing)
Tuesday 7.00 pm (healing)
Wednesday 7.00 pm (bi-monthly)

2. Angel Light Spirit Centre
Oakbank Community Centre, Viewlands Road West, Perth
Tel. 01738 552457
www.angel-lightspiritcentre.co.uk

Times of services: Saturday 7.30pm

Prestwick

1. Prestwick Spiritualist Church
Community Centre, Carlaeverock Road, Prestwick KA9 1HR

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30 pm

Rutherglen

1. Rutherglen Spiritualist Church
Spittal Community Hall, 2 Carrick Road, Spittal, Rutherglen G73 4LJ

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30pm

Shetland

1. Shetland Spiritualist Church (SNU)
Freefield Centre, North Road, Lerwick, Shetland ZE1 0NP
Tel. 01950 477889
E-mail: jamesburnett@ukonline.co.uk

Times of services: Tuesday 7.30 pm (second Tuesday in month)

Stevenston

1. Stevenston Spiritualist Church
Hayocks Community Centre, Hyslop Road, Stevenston KA20 4HS

Times of services: Monday 8.00pm

Stewarton

1. Stewarton ASK
35 High Street, Stewarton
Tel. 01294 211818

Times of services: Tuesday 6.45 pm (healing), 7.30 pm

Stirling

1. Stirling Spiritualist Church (SNU)
27 King Street, Stirling FK8 1DN
Tel. 01786 474043

Times of services:

Sunday	6.30 pm, 8.30 pm (healing)
Tuesday	7.00 pm (healing)
Wednesday	7.30 pm
Thursday	7.00 pm (healing)
Saturday	10.00 am (healing)

Stranraer

1. The Stranraer Spiritualist and Psychic Awareness Church
Queen Street, Stranraer DG9 7LQ
www.southwestspiritualists.co.uk

Times of services: Wednesday 7.30pm

Tranent

1. Dawn of Light Church
Town Hall, Church Street, Tranent
Tel. 01875 811883
www.dawnoflight.co.uk

Times of services:

Thursday	7.30 pm (open awareness circle)
Friday	7.30 pm, 9.00 pm (healing)

Contact: John Aitken