The Nature of Magic

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Preface

The black of the night enveloped me as I lay alone in a shavan, *an Iranian nomadic tent, by the side of a noisy rushing stream on a Snowdonian hillside of North Wales. My aim was to communicate with the spirits of the dark and elemental nature. The waters cascaded over the large stones in the stream and I let them enter my awareness of the place when the feelings of fear had subsided a little. I had come back to Cae Mabon, a 'stunningly beautiful elemental centre on the edge'*[1] *with an eclectic shamanic magical group called 'Mad Shamans'. The previous year a group of us had climbed Mount Snowdon, and as it had been my birthday, it had particular significance for me. At the end of our stay at Cae Mabon I had danced the spirits of the mountain and its waters as they surged through me. I felt very connected to the place – the wild mountain had become a part of me: 'external nature' had become internalized, and a change had occurred in my consciousness. This year I wanted to return; it was like returning to a part of myself. As I lay in the* shavan *I consciously opened myself up to the dark and the further change that I knew would occur. The experience of the dark of the night in the* shavan *and the thunderous, cascading Snowdonian river had left me with a feeling that I had to let the past and the non-essential go. On the way home I had my luggage stolen from the train; this seemed to me to be a very real confirmation of my communication with the Snowdonian elements.*

This work is an anthropological study of magic and consciousness conducted through an examination of nature spiritualities. Often collectively termed 'nature religion', nature spiritualities are concerned with developing intense personal relationships with nature, as demonstrated by my own encounter with the Snow-donian elements above. In Western cultures, nature, the earth, or 'the environment' as it is now frequently called, has been progressively devalued by some dualistic conceptions of the universe that separate humans from nature. A definition of the environment as 'all material entities which exist on planet Earth but which are not human' reveals the fundamental separation between humans and the natural world (Simmons, 1993:1). The central theme of this work is to examine how practitioners of nature spiritualities overcome this cultural alienation and relate with nature as a living and inspirited cosmos.

The sociologist Max Weber observed that the 'fate of our times' was characterized by rationalization, intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world' (1948:155). Through the use of Friedrich Schiller's disenchantment phrase, he was referring to the degree in which rationalization had displaced magical elements in modern Western societies (Gerth and Wright Mills, [1948] 1970:51). Non-Western cultures have not been so affected and the anthropologist Victor Turner has astutely noted that African thought, which consists of autonomous linked world-views, 'embeds itself from the outset in materiality', but this materiality is 'not inert but vital' (1975:21). To a great extent Western cultures have lost a sense of material vitality (although it must be emphasized that some aspects have been maintained through forms of empirical naturalism as well as commonsense understandings and see Chapter 1). Re–enchanting the world for practitioners of nature religion means learning to see nature as alive and also as having a spiritual dimension; this particular type of thinking is not possible within a cosmology that

conceives of the world as de-spirited or as a machine. Reciprocity between inspirited beings has to be developed to establish communication; this is what I call 'magical consciousness'. 'Magic', a term used widely to mean many different things, is here employed to refer to a participatory and expanded aspect of consciousness awareness such as my Snowdonian experience already described. I shall argue that magical consciousness is an aspect of consciousness, a part of nature; it is natural rather than supernatural, and participatory rather than individual.

Nature religion is a response to a certain specific loss of relationship with the natural world. This book is not the place for a detailed examination of the history of the process of that loss; rather it is an exploration of the recovery of relationship, primarily through the development of magical consciousness. The work has two main aims within the general theme of reconnection to nature: the first is to examine magical consciousness as a de-centred perception, a natural aspect of mind, that enables an awareness of participation with other phenomena in the cosmos; and the second, which follows on from the first, is to look at some inherent paradoxes and contradictions and ask whether nature spiritualities are necessarily ecological in outlook. Nature religion has developed within a specific historical and cultural context of the Western Hermetic or Mystery tradition. Consequently, there are philosophical and ideological influences that reflect attention away from the natural world and encourage a focus on 'inner' nature and anthropomorphic deities; this tends to shift awareness away from a more ecological view. Some of the ambiguities of practice will be explored within the general context of participating in nature.

Why study nature religion? Some claim that movements such as the New Age (a component of nature religion – see below) are 'inchoate and barely studied' (Vitebsky 2003:287); and they have often been dismissed as 'plastic' or 'flaky' and not taken seriously by academics, especially anthropologists who frequently view such spiritual practices of Westerners with a suspicion, and sometimes ridicule, that would never be tolerated against non-Westerners. In my opinion, this is all the more reason to investigate this rich ethnographic area. Why focus on consciousness? Studies of nature religion have tended to focus on socio-cultural explanations rather than cognition, and anthropologists have rarely studied consciousness in the making (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992: 236–237; Glucklich 1997). By contrast, this work is an anthropology of consciousness in the making as an awareness of the relatedness of all things.

So, what is nature religion? Catherine Albanese, in her epilogue to *Nature Religion in America*, says that it is an elusive form of religion, 'Unorganized and unacknowledged as religion, it is – given the right places to look – everywhere apparent.' It is also a form of religion that 'slips between the cracks of the usual interpretative grids – or that, more slippery still, evades and circumvents even adventurous ways to name it' (Albanese, 1991:199). The reason why it is so elusive, she concludes, is because it contains its own pluralism within. Nature religion in the United States is really nature religions. Given this, Albanese has looked for significant cultural pathways in key historical contexts, offering a 'kind of plot' to her readers. I intend to follow Albanese's lead in providing cultural pathways through the rich diversities of nature spiritualities. For ease of analysis, I use the term 'nature religion' as an analytical construct that incorporates this diversity; I do not seek to homogenize differing nature spiritualities but simply to make analytical distinctions.

Nature religion comprises a number of spiritual ontologies, all of which have different conceptions of nature, but most share the view that there is an interconnected and sacred

universe. This universe is usually viewed primarily in animistic terms. 'Animism', a term coined by nineteenth-century anthropologist Edward Tylor, stems from the Latin word *anima* meaning 'breath', 'life' or 'soul' (Andrews, 1998:12) and expresses the idea that the world is inspirited. There is a multiplicity of psycho-spiritual practices, magical groups, occult societies, transpersonal therapies and organizations that may be said to comprise nature religion. However, as with all analytical abstractions and generalizations, the divisions between groups are often arbitrary, and practitioners may move in and out of the various organizations feeling, perhaps, that each 'path' offers a different dimension or approach to the same goal. This does not mean that there is an unending amount of freedom or flexibility, and the boundaries of some practices – especially those that involve initiation, such as in some forms of witchcraft – are often clearly demarcated and actively maintained. Nevertheless, the uniting theme beneath all the apparent diversity is a connection with, and a valuing of, nature experienced through magical consciousness.

