



THESIS

NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

FINE ART PAINTING

THE SICKNESS, THE SHAMAN, AND THE HEALING.

BY

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SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN
AND COMPLIMENTARY STUDIES IN CANDIDACY FOR THE DEGREE
OF N.C.E.A. B.A. 1993.

CONTENTS:

Introduction

Chapter One:	The Sickness	Pg. 3
1. The History:	Pg. 5	
2. The Present:	Pg. 11	
Chapter Two:	The Shaman	Pg. 19
1. The Initiation:	Pg. 22	
2. The Vocation:	Pg. 27	
Chapter Three:	The Healing	Pg. 39
1. Society:	Pg. 40	
2. The Arts:	Pg. 46	
Conclusion:		Pg. 51

LIST OF PLATES:

1. Pg. 20

2. Pg. 21

3. Pg. 24

4. Pg. 26

5. Pg. 31

6. Pg. 33

7. Pg. 35

8. Pg. 36

9. Pg. 54

INTRODUCTION:

The era of satisfying our wants is now drawing to a close, and is being replaced by an era of limiting our consumption to our needs. As members of western society, we are witnessing the intensification of a vast social and ecological crisis, which mainly evolved due to the application of the official ideology of our civilization.

This work first examines the negative elements of the western world-view that have helped create this crisis, by analyzing the social/cultural precepts involved in this world-view, and also by examining the basic aesthetic criteria of the art movement that has flourished this century within this western civilization, namely that movement labelled the modernist/post-modernist movement. A mythic archetype is then proposed as a theoretical structure for reform of these negative elements.

To fulfil these ends; Chapter One traces a brief history of the development of the principal characteristics of the western world-view, from 15th century europe to the present worldwide situation, and proposes a view as to what this contemporary ideology is.

Chapter Two departs from the western world-view, and constructs an over-view of the archetypal lifeway of the Shaman, through examination of firstly the nature of his initiatory procedure to his vocation, and secondly the nature of his commitment to his community. The radical disjuncture of the socio-ideological stances presented in these two chapters is a feature of the thesis narrative, purposely structured in this manner to highlight the disparity between the two ideologies.

The third chapter resolves the two seemingly unrelated elements of the former chapters, by showing how the archetype of the Shamans lifeway can be utilised as an incredibly appropriate model for the reform of the negative secular elements within the western world-view, and argues that to create a new set of vitally needed compassionate aesthetics and morals, modern individuals will have to find a quality of perception and being that is becoming rarer by the day, that of belief.

CHAPTER ONE: THE SICKNESS

"Our most seizing pain is facing limits. At least, that seems to be the implication of what we have done with technology. Given the power, we have freed ourselves of mornings and evenings of carrying water, of days collecting food, fashioning garments, creating shelters. Given the power, we have freed ourselves of the limits of our legs, of the impassability of mud roads and of time-eating distances of seas. Given the power, we have kept light after the sun sets, and life after childbearing ceases. Thus we have freed ourselves from fixing physical limitations, for the fluidity of psychological life and we have run from that opportunity, arms thrown across our eyes, as we might run from the realization of our nightmares"

(MARTINEZ, 1992, P.57).

For the first time in the history of human existence on planet earth, comparatively recently, there has evolved a culture that by its fundamental ethos has refused to recognise the possibility of the existence of a supernatural order that would work in tandem with the mundane processes and systems of that culture. In the last few hundred years humanity has witnessed, and indeed created, the blooming of history's first truly secular culture. This culture is, of course, the industrial/scientific/capitalist-consumerist culture of 'western' civilisation.

Growing with perfect synchronicity has been an art movement which has adapted to the competitive, ego-centred, market based socio/economic principles of its foster society, and developed aesthetics relating to an 'Arts for Arts Sake' criteria of social detachment. Furthermore to a great degree it has withdrawn from its duty of responsibility to the society in which it exists and indeed from any concerns apart from its self-referential interests, resulting in a severe truncation of its engagement with a more holistic sense of creativity and ability to believe in a spiritual dimension in the world.

The present stage of this comparatively recent art movement is now known as the modernist/post-modernist stage, a label which principally refers to all contemporary art being created within societies that ascribe to the modern western world-view.

It is true of course that within this 'secular' culture there exists a strong and indeed large presence of organised religion in relation to the social and cultural spheres of western civilization, which is mainly ward of the three monotheistic religions. But the observance of the doctrine of these religious institutions are corrupted and ultimately negated by the very nature of the western consumerist/scientific lifestyle and ethos, which virtually renders the real existence of an applied communal spiritual faith as a fallacy. The basic and common precepts of all religion cannot be, and are not, observed in modern western societies essentially narcissistic and materialist systems and goals. Hence the 'secular' aspect of the western world-view, in real terms, possesses the dominant ideological position, above the essentially 'phantom' religious influence.

So what forces shaped this modern western 'weltanschauung' a world view that due to its dominative nature, has come to not only represent the socio/cultural ideology of its birthplace, western Europe and its colonies but also to superimpose its doctrine on the economic, social and psychological systems of most of the world's nations, to a greater or lesser extent, and which continues in its fierce colonial drive to transform the structures of the few remaining traditional societies left in the world, from their indigenous composition, to its vision of 'progress'

The History:

The origin of the modern western world-view can be traced, principally, back to the renaissance, the period of european history marking the waning of the middle ages and the rise of the modern world, the dawn of the active and secular epoch, and the decline of the contemplative and religious existence. Of course this is a limited reading of the construction of such a complex ideological phenomena, but is necessary for a concise overview. During the renaissance there began a social revolution centring on the rights and the status of the individual. Of course a paradox exists in the notion of a social revolution, if its cause is the advancement of the individual. It had always been a characteristic of all societies that individuals were recognised for their unique personalities and talents and indeed were honoured for their unique traits. However, strong traditionally structured societies have always recognised that glorification of, and granting independent status to the individual above the communal would be a step towards social fragmentation. In contrast to this wisdom however, a belief in the advancement of the rights and standing of the individual slowly came to be regarded as the most important aspect of west european social politics of this time. Individualism was soon to be equated with freedom.

The incoming system of market based capitalism demanded the creation of a new class of entrepreneurs to create profit and fuel competition, so to replace the old order of feudalism, which had come to be regarded as a system in stagnation.

The medieval structure of european society was deeply set though , and coupled with the oppressive control the church had over the affairs of state and society, a mood of unrest was to arise with the appearance of these new ideas. The corrupt religious hierarchy encouraged faith over inquiry, and asceticism before accrual, teaching earthly humility would be repaid with heavenly reward.

However within the century the authority of the church and the belief in the laws of their logicians was crumbling. The nature of the rising scientific inquisitive mind was to re-examine and re-assess the world around it and challenge any previously assumed laws or certainties for authenticity. The church began to assume the statue of the 'old order'. By the turn of the 16th century the corruption and decadence of the church had become obvious, and heralded the Protestant reformation. The Protestant reformers created a new purified system of Christianity, advocating an individualist approach to worship, by-passing the corrupt hierarchy of Rome, instead favouring direct engagement with God through the bible.

"Personal faith and repentance were what mattered; ritual observance, seasonal festivals, pilgrimages, devotion to the Holy Mother and the cults of saints and angels were all denounced as pagan superstitions"

(SHELDRAKE 1990, p. 19).

To a great degree the reformers 'purification' of the church resulted in the exorcising of any magical properties that the operations of the church may have had.

"The reformation led to a contraction of the spiritual realm, a withdrawal of the spirit from the operations of nature. The realm of the spirit was concentrated within human beings; the rest of the natural world was just the background against which the human spiritual drama was played out"

(SHELDRAKE, 1990, P. 14).

The reformation in effect limited the presence of the spirit to the human world, in doing so contradicting the teachings of the orthodox church which had inherited its fundamentally animist beliefs from the medieval cathedral schools, and the myths of the pagan religions which it had assimilated into its body during the previous centuries. By confining the access to spiritual power solely to humans, Protestantism had begun to pave the way for a humanist social ideology, and likewise by regarding the material world as spiritually neutral, the ground for the mechanistic revolution in science, which was to appear in the next century, was prepared.

"The domains of science and religion could now be separated: science taking the whole of nature for its province, including the human body, and religion the moral and spiritual aspects of the human soul"

(SHELDRAKE, 1990, P.21)

Meanwhile the growth of the new dynamic capitalism was fuelled by the destruction of the feudal system which had greatly informed the medieval model of society since the eighth century. The system had been regarded as an unchanging divine order, but as with so many other similar institutions of this period, it was to fall foul of the growing dis-enchantment and iconoclasm which existed in Europe at this time in regard to the social systems and authorities that had dominated the lives of Europe's citizens for centuries without the amelioration and reform that was needed.

The villages of vassals, which had served under the nobility landlords, began to conglomerate to form market economy towns, wherein the farmers and artisans traded their goods and services to people who were basically strangers. A monetary system had begun whereby land, labour and goods were to be sold, bought and valued in terms of money. Thus commodification had been set in place.

The growth of urban centres was further aided by the creation of immense colonies in many foreign lands, in the name of Europe's nation states. Such colonies provided huge markets for Europe to sell goods to, and expanded the capitalist network to span a much larger geographical base. The towns rapidly expanded as a surge of the continents population left their rural semi-subsistence livelihoods in favour of financially rewarding work in the new urban based manufacturing industries. Many Europeans were producing masses of goods for strangers in distant towns, and indeed foreign lands.

