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REVIEW ESSAY

Heal Thyself

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Making a Mindful Nation: Mental Health and Governance in the Twenty-First Century, by Joanna Cook (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2023).

Global Ayahuasca: Wondrous Visions and Modern Worlds, by Alex K. Gearin (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2024).

Spiritualism's Place: Reformers, Seekers, and Séances in Lily Dale, by Averill Earls, Sarah Handley-Cousins, Marissa C. Rhodes, and Elizabeth Garner Masarik (Ithaca: Three Hills, Cornell University Press, 2024).

Journeys into the Invisible: Shamanic Technologies of the Imagination, by Charles Stépanoff, translated by Matthew H. Evans (Chicago: HAU Books, 2025[2019]).

Abstract

Recent work on metaphysical healing practices extends William James's observations on what he called the "mind cure." Four titles are reviewed on the topics of mindfulness, ayahuasca use, Spiritualism, and shamanism. In the United Kingdom, advocates join forces with parliamentarians to promote mindfulness as the key to ensuring a psychologically healthy nation. At commercial ayahuasca retreats in Peru, Australia, and China, spiritual seekers have different experiences with the drug based on their cultural presuppositions and relationships to local communities. The village of Lily Dale, New York, is populated entirely by members of Spiritualist churches, especially mediums who work to communicatively connect visitors with the spirits of their deceased loved ones. Finally, an analysis of shamanism in far northern Asia identifies a significant and consequential distinction between practices in which shamanic ability is learned and open to all to cultivate and those in which it is inherited—a distinction that the author speculates is at the origin of the formation of social hierarchy. Although the topics and sites vary widely, all demonstrate the persistence of ideas and practices in which the mind is understood to be an agent of healing.

Keywords: mindfulness; ayahuasca; Spiritualism; shamanism; healing

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In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James described growing American interest in what he called the "Mind-cure movement," also known as "New Thought" (1902: 92). James located the movement's origins in the Gospels, Transcendentalism, the idealism of Bishop Berkeley, Hinduism, "spiritism" (schools of thought formulating universal laws of spiritual progress), and popular understandings of evolution (93). These influences were merging in the late nineteenth century to create something James described as "deliberately optimistic"—so optimistic that "if your thoughts are of health, youth, vigor, and success, before you know it these things will also be your outward portion" (92, 105). Thinking healthy thoughts makes you healthy in every way.

A century and a quarter after James delivered the Gifford Lectures, which became his classic work, the mind-cure continues to harmonize with new and alternative religious practices. Belief in the power of positive thinking is a key feature of many "spiritual but not religious" groups, whether the mind is considered the responsible agent or something that must be aligned with other responsible agents. Such belief resonates with understandings of the body as energetically composed to foster a spiritual sensibility in which body, mind, and soul are ritually unified in the pursuit of health (Bender 2010). Neopagans who learn mental techniques for beneficial magical rites have strong affinities with Pentecostals who train themselves to pray conversationally and hear the voice of a God who only wants the best for them (Luhrmann 1989, 2012). In aligning their thoughts with bodily actions and spiritual commitments, present-day mind-cure practitioners articulate an understanding of health that is both radically individualistic (heal thyself) and also transcendent (heal the world).

But sometimes the self trumps the world. The individualistic aspects of modern mind-cure practices resonate with healthcare trends in the United States promoted by the "Make America Healthy Again" movement. The policies of Robert F. Kennedy Jr., Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services, seem designed to benefit the multibillion-dollar "wellness industry," which features metaphysical techniques of mind and spirit cultivation as well as the promotion of alternative medicines and nutritional supplements. Kennedy's dismissal of scientific expertise meshes with the valorization of health-seeking by individuals rather than the safeguarding of public health (Herd 2026). It might seem a strange alliance that brings together mindfulness advocates, anti-vaxxers, crystal gazers, and protein bros, but the marriage has come to make sense for those involved, rooted as it is in the affirmation of individual desire as sovereign and, for some, sovereignty as spiritually grounded.

In writing about the mind-cure in the U.S., James admitted that he did not know if it had become popular in Britain (1902: 92). Joanna Cook's *Making a Mindful Nation* offers a partial answer. She begins by showing how Buddhism appealed to nineteenth- and twentieth-century British publics for its potential to support psychological development. Buddhism was exotic to Victorians and Edwardians, yet also seen as rational and scientific in a way—a way that involved erasing its "superstitious" aspects, to be sure. After World War I, Buddhist techniques of meditation gained popularity in the United Kingdom. Decades later, hippies languidly pursuing alternative forms of spirituality saw Buddhism as one of many attractive options. Within Asia, Theravada Buddhism saw a twentieth-century surge in lay meditative practice, making meditation newly available as a product for commercially minded gurus to put on an international market.

