The Performing Artist as the Shaman of Higher Civilization

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Shamanism is a very complex phenomenon that has been considered exotic, if not quixotic throughout all of history, at least the history recorded by members of Western European civilization. In most cultures the world over, there are women as well as men who exhibit both the need and the ability to induce in themselves the kinds of experiences that take them to the brink of permanent madness or, even, death. Those experiences include depersonalization and fragmentation, in addition to feelings of weightlessness, ascensionism or flying, and bilocation. There are as many words referring to these practitioners as there are tribes supporting such practices. In some areas of the globe, they are referred to as *kam, angekok, ojun,* or *tadyb,* while in others, they are known as the *piayé, curandero,* wizard, soothsayer, faith healer, shaman, or super-star, depending on the dialect of the particular tribe. Despite the potentially painful crashing during subsequent re-entry into everyday reality, they are supposed to be able to relate their experiences in a way that somehow touches their fellow tribesmen and does them some good.

The shamans prognosticate through their visions. Or, they wield and bend the future through their communications with the spirit world. Or, they provide catharsis through ecstatic rites grounded in psychotropic substances, or the kinds of vestibular stimulations that come from jumping, running, or frenetic dancing to loud music and fluctuating lights within an enclosed space—nowadays referred to as "runner's high," "disco high," or "free fall high." Great shamans are masters of ventriloquism and legerdemain.

They understand about speaking in tongues or voices, about laying on hands, and about diverting a subject's attention. In addition, they instinctively know when and how to employ music, dance, costume, and all the other components of theatrical performance.

Recently, shamanism has become a rather "hot topic" with the media and the popular press. Elsewhere in the world, as well as here in the United States of America, journalists have appropriated the word, applying it diversely, so as to make it a still trendier verbal convention. In addition to the issue of *People* magazine featuring Michael Jackson as a magician or born-again shaman, there have been the numerous articles in *Time* calling performers, like Bob Dylan, John Belushi, and Shirley MacLaine, shamans.[1] A recent issue commemorating Liberace reported that he also "often suggested that he enjoyed special spiritual grace, and some fans concluded he had faith-healing powers."[2]

Whether *The New York Times* is intellectually a notch or two above those magazines is irrelevant. The word shaman often appears in its entertainment section. There, reviewers refer to the international operatic stars brought into the Metropolitan Opera —interestingly enough, so far not the City Opera—as shamans.[3] In the late 1980's it seems to be no longer sufficient to praise a performer's talent or genius. He, and an occasional she, must absolutely be categorized as a shaman—the feminine form of the word, namely, shamanka, has not yet gained any currency, perhaps, because it, like babushka, sounds too frumpy to the consumers of high art.

The reverence for things shamanic has also spread to other middle class groups, like those who subscribe to the *Smithsonian*. An illustrated article about the world premiere of Janis Mattox's computerized opera, *Shaman,* on September 29, 1984 at Stanford University, described the performance combining multitrack tapes, plus four or so live performers. The reporter seemed intrigued by the possibility that the participants had formed a group in search of its acronym, Center for Computer Research in Music, purportedly pronounced "karma."[4]

[1] Albert Goldman, "Analyzing the Magic," *People Weekly Extra,* Vol. 22, No. 26 (November-December, 1984) 72-77. Jay Cocks, "Overdosing on Bad Dreams," *Time* (June 11, 1984) 89, and "The Postman Rings Forever," *Time* (October 20, 1986) 90.

[2] *Time* (February 16, 1987) 82.

[3] See, for example, Glenn Collins, "New Magic Makes the Audience Appear," *The New York Times* (Sun., July 5, 1987) H, 5 and 8.

[4] *Smithsonian* (December 1984) 97.

The readers of art journals and exhibition catalogues have also developed great interest in shamanism, largely due to Joseph Beuys and his fellow purveyors of multi-media events, happenings, and actions—op, pop, and hop were the 1960's designations. Beuys was rescued by Tartars when his *Luftwaffe* aircraft was shot down during World War II. Those tribesmen used fat and felt to fix him up, so Beuys adapted the like as his early sculpting materials. He went on to experiment with including sound, especially music, as an equally viable medium for sculpture. As Beuys himself explained during an interview in English in 1978, "So when I appear as a kind of shamanistic figure, or allude to it, I do it to stress my belief in other priorities and the need to come up with a completely different plan for working with substances. For instance, in places like universities, where everyone speaks so rationally, it is necessary for a kind of enchanter to appear."[5] Many of the drawings Beuys entitled shaman were contained in the exhibition sponsored by London's renowned Victoria and Albert Museum, which also brought out a very impressive catalogue of them in 1983. Some of those drawings were studies for so-called shamanic happenings, the most startling of which had to have been *Coyote*. It constituted the three days Beuys spent in the carefully delimited space of a New York art gallery together with a live coyote, a cane, much straw, fifty copies of the *Wall Street Journal,* a triangle, and a tape-recording of chaotic turbine sounds. Wrapped in an enormous felt blanket and wearing the trilby hat he insisted