The hardships and modest gains of working on the land were being slowly substituted for life in the rapidly expanding towns. This, coupled with an increase in migration to the "New Worlds" of the colonies, and the change from the basic mode of commerce from small scale society trading to the impersonal system of financial competition, would come to effect further fragmentation of the traditional social unit and place more emphasis on the independence of the individual.

The banking system grew rapidly in accordance with the huge amounts of money that were now circulating in the growing economy, and in accordance too with the importance which was being placed on this wealth. Affluence was becoming the new motivation to toil for, replacing heavenly reward. Reflecting these transfers of pursuits and concerns, were the defiant changes in bank policies, which contravened church regulations concerning the use of money, for example the introduction of the charging of interest on money lent by the Wisselbank in Amsterdam in 1609, an action that the church had prohibited, regarding such charges as usury, and therefore sinful. But the maintenance of the economy had begun to overtake people's attentions, replacing their obedience to the clergy, either Roman Catholic or Calvinist.

The seventeenth century saw, in quick succession, the appearances of the psycho/scientific ideologies of Rene Descartes and Isaac Newton, whose principally utilised and applied theories of dualism and reductionism, respectively, were to fuel the scientific revolution of mechanistic rationalism of the eighteenth century. This philosophical doctrine advanced the status of the reasoning brain above all other modes of approach to problems and disregarded the benefit of subjective experience. Ultimately it enshrined the mode of objectivity as the only tool of analysis which could illuminate the truth. Also, the mechanistic scientific ideology withdrew the 'soul' from the whole of the natural world, elevating the intellect and conscious mind to the position of ultimate value, and viewed all living things and matter as mechanical automatons.

Such scientific precepts were ultimately to remove any element of animism in the sciences, and technically resulted in the first refutation of existence of a god or spiritual world, that all civilization had believed in previously. This split between matter and spirit, and indeed eventual denial of the spirit, that rationalism created, fulfilled Francis Bacon's theories of a natural world devoid of moral worth. Now nature was no longer ward of the divine, and so was primed for anthropocentric exploitation. The industrial revolution capitalised on this new moral freedom, and scientific mastery of nature was pursued with great fervour. Now mankind had not only biological and ideological supremacy over the rest of nature, and the retained god given right to dominion (GEN 1: 28-30), but also he had the advanced technology to realise that dominion on a grand scale.

The mechanistic theory was challenged of course from the seventeenth century onwards by 'vitalists' who countered the mechanistic dogma by maintaining that phenomena and living creatures depend on a vital life-giving force for their existence but it was the reductionist/rationalist/mechanical scientific world-view which became sciences orthodox premises.

The surge of 'development' and 'progress' that was propelled by the 'enlightenment' has fundamentally informed our present situation and brought us to where our western society is in the present. Basically these processes of rationalism, mechanistic scientific thought, capitalism, regression of a church controlled state and the rise of the individual's status have informed the fundamental precepts of the western world-view. So where are we?

The Present:

We in the west have basically become an anti-traditional society

"We refer to traditional societies as traditional precisely because they are productive communities, much concerned with the social relations between their members, as opposed to marketplaces that are primarily concerned with the economic transactions between their members. Where traditional societies have complementarity we have competition. Where they strive for stability we seek dynamism"

(MAYBURY-LEWIS 1992 PG. 85.)

Due to the incredible pace of modern technological/social advancement, the values held by a generation in the western world are almost rendered obsolete by the generation that succeeds them. As a result we damage our links to our recent past, in doing so often severing our roots and endangering our ability to attain a properly informed notion of our identity. Such a disruption experienced by any society can fracture the continuity of their vision of who they are and where they are going, which is so vital to the preservation and renewal of their traditions and ultimately their heritage which distinguishes them as that which they are, in short their identity. The mostly transient innovation-based character of modern society has undermined our ability to form a permanent strong traditional identity, with which we can relate to our antecedents, both recent and ancient. Our modernity, which is widely held as one of the greatest triumphs of the western world, seems to exist at the cost of our history, in the sense of a history still accessible to us.

The modern social unit of the west can be seen to have shrunk from the nation to the society, and from the society down to the individual. Individualism and anti-traditionalism are fundamentally the same. (Anti-) social force, as to exercise individual traits, is to undermine the quality of belonging to a tradition which would inform ones character. The freedom which individualism brings, when brought to its extreme, can become a disorientating process. Without alliance to a tradition the individual can often find that there is "no example to follow, no authority to rely on, no discipline to be received" (GABLIK 1984, P. 188). It is a basic feature of the human to have a reliance on a frame of reference which is stable and with which the person can make informed judgements, decisions and movements. Traditions have that stability, as their very construction is the result of "the recurrent affirmations that have gone into their practice" (GABLIK 1984, P.117) in this way tradition serves as a security for the people who identify with it, always remaining as a strong fixed point of reference, which situates them in the centre of an eternal cultural process which has an origin and a future. Placing oneself in a larger whole also serves to humble the individual, and provides him, or her, with responsibilities that must be observed so to qualify their position within the tradition, and maintain their identity as an integral member of that group.

Of course complying to the constraints and taboos of that tradition, can be read as being forced to sacrifice the individual's liberty and indeed their freedom. This is true, but the nature of the freedom sacrificed is usually that of autonomy, the very freedom that isolates and detaches.

This self sufficiency by its very nature denies the existence of a network of interrelated forces. In pursuing their freedom to the extreme, the individual becomes a 'professional', a position which enshrines specialisation, and renders all demands and phenomena outside of the professional's direct concerns as 'other', therefore beyond their control, influence and as a logical progression, responsibility. Such dislocation must eventually result in a belief in interrelationships collapsing. This results in communication breakdown and then ignorance ensues, as without belief in and a desire for interrelationship with others, these very interrelationships disappear. Externalising all other phenomena results in externalising blame. Such passing of responsibility is the very action that affects paralysis in a fractured society of 'independent' people. When the instinct to sacrifice individual gain, in the effort to benefit the group, disappears, the communal starvation of autonomy sets in.

Such a weakness can be seen as an entry point for criticism of the negative aspects of our current model of art. Taking its cue from the role of the professional in the economic marketplace, the vocation of the artist in many cases is twisting into an ego-centred, self-propelling detached and paradoxically anti-social figure. (I say paradoxically, as surely artists wish to speak to society through their work).

Rooted in the western world-view's notion of freedom, being the removal of any limits to the actions or the ambition of the individual, the very basis of the aesthetics of most contemporary art is that of self-expression and innovation wherein the artists individualism as regards the stylistic and thematic aspects of their creations are the measure of the works success or worth.

Thus the aesthetics of such art divorce the work from any external purposes or requirements in the greater cultural/social sphere, and ultimately exalts such detachment so that if the work does attempt to enlighten anybody or anything within society it is at fault.

"For the committed modernist, the self-sufficiency of art is its salvation. Aesthetic experience is an end in itself, worth having on its own account. The only way for art to preserve its truth is by maintaining its distance from the social world - by staying pure".

(GABLIK, 1984, P.20)

Such aesthetics of course totally contravene the aesthetics demanded of art that holds a central place in a traditional society where the practical informed the aesthetic and vice versa. Such requirements necessitated that the art produced within society was a full and proper reflection of that society's goals, beliefs, and fundamental identity. In itself the art had no intrinsic aesthetic worth, as it was regarded as a mere element of that societies real concern which was the preservation of a stable existence. So deeply embedded was this type of art that most societies of this nature did not even have a word for art, as it could not be separated from any other manifestation of the workings of that society. The visual language needed by artists within these strong traditional societies, that must be fluent amongst all members of that society, was passed on through the solid base of the societies heritage.

"It is given to him in the forms and symbols of the religion that dominates his particular collectivity and marks all its activities. He will of course modify these forms and symbols according to his own particular sensibility but any such modifications will be subordinate to the over-riding coherence of the traditional language of which he makes use - a language which he shares with his collectivity and through which consequently he can communicate in a living manner an awareness of spiritual realities to that collectivity".

(SHERRARD 1990 P.38)

So deeply ingrained were the spiritual beliefs of such a society, and the visual language that re-enforced and acted as a catalyst for these beliefs, that the beliefs were regarded with as much faith which we give the 'facts' of science, like gravity and motion, today, never doubting their reality, and their art was as easily 'read' as English language is to us today.

"The real crises of modernism, is the pervasive spiritual crises of western civilisation: the absence of a system of beliefs that justifies allegiance to any entity beyond the self"

(GABLIK, 1991, P)

In adopting the rationalist cartesian mode, we have evolved into a race that is destroying its own soul. Our whole frame of reference and mode of education has been constructed so absolutely by this world-view, that our very ability to open our hearts to the notion of a holistic world-view has been almost annihilated.

"We live in a world that prides itself on its modernity yet is hungry for wholeness, hungry for meaning. At the same time it is a world that marginalizes those very impulses that might fill the void"

(MAYBURY-LEWIS, 1992, P 231.)

We have become so conditioned by our modern notion of freedom, that we find it almost impossible to sacrifice any of our liberty in recognition of the existence of a larger network in which we play a small, albeit integral, part, be it communal, natural or spiritual.