There is considerable debate amongst practitioner/academic email lists, for example Natrel (the nature religion scholars' list), on the definition and practice of nature religion, and there is no commonly agreed definition. The fact that nature religion is described as 'religion' with connection with the natural world raises the question of whether a religious attitude is appropriate. The word 'religion' derives from the Latin *religio* signifying the need for duties and reverence in the maintenance of a harmonious relationship with divinity (Hutton, 1999:3), but this does not necessarily equate with an ecological view that is more concerned with relationship with the natural world rather than reverence to divinity, even if nature is the source of that divinity. A broader definition of religion is required to account for the diverse forms that it takes in the world. Theologian Ian Markham argues – utilizing Wittgenstein's view that it is a mistake to search for the essence of a 'thing' that includes everything within a certain definition – that religion is a way of life that embraces a total world-view, certain ethical demands, and certain social practices (Markham, 1997:5–6).

Unfortunately, for those seeking precise definition, nature religion does not embrace one world-view, and it is important to note from the outset that there is little homogeneity of practice apart from the overarching need to reconnect with nature. For the purposes of analysis, I shall demarcate three very broad categories of spiritualities that are sufficiently different from each other to warrant some comparison, whilst noting that there are many similarities amongst these categories – both in terms of beliefs and practices. The categories are Paganism, New Age, and Western Shamanism, although it must be emphasized that these are not discrete; they overlap with each other, often merging into a more general category of 'earth mysteries'. There are New Age shamans, Pagan shamans, Pagans who adopt New Age healing therapies and New Age practitioners who venerate a pagan goddess.

'Paganism' is an umbrella term for a number of different world-views, epistemologies, and systems of belief ranging from high magic (which incorporates elements of esoteric Christianity), contemporary witchcraft or Wicca (developed in the 1940s), feminist witchcraft or Goddess tradition, Druidry, Norse magic or Heathenism, Egyptian magic, and in some cases also Chaos Magick as well. Paganism is part of a sustained occult tradition largely originating in the Renaissance rather than deriving from folk beliefs. The New Age movement is a counter–cultural form of spirituality that also originated in Western esoteric traditions (Hanegraaff 1998) and emerged in America as a self-conscious social movement

in 1971 (Melton, 1986). The New Age was originally millennial and world-denying in its search for a new order based on spiritual enlightenment. The earth was seen to be entering a new cycle of evolution marked by a new human consciousness that would give birth to a new civilization – the 'Age of Aquarius'. This would overcome the present corrupt culture by cataclysm and disaster. The idea of a New Age, according to David Spangler, one of its foremost proponents, came from the predictions of Nostradamus, the American psychic Edgar Cayce, the Theosophical Society, the Lucis Trust, Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy, prophecies found in the spiritual traditions of Mayan, Aztec and Hopi Indians, and also from the 'Judeo-Christian belief in the second coming of Christ' (Spangler, 1984:17–19). When the anticipated apocalypse did not arrive there was a 'turn inward' and nature became a source of revelation rather than something that obscured real spirit (Sutcliffe, 1998). Many Western shamanic practices merge with the New Age, while others seek to emulate or recreate native and indigenous spirituality. There are many different practices ranging from so-called Native American medicine wheel teachings (which derive more from New Age aspects of Shamanism) and Core Shamanism (a practice that concentrates on techniques of soul retrieval and healing for Westerners) to specific Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, heathen or Romany gypsy traditions. These are developments of what is probably an ancient human method of contacting the spirits of game animals and ancestors.

All in their different ways seek to kindle an awareness of different possibilities within sacralized views of nature. Beneath the heterogeneity of approaches lies the notion of magic as an alternative world-view. Anthropologist Ariel Glucklich says that the word 'magic' works too hard, 'we reach for it frequently, to describe wildly different things' (1997:vii). As a historical category magic is constantly created and recreated; it is understood in relation to religion and to science, often in oppositional terms. In the past magic has been rejected as non-religion, today it is often condemned as non-science (Ankarloo and Clark, 2002:x). However, increasingly the tripartite division between magic, religion and science is breaking down. Magic is frequently viewed by its practitioners as a religion and as a science (it has its own laws which will, one day, be discovered by science), as well as a form of spirituality. Above all, it comprises a 'holistic' alternative way of seeing the world, one that is frequently rooted in an awareness of the spirituality of the everyday, the earth, the body with all its attendant thoughts, feelings and emotions, and a sense of the interconnectedness of it all. This is magical consciousness, the conception that has the capability of 're-enchanting the world' for those who experience it.

The methodology that I adopt for this research is one of direct involvement. I have dealt at length with the complexities of conducting anthropological fieldwork from a participatory approach in previous works. This is notoriously difficult when studying magic due to the varying and often derogatory attitudes to what is seen as the non-rational and non-logical in Western social science. I do not intend to repeat the arguments already made but would instead refer the reader to my ethnography on high magic and witchcraft, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld* (2000), and also to some reflections on the morality and ethics of an anthropology of magic (Greenwood 2003). Most of my research data was gathered through participant observation – putting myself in similar situations to other practitioners and experiencing what happened. I also spoke to many people, had long involved conversations, and made a number of close personal friendships in the process. I attended workshops, healing sessions, sat around a fire in a Pagan protest camp, and took part with other practitioners in an anti-war demonstration in London I took extensive notes,

occasionally used a tape-recorder (with permission); sometimes I asked people to send me their reflections which I then incorporated, with their agreement, into the final text.

Growing out of my earlier book, this work, like its predecessor, has challenged me to try and write academically about magic – the experience of the otherworld. Virginia Woolf once wrote that the main thing in beginning a novel was not to feel that you could write it but that it existed 'on the far side of a gulf, which words can't cross' (Banks, 1989:238). This was a little how I felt about writing about magical consciousness. After sharing experiences of magic with many practitioners I knew that magical consciousness existed – intuitively I had 'known' about this as a child – but trying to put it into words was like crossing a chasm or an abyss to bring the meaning through, and then only incompletely. The problem was how to express the inexpressible, or what psychologist William James termed 'the ineffable'. Woolf thought that the novel had to be 'pulled through' in 'breathless anguish' (ibid.), but when I was writing the bulk of this book – during one 'mad' summer – it felt not as though I was pulling it through but that it was creating itself through me. Surely no one admits to writing anthropological fieldwork in this way; this approach is much too subjective. However, magical consciousness *is* subjective and I was engaged in intense 'participant observation' at the time, working with Romany gypsy shaman Patrick 'Jasper' Lee and his herbalist assistant Lizzie Gotts-Lee.[2] 'The field' and my own life came into what seemed like a crash collision: after a healing ritual and some sound advice from Jasper I experienced a profound feeling of communication with my ancestors and came to realize what many non–Western peoples know – that the dead and the living are intrinsically linked in life. This was a major turning point in my research and I started to explore it using the notion of magical consciousness.