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Cook notes that in World War II, Britain's political health was discursively linked to psychological health. Britons prided themselves on being non-aggressive but also possessing a "'bulldog' spirit" (31–32). They would survive the war because they were not extremists and did not scapegoat others. They had a resilient character. Joining Buddhism's democratization and globalization with British experiences of the war and self-understandings of national psyche, Cook presents a complex history briskly but effectively. And with this background in place, she moves on to the central subject of her book: how "mindfulness" has flourished popularly in early twenty-first century Britain to the extent that the government has recently promoted it as a key to improving public health.

The book is animated by questions of the good life and how one can achieve it. The short answer is mindfulness, or paying attention to your thoughts without judging them. Changing the way you relate to your own thoughts will make you more engaged in the present moment and more able to cope with intellectual and emotional challenges of all sorts. This is the good life: to be aware, to be "present," to pay attention to paying attention. This might not sound particularly British, and Cook notes how mindfulness advocates do indeed portray it as a universal practice with ultimate benefits: transcending Buddhism, it is not supposed to be culture-bound. Yet she also points out that "it is possible to make a case for Britain as the epitome of the 'mindful nation.' Unlike in the U.S., mindfulness in Britain receives public funding, and its uptake has been facilitated by centralised deployment" via the National Health Service (13). *Making a Mindful Nation* is thus an ethnography of Britons carrying out a universalizing project and seeking to give it national institutional force. The book attends jointly to British cultural values, utopian ideals of universal human potential, and the politics of public health.

Cook conducted fieldwork by participating in training courses (including classroom lessons, workshops, retreats, and practical exercises) and working alongside parliamentarians and mindfulness advocates in the Mindfulness All-Party Parliamentary Group. This group produced the 2015 report *Mindful Nation UK*, hence the title of Cook's monograph. In my reading, the most fascinating parts of the book come when she describes the struggle between advocates and politicians to explain why mindfulness is so important for ensuring a healthy Britain—a nation hoping to see more psychological flourishing and less depression, criminal reoffending, and worker absenteeism. For advocates, mindfulness is essentially an ethical practice. For politicians, it needs to be (and can be) economically useful. Advocates understand the remit of a parliamentary report but feel that justification in economic terms falls short of explaining mindfulness's true utility, which includes the cultivation of wisdom, whether or not British taxpayers want to hear this.

Cook shows how appreciation of mindfulness depends on a particular understanding of the human condition—the belief that we are all hardwired for survival in ways that can become damaging in the "frantic" modern world—as well as a focus on the atomic individual subject who can self-heal especially by turning inward. She observes the many ways in which evaluations of mindfulness arrive at a kind of balance. It is scientifically grounded but open to wonder. It is ethical and also useful. It is ordinary and extraordinary.

It also sounds religious, emerging as it does from Buddhism and (in eclectic New Age style) borrowing from and resonating with Theosophy, Taoism, romanticized Indigenous (read: non-"modern") traditions, yoga, and other sources. Yet part of mindfulness's appeal to British politicians seems to be that it is *not* considered

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religious or spiritual despite its historical roots and its utopian, salvational hopefulness. In fact, one parliamentarian comments on a mindfulness course, "I found the ethos, thinking and practice totally compelling and additionally, free of 'psycho-babble', religion and spiritual allusions"—although another response includes the telling line, "Although initially sceptical … I'm a convert" (96). Might mindfulness be appealing precisely because it is a deeply religious movement couched as non-religious? Cook does not pose this question, but she does admirably balance appreciation of mindfulness's benefits as a therapeutic technique with gentle skepticism of its advocates' more exuberant claims.

If the modern condition is seen as a source of stress and sickness, mindfulness becomes a way to slow down in order to build up, a way to become aware of how one engages so one can, to some extent, disengage. Another way to deal with modern social pressures is to take drugs. In *Global Ayahuasca*, Alex K. Gearin moves between three remarkably different fieldsites to work with subjects who care just as much as Cook's do about healing through thinking but achieve their goal not by looking to a watered-down Buddhism but rather to a fully juiced cup of *Banisteriopsis caapi*, the drug of the title.