Because the religious sphere of the western world-view is dominated overwhelmingly by the three monotheistic religions, we are further discouraged from seeking direct union or experience of god. Whilst built on myths of visionary humans (Jesus, Moses, Mohammed) these religions dissuade their followers from actually seeking visionary states themselves, realising direct revelation illuminating the nature of the divine would cause the mystic to experience the ecstatic experience of transcending his or her own ego and reaching a true state of enlightenment, in communion with the reality of 'God' itself. Such a revelation would render the mystic's relationship with organised religion pointless as any church is merely a human created mediating organisation between the believer and divinity. Piety is preferredly channelled through their disabling hierarchy.

The rationalist/scientific ideology dismisses the notion of a spiritual order or any intelligent animate force within nature altogether, and indeed throughout its history the scientific establishment has actively pursued a policy of dissemination of supernatural or spiritual phenomena, in a process of dissection, measurement and hyperrational objective explanation. Such a tradition of myth exorcism has modelled the western world-view to such a degree that on encountering mysterious phenomena we are compelled to 'discover' what is the cause of such experiences, expecting (and indeed only concluding our investigations in the resolution of) a rational 'ordinary' explanation. Such is our definition of ordinary: rational, concrete, definite and scientifically abstractly explainable.

Where the western world-view has been taken to its logical extreme (most of the western world by now) the closure of visionary sight has been almost totally achieved. We have destroyed our myths, ceased any meaningful ceremonies that link us to the source of our existence, the earth, beaten back the spiritual guides we once believed in, rendered our art socially autonomous to the degree of austerity and impenetrable privateness and created the most wasteful ecologically damaging culture the world has ever known.

Added to this is a tradition defying society that provides little inspiration to the heart: our authorities are either corrupted or bureaucratic to the degree of impotence, our system alienates it own denizens, our heros are media celebrities and increasingly our capacity to rise above self service and envisage a holistic positive un-polluted future is evaporating at the same steady state rate that our solution-destroying cynicism is breeding.

Of course there are many positive aspects of western society, such as the freedom of speech which enables me to write a thesis supporting my own views, but the purpose of this work is to serve as a critique of the negative aspects within certain realms of the western ideological world-view and hence the basis of the discourse within this work is that of critical analysis.

Because the root of our dilemma is that of belonging to a cultural/social paradigm, that by its nature is iconoclastic, ecologically destructive and dangerously consumptive, our whole model of social ideology will have to be radically reformed, if we are to properly address the problems outlined in this chapter. To build a holistic humble tradition as a society and as artists within this society we must now ask ourselves what role model could serve to transform us from demons to healers?

CHAPTER TWO : THE SHAMAN.

"The Shaman is a master of play, dancing and chanting in the field of human suffering. And through these acts, the people are awakened from the nightmare of sickness to the dream of paradise. Playfulness and absurdity sharply rouse the slumbering ones. The beauty of poetry and the ferocity of keen wisdom remind the forgetful ones. Compassion and poise heal the diseased ones. The world is revealed, remembered, and celebrated. The ancestors and nature-kin are again in the sacred circle".

(HALIFAX, 1982, P.26)

The lifeway of the Shaman recedes far back into the history of nearly all cultures, present and past, of the world, predating the earliest recorded civilisations by thousands of years, originating in

"An age beyond literary record, so the only accessible source of information is the record of 'sacred history' which differs from the profane variety in that it reaches vastly further back into the past, drawing its material from myth and traditional cosmogony"

(MITCHELL 1975, P. 86)

and it is a role which to the present still exists in many indigenous societies worldwide.

The Shaman is a communities' spiritual guide their channel for communication with the spiritual order. He (or she) is a judge, a politician, healer, poet, mystic, artist and ceremonialist for the society in which he lives, being the chief of certain communities, whilst being the mysterious outsider to others. But a common position is shared by every form and type of Shaman, regardless of geographic or historical habitat.

These qualities are a perception for other realms of reality, the ability to directly communicate with the spiritual forces that mould the community's lives and a mastery of the techniques of ecstasy.

Traceable to palaeolithic time, it has been widely deduced that the Shaman was the sorcerer of the hunt, becoming the master of the wild animals who provided sustenance and clothing for himself and his people. (Fig 1) To these ends he became an adept at animal disguise and mimicry, creating his ceremonial dances out of their movements, in doing so creating a metaphysical bond between himself and his communities' prey, influencing their destiny to create a fruitful hunt. (Fig. 2)

From these early times the phenomena of magic, art, religion and society were bonded. The psychic/spiritual bond that the Shaman created with these animals was to be the foundation of the first instance of magical/religious activity amongst humans, that of animism. Within such an animist system the concept of a disparate spiritual entity, such as a soul, was thought to have existed, and mankind not only believed that they had such a spiritual consciousness, but also that all creatures and indeed trees, rocks and places did too, and the souls of such elements had the power to 'possess' a man, or a man to 'possess' them.

Shamanism in effect was applied animism, as it still is today. When nature is perceived to be a living web of interconnected spirits, the Shaman's role becomes that of a sacred intermediary between the different planes of existence, the mundane and the numinous.

Figure 1.



1. A cave painting depicting a Shaman, with his bird staff, in repose beside a sacrificed (disembowelled) bison. The spirits of both Shaman and bison are liberated one through trance, the other through death creating communion between the two. (Cave painting, Lascaux, France, Upper Palaeolithic).



Figure 2.



2. The famous "Dancing Sorcerer" cave painting, seemingly depicting a Shaman dressed in animal skins with a horses tail and reindeer antlers. (Drawing after Abbe Henri Brevil, of cave painting, Les Trois Freres, Ariege, France, upper Palaeolithic).



Such communication is achieved in a state of ecstatic trance which denotes the Shaman as the chosen spiritual ceremonialist within his community. Only the divine vocation of the Shaman allows for survival as both a God and a human, not only receiving sacred knowledge through ecstatic encounters with the spirits, but also acting as an interpreter of these revelations, applying their effects through his wisdom and knowledge. He is as Mircea Eliade says " A technician of the sacred". (ELIADE 1964, P.33)

The Initiation

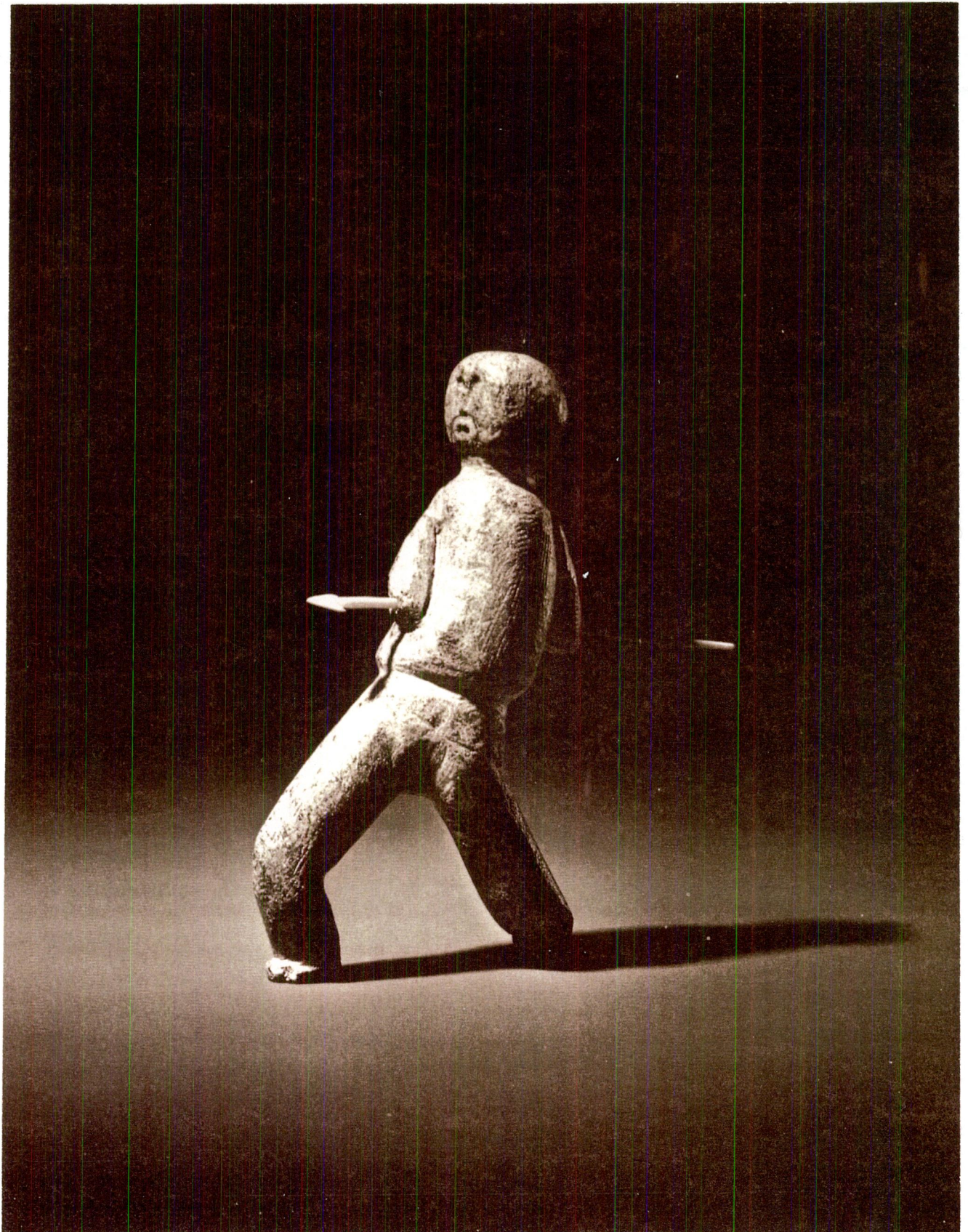
The most revelatory element of a Shaman's vocation is the call to service and initiation procedures that he must pass through, and it is these steps that form the departure, from the profane pre-enlightened individual, to the sacred visionary. This period of transformation seems to have a patterned course across all the disparate cultural instances of Shamanism. This break from the mundane is characterised by three main features, the experiences of death, rebirth, and revelation of the sacred. The indoctrination to the vocation is opened by a separation from the mundane world, a rejection of the secular world and an entrance to the realm of the interconnected spirit world. This change is visited upon different neophytes in different manners. Some times the vocation is passed through a hereditary lineage, sometimes the foster society chooses and encourages a child amongst them who has shown a proclivity for the sacred, to follow the Shamanic way.