After I had sent my completed typescript to the publishers I came across Ariel Glucklich's *The End of Magic* (1997) when looking for a text to give my undergraduate students studying altered states of consciousness at the University of Sussex. As I read the introduction to Glucklich's work, I realized that we had both come to the same conclusion about the academic study of magic: that many psychological and sociological theories explained magic away. Indeed we had both employed the term 'magical consciousness' in order to bring the experience of magic back into theoretical consideration. Consequently, it was with great pleasure that I read his work and incorporated it into my analysis in the final draft of this present volume. That we should independently come to the same conclusions using different 'data' is affirming of our idea that magic is a natural process of the human mind.

Many people are due thanks in helping to bring this work to publication. I am grateful for so many thought–provoking conversations with Brian Morris whose influence on my thinking is obvious, although we may well agree to disagree on some issues. I have been extremely fortunate to have taught two undergraduate courses on Shamanic Consciousness and Altered States of Consciousness instigated by Brian Bates at the University of Sussex. Teaching these wonderful courses (the latter over a number of years) allowed me to explore consciousness in a way that would have been impossible under different circumstances. Brian's wit and wisdom, as well as the students at Sussex, have taught me so much and I am deeply appreciative. I also thank Gordon MacLellan for his critical and profound reflection on a whole range of issues to do with magic; for his friendship, and for his support when things got tough, which they often did.

I am privileged to have had the enormous benefit of many stimulating and wide-ranging

'mycelium' discussions on magic, shamanism, and Paganism with Geoffrey Samuel; and Annie Keeley has enriched my understandings of magic with her insights and observations from many years of experience. Thanks are also due to Graham Harvey who in asking me to teach a course on nature and religion at King Alfred's University College in Winchester set the whole project in motion. I would also like to thank Pat Caplan for continuing support and for encouraging me to reflect more on magic and the politics of knowledge through contributing to her edited book on morality (Caplan 2003) whilst writing this work. Justin Woodman invited me to give a paper on work in progress – now Chapter 6 on the Wild Hunt – at a University of London Intercollegiate Seminar; this helped develop my thinking. Many people read draft chapters and gave valued critique and suggestions: Geoffrey Samuel, Brian Morris, Gordon MacLellan, Jenny Blain, Annie Keeley, Jasper Lee, Lizzie Gotts-Lee, and Adrian Harris have all helped me to see with fresh eyes. Andy Letcher, Ruth Smith, Anne Barrowcliffe, Annie Keeley and Jo Crow offered reflections on magical experiences; Derek Duparcq enriched my understandings of the New Age with his treasured vignettes of early New Age life in Australia. I am also deeply grateful to the anonymous reviewer at Berg for insightful suggestions, Ross Wignall for looking over the typescript, and to Jo Crow for helping with the index.

I also want to thank Jo Crow for shared journeys 'into the carpet'; Phil Hine, Maria Strutz and the other Mad Shamans; Scottie Eadie for diving wing–deep into magic; my cousin Jax Handford for her amazing sense of humour and for being a great Empress; and of course my son Adrian and daughter Lauren for being who they are.

Finally, I leave the last acknowledgement to be exprssed by poet and philosopher Susan Griffin: 'These words are written for those of us whose language is not heard, whose words have been stolen or erased, those robbed of language, who are called voiceless or mute, even the earthworms, even the shelll-fish and the sponges, for those of us who speak our own language . . .' (*Woman and Nature*).

Notes

1. This description comes from a 2001 Cae Mabon promotional leaflet.
2. When I was conducting fieldwork Lizzie's name was May-Gotts.

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Introduction

On one occasion at Beltane (1 May) on Old Winchester Hill, an Iron Age hill fort on the South Downs in Southern England, a gathering of ten New Age practitioners attuned to the natural energies of the earth. Using a combination of chanting, walking, singing, dowsing, and dancing around a maypole, the aim was to bring healing and balance to each person as well as to the environment by the alignment of inner energies with the ley lines and chakras[1] of the earth. Up and down the country assorted groups of witches celebrated the coming of summer in various ways, some as the rebirth of the young King of the Greenwood and his union with the Goddess as the embodiment of nature; while other Pagans were encamped in a wood in Kent to prevent it being turned into a leisure centre. During the same period in the same county, a group of local school children, guided by shaman environmental educators, created an imaginative world of animals, plants and fairies in a bluebell wood for a May Fair. What motivates and connects these events is a spiritual revaluing of the natural world and the regaining of a sense of unity with nature. One well-known Pagan said to me: 'For modern people the world has been intentionally deprived of significance, and so you have to reconnect.' Connection with the natural world is thus the basis of nature spiritualities.

How is it that the human mind comes to 'disconnect', to 'renounce its sensuous bearings isolating itself from the other animals and the animate earth' (Abram, 1997: 261)? Historian Catherine Albanese, in her study of nature religion in America, observes that historically religious reflection in Western cultures, which has been primarily conducted through the 'Judeo-Christian tradition', has been preoccupied with three symbolic centres: God, humanity, and nature. God has been paramount, and humans and nature, as creatures of God, have shone – but only in reflected light, leaving nature as a symbolic centre largely unnoticed. By contrast, what she terms 'nature religion' focuses on nature as source of the sacred (1991:7–9). Disconnection is largely due to the fact that in Western history there has been a progressive withdrawal of divinity from the natural world accompanied by a devaluation of human experience. This started in the period of Late Antiquity between the accession of Marcus Aurelius and the conversion of Constantine to Christianity (Dodds, 1990:37). Aided by Copernicus's transferral, in 1543, of many astronomical functions previously attributed to the earth to the sun, a fundamental change was made regarding human relationships to the universe and to God, creating the transition from a medieval to a modern Western view (Kuhn, [1957] 1974:1–2). The Copernican revolution facilitated the seventeenth – century mechanistic conception of nature developed by philosopher René Descartes (1596–1650) who separated the thinking mind from the material world and thus laid the ground for an objective science; this contributed to the view that human relationships to the world were in opposition to nature.