[5] The interview was by Caroline Tisdall, who published it, among others, in *Joseph Beuys* (New York, 1979) 23. Beuys again and again popularized what had already become a long tradition of information in German academic circles. Consider Beuy's concern for the mythic underpinnings of European civilization in other of his interviews, for example, the one published in *Moderna Museet.* Moderna Museets Utstallningskatalog, No. 90 [January 16-February 28, 1971] (Stockholm, 1971) unpag. 7-8. *Similia similibus: Joseph Beuys zum 60. Geburtstag,* ed. Johannes Stüttgen (Cologne, 1981) 203. *Kreuz + Zeichen: Religiöse Grundlagen im Werk von Joseph Beuys* (Aachen, 1985) 6, 82-85. Wilhelm Bojescul, *Zum Kunstbegriff des Joseph Beuys,* Kultur—Literatur—Kunst, ed. Jürgen Klein, Vol. 1 (Essen, 1985) 22, 94, 118, 130, 135. In the course of what might strike some scholars as a campaign of intellectual disinformation, many articles appeared in print. Among the most fashionable, yet least informed were those by Jack Burnham. His "The Artist as Shaman," "Objects and Ritual," and "Contemporary Ritual: A Search for Meaning in Post Historical Terms" were brought together in the book, *Great Western Salt Works: Essays on the Meaning of Post-Formalist Art* (New York, 1974). Of pertinence to this subject are pp. 140, 143, 151, 152, and 154. See also, Michael Fried, "Art and Objecthood," *Artforum* (Summer 1967) 12-23. The new-era mystification continues with books like the one by Gregory L. Ulmer, *Applied Grammatology, Post(e)-Pedagogy from Jacques Derrida to Joseph Beuys* (Baltimore and London, 1985) 229-241.

was shamanic, he was carried in and out on a stretcher and transported to and fro in an ambulance.[6]

Such events, as well as the present media use of the term shaman, are really not too hard to explain. There has been a gradual absorption from loftier heights of intellectual inquiry. Thinking of a kind of *versunkenes Kulturgut* is probably not altogether wrong. During the 1940's and 1950's, when all the social sciences were advancing mercilessly, reports about fieldwork in so-called primitive societies received increasing attention. The two names that stood out then and continue to stand out now are those of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Mircea Eliade. While the latter analyzed those reports in order to interpret the shaman as an archaic religious ecstatic, the former compared the shaman to a modern psychiatrist, stressing his salutary effects for given audiences. Lévi-Strauss went on to elaborate:

> The modern version of shamanistic technique called psychoanalysis thus derives its specific characteristics from the fact that in industrial civilization there is no longer any room for mythical time, except within man himself. From this observation, psychoanalysis can draw confirmation of its validity, as well as hope of strengthening its theoretical foundations and understanding better the reasons for its effectiveness, by comparing its methods and goals with those of its precursors, the shamans and sorcerers.[7]

With the 1960's, there dawned not only the highly tauted Age of Aquarius but also an age of increasing intellectual arrogance. Talented people, like Jerome Rothenberg, who edited the still valuable anthology, *Technicians of the Sacred,* asserted that it was precisely the new Western interest in the oral, tribal cultures of the Third World that had been responsible for such a massive popular return to intuition and instinct, as had ever been experienced on the face of this planet. He even went into print claiming that the

[6] *Joseph Beuys Drawings* (Leeds, Cambridge, and London, 1983) 11-12, 14, and 18, with shaman figures or shaman-related scenes on 50, 53, 54, 62, 73, 74, 80, 102, 106, 145, and 148. Caroline Tisdall, *Joseph Beuys Coyote* (Munich, 1980) 10-15. An eye-witness account was given by Professor Ingeborg Hoesterey of Indiana University in Bloomington, "Amerika liebt mich, Die erste Aktion von Joseph Beuys in den USA," *Der Tagesspiegel* (Berlin, June 8, 1974).

[7] Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Structural Anthropology,* tr. Claire Jacobson and Brooke Grundfest Schoepf, Vol. 1 (New York and London, 1963) 204. Interesting comparisons can be found in the writings of George Devereux, like, for example, "Normal and Abnormal" [1956] in *Basic Problems of Ethnopsychiatry,* tr. Basia Miller Gulati and George Devereux (Chicago, 1980) 14-17, 25, and 64-65.

Beat poets, along with Rainer Maria Rilke, Arthur Rimbaud, and the various generations of Dadaists, with their attempts to combine words, music, dance, and event, all represented "neo-shamanisms."[8] The explanation Rothenberg gave for the manipulation of the creative imagination is as follows:

> Our ideas of poetry—including, significantly, our idea of the poet—began to look back *consciously* to the early and late shamans of those other worlds: not as a title to be seized but as a model for the shaping of meanings and intensities through language. As the reflection of our yearning to create a meaningful ritual life—a life lived at the level of poetry—that looking-back related to the emergence of a new poetry and art rooted in performance and in the oldest, most universal of human traditions.[9]

By the mid 1970's, French intellectuals had so often invoked the word "shaman" in their debates as to make it a kind of theoretical buzz word. Roland Barthes, focussing on the subject of voice in "The Death of the Author," for example, had written that "in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, a shaman or speaker, whose 'performance' may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his 'genius.' "[10] Barthes did not, however, detail what he understood or meant by that still rather elusive word "shaman."

Jacques Derrida, like so many of his countrymen searching for answers, went back to ancient as well as 18th-century texts to explain the essence of performance, among other things. His conclusion was that Plato "is bent on presenting writing as an occult, and therefore suspect power. Just like painting, to which he will later compare it, and like optical illusions and the techniques of *mimesis* in general. His mistrust of the mantic and magic, of sorcerers and casters of spells is well attested."[11] The role of Socrates as a *pharmakeus,* or sorcerer, magician, shaman, was apparently definitively illustrated for Derrida by the passage in the *Symposium* where com-

[8] Jerome Rothenberg, *Technicians of the Sacred: A Range of Poetries from Africa, America, Asia, Europe, and Oceania,* 2nd rev. & enl. ed. (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London, 1985) xxx.