But the most common form of initiational designation is that where the neophyte receives visions that illuminate his realization. This path, of being 'chosen' rather than 'choosing' can be an exceedingly disturbing revelation to the neophyte as the entrance into the unknown is by nature an introduction to the chaotic. This is the entrance to the crisis journey.

This crises journey is usually heralded by the instance of an intense sickness or near death experience, brought on by disease or accident. In the aftermath of such instances the harbinger of the visions that illuminate the neophyte, are viewed, usually, to have been divinely sent, and so the disease or accident is viewed as a sacred revelation. Such trauma, of a physical or phycological/spiritual nature, brings the victim within the realm of death, and so is exposed to a fundamental crisis. In this moment the neophyte turns inward and faces the internal realities of spirit and mortality. Such engagement with fear places the mortal human in perspective, revealing his position in relation to the divine spirit which he discovers is intertwined in all that exists. Thus, this initial exposure to psychic/spiritual reality is the neophyte's first direct encounter with chaos and natural numinous unity. Such an experience can only result in the annihilation of the 'sufferers' ego. (Fig. 3).

With the destruction of the ego, comes the dissolving of the boundaries between inner and outer, object and subject. Such a dissolving results in the Shaman being absorbed into the true grand matrix of the cosmos. The ego is the dominant, and dominator, archetype of our world.

Figure 3.



3. An Eskimo carving depicting a Shaman harpooning himself, thus suffering intense crisis in the search for a higher order of knowing (Eskimo carving in grey stone, ivory and bone by Emik, from Payne Bay, Canada, 1949).



The very existence of ego is defined in terms of control and the constant modelling process that the ego pursues is an attempt to fight the absence of closure, which is the fundamental state of chaos. The ego demands closure and a rational system of boundaries from which to create a finite assessment of its constitution. When the engagement of fear destroys the strictures of the ego, this signals the resumption and acceptance of life's natural state, chaos. With chaos comes the opening of the Shaman's vision to the nature kin, the spirits, the past and the future. Chaos is beyond rational apprehension, and once the neophyte comes to accept the nature of this phenomena, this rich stream of spirit he has been exposed to, he may feed from it as an oracle of divine revelation.

Such encounters with divine truth are also experienced in dreams, which again seem to choose the elected neophyte, instead of him choosing his vocation, as dreams are involuntary and uncontrived. Again through such visions the soul is freed of the prison of its ego and its time governed mortal body so to open to instruction and ultimately transformation. As Eliade has noted to have contact with the spirits is to have contact with the dead, and to speak with the dead, is to be dead. This death achieved through ritual, dream or sickness is the gateway to rebirth in an illuminated form. The Shaman returns from his destruction, in a new enlightened form, reborn with the wings of freedom and transcendence, and allied with the spirit who destroyed the former incarnation of the Shaman, who has now become the Shamans instructor and helper (Fig. 4). These spirit allies usually make themselves known in the form of animals.



Figure 4

4. A spirit ally, in the form of a bear, instructs a Shaman in the way of animal wisdom. (Sacred redstone pipe, East Dakota, USA).



It is through an acceptance and humbling before these spirit emissaries that the Shaman is saved from death, and it is his acceptance of the reality of the spirits and subsequent acceptance of this role of Shaman that in fact heals the Shaman. Through this pivotal action the Shaman not only accepts the vocation to heal through his power attained by his experience of engaging death, but miraculously heals himself, as his knowledge of the nature of his crisis enables him to master the spirits that control, appease, subdue and direct spirits that separates the Shaman from his community and their mundane existence as he is the master and ally of these forces and they are the victims of their power and in the animist world-view, everything is infused with the forces of the spirit world.

The Vocation:

After the ordeal and subsequent revelation of the Shaman, in the death and rebirth process of his initiation, the second feature of his vocation is his duty towards his community. The spirits call on Shaman neophytes not to bless the individual with divine knowledge, but instead to 'recruit' a human to act as a singular channel by which to reveal insights and balance a mortal society. The gifts awakened in the Shaman are not for use in private. His whole lifeway is created for service to the community. His work is directed towards the healing of individuals, and the collective, of his society through the use of natural medicines and the balancing of the sick in relation to the greater cosmos. He is recognised as a vital element for a healthy society by his people and always greatly respected and supported by his community.

When a society is aware that they are not in control of nature but merely part of its grand scheme, then they appreciate the nature of sacredness and divinity. Such a community will naturally greatly value the help of their sacred politician, their divine healer. Without him they have lost their direct channel to the spirits that control their world. Such respect is returned to the community by the Shaman, as it is universally recognised by the Shamanic elect that he is privileged to have been chosen by the spirits for his vocation. Without the community, and the tradition that places him within the community, the Shamans existence and abilities have no meaning. To refuse the vocation is to herald death, and the journey of the Shaman's lifeway is perilous

(the Chuckchee, a Siberian shamanic society, speak of the ones who are elected for the life of the Shaman as 'doomed to inspiration')

(HALIFAX, 1982, P.15)

and for this, his guidance is consummately followed, and his word adopted with faithful belief.

To seek wisdom the Shaman journeys out into the wilderness to seek visions. It is in these vast landscapes that the Shamans mind can become attuned to a state ready to receive visions. The external wilderness is the locus for the elicitation of the Shaman's inner wilderness and it is here that the spirits come forth and break into song. Engaging directly with nature again dissolves the boundaries between subject and object that the ego creates and creates and incredibly humbling and even fearful sense of wonder, in its place. This awe opens the way for the vision to enter the Shaman.

Through the ingestion of a psychedelic plant such as the buttons of the peyote cactus or psilocybe mushrooms, or through a dream-state/trance the Shaman re-enters the spiritual communion that he experienced in his initiation, where too he was placed in the solitude of crisis. A death to the mundane rational world again takes place and the Shaman is reborn within the numinous world, transcendent. The vital communion between culture and nature manifests here in these visionary moments. In a surrendered state the mortal is exposed to the eternal truths of sacred nature. The Shaman is the flute, the sacred is the breath and revelation the music. With this music, the Shaman returns to the reason for his journey: his people.

In engaging his community, the Shaman relates his revelations to his people through the language of ceremony and ritual. Ceremonial ritual is the manifested enactment of the Shaman's internal journey. The rhythm and flow of a sacred ritual brings the community (as the participants/audience) together into a unified field and creates a world in which a belief and subsequent engagement with the spirits can take place. The mystical inner journey of the sacred politician is exploded out from the Shaman's psyche and into the visible arena. The mythic images woven into a societies collective psyche and fabric suddenly manifest in dance, theatre, fire, water, colour and song, fulfilling the circle of tradition which surrounds and protects the society. The Shaman's body becomes a vessel for the spirits of the dead, the animals and the heavenly realm, that possess and communicate through the Shaman's human form. Once again he lives out an ecstatic journey, physically forming it whilst in a trance state undertaking the journey on the spiritual plane.

Through creative expression the spiritual journey is elevated, mythologized and collectively absorbed and understood. The inner revelations are danced manifest, witnessed, shared and ultimately exorcized.