It has been suggested that the notion of nature as a mechanical inanimate system may be comforting for some, giving the idea that human beings are in control of nature and confirming the belief that science has risen above primitive animistic beliefs (Sheldrake, 1990:3). However, this view comes at a cost. A superior sphere of reason was constructed

over a sphere of inferiority; the former was a privileged domain of the master, while the latter, which formed a category of nature, comprised a field of multiple exclusions created by racism, colonialism and sexism. Racial, ethnic and sexual difference were cast as closer to the animal and the body, a lesser form of humanity lacking full rationality or culture (Plumwood, 1993:4). During the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries discourses on the animality of negroes, American Indians, the Irish, infants, women, the poor, the ignorant, the irreligious and the mad prevailed (Thomas, 1984: 42–44).

The mechanistic conception of the world was combined by some philosophers with a particular Protestant rationalized belief system that viewed God as an omnipotent clockmaker standing outside and apart from his creation. The element of design in mechanistic philosophy did not arise from 'the "natures" of things but from the properties with which God endowed them' (Hooykaas, 1977:14). A divine creator implies a dependence of the created on a creator, and also a differentiation between creator and created. Human beings had a special role to play due to being made in God's image; this further emphasized their separation from the rest of creation. The development of capitalism promulgated the view that nature was a commodity or a resource to be used (Merchant, [1980] 1990:51–56; Morris, 1996:20). Although mechanistic theories did not go unchallenged, particularly by Vitalism, a radical analysis by Paracelsus of the activity in nature whereby matter and spirit were unified into an single, active, vital substance (Merchant, [1980] 1990:117), and also by the academic disciplines of botany and zoology (Sheldrake, 1990:41), Descartes' views have been influential. Historian Keith Thomas notes that Descartes' explicit aim was to make men lords and possessors of nature; other species were inert and lacking any spiritual dimension and this created an absolute break between man and the rest of nature, a 'transcendent God, outside his creation, symbolized the separation between spirit and nature'. Indeed, Thomas goes further by saying that 'Man stood to animal as did heaven to earth, soul to body, culture to nature' (Thomas, 1984:34–35). The result has been described as a spiritual alienation from the natural world. This work is not a history of this alienation, rather it seeks to examine nature religion as a spirituality that seeks to find a unity in Nature; it has emerged as a 'backlash' to the general historical and philosophical context that has separated mind from nature. As anthropologist Clifford Geertz has noted, our brains are in the world, 'And as for the world, it is not in our brains, our bodies, or our minds: they are, along with gods, verbs, rocks, and politics, in it' (Geertz, 2000:205).

Not surprisingly, the term 'nature' has a history. In early Greek philosophy, nature was the essence of a thing that made it behave the way it did (Morris, 1996:27). This oldest meaning of the term was dominant into the thirteenth century when it denoted an essential quality, an innate character. A century later it came to mean a vital or inherent force that directed the world of human beings. At the time of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, nature was viewed as a physical power causing phenomena of the material world. The changing meaning of nature reflected the changing structure of society, and in the seventeenth century nature was observed and studied as the work of God. By the eighteenth century, with the establishment of a scientific world-view, nature was seen to be governed by laws; nature became increasingly synonymous with the material world and science was involved in interpreting its universal laws. At this time, nature was a clear authority: the laws of nature were the laws of reason. Nature had become rationalized (Marshall, 1995:222–223). Inevitably, there was a reaction to scientific rationalism and it took the form of the Romanticism movement with its view of nature as pastoral landscape and immanent

mysticism. More recently, four contemporary discourses on nature have been outlined: the first is as a science where nature is seen in objective and abstract terms; the second is as an economic resource – nature is a source of productive wealth; the third views nature as a source of emotional identification, relationship and tradition; and the fourth is through nature mysticism whereby nature has spirit and is worthy of reverence and awe (Ivakhiv, 2001:37). Nature spiritualities draw on the last two discourses: nature is viewed as a source of emotional identification and spirituality; practitioners immerse themselves in nature.

Catherine Albanese calls the immersion in nature a 'quantum dance of religious syncretism' in which the different movements 'move freely together, mixing and matching, bowing to new partners'. The centrality of nature, Albanese observes, provides a language to express cosmology and belief; it forms the basis of understanding and practising a way of life; supplies material for ritual symbolism, as well as drawing a community together (Albanese, 1991:154–156). Nature religion does not exist as a definite and identifiable religious tradition such as Buddhism or Christianity, but, as Peter Beyer notes in his sociological analysis, the term refers to a range of religious and quasi-religious movements, groups and social networks in which practitioners consider nature to be the embodiment of divinity, sacredness, transcendence, or spiritual power (Beyer, 1998:11). Beyer, who analyses nature religion in terms of globalization, points out that nature religion comprises a counter-cultural strategy – a religious critique of institutionalized social structures and normal consciousness. He is concerned to show how nature religion fits into a global context through the use of 'nature' as a powerful counter-structural symbol representing resistance to dominant instrumental systems. Using anthropologist Victor Turner's ([1969] 1974) analysis of the anti-structural components of religious ritual, Beyer argues that nature religion is counter-structural – stressing oppositional aspects – rather than being anti-structural (1998:18). He notes certain critical features that characterize nature religion: a comparative resistance to institutionalization and legitimization in terms of identifiable socio-religious authorities and organization; a distrust of politically oriented power; a faith in charismatic and individual authority; a strong emphasis on individual path; a valorization of physical place; a this-worldly emphasis with a search for healing, personal vitality, and transformation of self; a strong experiential basis; a valuing of non-hierarchical community; a stress on holistic conceptions of reality; and a conditional optimism regarding human capacity and the future. This is certainly the case in radical Pagan protest against the destruction of nature for road development etc. However, magical consciousness is not necessarily counter-structural. Some movements within nature religion – such as the New Age – are alternatives to Christianity, incorporating many mystical elements of Christianity, and may be said to be supportive of mainstream social structure, particularly regarding capitalistic enterprise.

Also viewing nature religion in terms of globalization, anthropologist Piers Vitebsky, in a comparison of Sora shamanism in tribal India and ethnic revival shamanism in Arctic Siberia, claims that indigenous knowledge loses its holistic world-view when appropriated by New Age neo-shamanists; when transplanted it becomes global rather than local cosmological knowledge (2003:295–296). An alternative approach is to see nature religion not as a counter-cultural movement, or as an expression of a form of global knowledge, but as an expanded form of consciousness that is common to all humans. I shall argue that if nature religion is studied in terms of magical consciousness then holism, a central defining feature of indigenous knowledge, is not lost but just expressed in a different cultural and

physical context.