[9] *Ibid.* xviii-xix.

[10] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," tr. Richard Howard [*Aspen Magazine,* III, 5-6 (1968)], *The Discontinuous Universe, Selected Writings in Contemporary Consciousness,* eds. Sallie Sears and Georgianna W. Lord (New York, 1972) 8.

[11] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination,* tr. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, 1981) 97. Ulmer (footnote 5) 230-241, managed to further becloud the most pertinent issues about the backgrounds of shamanism.

parison is made to the shamanic power of Marsyas, the flute-playing satyr.[12] I think the section where Socrates is being addressed by Alcibiades is worth quoting at length in order to clarify matters somewhat:

> And are you not a flute-player? That you are, and a far more wonderful performer than Marsyas. For he indeed with instruments charmed the souls of men by the power of his breath, as the performers of his music do still: for the melodies of Olympus are derived from the teaching of Marsyas, and these, whether they are played by a great master or by a miserable flute-girl, have a power which no others have; they alone possess the soul and reveal the wants of those who have needs of gods and mysteries, because they are inspired. But you produce the same effect with the voice, and do not require the flute: that is the difference between you and him. When we hear any other speaker, even a very good one, his words produce absolutely no effect upon us in comparison, whereas the very fragments of you and your words, even at second-hand, and however imperfectly repeated, amaze and possess the souls of every man, woman, and child who comes within hearing of them. And if I were not afraid that you would think me drunk, I would have sworn as well as spoken to the influence which they have always had and still have over me. For my heart leaps within me more than that of any Corybantian reveller, and my eyes rain tears when I hear them. And I observe that many others are affected in the same way.[13]

To return to the here and now of the 1980's, it would seem that the word shaman has developed into a shibboleth for those associated with the Milwaukee Center for 20th-Century Studies. There, "shaman" seems to have somehow become intimately tied to postmodernism, a concept purportedly derived from Arnold Toynbee and given currency by Ihab Hassan. Michel Benamou has gone so far as to contend that performance, if not shamanism itself, is "the unifying mode of the postmodern."[14] Neither Toynbee, Hassan, nor Benamou, has, however, shown any histor-

[12] Derrida, *Dissemination* 118.

[13] *The Republic and Other Works,* tr. B. Jowett (Garden City, NY, 1960) 358.

[14] Michael Benamou, "Presence and Play," *Performance in Postmodern Culture,* eds. Michel Benamou and Charles Caramello (Madison, 1977) 3. See Ulmer (footnote 5), and Ihab Hassan, *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Towards a Postmodern Literature,* 2nd ed. (Madison and London, 1982) xi, 7, 10, 15. Compare also Robert Jay Lifton, *The Broken Connection: On Death and the Continuity of Life* (New York, 1979) 75-76, and *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York, 1986) 481-485, esp. 481: "All Nazi doctors, that is, were to become shamans, many of them black shamans in their ritualistic participation in killing processes in the name of healing the tribe or people."

ical accountability for their use of that vocabulary. Not one of them has offered a precise explanation of just what is meant within which context. The result is that we are left with nothing but confusion.

As these lengthy introductory remarks must indicate, the word shaman has come to mean many things to many people. Disentangling the multitude of often contradictory strands without diluting or destroying any of them has been a far more enormous job than I originally suspected. Since the word is associated with the beginning, I started my disentanglement efforts with it and proceeded from there. Of all the many, many words in many languages and dialects designating the phenomenon, the one that came from the Sanskrit [*sramana/srama*] and was transmitted through the Siberian Tungouse to early explorers is the one that happened to become the generic term before the end of the 18th century. Those explorers were mostly native Germans; or, they were trained in Germany; or, they acknowledged German as the up-and-coming language of scientific discourse. Not to be forgotten is that from 1714 on, England was ruled by the German-speaking Hanoverians, whose support of exploration and research led to many cross-Channel cooperative ventures. As a result, in use during the 18th century were the nouns *der Schaman, die Schamanka,* and *das Schamanentum,* while the verb was *schamanen.*

That "shaman" gained acceptance as the generic term so long ago should not be surprising given the fact that enlightenment, which even back then had its double meaning, was sought on various planes and in many ways. As male-dominated scientific professionalism burgeoned—to go along with Michel Foucault—things that were rationally inexplicable, like the power associated with the herbal knowledge of the wise women, the witches or shamankas, were condemned. Such things, however, did not disappear. They remained operative, yet went underground, so as to provoke continuing research and reflection.

During the 18th century, the whole globe, with its inhabitants, natural resources, and potential for investment as well as political power, suddenly became the object of avid investigation. The conquistadores and missionaries of past centuries were supplanted by academically trained observers, collectors, and measurers. The solitary explorers as well as the large teams all depended on some or another kind of European financial support. There were monies from religious orders, like the Society of Jesus; there were the grants of the British Association for Promoting the Study of

Africa; and there were the munificent coffers of the Russians, especially Catharine the Great, who wanted to gain information about a vast realm that sorely needed consolidating, if it were ever to be exploited.