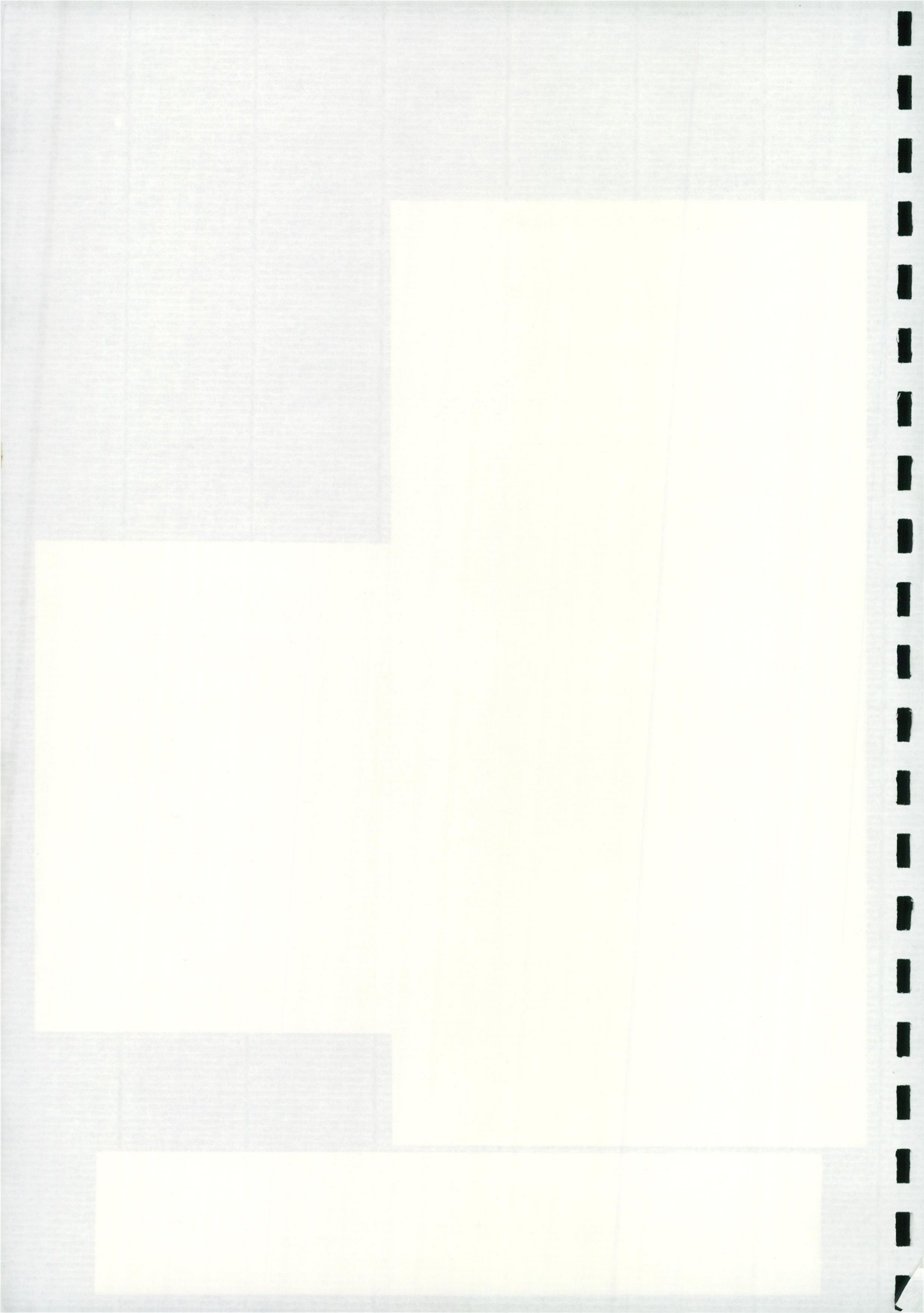
This is where the poetic artistic qualities of the Shaman are fully engaged. If the Shaman surrenders himself fully to the spirits they will sing through his form re-establishing the mystical unity of the mundane with the numinous that was lost at the beginning of time. This unifying of the sacred circle is codified in the Shamans' chants and songs, in masks and costume that he wears in the dances and theatre that he animates, (Fig. 5) making visible the passionate journey he is internally experiencing, draws the community into a whole. His art is the substance of survival, the very blood of the tradition that will inform his community's identity and give them strength, for it gives structure to that which is unfathomable, flesh to that which is invisible, a voice to that which is silent and coherence to the chaotic. By representing that which is intangible the Shaman acts as a focus for the vast ethereal energies which create his visions and inform his wisdom, and by dancing the myths which control life he attains some control over the eternal and unlimited forces of nature's spirit. The ritual becomes a catalyst for the voice of the numinous and the beliefs of the people.

In this moment of ecstasy, mysterious chants, songs and sound burst forth from the Shaman, again created by the forces that guide him in his internal adventure and blossoming into the air of the ceremonial ritual.

Figure 5:



5. In colour, a Shamans costume covered with symbolic images and talismans including feathers, the faces of summoned spirits, and on his right shoulder a chinese oracular mirror to assist the Shaman in seeing the worlds beyond. (Shaman's costume, Tungus, Siberia, Late 18th C.) Inset is a photo of a Finno-Ugrian Shamaness dancing in a trance whilst playing her drum, adorned with animal pelts bird wings and talismands. (Photo by Kurt and Margot Lubinsky).



These poetries overwhelm the Shaman and transform his identity to divine oracle and his form to spirit. Geronimo, the apache chief and Shaman told the ethnomusicologist Natalie Curtis

"As I sing, I go through the air to a holy place..... I change, becoming spirit only"

(HALIFAX 1979, P.32)

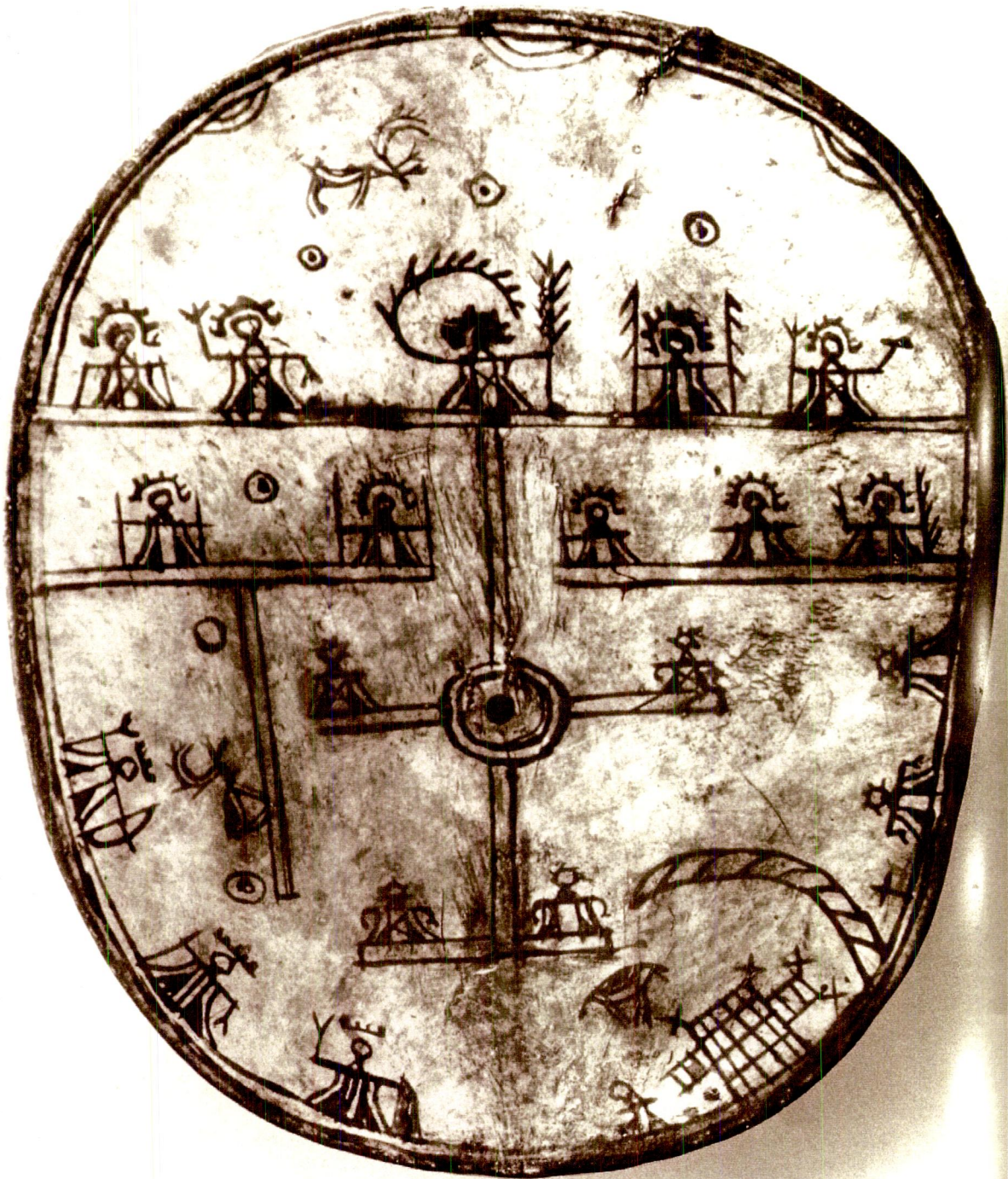
These chants are of primary power, as they become a sacred centre, drawing the spirits of the ceremonies participants towards this centre. The voice is the voice of the spirits who exist at this centre of being. The Huichol Shaman Matsuwa told Joan Halifax in 1977

"From Peyote comes forth Kauyumarie, the little dear spirit ally.... when you hear me chanting the sacred songs, it is not I who sing but Kauyumarie who is singing into my ear. And I transmit these songs to you. It is he who teaches us, shows us the way. This is how it is"

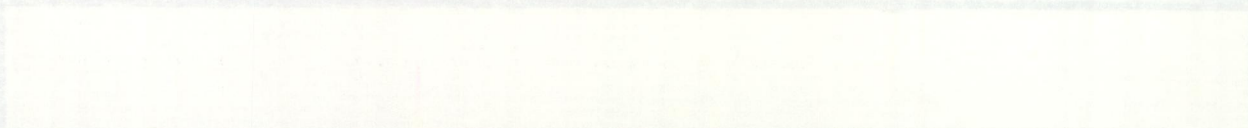
(HALIFAX, 1979, P.250)

This sacred centre from where the spirit voice emanates, is often represented within Shamanic societies as the axis mundi, the tree of life, the cosmic tree (Fig. 6) This tree is the threshold between the immortal and the mortal, as it harbours the divine sap of immortality, and transects the three worlds. The underworld is said to be penetrated by the trees roots, the middle world, that world of the mundane which we inhabit and is represented by the trunk, and, the crown of the tree which represents the heavenly realm. The tree is the place of confluence of the Shamans community, pointing the societies spiritual energy skyward, to the birds, Shamanic symbols of transcendence and bearers of celestial messages.