Each of Gearin's sites hosts commercial ayahuasca retreats. Visitors pay for a psychedelic pilgrimage. The first place he examines is ayahuasca's homeland of Peru, with a focus on the Pachamama Temple in Pucallpa. Gearin observes that many Amazonian ayahuasca retreat centers are owned by North Americans and Europeans; Pachamama Temple has a Polish "business partner" but is co-owned by Shipibo healers, whom Gearin notes "have become perhaps the most successful shamans in the global revival of ayahuasca" (71, 77). In the global psychedelic imagination, if one wants an authentic ayahuasca experience, one should go to the Amazon and learn what the Shipibo can reveal through administering ayahuasca while singing sacred healing songs.

The problem is that Shipibo have traditionally used ayahuasca to fight sorcery, and clients from Connecticut are not looking for help in this area. The typical visitor to an Amazonian ayahuasca center is looking to experience cosmic awe and unity, transcendence of the self, and healing from trauma. They want to receive life-altering visions, not learn that shamans in the next village are eyeing them maliciously. Like other anthropologists who have shown how material interests shape exoticist tourism encounters (e.g., Ortner 1999, Stasch 2016), Gearin argues that Shipibo willingly adapt and sell ayahuasca ceremonies for their own purposes. Shipibo see an opportunity to enhance their own lives by giving tourists what they want, which, it turns out, is ritually easy to accomplish. Whereas local shamanic healing practices articulate a "closed cosmological system" in which healing one person means displacing their affliction onto another, Shipibo have come to see their foreign clients' "spiritual essence" as weak, and banishing their problems therefore comparatively simple: "The healers at Pachamama Temple all told me that they would rather heal visitors than locals, not simply because visitors pay around ten times more money for their service, but also because visitors are easier to heal than locals" (88). Pilgrims often appreciate Shipibo poverty as a sign of spiritual authenticity, but Shipibo worry that foreigners' wealth will motivate more sorcery from jealous rival healers, as well as police and politicians looking for payoffs. Even as individual shamans attend to each client personally, helping them through the psychedelic journeys they have paid for, one shaman stays in the middle of the performance space to guard against sorcery attacks from the outside (79).

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Gearin's second fieldsite is a range of Australian ayahuasca retreats. He mentions how, after a popular movement of psychedelic exploration in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Australian spiritual pilgrims turned to ayahuasca for new and distinct purposes: "Ten years into the new century, drinking ayahuasca had crystallized into a unique approach that was mainly attracting people from New Age and alternative healing networks less interested in psychonautic experimentation than in healing trauma, discovering their Higher Self, and connecting with Mother Nature" (134). Underpinning these quests is a sense of disenchantment from the modern world and a desire to reconnect with nature in order to heal oneself. Whereas Amazonian retreats feature local healers, grounding visitors' trips in Indigenous attachments to place, Australian retreats do not have the same relationship to traditional wisdom. Australia's visa policies mean Latin American healers do not often come to guide drinkers through ayahuasca's mental journeys, and local retreat leaders are mostly white Australians who make a point of calling themselves "facilitators" rather than "shamans" (150). Ayahuasca has not been part of Australian Aboriginal traditions. In seeking the perfect natural landscape in which to be spiritually healed, are ayahuasca drinkers erasing deep Indigenous connections to land, creating a purity they can then pretend to find? One facilitator, Joseph, sidesteps the question of indigeneity and ayahuasca use by crediting the drug itself as the teacher. As Gearin puts it, "Joseph learned his ayahuasca trade straight from the brew" (152).

The book takes off in an ethnographically fascinating direction when the author goes to China. Ayahuasca's consumption is strictly forbidden there, but Gearin was able to find and participate in clandestine sessions and interview the participants. Rather than escape modernity to become one with nature, Chinese ayahuasca drinkers seek to become better at modernity. The drug gives you an edge in business. In a story that would blow the minds of seekers at Pachamama Temple, the Chinese manager of a fast-food chain explains how taking ayahuasca has helped him visualize better restaurant design and made him realize he had been "failing to address performance issues with key managers and HR staff" (184). The conjunction of psychedelic drugs and corporate performance enhancement in China is driven by one person, a European whom Gearin calls "Luke," who has developed corporate leadership-training packages in Shanghai, Beijing, and Shenzhen in which ayahuasca plays a prominent role. Luke trains his clients to see themselves as "Suited Monks," connecting their inner spirit and intuition with material success.