Magical Consciousness

So, a connection with nature concerns less a form of counter-cultural resistance – although this may be the case in more radical forms of Pagan protest – and more a development of magical consciousness. Using the term 'magical consciousness' creates a definition that is doubly ideologically loaded – both 'magic' and 'consciousness' are broad concepts that are notoriously difficult to define. Facing a similar dilemma over a definition of 'globalization', the historian A.G. Hopkins notes that holistic concepts may be a source of confusion as they invariably carry conflicting ideological messages, but abolishing them would not remove the difficulty. He recommends that when using general terms to describe broad issues, definitions should be explicitly stated and framed to match the purpose in hand. With this in mind I shall define magical consciousness as a specific perception of the world common to practitioners of nature religion. Before that, however, it will be necessary briefly to consider both consciousness and magic.

Although consciousness has been of modern philosophical concern since Descartes' *cogito* 'I think therefore I am' shifted the focus from the cosmos to the individual human being (Rapport and Overing, 2000:65), a single definition of consciousness is evasive. The study of consciousness is problematic, not only for neuroscience and psychology due to its subjective and constantly changing character (Edelman, 1992:111), but also for anthropology, which has only belatedly come to find consciousness relevant, having taken it 'largely for granted, neglecting – even, perhaps, denying – its significance and relevance' (Cohen and Rapport, 1995:1). As John and Jean Comaroff have pointed out, anthropologists usually study consciousness and its transformations by examining its effects or expressions; its social and symbolic manifestations as *conscience collective*. Rarely is the nature of consciousness in the making, or its historicity examined. Consciousness itself is seldom scrutinized:

> Sometimes it is regarded as the mere reflection of a reality beyond human awareness, sometimes as the site of creativity and agency. But, almost invariably, 'consciousness' is treated as a substantive 'mode of'or 'for' the world, as so much narrative content without form. (Comaroff and Comaroff, 1992:236–237).

The classic work of psychologist William James (1890 [1950]) indicates why consciousness has been seen to be so formless and so difficult to pin down. James's notion of mind as a 'theatre of simultaneous possibilities' views consciousness as a process that compares, selects and suppresses data, much as a sculptor works on a block of stone, extricating one interpretation from the rest. He writes that '[m]y world is but one in a million alike embedded, alike real to those who may abstract them. How different must be the worlds in the consciousness of ant, cuttle-fish, or crab!' (ibid.:288–289). Consciousness, says James, is also like a stream or river (ibid.:239); it is a continuous and always changing process. The work of neuroscientist Gerald Edelman, in *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire*, draws on and develops James's ideas: consciousness depends on unique history and embodiment, it is constructed

through social interaction, and meaning takes shape in terms of concepts that depend on categorizations (1992:170). The picture that emerges from these views is that there is a multiplicity of consciousnesses, or aspects of consciousness, rather than a single state.[2] The notion of consciousness as a stream of possibilities both overcomes the Cartesian emphasis on mind and reflective reasoning aspects, and opens up possibilities for alternative views of consciousness as process that is inclusive of body, as well as being more expansive to include other beings in nature, and even perhaps being an intrinsic quality of a wider universe.

Notwithstanding, anthropologist Michael Harner, who explored South American Indian shamanism and developed 'Core Shamanism' as a method that synthesized shamanic techniques for Westerners, differentiates between what he terms an 'ordinary state of consciousness' (OSC) and a 'shamanic state of consciousness' (SSC), referring to 'ordinary' and 'nonordinary' reality respectively. The shaman can move between states of consciousness at will (Harner, [1980] 1990: xix). Harner's distinction of OSC and SSC for Westerners belies the complexities of consciousness – such as aspects arising from imagination, emotion, cognition, and perception – and that people, whether shamans or not, are constantly shifting effortlessly from awareness to awareness or aspect to aspect; it is not always so easy to categorize consciousness in this manner.[3] This is not to deny that a shaman is nonetheless a specialist in one part of this process as a mediator of different realities.

Turning to magic we will see that it means many different things to different people. Magic, as anthropologist Ariel Glucklich points out, can refer to a moon-swept landscape, love, music, the occult, the extraordinary that defies the laws of nature, and gross superstition among many other things. It is, he claims, a 'decadent hodge podge of ideas from many sources'. We use the term so much, Glucklich argues, that it means too much and therefore hardly anything at all; we need a clear and definite understanding (1997:vii, 4–9). Historically, magic had a negative association in Roman times being viewed as a system that utilized powerful forces to control nature. Seen to be outside the ordinary course of nature in the fifth century (Flint 1993:3), it was rehabilitated in an exalted sense in the Hermetic tradition of the Renaissance when it was seen as a way to contact higher powers or God and was associated with neoplatonism (Solomon and Higgins, 1996:122). Magic, under this guise, was 'natural magic' or 'sympathetic magic' and involved the secret virtues of plants, stones and talismans for drawing down the powers of stars (Yates, [1964] 1991:2, 22). This was a form of esotericism based on the view that there were correspondences between the natural and celestial worlds, both seen and unseen (Faivre 1994:10–13; see p.29). During the Reformation, demonic magic, which was seen to rely on supernatural intelligences, was sharply demarcated from 'true' religion and science. The aspect of control – using preternatural or supernatural means to gain control over nature – was opposed to the religious attitude of reverence: an inclination to trust and to be in awe of powers superior to humanity. Magic is also concerned with the ritual working of unseen (occult) or subtle levels of reality in order to create change in the everyday world – such as casting a spell or raising energy to direct to a specific intention (see pp.29–30). Magic is, as Pagan Margot Adler observes in her influential study of Paganism (she calls it Neo-Paganism) in America, a convenient word for a whole collection of techniques that involve the mind, including the mobilization of the imagination and the ability to visualize; magic is a knowledge about how emotion and concentration can be used to change consciousness

([1979] 1986:8).

My use of the term 'magic' here concerns an aspect of consciousness that is primarily natural rather than supernatural or mystical, although it may be interpreted in those ways socially or culturally. A magical 'state of mind' must be experienced; it has an intrinsically subjective and sensory quality that is embodied and intuitive rather than purely reflective and intellectual, although the reflective and intellectual may be engaged *with* the intuitive and the embodied as there is no radical opposition. I want to make it clear that my use of the term 'magical consciousness' is not an attempt to reify an aspect of consciousness but rather to draw attention to a certain dimension of human experience. In my focus on magical consciousness I do not wish to suggest that magical consciousness should be opposed to rationality, neither do I want to create a dualism between science and magic (or religion) or between reason and imagination, but rather to highlight a part – or strand, or thread, or 'expanded' awareness – that is an important component of the whole process of consciousness central to how many practitioners of nature spiritualities experience the world. It is the development of this type of expansive awareness – one that actively develops the imagination in making connections between other beings both seen and unseen – that constitutes the basis of magical practice. Above all, magical consciousness concerns the awareness of the interrelatedness of all things in the world.