Figure 6.



6. A painting on the skinhead of a Shamans drum depicting the cosmic tree, the axis mundi, transecting the three worlds whilst standing at the centre of all (Lapp Shamans Drum).



The Shamans ecstatic journey often takes him from the underworld domain of evil spirits and the dead through the trunk of the tree and ascending the crown into contact with the spirit world, which he receives revelation within so to return through the middle world trunk to his community.

The axis mundi forms a focus and a centre point for the sacred activities of the Shamanic trance ceremony and acts as both the centre of the living universe for the Shamanic society and as a centre for their traditional identity. Within the ceremonial ritual the means for communal ascent to the higher plane of consciousness the cosmic tree's crown, the realm of the sun, was the Shaman's "Horse" the name commonly given to his drum by the Shaman. (Fig. 7). The constant monotonous beat of the drum binds together all the elements of the ritual, and all the people present into a unified group. The rhythm summons the benevolent spirits to the drum and catches them within its frame, made from a sacred tree, and its horse-skin face. The beat of the drum in constant repetition creates a suspension of time within the ceremony and induces a trance state in the Shaman, and in the entire community present. This rhythm carries those assembled up the cosmic tree, and into the realm of the sun, where the community are set in rapture and balance is attained which heals all that was problemated. (Fig. 8)

This is the lifeway of the Shaman, illustrated by characteristics that are universal to all Shamans from pre-palaeolithic times to modern day, and from the tungus of Siberia to the Huichol of Mesoamerica.

Figure 7:



7. A Siberian Shaman, at the turn of the century, plays his frame drum during a healing ceremony.

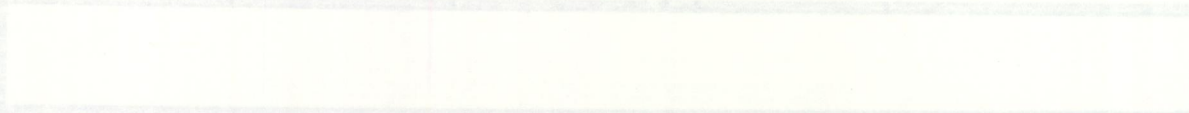
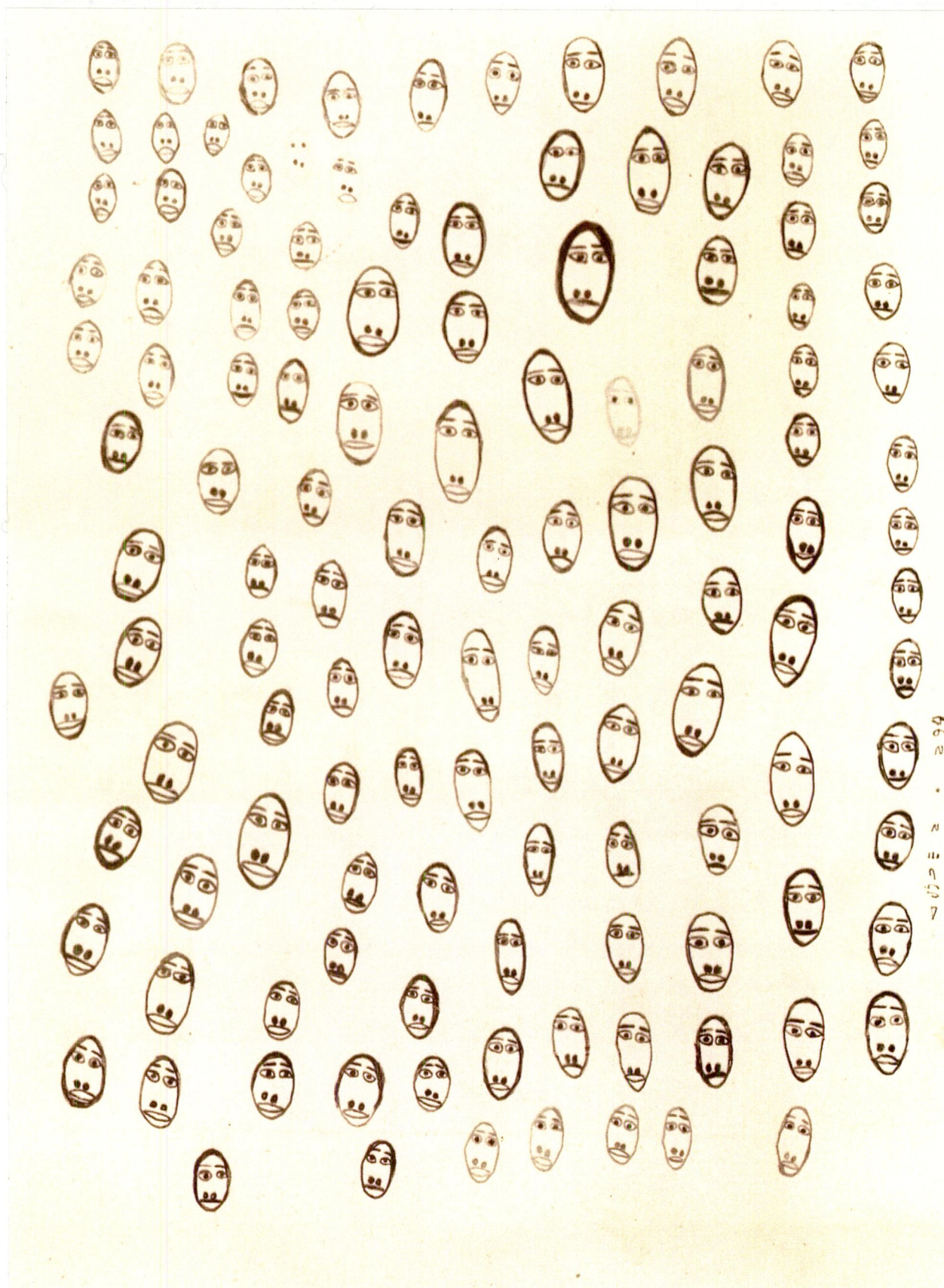
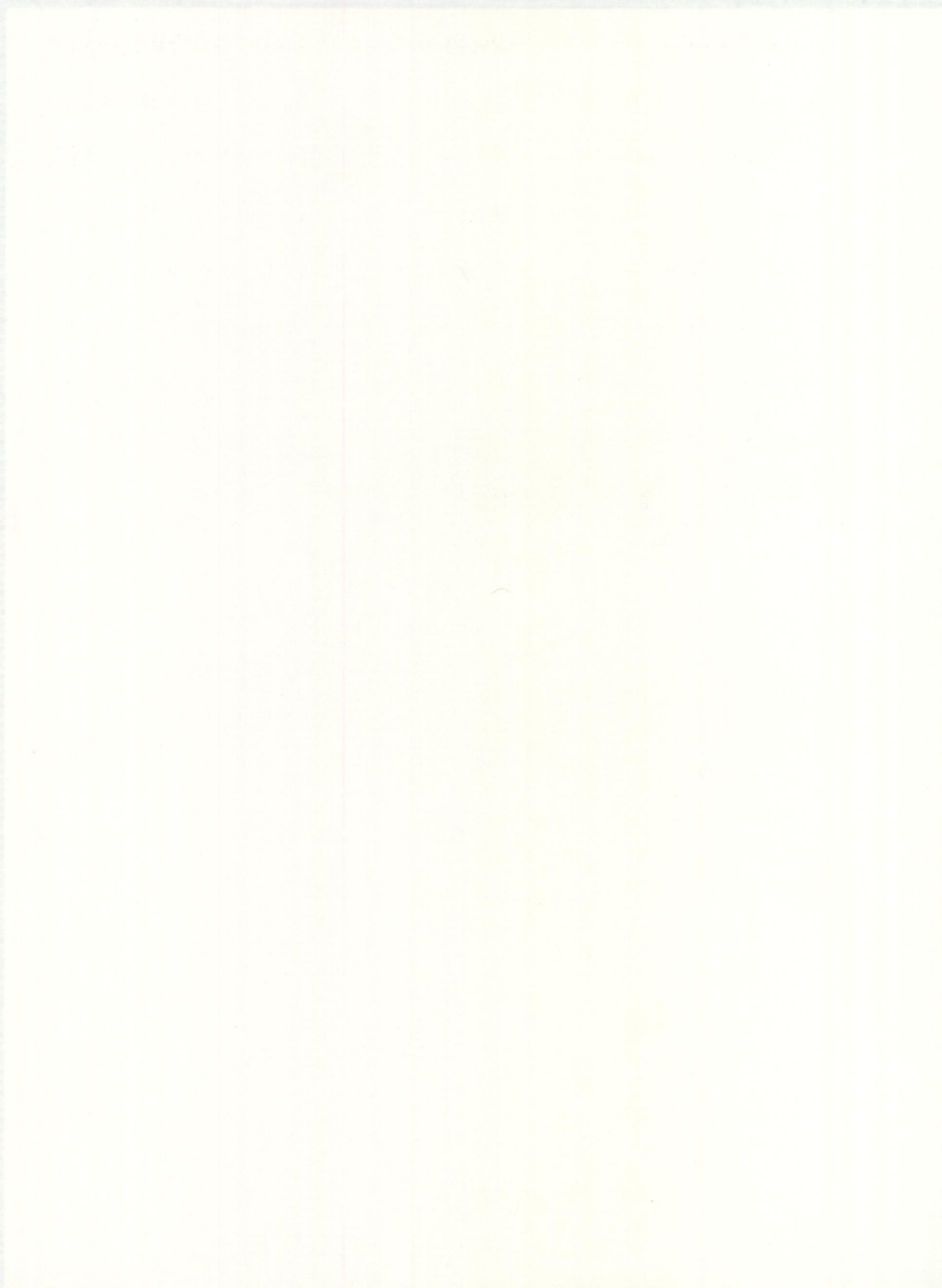


Figure 8:



8. An Eskimo drawing portraying an entire community in a trance state during a Shamanic ceremony. ('People stunned by the Drum' by Luke Anguhadluq, Baker Lane, Eskimo, Alaska, 1972).