Gearin's mesmerizing ethnography is held together by a simple but persuasive argument, one with which most anthropologists and historians will not quibble: that quests for a universal human experience—in this case, the psychedelic experience of seeing wild nature spirits, cosmic cats, snakes, insects, and fractal patterns—are never really universal because they are always culturally contoured. Particular kinds of experience are always presupposed (Luhrmann 2020). Gearin's foil is the late psychologist Benny Shanon, who argued for an ayahuasca experience common to everyone who drinks it. But ayahuasca works differently in the Amazon than it does in urban China because, among other reasons, Amazonian shamans are getting ready to fight sorcery and Chinese businesspeople are getting ready to slay a different kind of competition. In a nice comparative touch, however, Gearin notes that Amazonian and Chinese users of ayahuasca share a deep pragmatism that distinguishes them from Australian New Age framings of the drug as a therapeutic escape from modernity's ills (170).

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In addition to characterizing culture as foundational to experience, even psychedelic experience, Gearin offers a related argument about how narrative is key to ayahuasca's commercial appeal. Stories integrate psychedelic experiences on multiple levels. Drawing on ethnographies of traditional shamanism, he writes that "Some Indigenous approaches have emphasized keeping ayahuasca experiences secret. … For Shuar in northwest Amazonia, speaking openly about a powerful spirit ally that was gained while drinking ayahuasca risked causing the ally to leave the body. Narrating the experiences could weaken their intrinsic powers" (190). In contrast, new adaptations of ayahuasca emphasize the efficacy of storytelling: "cultivating and sharing narratives of ayahuasca experiences is a major healing activity in the burgeoning commercial use of the brew. Ayahuasca practices in these loosely categorized [*sic*] global networks … widely promot[ing] the benefits of narrating ayahuasca experiences" (190–91). In the book's epilogue, the author shares the story of his most adventurous ayahuasca experience. Like a fever dream, it is evocatively nonsensical, moving from the feeling of being filled with "psychic fluid," receiving "faint ornamental visions and glowing sensations," and seeing his late grandmother's face overshadow the Shipibo healer's appearance (237). It is a fitting end to a book that began, in its acknowledgments section, by thanking drugs. Listing seven species by their Latin names, Gearin writes matter-of-factly, "I should acknowledge the educational and accumulative presence of tryptamine plants in my body, thinking, and perception" (xi).

Whereas Gearin thanks nature's psychoactive bounty for making his book possible, the authors of *Spiritualism's Place* thank their Patreon supporters. The four collaborators—Averill Earls, Sarah Handley-Cousins, Marissa C. Rhodes, and Elizabeth Garner Masarik—host a history podcast titled "Dig," and their listeners' donations helped fund the research behind this book. The titular place is Lily Dale, a village south of Buffalo, New York, where you can reside only if you are a member of a Spiritualist church.

Spiritualism, with a proper capital S, is a religious movement that began in 1848 and continues today, with national institutions such as the National Spiritualist Association of Churches (based in Lily Dale) and the United Kingdom's Spiritualists' National Union, as well as Australia's regional Victorian Spiritualists' Union. Over its 178-year history to date, Spiritualism has seen a shift in popular practice from "physical mediumship," in which spirit presence is made tangible, to "mental mediumship," in which a medium receives signs from the spirit world in her mind and body. Spiritualist mediumship gained popularity alongside the rise of staged magic shows, but mediums of the era insisted they were truly in communication with people in the spirit world: they were astral telegraph operators, not illusionists. The problem was that scientists investigating physical mediums' claims routinely found proof of unconscious bias and conscious fraud. Tables tipped because of sitters' ideomotor responses. Ghost faces showed up in photos due to double exposure. Ectoplasm was muslin, and sometimes offal. Perhaps in response to such revelations, mediums increasingly turned to mental mediumship, which is the style practiced most widely in Spiritualism today, including in Lily Dale. Mental mediumship places much emphasis on healing, both the healing power of receiving loving messages from the deceased and the energetic healing power mediums channel from the spirit world through their minds and bodies (Singleton and Tomlinson 2025: chapter 5). When James associated the mind-cure with "spiritism," among other sources, Spiritualism was an especially prominent spiritist movement, and

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Spiritualist mediums today generally agree with the proposition that thinking healthy thoughts will help one become and stay healthy.