Anthropologist Bruce Kapferer, in his study of sorcery among Sinhalese Buddhists in Sri Lanka, argues that the magicality of human beings is in embodied, passionate relationships with others and in the way that realities are constructed; sorcery (as a psycho-social expression) accentuates vital dimensions of the ways that humans explicitly or implicitly construct their realities:

> Human life is magical in the sense that human beings span the space that may otherwise individuate them or separate them from others. Their magical conjunction with other human beings in the world – imaginative, creative, and destructive – is at the heart of human existence. (Kapferer, 1997:2).

Magical conjunction, I suggest, is magical consciousness; it is not a category of thing in itself but an aspect of a particular experience of consciousness and a way of ordering reality. Magical consciousness is a dimension of human thought and action; it is not primarily individual nor can it be divorced from the wider social or environmental context – it is a participatory and holistic way of thinking.

Psychologist, biologist and anthropologist Gregory Bateson was a holistic thinker seeking an understanding of the human part in the whole living world (Rapport and Overing, 2000:102); he sought to overcome the Cartesian split between mind and body, and in *Mind and Nature: a necessary unity* (1985) he expressed a relational view of mind. Bateson thought that the mind should be seen as immanent in the whole system of organism–environment relations in which humans are enmeshed. The brain was in relation to the surrounding environment and the mind (as a processor of information) extended outwards into its environment along multiple sensory pathways; the perceiver was involved in his or her environment. Thus the mind was not just involved with the working of the human brain; it was viewed in much wider terms as a way of coming to understand the world by being in the world. Bateson tried to find a language of relationship to describe the living world as a dynamic reality. He thought that logic, a method for describing linear systems of cause and effect, was unsuitable for the description of biological patterns and that metaphor

was the language of nature. Bateson attempted to find the underlying pattern in the structure of nature and the structure of mind in 'an ecology of mind'. The mind is concerned with thoughts and ideas about the world; it classifies and maps things. Mental maps organize connections and differences between things in a familiar pattern; and patterns connect. Bateson called this 'ideation'. By contrast, 'abduction' was the process of recognizing the patterns between different things through metaphor, dreams, allegories and poetry. Abductive systems link the body and the ecosystem: a meta pattern is shared (Bateson, 1985:16–17, 157–158; Rapport and Overing, 2000:102–108; Ingold, 2000:16–18).

Although Bateson did not discuss magic directly, his work on abductive systems employing dreams, poetry and metaphor links closely with conceptions of magic as relational thinking. He believed that knowledge always existed surrounded by an unknown that was penetrable to the ambitious investigator. Ideas could be drawn from many disciplines and he 'respected the mystic's approach to life as much as the scientist's' (Heims, 1977:150, cited in Lipset, 1982:201).[4] Creating relationship – in physical or spirit form – is the basis of magical consciousness. A de-centred part of the process of consciousness that is receptive to other beings both seen and unseen, magical consciousness is a perception that is able to move away from a primary focus on the individual; it is a consciousness that is aware of connections between phenomena and it is shaped by psycho-social experience and world-view. Magical consciousness may be explained in terms of mysticism, an experience of vastness, sometimes experienced as a union with an ultimate reality, cosmic consciousness, or God; it is also explained in more animistic terms. Ecologist and phenomenological philosopher David Abram says that the human mind is instilled and provoked by the 'tensions and participations between the human body and the animate earth'. He asserts that by acknowledging an inner psychological world and the surrounding world, psychology is loosened from the strictly human sphere to meet with other minds in oak, fir, hawk, snake, stone, rain, and salmon; all aspects of a place make up a particular state of mind – a 'place-specific intelligence' shared by all beings that live in the area (1997:262).

Magical consciousness requires a shift in perception from a so-called normal perception; this is akin to what the anthropologist Stanley Tambiah, drawing on philosopher Lévy-Bruhl, has termed 'participation'. An ancient construct in Western philosophy and theology, the term 'participation' accounts for the togetherness of diverse elements – how one thing participates in one or several others (Saler, 2003:50). Tambiah says that participation can be represented as occurring when 'persons, groups, animals, places, and natural phenomena are in a relation of contiguity, and translate that relation into one of existential immediacy and contact and shared affinities' (1991:107). Participation, according to Tambiah, uses the language of solidarity, unity, holism and continuity in space and time; it also engenders a sense of encompassing cosmic oneness (ibid.:109). Participation is contrary to causality, defined by Tambiah as quintessentially represented by the categories, rules and methods of positivistic science and discursive mathematico-logical reasoning (ibid.:105). Analytically separate, participation and causality intertwine in many combinations and Tambiah is careful to emphasize that they do not form a dualism; he points out various contexts and discourses where one or the other mode predominates, the different modes becoming increasingly difficult to separate in the scientific theory-making branch of modern physics (ibid:110). In fact, if consciousness is viewed as a process the problems of dualistic thinking are avoided. My experience on the Snowdonian hillside, already mentioned, is but one

example of the participation required in developing magical consciousness. Experiences such as these are said to bring about a transformation of perception; changes may occur through the meeting of other practitioners for rituals, meditation, as well as specific practices of healing or environmental protest, for example. In the chapters that follow more examples will be given.

Part of the process of developing a magical consciousness is learning to see the natural world as vital and alive – seeing it in animistic terms. Edward Tylor used the term 'animism' to refer to the 'anima' or soul as the essence of a being or the 'animating principle'. For Tylor, animism was the earliest form of religion, coexisting with magic in 'primitive' societies (Tambiah, 1991:49–50). More recent anthropologists, such as Tim Ingold, take a phenomenological approach to animism, seeing it as a world-view envisaged from within a 'total field of relations whose unfolding is tantamount to the process of life itself'. Taking his cue from Bateson and drawing on ethnographic work on the hunter-gatherer Cree people of northeast Canada who say that the entire world, not just the human world, is saturated with powers of agency and intentionality. Ingold asserts, like Bateson, that mind should be seen as immanent in the whole system of the organism–environment relations;[5] the whole organism-in-its-environment is the point of departure of an indivisible totality (2001:13–19). There is no separation between mind and nature; mind is not added onto life but is immanent in intentional engagement of living beings within their environments (ibid.:107–108). David Abram takes this further when he argues that 'perception, in its depths, is truly participatory' (1997:91). He defines magic in its most primordial sense as participating in a world of multiple intelligences with:

> the intuition that every form one perceives – from swallow swooping overhead to the fly on a blade of grass, and indeed the blade of grass itself – is an *experiencing form, an entity with its own predilections and sensations, albeit sensations that are very different from our own.* (Abram, 1997:9–10).