The role of the Shaman is a divine vocation, in its purest sense. Born to a secular life, the Shaman is chosen by the spiritual forces to be his (or her) communities visionary intermediary, to exist as a channel by which the numinous may communicate to the mundane. His initiation embraces the experience of death, rebirth and illumination, through which the once "profane" neophyte is introduced to the realms of pain and sickness, chaos and spirit, divinity and nature's true numinous state. He gains such experience of both pain and ecstasy for one purpose solely; to balance and heal the community of which he is part. The Shaman is the wounded healer, the myth dancer, the spirit singer, the soul guide, whose whole existence is to help and guide his people in the all important and all permeating realm of the spirit of nature.

CHAPTER THREE: THE HEALING

"The human mind is haunted by both the many presences sensed within the self and by a confused sense of self. Wherever we turn in the world of nature and the psyche, we encounter life, animation, and a willingness to communicate that confounds the fragile pyramid of boundary consciousness and human values that have emerged over historical time through the suppression of our intuitions"

(MC KENNA, 1992, P.107)

"What we are learning is that for every situation in our lives there is a thought pattern that both precedes and maintains it, so that our consistent thinking patterns, create our experience. By changing our thinking, we can also change our experience. People give legitimacy to all social institutions, no matter how powerful those institutions seem to be, and they also have the power to withdraw legitimacy"

(GABLIK, 1991, P.23)

"The entire world may be understood as the dream of an awakened dreamer. In dreams of this order there is, literally, no distinction between levels of reality. Spiritual and material aspects of the world come into existence together, and are perceived and created simultaneously. Emanation is equated with realization".

(COXHEAD AND HILLER, 1976, P.65)

The lifeway/archetype of the Shaman has become an incredibly appropriate and potent archetype for the imperative transformation that the societies who subscribe to the scientific /industrial western world-view and the modernist/post modernist art movement that exists within these societies, a transformation from our current anthropocentric individualist mode to that of a more holistic responsible mode. The Shaman's lifeway has become such a potent role model for a reform of our world-view not by adapting to our situation, but reversely by its historical consistency and harmony, which serves to highlight our recent social history's escalating problems.

Such an appropriate archetype is qualified not only by the correspondence between the series of events which combine to result in the Shamans transformation, and the fundamentally analogous events which western society is experiencing now, but also by his dedication to address the imbalances in his community. Address these imbalances by addressing the spiritual aspect of his community. In the essence of these events lies the possible ingredients to our cure.

Society:

Just as the neophyte is led to his transformation by crisis, so are we. The arrogant mishandling of our natural environment is, in reality, leading the living earth to death. Over population, incessant consumption, a refusal to honour obvious limits, a truncation in our ability to care for or believe in other social or spiritual systems than our own, and a denial of the inter-relational character of all nature, has created a bizarre disease of social habit, in which we choose to ignore the taboos which we must observe to avoid our self destruction, which we are being made aware of increasingly as being a genuine risk in our near future. We live in the first historical era where one of the worlds animals has acquired the ability to completely annihilate their whole bio-sphere habitat.

Our advanced and incredibly sophisticated media and communications systems relay the magnitude of our crisis to us on a daily basis, but somehow western society seems to have failed to profoundly engage this reality. We seem to avoid at all costs actually engaging fear.

This trance of dis-engagement is created by our denial of the interrelatedness of all nature, resulting in our habit of witnessing the mass defiling of our societies and our environment as spectators, not as the abused party.

Many people would disagree with this point, arguing that they are concerned and active in the fight against the worlds destruction, but in an applied realistic sense, how many of us are actually imposing limits on our behaviour that constitute a genuine sacrifice in terms of our normal consumption and lifestyles? How large is the percentage of modern western society that are actually effecting the radical changes to our social and spiritual lives that our present dilemma demands? How many of us feel enough pain to make us attack the cause instead of just abating the symptoms? I genuinely see our current mode of activity as being passive recognition, an activity that appears in an eleventh hour era that instead demands passionate action.

In this age of abuse, it is time to engage our fears. The facts highlighting our mortality are the tolls of the limits we have ignored, and like the Shaman archetype we must engage in the reality of our sickness. The time has come to dismember the body of ideological precepts that the western world-view is fleshed with, and die in our current form. Of course this seems very dramatic, but nuclear weaponry is dramatic, the rate of tropical deforestation is dramatic, enforced extinction of tribal cultures and whole animals species is dramatic, as is the genetic engineering of new species of animals and plants better suited to intensive farming and production.

It seems very dramatic to state that this is the most perverted and unnatural era the history of the world has ever known, but nonetheless is this not the truth?

Our technology has twisted from being tools of assistance for man into

"the disclosure to man of all beings whatsoever as objective, calculable quantifiable, disposable raw material which is of value only insofar as it contributes to the enhancement of human power"

(DEVALL, 1985, P.99),

and our sophistication and progress have become the false prizes of a race that has divorced itself from the nature that supports it.

Dramatic, yes, and maybe even 'subjective' but is not our situation tragically dramatic? And what is objectivity if it is not a tool of the dehumanising detachment that allows the mind to ignore the heart? A phenomenon that is at the source of our crises.

The literal definition of the word 'humble' is to be "conscious of one's failings" and "to lower in status". Through humility we must engage in the reality of our failings, and in engaging the truth of our position in a holistic hierarchy of nature, experience the 'death' of our current western ideology/ego. Like the Shaman archetype, the dissolution of our current paradigm will concurrently be realised by, and will realise, the true character of the interrelationships and equality that constitutes the whole body of nature, and therefore our true place in the larger whole of all life. As a race, the human depends on the food the land creates and the air the plants purify.

Our whole existence is supported by the complex natural structure of our environment, yet our disrespect towards these very structures signify a fundamental lack of humility that is unique to the human, and which has been exalted in the classically anthropocentric western world-view. Such an illusion of autonomy, however, is easy to dissolve and transcend, once properly engaged and examined. The difficulty exists in our willingness to sacrifice the elements of our lifestyles that will enlighten us to such engagement.

Once engaged, and the sacrifices observed, the death of the former destructive collective psyche (cultural paradigm) heralds the 'rebirth' of a new harmonious world-view. However such a radical transformation necessitates the application of a quality which our education into the western world-view has managed to starve us of, that of belief. Belief is the true precious substance of our age. To enable us to reach a visionary state we must transcend the limited, closed world of rational perception.

"Paradox that it may sound, it is only the divine and what is divinized that can perceive and experience the divine. It is only in the divine light that the soul can see - see, that is to say, the inner reality of thing, their inner love and beauty"

(SHERRARD, 1990, P.158)

By allowing ourselves to believe in phenomena that we are ignorant of, but which we require, we create the power to realise such phenomena. Emanation is equated with realization, the reward of faith.

Concerning such cultivation of belief, there is an incredible irony at the heart of the scientific/rationalist ideology which has become the most influential source for the western world-view.

This irony is that the cutting edge of contemporary science

"has begun to transcend the mechanistic world-view. The idea that everything is determined in advance and in principle predictable has given way to the ideas of indeterminism, spontaneity and chaos. The invisible organizing powers of animate nature are once again emerging in the form of fields. The hard, inert atoms of newtonian physics have dissolved into structures of vibratory activity. The uncreative world machine has turned into a creative, evolutionary cosmos"

(SHELDRAKE, 1990, P.XIV)

Such a collapse of previously presumed constraints can enable us to regain a sense of wonder at the complexity, beauty and ultimately mystery of the natural world. With such a recovery of wonder comes a chance for a re-entry of recognition of the sacred into our lives, and a sense of awe, upon which to build our respect. This, like the Shaman, is our humbling and enlightening encounter with chaos and the spiritual realm.

Such reforms within the sciences which are recognising the existence of an indeterminable mysterious essence within nature serve to further highlight the argument that the scientific laws that were set in place at the time of the enlightenment are mistaken aberrations in humanities understanding of the universe. Even the founding fathers of these sciences, Bacon, Descarte and Newton, were deeply influenced by The hermetic arts of alchemy, which concerning the matters of spirit and nature held

"The orthodox view that had survived into the middle ages from prehistoric times as expressed by the alchemist Basilus Valentine: 'The earth is not a dead body, but is inhabited by a spirit that is it's life and soul. All created things, minerals included, draw their strength from the earth spirit. This spirit is life, it is nourished by the stars, and it gives nourishment to all the living things it shelters in its womb:

(MICHELL, 1975, PG.14).