As to be supposed, such funding came with certain strings attached. Those strings often limited the dissemination of findings, if not the freedom of intellectual inquiry. The "Instructions" Catharine gave to one expedition outlined not only the topics to be observed, but also the means for doing so. She fiercely opposed the "women-men," that is, the transvestites associated with shamanism, for they neither helped to increase the population of her empire, nor did they enrich its coffers by supplying valuable pelts. They simply were not hunters. She thought their superstitious practices and the gullibility of their followers underscored the need to introduce the Enlightenment swiftly and efficiently. By that, she meant doing what the Inquisition had given the conquistadores the mandate to do in the Americas a few centuries earlier, namely, exterminate the homosexuals and eradicate all traces of their rituals as well as the mind-altering substances they tended to use.[15]

Many scientists complained bitterly about the entire assumptive system that underlay such 18th-century exploration. Some, like Georg Forster, thought of European mercantilism as science gone awry. It seemed to be the literal application of what Francis Bacon had written about taming, shaping, and subduing Mother Nature, as in his statement, "I am come in very truth leading to you Nature with all her children to bind her to your service and make her your slave."[16] It is more than just interesting that so many of those who lodged such protests had received their academic training—usually in classical philology, history, and medicine—at the university considered politically safe enough to become the repository for the artifacts from the South Seas collected by Captain James Cook. The University at Göttingen, founded in mid-18th century by the Hanoverians, seems to have imbued its students with rever-

[15] See my article, "Sex and Shamanism in the Eighteenth Century," *Sexual Underworlds of the Enlightenment,* eds. Roy Porter and George Rousseau (Manchester, 1987; Chapel Hill, 1988). Discussion of the various ways reports were altered to suit the prevailing political winds can be found in James R. Masterson and Helen Brower, *Bering's Successors, 1745-1780: Contributions of Peter Simon Pallas to the History of Russian Exploration towards Alaska* (Seattle, 1948) 14-15.

[16] As quoted in Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven and London, 1985) 36.

ence for Mother Nature in addition to encouraging the intellectual curiosity associated with male-dominated scientific professionalism.

Those 18th-century men who set out to explore this planet, from the New World to the frozen Arctic and arid Siberian wilderness, to the warm South Pacific islands and hot African deserts, did the job they were sent out to do. They submitted measurements. And, in most instances, copious sketches and illustrations accompanied their maps and diagrams.[17] They also sent back artifacts—costumes, weapons, utensils, musical instruments—as well as all kinds of herbs and seeds indigenous to the particular geographical place. Equally important were the lengthy descriptions about matters pertaining to the lifestyles of the native inhabitants with whom they had contact.

Reports by those who considered themselves firsthand observers were quickly published—sometimes, in installments as soon as they arrived in Europe, and other times, simultaneously in two or three languages. That information was picked up by scholars, mostly comfortably ensconced academicians, who analyzed it and shared it with other colleagues, who thereupon provided interpretations for the European reading public, which never seemed to learn enough about the "other" parts of the world. The next filtration came from the compilers of dictionaries and encyclopedias. And, then, there was still further filtering by the popularizers, who oftentimes exploited the enormous market for folio-sized picture books or, more importantly, for children's books. And, of course, there were also those who have been classified as travel liars.[18]

Whatever the level of scientific objectivity or truth might or might not have been, the average literate 18th-century European rarely failed to read the latest publication. Such publications were

[17] Barbara Stafford, *Voyage into Substance: Art, Science, Nature, and the Illustrated Travel Account, 1760-1840* (Cambridge, Mass., 1984) 116, 160, 290, 327, and 395.

[18] Percy G. Adams, *Travellers and Travel Liars, 1660-1800* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1962) 11, 12, 44, 142, and 162. Compare also Professor Adams's most recent pioneering study, *Travel Literature and the Evolution of the Novel* (Lexington, Kentucky, 1983), passim. The following are of related interest: Philip Babcock Gove, *The Imaginary Voyage in Prose Fiction: A History of Its Criticism and a Guide for Its Study, with an Annotated Checklist of 215 Imaginary Voyages from 1700 to 1800* (New York, 1941) x, 17, 183, passim; Mirco Mitrovich, "Deutsche Reisende und Reiseberichte im 17. Jahrhundert, Ein Kultur-Historischer Beitrag" (Diss. University of Illinois, 1963); and William E. Stewart, *Die Reisebeschreibung und ihre Theorie im Deutschland des 18. Jahrhunderts.* Literatur und Wirklichkeit, ed. Karl Otto Conrady, Vol. 10 (Bonn, 1978) 62, 90, 180, 228, and 236.

the talk of the moral weeklies, the sources for the latest dress fashions, the subjects of new operas, the topic of lectures by philosophers as renowned as Immanuel Kant, and the means whereby Friedrich Schiller inadvertently caused the students at the University of Jena to up and riot in support of the study of universal history. Other 18th-century dramatists were also smitten with travel reports, as were many novelists, composers, people of the theater, and critical theorists.

Although there were many matters about "other" parts of the world that attracted 18th-century Europeans, the ubiquitous phenomenon of shamanism, with its self-induced cure for a self-induced fit, thoroughly captured their imagination and their interest. One result was that a steadily increasing number of people began to think more and more often about the creative personality and its potential for receptivity. Another related result was the European reflection about enthusiasm, madness, spirit possession, convulsionaries, and the arts of performance, upon which everything else seemed to hinge.[19] They then contemplated the implications of daring and brinksmanship. And, they went on to reconsider what they had heard about the transport of Longinus and the infectious rings of inspiration mentioned by Plato's rhapsodist Ion. Gradually, the theoretical focus shifted from the work to the person or persons who made that work come alive. That creature, whether labeled a genius or a shaman in the 18th century, did not convince his audience logically. Nor did he persuade, like an orator. He was not really an imitator. Like Plato's Ion, he was a shaman or a kind of channeler—yet another word current in today's media and popular press. He somehow was or became the real thing in order to transmit his creative trance to that audience so as to transport them momentarily out of themselves into other cosmic regions where they themselves could experience the mysteries of the universe. In other words, the genius or shaman allowed the common person, if ever so briefly, to comprehend the meaning of birth, life, death, and regeneration.