Abram draws on Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology and makes four points to illustrate this magical animistic world-view: firstly, perception is inherently interactive and participatory – there is a reciprocity between perceiver and perceived; secondly, spontaneous pre-conceptual experience is not dualistic in terms of animate/inanimate but forms relative distinctions between diverse forms of animateness; thirdly, perceptual reciprocity between sensing bodies and animate expressive landscape engenders and supports linguistic reciprocity – language is rooted in non-verbal exchange; fourthly, human languages are informed by structures of human body, human community and more-than-human terrain. Language is not specifically human: 'Experientially considered, language is no more the special property of the human organism than it is an expression of the animate earth that enfolds us' (Abram, 1997:89–90).

In views such as this magic is essentially a natural phenomenon, not mystical or metaphysical; it expresses a conceptual and perceptual world-view that creates meaningful connections between phenomena. To an extent, this is what Carl Jung meant when he said that, 'No man lives within his own psychic sphere like a snail in its shell, separated from everybody else, but is connected with his fellow-men by his unconscious humanity.' Jung saw this as a collective unconscious, a living reality; the pre-conscious aspect of things and a reservoir from which to draw – it was nature not something mystical. Here Jung draws on the Greek definition of psyche which, according to Aristotle, meant the 'principle of life'

that animates a living thing. Psyche was a wider concept than mind or consciousness and was equivalent to soul, the 'first principle of living things' and the functional state of a living creature (Morris, 1994:44–46). For Jung, the psyche occurs in living bodies and in matter, but the original feeling of unity with the unconscious psyche has been lost due to the conscious mind becoming more and more the victim of what Jung saw as its own discriminating activity (Sabini, 2002:14, 72, 82).

Practitioners of nature religion may look back to a time of unity with nature and psychologist Brian Bates's historically-based novel *The Way of Wyrd* ([1983] 1996) has been influential in this respect.[6] This work is an introduction to a shamanistic inspirited nature as told through a story of the initiation of Wat Brand, a Christian scribe, by Wulf, an Anglo-Saxon sorcerer. Wulf tells Wat that the soul is the essence of wyrd and is present in everything – even rocks have soul (psyche), the principle of life. Wat questions Wulf:

> 'Rocks do not breathe, Wulf. Surely then, they cannot have soul?' Wulf watched me steadily, through narrowed eyes.
>
> 'Rocks breathe,' he said evenly. 'But each breath lasts longer than the life and death for a man. Hills and mountains breathe, but each breath lasts a thousand human lifetimes.' (Bates, [1983] 1996:111)

Bates writes that the original Anglo-Saxon form of the word 'weird' meant 'destiny', 'power' and 'magic' or 'prophetic knowledge'. He points out that in Anglo-Saxon times all aspects of the world were seen to be in constant flux and motion, and a dynamic and pervasive world of spirits coexisted with the material world. The spirits were manifestations of the forces of wyrd and were invisible to most humans ([1983] 1996:6–7). Life force, or vital energy, permeated everything in this world-view; it was manipulated by the sorcerer, as the mediator of the spirit world and the human world, who 'connected individual human functioning with the pulse of earth rhythm' (ibid.:13).

Bates sees wyrd as a path to knowledge – of psychological and spiritual liberation; it is a way of being that challenges dominant notions of body, mind and spirit. All aspects of the world are seen to be in relationship in this view, and the totality is conceived of as a web. The web of wyrd is a view of the world conceived as a relationship of patterns (ibid.:12) and it offers a metaphor for connection – a European model for a cyclical process more visible in non-Western contexts. Bates himself likens it to the Chinese notion of Yin and Yang, but it also has parallels with much African thought in the sense that the material world is not seen as inert but vital. Bates employs a psychological approach to shamanism that is very popular amongst practitioners but problematic for some academics; I shall discuss this further in Chapter 8.

Theoretical Approach

As I have already indicated, magic is a difficult and complex area to study; it is fraught with different conceptions, misconceptions, prejudice and a certain amount of ambiguity. This is all the more reason to examine magical consciousness as an aspect of human thinking. I have chosen to focus on consciousness because it is so fundamental to how we come to know the world, as well as to conceptions of our place in nature, and it has not been dealt

with adequately by anthropologists. Studying magical consciousness raises interesting problems for scholars in the social sciences. Western science has been shaped by the dominant philosophical theme of rationalism, a tradition stemming from Plato, which holds that knowledge is based on reason, and is associated with Descartes who had an ecstatic visionary experience during which the nature of the universe was revealed to him. Ironically, this convinced him that his mission in life was to seek truth through reason and he reformulated the rationalist tradition to argue that knowledge was derived from rational reflection on the world, rather than from empirical observation.[7] As noted previously, he adopted a mechanistic conception of the world and thought that ideas such as 'God', perfection, and infinity were derived from thinking itself. For Descartes, the mind was associated with the immaterial soul, and was a thinking substance capable of self-consciousness; the body, on the other hand, had materiality and was part of a mechanistic universe. Without a soul the human body was an automaton responding to inner and outer stimulation according to the rules built into its mechanism: it was without consciousness, and under the control of its emotions and external stimuli. By contrast, a soul without a body had consciousness, but only of innate ideas lacking sensory impressions of the world (Morris, 1991:6–14). Equating the mind with soul and thought, Descartes claimed that the mind produced ideas out of its own potentialities through a rational reflection on the world. Descartes' rationalism was enforced by the eighteenth-century Enlightenment when the 'light of reason' was to be shed on the dark mysteries of religious traditions: scientific research would overcome magic and superstition.[8] Magic came to be separated from both religion and science.

The split between magic, religion and science was reinforced by the dichotomy of mind and body, as well as self and other. Cartesian philosophy is responsible for the radical dualism between mind and body so prevalent in Western thought.[9] Despite the fact that since the Enlightenment there has been a repudiation of the ultra-rationalism of Descartes through an emphasis on experience,[10] his dualism of mind and body has had a profound effect on Western philosophy and thinking making it hard to envision alternatives.

Anthropologist Geoffrey Samuel claims that in modern Western societies the mind–body and self–other dichotomies are deeply entrenched (1990:135). Referring to the West African and African–American *orisha* cults, where possession of devotees by the spirit *orisha* is a central part of the practice, he notes that the language of immanent gods and spirits found in such cults is not completely unfamiliar to modern Westerners because it formed a way of thinking at one stage in European thought. However, Westerners have lost the ability to understand this kind of discourse, making it 'difficult to understand other cultures where such a language is still spoken' (ibid.:134). How do we analyse magical consciousness as part of a wider process of consciousness when our structures of thought have been shaped by a rationalism that does not recognize magical consciousness as a legitimate form of knowledge?