No lesser a figure than Rene Descarte was informed in a dream at the beginning of his career, by an angel, that the conquest of nature was to be achieved through measure and number. It seems that the ultimate application of the reductionist/mechanistic ideology which has informed our destructive cultural habits, evolved after the lives of its founders who themselves retained some semblance of spiritual belief. Again the 'crisis journey' of the Shaman finds a parallel with our present situation. If the Shaman resists the calling, he will be consumed by the forces that created his sickness, and will be destroyed. The destructive elements within western culture so too can only avoid destruction, in this instance of the whole natural world, by succumbing to the metaphysical truths that defy our currently destructive ethos, and recognising their mortality. In short our present crisis demands that we regain a spiritual holistic dimension to our lives, and humble our ways.

In the Shaman's view, the turmoil and pain he experiences are to be turned to creative use, and he perceives his trials as a necessary learning process by which he can discover the true path of co-existence with the sacred. The magnitude of our crisis is such that it has created an opportunity for a re-bonding of the community on a global scale, as co-operation is possibly the only system by which the malady of the western world can be resolved. Thus our collective dilemma can be (at least in one regard) turned to creative use, acting as a catalyst to reverse our social fragmentation.

The Arts:

After the Shamans death-illumination-rebirth passage of initiation to his vocation, the second principle feature of his lifeway is his dedication of his live to the welfare of his social group and the means by which he imparts his revelations to his community. In this second element of the Shaman's vocation, I believe, lies a further archetype, that contemporary art could use as a role-model to address the problems within the modernism/post-modernism genre referred to in Chapter One.

Our contemporary arts have, to an extensive degree, become a private affair. The role of the artist has, mostly, become dislocated from the rest of the community, and to an increasing degree speaks only to a small, elite 'art' audience. This dislocation has established the governing modern art aesthetics as those of isolation and detachment, abstraction and dynamic innovation, with subject matter increasingly constituting pure individualism and self-referentialism.

The collapse of a definable, unifying tradition within art and the exaltation of hyper individualist innovation as the true measure of "good art" by such influential critics as Greenburg and Herbert Read, has resulted in the great achievement of modern art as being the collapse of a common visual language by which art can be communicated to the whole of is foster society, not just an elite. Our art now has lost the coherence of art produced in societies which had a strong communal heritage and identity where

"The artist exalted the dominate values of his society, and society in turn recognised in an art that was expressive of its values religion, ritual, and art existed primarily to support the social order:

(GABLIK, 1984, P.30)

The key feature of the post-modern age, in society as in art, has been the dissembling of myth symbol and meaning, actions that have served to further remove societies bonds, the elements that held its disparate parts together and form a unified identity.

These aesthetics have dragged art from the centre of society to its current resting place in the western world which is at the periphery, concerning mostly the rich and the over-educated. There are artist working outside and against this system but the vast majority of contemporary art has managed to become impenetrable to the vast majority of contemporary society. Like the Shaman archetype the artist and the art infrastructure must now realise that their new aesthetics must be those of compassion, openness and communication. The modern artist must now restore faith in the community that art is a vital force that can heal, guide and enlighten, not merely entertain, confound or confront, the modes by which it has largely become to be known.

Art can and has been for man cultures (in fact probably all cultures bar the modern capitalist/scientific) the potent manifestation of that cultures deep held beliefs and identity, both social and spiritual, both reflecting and inspiring these beliefs. art, abused and disseminated as it has become, still has to power integral to its nature, to illuminate and bond society.

"Next to religion there is nothing in culture more capable of stirring us to risk the solitary experience of psychic space than art. When so experienced, art is no accident. It is the child of that same surge that swirled the universe into galaxies, stars, and planets, that drove the individuation of being into our water bearing blue earth, into the billions of unreplicated lives it has borne; the surge that resists the entropy of our fear, our willed not knowing; the surge that keeps the possibility of being spinning through time"

(MARTINEZ, 1992, P.59)

Art speaks first to the soul, through the intuitive senses, whereas literary narrative is debased in its ability to express by its reliance on the confines of verbal language. The Shaman seeks to engage with the immense power of nature and sacred metaphysical truth, through direct experience and revelation in the natural wilderness, both internal and external. With the visionary knowledge he has gained he then returns to his society and applies his vision to their situation in an attempt to heal, re-balance, and reveal to them the reality of the sacred world he has come in contact with for them. he does this not through sterile instruction, but through song dance ceremony and visual tools. He speaks through art.

Because the source of the sacred is the energy of life itself, no matter how far from recognising the necessity for a spiritual dimension in our 'ordinary' lives, it is only the denial (or lack of recognition) of the spirit that wards it off from our existence. The source of sacred vision is perpetually present. It is merely our ability desire and means to bring this fully rounded vision to contemporary western living that is the modern artists most vital objective.

As artist we must turn our attentions toward the manifold manifestations of the sacred character of nature, and drawing wisdom from direct thorough engagement and experience of the inter-relational essence of all nature, encode this wisdom in compassionate meaningful art forms that can, in turn, directly engage the whole community and act as a new role model for a radically revised set of social goals and aesthetics; those of co-existence, humility and holistic reality recognising the genuine existence of sacred forces within all nature, the nature that supports us, and is us.

"We cannot actualise our spiritual potentiality, let alone produce a sacred art, unless and until the inner spiritual vision we have of things is in harmony with the way in which we actually conceive, rationally and consciously, and perceive the outer physical world"

(SHERRARD, 1990, P.147)

This new art, as with the Shaman's art, should attempt to address the imbalances in the source of our aberrations, not merely identify the symptoms, and to truly affect this radical change in priorities, our whole society will have to re-assess and transform its applied attitudes to effect an actual change in its anthropocentric secular world-view. Maybe then the once indistinguishable boundaries of art and other social interactions can dissolve once again.

The ultimate lesson to be learnt from the archetype of the Shaman's lifeway is thus: Art and its creative energy must be re-asserted as the most important aspect of western societies arts, replacing the artist as a centre stage personality.

As artist we must learn humility by truly engaging in the realities of a holistic view of life and mans place in nature as a whole, thus allowing our visionary sight to unfold, an engagement that will dissolve our individualist ego based desires for detached self-promotion and aggrandizement, and place our skills at the service of our communities, both in the social, and wider context of the communities of all life to which ultimately we belong. The creative act has the power to act as the prayer that will heal the damage created by the curse of the destructive act, and as channels for the creativity that can serve as a coherent and inspiring voice for the mystery of the divine, it is the duty and indeed the honour of the artists of this age and western society to illuminate, reflect, and celebrate the metaphysical truths which can serve to transform us from profane narcissistic destroyers to magical healers.

CONCLUSION

"The Shaman is self slain through the surrender of all that is transient, becoming like a great field that is ploughed, ripped open for seed to be planted"

(JOAN HALIFAX, 1982, P.25)

Through the lifeway of the Shaman I believe we have been given an incredibly significant and potent map with which to lead western society, and in an expanded form all societies adherent to the western world-view, out of the crisis situation which it has created, and which it finds itself in.

Principally evolving from renaissance Europe and its subsequent capitalist colonial nations, has formed what has become the modern western world-view, informed by the advancement of the status of the individual, to the extent that individualism has now become the basis for modern criteria applied to measuring freedom, at great cost to strong traditional structures, as well as the progressive bankruptcy of applied religious belief, the ideological percepts created by the industrial/scientific revolutions of the enlightenment, and the adoption of the economic-consumerist ethos as the basis of social dynamics.

This incredibly influential paradigm has resulted in a unique cultural aberration in the history of civilization, by creating the first ever official social ideology which denies the existence of a spiritual essence in nature, and has resulted in the mass desecration of our common natural world in the name of progress and profit.

Further compacting our crisis, the contemporary structures, social relevance, and aesthetics of the arts within the western world, arts of the modernist/post-modernist ethos, have become those of anti-social, detached, ego-based, elitist and market driven concerns, resulting in the retraction of the arts from their original position in the centre of their society, to their present position at the periphery, exacerbated by the collapse of a coherent tradition within art, and the loss of a widely comprehensible visual language with which society could access the art.

I have argued that the death of our current anthropocentric, ego-drive social order must occur in order for the collective psyche and soul of western civilisation to be rescued and transcend our intensifying crisis, realising and revealing the truth of the sacred power that permeates all of natures' manifestations, thus humbling ourselves to take our true, equal, non-dominative, place in the world's natural order. To these ends I have detailed the archetype of the Shaman's initiation, involving his death to his former secular self, enlightenment and rebirth in illuminated, balanced form.

Further utilising the archetype of the Shaman I propose that western societies artists adopt a renewed commitment to the healing and enlightenment of their communities, through enchantment and celebration and the employment of new co-operational, compassionate, engaged aesthetics.

To reach these means I urge the pursuit of direct experience in the natural environment, the observance of humility and pride, and sincere attention to be restored to any system which opens our natural abilities for healing, visionary sight, employing, as artist and the greater community, the creative act as a prayer for our re-balance as humans within the great rhythm of nature.

"In ancient times, when balance was lost on the planet, a great flood came to destroy all that which was on earth so that the world could be reborn. A similar imbalance seems to be occurring this generation; we have forgotten our life source, the sun and the sacred sea, the blessed land, the sky and all things of nature. Unless we remember quickly what our lives are about, unless we celebrate through ceremony and prayer, we will again face destruction, but this time, it will be by fire".

Matsuwa, a Huichol Shaman (Mexico) 1972.

(HALIFAX, 1979, P. 250).

(Fig. 9).

Figure 9:



9. The huichol Shaman, Matsuwa, in trance during a Shamanic ceremony in the mexican sierras. (Photo by Prem Das).



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