Before I turn to aesthetic theory and then, literature, I should like to discuss the kind of information about shamanism available to Western Europeans in the 18th century. During earlier centuries, zealous members of various orthodox religions worked as-

[19] Hans Grassl, *Aufbruch zur Romantik: Bayerns Beitrag zur deutschen Geistesgeschichte, 1765-1785* (Munich, 1968) 141, 190, passim.

siduously to convert those who staunchly held to shamanism. Whether Christians among the Lapps, Buddhists among the Buryats, or Lamaists among the Tibetans, they were almost always intrigued by the practices of the natives.[20] Those in Lappland insisted upon viewing such practices carefully in order to learn just what they were up against. Their many reports, which Johannes Scheffer incorporated into his book *Lapponia* in 1675, all told of the shaman's singing, dancing, jumping around, and working himself up into an ecstatic state, whereby he eventually fell to the ground in a death-like stupor. Mention of the magical accoutrements, the drum, the triangle, and the rattle was hardly ever omitted. Upon reviving, the shaman stressed that his soul had left his body and flown off to do its business with the spirits in their world. To prove he had actually flown away, and thus establish his credibility, he presented his audience with an object or a token of something he purportedly found beyond the rainbow. Then he provided the answers he had set out to obtain. Many missionaries thought conversion would be swift in coming as long as they confiscated the shaman's paraphernalia. Even when seemingly successful, the result, as we know from a report written 100 years later, was to force shamanistic practices underground, out of generally accessible public view.

The natives began developing clever strategies to counteract what they viewed as attacks by a vicious new enemy.[21] Their séances were held secretly. If a shaman still had his tambourine, rattle, mask, and outfit with all its spangles, teeth, and feathers, he hid them. Otherwise, he conjured them up at need; that is, he made believe. Some natives were reported as openly stating that Christian sermons and devotionals adversely influenced their old practices, rendering them mostly inoperable. One shaman bitterly complained that his body now always stayed on earth instead of joining his soul for the trip over the rainbow as it was supposed to do.[22] Distortions of the missionaries' teachings produced continuing confusion in beliefs. This was exemplified by a shaman who tried to be conciliatory and heartily agreed that heaven was,

[20] Walther Heissig, "A Mongolian Source to the Lamist Suppression of Shamanism in the 17th Century," *Anthropos,* Vol. 48 (1953) 1-29 and 493-536, esp. 501, 506, and 532.

[21] Matthieu de Lesseps, *Journal historique du Voyage,* 2 vols. (Paris, 1790) I: 178-179.

[22] Paul Egede, *Nachrichten von Grönland: Aus einem Tagebuche, geführt von 1721 bis 1788* (Copenhagen, 1790) 95.

indeed, a most wonderful place. He reported to his Christian minister that he knew it as a fact, for he had taken a flight there to check it out for himself.[23] Another shaman refused to believe that Jesus Christ could be anything other than the chief shaman of all shamans, for he had not only flown off to the heavens himself, but he had also arranged the departure times and flight plans for so many of his friends and relatives.[24] Yet another ice-bound shaman had learned from a Christian missionary that there were internal parts of the earth where souls experienced immortality in constant warmth, so he decided he would prefer to journey in that direction.[25]

Information about the innumerable manifestations of shamanism proliferated so quickly in the first half of the 18th century that even the dictionaries, encyclopedias, and reference works—those standard repositories of conventional knowledge—treated the subject at length. A German one published in 1745 included mention of the clothing decorated with feathers, animal teeth, and an assortment of iron do-dads, each meaningful in its own way. The effect of music, at least rhythm and movement marked by the tambourine and rattle, was mentioned, as was the chanting, the crying out, and the croaking. The whole dramatic process leading up to the trance was described, whereupon we read that the following usually happened:

> hierauf fällt er auf die Erde gleichsam in Schwindel und Entzückung und den Augenblick verschwindet alles wieder; Wenn er nun also, als todt und ohne Verstand, etwa eine Viertel Stunde gelegen, so kommt er wieder zu sich selbst und sagt alsdenn dem, der ihn Raths gefragt, wer ihn bestohlen, und was er sonsten zu wissen begehret, da soll denn auch alles, was sie sagen, nach dem Worte des Schamann oder Zauberers eintreffen, ihr Schamann wird bey ihnen in grossen Aestim gehalten, und haben sie grossen Respect für ihm ob nun gleich diese Leute ein erbärmlich Leben führen.[26]

The large picture-books so popular at mid-century were creations of the relentlessly emerging publishing industry. Shamanism remained a topic in them because it was shockingly superstitious and sexually titillating, and, besides, it helped to sell big,

[23] *Ibid.* 214.
[24] *Ibid.* 36.
[25] *Ibid.* 121-122.
[26] Johann Heinrich Zedler, *Großes vollständiges Universal-Lexikon,* Vol. 45 (Leipzig and Halle, 1745), cols. 1815-1816.