With their experience as popular podcasters, the authors write in a friendly, accessible style. I have never read a more entertaining description of the New Age movement than Handley-Cousins's shorthand "why your medium might have a chakra chart hanging on the wall over a table that holds a Bible, some tarot cards, and a few turkey feathers" (153; n.b., all but one chapter are written by individual contributors). At some moments, the writing becomes casual to the point of perhaps giving pause: Earls and Handley-Cousins both refer to aspects of Spiritualism's history as "cringey" for making them uncomfortable, which one might read as refreshingly honest or dismissively presentist. At the end of a paragraph on Lily Dale as an example of an intentional community born in the nineteenth century, Handley-Cousins concludes: "it's actually completely natural that Lily Dale should be located in this quiet forested corner of western New York. What was actually remarkable was that it was still there" (16). But why is Spiritualism's continued existence remarkable? The assumption that alternative religious groups are doomed to disappear is not a strong basis for understanding how their past made them what they are today.

"Ours is a book about place," Earls writes, "about the history of religion, activism, feminism, and emotion that's been churned up and paved over in the streets, bricked up and burned down in the buildings, and etched into every stone and plank of wood that makes up Lily Dale" (169). They trace the early development of Lily Dale as a resort, a place where Spiritualism was featured but was not the only attraction. Here, their book resonates well with Cook's and Gearin's: if you agree that the modern world agitates us with stress and sickness, then we need to find a refuge within it, whether that is at a mindfulness training session in London, an ayahuasca ceremony in Nimbin, or a pleasant summer-camp-style village with an old-growth forest and a gorgeous lake, a place that just happens to be where you go to speak with the dead.

To emphasize the theme of place, the book's chapter titles are based on local sites, including the Fox Cottage (the house where Spiritualism's founders grew up, which was not originally in Lily Dale but was moved there), the Auditorium (site of large-scale events), and the Maplewood Hotel (chapters three, four, and five, respectively). These chapters move away from their title subjects to consider general historical topics. For example, the chapter on the Auditorium is predominantly about suffragism, the chapter on the Maplewood Hotel about prohibitionism. Histories are sketched largely through mini-biographies, revealing how Lily Dale was long a center of progressive activism. Stories of feminist leaders such as Elizabeth Lowe Watson, Marion Skidmore, and Abby Louise Pettengill—and the mysterious tale of Oskenonton, a Mohawk opera singer who lived at Lily Dale as a spiritual healer and entrepreneur—enliven the book's presentation of Lily Dale as a spiritual-political hub, a place where the mind-cure stretched in one direction to Seneca Falls and in the other direction to the afterlife. Best of all is the detail that the table on which Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucretia Mott had written the Declaration of Sentiments was used, in later decades, for séances (110).

Earls states plainly that the authors wanted to write a history, not an ethnography (171). The resulting work is lively and informative, but the focus on political activism does tend to mute understanding of the attraction of Spiritualism to many of its early (and current) advocates—the sense that they were genuinely discovering new truths about the nature of existence by communicating with the dead. The women who

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worked to advance progressive causes in and beyond Lily Dale transformed American history because of their deep ethical commitment joined to political courage. But to be understood in its own terms, Spiritualism must be seen as more than these causes: it was, and is, a modernist attempt to demonstrate that life after death can be proven. Spiritualists have always insisted that they are looking for evidence when mediums do their work. For this reason, Handley-Cousins's statement that "Spiritualism is, if nothing else, a *feeling* religion, in which emotions are at the center of nearly every interaction" (15; emphasis in original) is true in a small sense and false in a larger sense. It is true that mediums' embodied reception of spiritual signals and the Spiritualist vision of souls united in like-attracts-like relationships can be described as a framework in which feeling constitutes spiritual experience. Yet feelings have never been enough for mediums and their followers. Spiritualists recognize that some mediums are fraudulent, some listeners are too eager to hear from their deceased loved ones to be properly critical evaluators, and mediums and audiences must work together to arrive at an understanding of what counts as verifiable communication from the spirit world (compare, e.g., Zárate 2026).