Facing similar problems, religious studies scholar Adrian Ivakhiv, in this study of pilgrims and politics in the New Age centres of Glastonbury and Sedona (2001), avoids a sterile dichotomy between, on the one hand, a scientific view which questions the 'reality' of contact with spirits of the land and spirits of ancestors (by questioning whether ideas about spirits are a screen for the projection of fantasies and unconscious desires) and, on the other hand, a religious view that totally accepts that particular landscapes harbour numinous powers experienced as real energies, by adopting a Geertzian hermeneutic–

phenomenological position:[11]

> both of the opposite poles of these paired dichotomies emerge out of an interactive web that is tangled and blurred at its very origins. This is a tangled web within which the world is ever being created – shaped and constituted through the imaginative, discursive, spatial, and material practices of humans reflectively immersed within an active and animate, more-than-human world. It is a tangled web of selfhood and otherness, identities and differences, relations both natural and cultural; a web through which circulate meanings, images, desires, and power itself (the power to act, to imagine, to define, impose, and resist). I will argue and try to demonstrate that the Earth – the actual places, landscapes, and geographies – and imagination – the ways we conceive, narrate, and 'image' the world – are thoroughly intertwined within this tangled web of power – and desire-laden relations. (Ivakhiv, 2001:4)

Noting that science and mystical/religious means of knowledge production have different methods and draw on disparate ideas, he claims that both are a means of interpreting a reality which

> remains a protean tangled web, a reality whose nature is not known directly, but which is always mediated by signs and interpretative traditions. Scientists, scholars, New Agers, religious believers, postmodern philosophers are all interpreting subjects who spin webs of significance and meaning; these webs are conditioned by 'effectivities' or 'action capabilities' and desires and intentionalities both conscious and unconscious. (Ivakhiv, 2001:229–230)

Ivakhiv gives no guidelines on further analysis of this 'protean tangled web' and it remains unclear how specific meanings have arisen.

By contrast, Samuel has introduced a theoretical framework for social and cultural anthropology that reflects pluralistic and historical Western scientific thinking, and which is in harmony with a magical relational theme. His 'Multimodal Framework' (MMF) seeks to deliberately dissolve Cartesian dichotomies of mind and body, as well as individual and society: 'In philosophical language, the MMF is neither a form of "individualism" nor a form of "holism" (or "collectivism") as normally understood' (Samuel, 1990:8); it offers explanations in terms of both by seeking a new language within which scientific theories may be framed. Samuel's framework is anticipated in Aristotle's metaphysics, a higher order of science which connected different experiences – such as art and reasoning – in a scientific study of Being (Johnson, 2000:180–181). The MMF also covers informal and nonscientific knowledge where knowledge is not something contained in the mind but a 'patterning of mind and body as a totality' (Samuel, 1990:6). Rational thought is not opposed to 'symbolic' thought – there are a series of modes or states of human consciousness, all of which are rational and symbolic, individual and cultural (ibid.:37). Samuel's argument is for a new social science theoretical framework to reflect a pluralistic ideal of many ways of knowing – from commonsense, informal and non-scientific knowledge implicit in daily activities, to modes of operating within so-called traditional societies – that have been hard to incorporate effectively within Western rationalistic modes of knowing (ibid.:3–7).

Samuel is aware that any framework image chosen will necessarily impose some conceptual structure on reality, selectively including some aspects while ignoring others, but feels that the anthropologist Clifford Geertz's notion of a 'web' in which 'man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun' (1973:5) is a reasonable one. Thus Samuel's model does not reject the interpretative tradition but sets it within a broader

conceptual schema that seeks to break out of the 'hermeneutic circle' of meanings. Seeing hermeneutics as one of a variety of bodies of knowledge operating in the world, rather than a single all-encompassing and unified system, Samuel also uses the general metaphor of a web, but his intention is to provide an alternative explanatory framework. The MMF is a framework for the systematic testing of ideas (ibid.:26) and overcomes the problems inherent within the interpretative tradition of incoherence of general perspective (ibid.:31).

Whilst noting that webs are not purely individual – 'once spun, they take on a life of their own' – nor are they just social – 'they have spinners' (Scholte, 1984:540) – Samuel searches for a conceptual space that is neither individual nor social but within which webs might exist:

> These processes of spinning and being caught happen in time (through history), and if we are to describe them adequately, we should give time and explicit place within our image. Rather than speaking of 'webs of significance', therefore, I suggest that we view the structures of meaning and feeling in which and through which we live as patterns formed by the currents in the course of a vast stream or river. The direction of the stream is the flow of time. Geertz's 'webs' now correspond to semi-permanent currents, or to use William Blake's term, 'vortices', that have become established in the onward flow of the river. (Samuel, 1990:11).

At any point in the stream, which represents the dynamic and processual nature of life, we can draw a cross-section to see a structure of 'webs' laid across the surface. This model enables a 'particle and wave' approach developed using ideas inspired by Einstein's theory of relativity; it incorporates multi-dimensions – both 'stream' and 'web' are different perspectives on a wider whole[12] (cf. Grof 1993; Capra 1996; Glucklich 1997; Nettle 2001).

Thus the MMF also goes beyond the original non-scientific hermeneutic approach of Geertz; it is an approach that not only makes possible an examination of participation as a form of magical consciousness but one that also allows analysis of the discourses that have shaped contemporary thought and practice in nature religion. Magical consciousness, as examined within this framework, is represented (in Western cultures) as an informal way of knowing. In this view, knowledge is a patterning of mind and body in relation to a wider perceptual field. 'Nature religion', as a definable category, represents many eco-spiritual practices that recreate a relationship with nature. If we cut a cross-section through Samuel's theoretical river at the present point in history we can see a variety of practices shaped and informed by esotericism, romanticism and environmentalism; these are semi-permanent currents in the course of the process of life and will be explored in the following chapters. These currents provide the structure through which magical consciousness is experienced.

The question of whether nature religion is an eco-spirituality is one that specifically addresses questions concerning the place of human beings in nature, as well as the fundamental basis of consciousness. A comparison of these currents reveals inherent contradictions concerning religiosity and mystery (a discourse of esotericism) and ecology and connectedness (an organismic discourse), of which the paradoxes and implications will be examined in Chapter 8. Nature religion appears to be a 'widespread cultural response to the decay of main-line religions and to a widely felt awareness of ecological crisis' (Pearson, Roberts and Samuel, 1998:1). However, all is not as simple as it seems. Catherine Albanese, in an examination of Ralph Waldo Emerson's book *Nature* (1836), notes that within this work there is a confusion between a view of matter as 'really real', an embodiment of Spirit and the 'garment of God', and a view of matter as illusion, an unreality, a trap from which


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