beautiful, expensive books. Their illustrations, even with the best of intentions, derived more from contemporary opera and ballet poses than from any kind of genuine firsthand observation.[27]

The reports submitted by explorers out in the field were, as to be expected at mid-century, colored by the rationalistic tendencies of the day. In more than one way, those explorers helped to finish what the religious missionaries had begun, namely forcing the believers of shamanism to go into hiding or, at least, to get out of all too public sight. Johann Georg Gmelin, who spent ten years investigating and researching in Siberia, published his observations at mid-century. In that four-volume work, which opened with an encomiastic poem by the famous physician Albrecht von Haller, he repeatedly acknowledged widespread shamanistic practices. However, he again and again wrote how he had pointed out to the believers that they were being deluded by perpetrators of hoaxes. He related specific incidents revealing the ventriloquism, the sleight of hand, and the fancy as well as not so fancy tricks used by whatever kinds of shamans were in residence. As word spread about the kind of inquiries he made, many of the local shamans simply avoided appearing in his presence. Gmelin recognized the theatricality of their sessions, what with stage, mask, costume, drum, dance, and song. And, he even went so far as to imply that they were mediocre performers who got so carried away with their roles that their movements seemed to consist of "Verstellungen des Leibes, wie unsere Besessene zu machen pflegen."[28] What appalled him most of all was the fathomless gullibility and hopeless ignorance of the believers in shamanism.

The substances shamans used for inducing ecstasy had been of long-standing interest to Europeans. Even as late as 1760, a Spanish missionary published the following among the questions for those Indians preparing for the sacraments: "Has matado à alguno? A quantos mataste? Has comido carne de gente? Has comido el peyote?"[29] Among the missionaries, peyote was known to be from the devil, for it gave superhuman strength to those who would do all kinds of extraordinary things, like sing and dance all night long.

[27] Bernard Picart, *Ceremonies et coutumes religieuses des peuples idolatres,* Vol. 1 (Amsterdam, 1735), 62-63, and Vol. 2 (Amsterdam, 1728) 376-377.

[28] Johann Georg Gmelin, *Reise durch Sibirien, von dem Jahr 1733 bis 1743,* 4 vols. (Göttingen, 1751-1752) I: 275.

[29] Bartholome Garcia, *Manual para Administrar los Santos Sacramentos de Penitencia, Eucharistia, Extrema-Uncion, y Matrimonio* (Mexico, 1760) 14-15. This was brought to my attention by Edward F. Anderson, *Peyote: The Divine Cactus* (Tucson, 1980) 7-8.

Similar experiences were had by Stephan Krascheninnikow, who wrote a history of Kamchatka and the Kurile Islands in the 1760's. He studied the kinds of mushrooms that were consumed and their effects on bodily functions. His description in a chapter devoted to shamans, conjurers, witches, and interpreters of dreams is as follows:

> The first symptom of a man's being affected with this liquor is a trembling in all his joints, and in half an hour he begins to rave as if in a fever; and is either merry or melancholy mad, according to his particular constitution. Some jump, dance, and sing; others weep, and are in terrible agonies, a small hole appearing to them as a great pit, and a spoonful of water as a lake: but this is to be understood of those who use it to excess; for taken in small quantity it raises their spirits, and makes them brisk, courageous, and cheerful.[30]

Anyone intoxicated from drinking the liquor of that particular mushroom was urged to save his urine in a vessel. It was supposed to be as effective as the original, if not more so. Krascheninnikow did not fail to add that one of the brave young Cossacks in his party tried it—and nearly died.

In the last quarter of the 18th century, the expeditions usually included physicians, anthropologists, linguists, and ethnographers, as well as botanists, zoologists, and geologists. Many of the expeditions even had an illustrator and a cartographer along. The numerous materials they sent back were long and detailed. Almost always included were sections on shamanism and what its adherents were doing in order to preserve their beliefs in the face of uninterrupted assaults from more orthodox and more powerful systems, whether religious, political, or scientific. Georg Wilhelm Steller's work on Kamchatka appeared in the 1770's. It supplied very carefully executed illustrations showing how the local shamans engendered in themselves something comparable to a "Paroxismum vom kalten Fieber."[31]

Johann Gottlieb Georgi, whose fieldwork in the remote Russian provinces was considered exemplary during his own time, produced a number of publications during the late 18th century. In

[30] Stephan Krascheninnikow, *The History of Kamtschatka, and the Kurilski Islands, with the countries adjacent,* tr. James Grieve, M.D. (Glocester, 1764) 208. It was later made public as *Beschreibung des Landes Kamtschatka,* tr. Johann Tobias Köhler (Lemgo, 1766). The English rendition is also available in R. Gordon Wasson, *Soma: Divine Mushroom of Immortality* (New York, 1968) 236.