A popular form of mediumship in the nineteenth century was the trance lecture, in which the medium would be given a challenging scientific, literary, or philosophical topic on which to immediately deliver a public address. The most skilled speakers, like Emma Hardinge Britten and Cora L. V. Scott, would then astonish their audiences with their fluent lectures: this is how a gyroscope works, here is the true meaning of a Bible verse, that is the depth of earth's geological history. The trance lecture was a feminist ritual in which women were challenged and, at least in Spiritualists' own reports, consistently won impressive victories because they could convincingly express the truth. Whereas Earls insists that women mediums could never really get credit for their speech—"the presumption of passivity and lack of intellectuality associated with mediumship meant that mediums were seen as mere tools of Spirit" (49)—Alex Owen (1989) has written that mediums' performances as mediums (not just as suffragists, not just as temperance advocates) accomplished a great deal for women's rights. Describing séances specifically, Owen argues, "mediumship was capable of sabotaging the mechanics of power inherent in the Victorian codification of gender difference. … Spiritualists may not have set out to challenge the dominant view of womanhood, but séance behaviour itself signified a transgression and transposition of normative femininity. For, whilst speaking directly to the feminine ideal, mediumship succeeded in effectively undermining it" (1989: 11).

There are two moving and intriguing stories in *Spiritualism's Place* that the authors offer but leave unexplored and that might have helped develop a fuller consideration of Spiritualism's specifically religious appeal. Earls writes in the introduction that she has only had one sitting with a medium. She was hoping to hear from the spirit of her mother but doubted she would. And, to her chagrin, she did not, and left the site with "tears streaming down my face, deeply disappointed and not the least surprised" (10). Rhodes describes visiting a Lily Dale medium with a group of friends and receiving a reading that was notably accurate and overwhelmed her to the point of sobbing (117). Of the many stories in *Spiritualism's Place*—stories about mediums, activists, and a close group of friends who work together on a podcast and decide to make Lily Dale their joint academic project—these two narratives get

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closest to illuminating why Spiritualism has endured, and will continue to endure, as people seek solace of proof beyond feeling, evidence that gives hope.

Charles Stépanoff's *Journeys into the Invisible*, translated from the French by Matthew H. Evans, is a different sort of book than the other three considered here. It is an older type of work, an exercise in grand theory-building, with extensive attention paid to comparative ethnography. The author's core question—what is the origin of social hierarchy?—is answered straightforwardly, and in great detail, through an examination of two main types of shamanism in far northern Eurasia. Stépanoff argues that social inequality arises when societies shift their understanding of shamanism as something learned to something inherited, from a skill evaluated relatively (you might be a good shaman or a bad one) to one judged absolutely (you are a shaman, or you are not). He argues that the development of hierarchy in shamanism correlates with the permission of substitution in transactions of life and death—seeking bridewealth instead of brideservice, for example, and allowing payment for murder rather than insisting on an eye for an eye. But imagination is what Stépanoff urges readers to pay attention to: "The origin of inequality should not be sought exclusively in a society's economic realities, but also in the historical transformations of its ecologies of imagination" (370).

The warrant for this argument is the expectation that heterarchy must precede hierarchy (on this point, he refers to Wengrow and Graeber [2015] on the seasonality of hierarchy). Stépanoff's model of heterarchical shamanism is what he calls the "dark tent," seen for example in Chukchi and Yukaghir societies. In dark tent shamanism, the shaman "effaces" himself or herself (101), allowing other people to have what seems to them like direct communication with spirits. These shamans do not wear elaborate costumes, and they might ingest hallucinogenic mushrooms to help them in their work. In contrast, "light tent" shamanism, practiced for example in Tuvan and Evenki societies, is a triadic relationship in which the shaman is visible as an authorized—and spectacularly costumed—mediator between people and spirits. Light tent shamans do not take mushrooms because (as Gearin's interlocutors could attest for ayahuasca) substances like these can undercut hierarchy by giving everyone access to the spirit world.

Stépanoff offers a "hypothesis … that the way the imagination is mobilized in shamanic journeys relies on the same capacity to immerse oneself in other worlds that emerged at the start of our history as a species of hunters" (31). And hunting is not opposed to healing. In describing the dark tent, he observes how a shaman, subsumed in the dyad of people-and-spirits, works to heal the sick by recovering their souls and driving demons away, and also "to see what others are unable to see—to track down a lost [reindeer] herd, for example" (122). Here is an ethnographically well-attested characterization of the mind-cure in an old-fashioned form. True, the spirits need to show up to make things actually happen—as in ayahuasca retreats and Spiritualist rituals, too—but as Stépanoff shows clearly, shamanism is deeply imaginative work. To hunt or heal, one needs to think with spirits.

He considers how shamanic traditions practically animate ecologies of the imagination, for example through the design and use of drums and costumes. Although the analysis of material techniques for mental stimulation is useful, too often Stépanoff falsely separates experience and semiosis, smuggling the terms "symbolism," "worldview," and "reflection" into the latter category as demons to be driven out of his analysis. After quoting shamans on how their drums orient them in the spiritual world, he comments: "No notion here of the drums conveying a

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message or 'reflecting' ideas, but rather their use as an aid to orientation, a little like compasses of the invisible" (213). But this orientation is in fact a reflection, a diagrammatic indexical icon of one's position relative to the things one seeks and expects to find. After criticizing European ethnographers for interpreting images painted on shamans' drums from the audience's point of view, he notes that one needs to see them from behind and inside the drum, reversing the images to apprehend them from the shaman's point of view. His criticism is not just that other scholars have seen the images externally and backwards, but that they have described the images in terms of their "reflection" of the cosmos. "Semiotic readings" such as these, Stépanoff argues, "reduce the designs to iconic inscriptions of beliefs about the world" (212). But semiotic readings are expansive, not reductive. They open up new possibilities for understanding and action. The kind of iconism at play here, again, is the diagrammatic indexical iconism in which shamans, their drums, and their observers connect with each other and order their relationships and in which beliefs (as both propositions and commitments) are presupposed and entailed.

Stépanoff's distrust of symbolism seems to stem from his desire to distance himself as far from Mircea Eliade's work as possible, so far that he does not even mention Eliade when discussing *axes mundi* (297). But one need not endorse Eliade's model of shamanism to appreciate that semiosis always matters in work of the imagination. The author is hardly obligated to pay close attention to signs, but he dismisses them in a way that suggests he does not understand their imbrication with action. At the beginning of the book, he tells the story of a shaman who heals a man languishing in the hospital. She finds the man's soul in the spirit world and is bringing it back when she realizes she has forgotten his cap, so she goes back to get it (3). Returning to the story later, Stépanoff writes that the need to retrieve the missing cap eludes interpretation, but also does not really require it: "It would be difficult to explain an unexpected incident like this one in accordance with any hypothetical cultural model concerning the symbolic function of caps; there is no such thing in Siberian shamanism" (46). This is true as stated, but there is nonetheless enormous significance to the missing cap: getting it back diagrams the completion of the sick man's restoration. The point is not that it was a cap; the point is that it was a missing part of him that needed to be returned for him to be able to heal and leave the hospital. As erudite, carefully comparative, and breathtakingly ambitious as *Journeys into the Invisible* is, at times Stépanoff's interests and terminology lead him to replace the *both/and* logic of religious experience with a constricting insistence on *either/or*.

I began this review with James's discussion of the mind-cure movement and its faith that "thoughts … of health, youth, vigor, and success … will also be your outward portion." All of these books make valuable contributions to the literature on what we might think of broadly as metaphysical healing, although with remarkably different foci. Some mind cures pay more attention to the mind than others. Shamans and Spiritualist mediums use imaginative mental techniques to engage with spirit worlds that are supposed to effect healing; psychedelic pilgrims want to expand their minds and improve their wellbeing by drinking for thinking, turning to ayahuasca as a vehicle for spiritual trips; British parliamentarians, it turns out, are among the most purely mind-focused of modern mind-cure devotees, as they see a healthier nation developing from people thinking in new ways about their thoughts.

Stépanoff's is the most intellectually ambitious of the four books, contributing to the comparative analysis of shamanism and to broader theory on the development of social hierarchy. When he writes that moving from dark tent to light tent shamanism

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means giving up direct communication with another world in a process of "the human community … turning in on itself," he concludes persuasively that "how this system of relations comes into being represents an anthropological problem of the utmost importance" (167–68). The work of Earls, Handley-Cousins, Rhodes, and Masarik is a lively, conversational engagement with each other as they situate themselves in one of the most fascinating towns in the U.S., a place dedicated for a century and a half (so far) to proving that there is life after death. Gearin's book contains the most delicious bits of unexpected ethnography, grounded in careful fieldwork and twice as surprising as anything written by Carlos Castaneda: who would expect to read of ayahuasca drinkers in China who "sometimes measure the value of it … by its capacity to inspire actionable changes to workplace and corporate contexts" (170)? And Cook's examination of British mindfulness has relevance for people in many societies struggling to reconcile individual health-seeking with government obligations to public health—even when health is, as some would have it, ultimately a matter of thinking about it the right way.

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