[31] Georg Wilhelm Steller, *Beschreibung von dem Lande Kamtschatka* (Frankfurt and Leipzig, 1774), reprinted, Quellen und Forschungen zur Geschichte der Geographie und Reise, Vol. 10, ed. Hanno Beck (Stuttgart, 1974) 278.

each, he took up what had by then become the exceedingly fashionable subject of shamanism. His observations led him to consider it a primordial religious form in which males usually dominated females in spite of the fact that they tended to be at least equally effective as regards healing, divining, and prognosticating. Those shamankas and shamans prided themselves in their ability to deal with the other world and with the spirits populating that great beyond somewhere over the rainbow. The descriptions Georgi gave of the séances he himself witnessed began in the usual way. He wrote that the practitioners sang, danced, and played themselves into an ecstatic state, trembling, shaking, and sweating: "so thun sie es mit den Grimaschen eines Unsinnigen und scheinen zum Theil wüthend." After such prolonged carrying-on, they fell into an incontestable stupor, "weil ihre Seele sie verlässt und die Götter der Höllen in ihren Wohnungen, Bergen, Wäldern, Abgründen ec. besucht und mit ihnen unterhandelt. Die Seelen machen diese Reise auf Bären, Schweinen, Adlern u.s.f. Alle behaupten nachher, die Satane in Gesichtern als Bären, Löwen, Eulen, Adler, Schwäne, Käfer, Spinnen, Drachen, e.c., als Lichtschein oder Schatten gesehen zu haben."[32]

Like the oracles of old, Georgi wrote, the shamankas and shamans spoke in an extraordinarily flowery and unclear language so that what they said could be applicable in all cases whatever the outcome. His disbelief in their practices was all but cancelled out by his utter amazement over their poetic gifts, which he considered not only naturally effusive but also astonishingly sophisticated.

Georgi did not overlook the importance of their costumes and the requisites they always used, especially the tambourine. Nor did he overlook the subtle forms they adopted in order to continue their ancient practices without threat of punishment from those who knew how to make "bigger medicine," whether clergymen, physicians, or adventurers with firearms. In likening such practitioners of shamanism to what contemporary Europeans called enthusiasts, Georgi made a very clear connection between religion, psychology, medicine, anthropology, philosophy, and the arts. The volume of illustrations accompanying one of his trilingual re-

[32] Johann Gottlieb Georgi, *Beschreibung aller Nationen des Russischen Reiches, ihrer Lebensart, Religion, Gebräuche, Wohnungen, Kleidungen und übrigen Merkwürdigkeiten,* 4 pts. (St. Petersburg, 1776-1780), III (1777), respectively, 393 and 394.

ports provides some of the best interpretations of the phenomenon of shamanism as still extant in the late 18th century.

Throughout the 18th century, the incipient discipline of anthropology welcomed whatever such intelligent, courageous, and oftentimes, rather dashing, explorers sent back. Usually there were just reports with illustrations, but, in many instances, artifacts were included. The most important for the late 18th century were those uncovered by Georg Thomas von Asch, a Russian citizen of German descent, who had been allowed to study medicine in Göttingen. His doctorate brought with it the inevitable commission in the Russian Imperial Army, but he knew how to turn disadvantage into advantage. He observed native inhabitants wherever he was stationed and collected what he thought were representative items. And, between 1771 and 1806, he sent them back to his *alma mater*. Prominently displayed for all to see was the complete outfit of a real shaman from the Tungus that somehow failed to make it to the compulsory funeral pyre. Some of the most distinguished people did go to Göttingen to see it, among other things, of course.[33]

European intellectuals of the 18th century had no alternative but to come to terms with this massive surge of exciting new information right at the moment of its arrival. Johann Gottfried Herder was one of the quickest to apply to aesthetic theory the prodigious number of ideas he had assimilated from that new information. Herder insisted that the songs of Ossian, with their lively rhythm, melody, imagery, and pantomime, still lived among the American Indians. Songs like those, he went on to claim, provided nothing but the truth, for they did not contain the distortions of the prosaic descriptions by European explorers: "Ihre Gesänge sind das Archiv des Volks, der Schatz ihrer Wissenschaft und Religion, ihrer Theogonie und Kosmogonien der Thaten ihrer Väter und der Begebenheiten ihrer Geschichte, Abdruck ihres Herzens, Bild ihres häuslichen Lebens in Freude und Leid, beim Brautbett und Grabe."[34]

For Herder, the artist was a shaman, that is, a poet, singer, actor, prophet, seer, healer. He cited numerous illustrations from dif-

[33] Thanks to Dr. Manfred Urban of the University of Göttingen I had opportunity to look at the guest book, "Das alte Fremdenbuch des academischen Museums" [Göttingen, 1808 ff.]. Among the signatures I happened to have noted were those of Duke Carl August, Carl Gustav Carus, Adelbert von Chamisso, Caroline Schelling, and August Wilhelm von Schlegel.

[34] *Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Bernhard Suphan, Vol. 9 (Berlin, 1893) 532.

ferent cultures in several epochs, but he repeatedly came back to the original singer, Orpheus, as the epitomy of the shaman. In an essay on minstrels, troubadours, skalds, and bards, he mentioned that the Greeks had also been savages before their civilization blossomed, and that even after it did, they remained much more closely attuned to nature than contemporary 18th-century European intellectuals would allow. And, the Greek poets, he maintained, here as well as elsewhere, were never completely separated from nature, they were all "edle griechische Schamanen."[35]

Herder went on to contend that more than three-fourths of the people on earth still believed in shamans. If the details of the actual practices differed, he explained, it was only because they were formed according to the location, climate, and particular attributes of the people. He was very much aware of what happened when the "bigger medicine" of orthodox religion or modern science confronted such practices:

> in Europa hangen die meisten Nationen Finnischen und Slavischen Ursprunges noch an den Zaubereien des Naturdienstes und der Aberglaube der Neger ist nichts als ein nach ihrem Genius und Klima gestalteter Schamanismus. In den Ländern der Asiatischen Cultur ist dieser zwar von positiven künstlichern Religionen und Staatseinrichtungen verdrängt worden; er lässt sich aber blicken, wo er sich blicken lassen darf, in der Einsamkeit und beim Pöbel; bis er auf einigen Inseln des Südmeers wieder in grosser Macht herrschet. Der Dienst der Natur hat also die Erde umzogen und die Phantasieen desselben halten sich an jeden klimatischen Gegenstand der Uebermacht und des Schreckens, an den die menschliche Nothdurft grenzet. In ältern Zeiten war er der Gottesdienst beinah aller Völker der Erde.[36]

In Herder's opinion, nothing at all was accomplished by calling the shaman a trickster, a deceiver, or a criminal. Although any of those words might be made to apply in various cases, he insisted on viewing shamans as integral functionaries of the people they served. He thought they themselves had been completely taken in by what their tribe or folk believed. Otherwise, there would have been no reason for them to suffer so much fasting, solitude, emotional stress, and physical exhaustion. Nor, would it have seemed reasonable for them to be willing to repeat those debilitating ef-

[35] *Ibid.* 534. See also *Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Bernhard Suphan, Vol. 6 (Berlin, 1883) 397-398, and Vol. 25 (Berlin, 1885) 84. This is a topic that remains of concern to medievalists to this very day.

[36] *Sämtliche Werke,* ed. Suphan, Vol. 13 (Berlin, 1887) 305-306.

forts so many times throughout their lives in order to intercede with the spirit world on behalf of their fellow tribesmen.

The shaman's ability not only to reach the imagination of others but to gain complete sway over it interested Herder more than the various means employed to induce frenzy or the trance. Unlike so many others who reflected upon this phenomenon in the 18th century, Herder did not find the chanting and dancing to the tambourine, the ventriloquism, legerdemain, and other artful tricks contemptible.

Herder was not the only member of his generation to view the performing artist as the shaman of higher civilization. The innumerable reports that the phenomenon still existed in many regions in various stages, ranging from archaic purity to civilized decline, saw to it that the idea caught on mightily at the end of the 18th century. Many intellectuals, as a result, began looking closer to home. Even arch conservatives, like August Wilhelm Iffland, did not choose to sidestep the issue. Iffland confronted it by writing that some people simply were imbued with ultra-sensitive faculties of perception and communication. Usually they were not the hyper-cultured, urban types, for those people knew too little about body language. The Amerindians were repeatedly cited as examples. Again and again, reports had it that such peoples knew how to find often without words the clearest means of communication between souls. In regard to professional acting, Iffland was appalled that so many Europeans demeaned it by brushing it aside as a mere conjuring trick.[37]

The next generation took up such ideas and put them together in an exciting, yet potentially threatening way. Friedrich Schlegel equated all thinking with divining. Ludwig Tieck thought of Shakespeare as the consummate shaman who initiated spectators into his world of magic and made them closely acquainted with hundreds of magical figures. E. T. A. Hoffmann again and again wrote tales about bilocation, ventriloquism, legerdemain, music, ecstasy, and psychic rapport. Enthusiastic seizures could be induced easily enough. The greatest problem, however, was implementing the self-cure, or as it was, learning how to halt the seizures and come out of them unscathed.

As a result of all this, it became more and more fashionable to

[37] August Wilhelm Iffland, "Briefe über Schauspielkunst," *Rheinische Beiträge* (1781) 367. See also *Die Protokolle des Mannheimer Nationaltheaters unter Dalberg aus den Jahren 1781 bis 1789,* ed. Max Martersteig (Mannheim, 1890) 94.

speak of the performing artist as a channeler or a medium for the world beyond mundane nature. One artist was described performing, "as if a higher genius spoke out of him and gave itself being."[38] Again and again demonic exaltation and possession were mentioned, and words like bewitched, entranced, enchanted, enrapt, and spellbound became standard in the critical jargon.

I should now like to conclude with an example from a writer, whom Herder and most other late-18th-century intellectuals knew very well. This writer not only assimilated available information on shamanism and incorporated it into his critical theory, but he also brought it all into a grand aesthetic form. The writer is Denis Diderot. And the work is *Le Neveu de Rameau.* It deserves to be singled out as my concluding example because of its convoluted publication history as well as because of its subject matter. When Diderot died in 1784, his library went to Catharine the Great in Russia. She was a very smart German princess who knew that things like rare books and literary memorabilia could provide a hedge against inflation. The manuscript of *Le Neveu de Rameau* was among the things she obtained. A copy of it was later smuggled out of Russia and into Germany. Friedrich Schiller, a physician trained in psychosomatic medicine, as well as a playwright and a philosopher, got hold of it and showed it to Goethe, who, having long immersed himself in matters shamanistic, instantaneously recognized its merits. Diderot's manuscript, which was written in the 1760's and pretty much completed when Herder visited him in Paris in the early 1770's, was first published by Goethe in a German translation in 1805. A manuscript in Diderot's own hand did not come to light until 1891.[39]

Le Neveu de Rameau is a satirical dialogue or dramatic conversation that brilliantly treats all the burning aesthetic issues of mid-18th century. The most striking one for the present context occurs not in the music lesson, not in the discussions of theater, not in the references to the many Parisian operatic quarrels. It occurs when Diderot has the nephew "shamanize" in the café after being

[38] In reference to Ferdinand Fleck, as translated in Simon Williams, *German Actors of the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: Idealism, Romanticism, and Realism.* Contributions in Drama and Theatre Studies, No. 12 (Westport, Conn. and London, 1985) 63.

[39] Rudolf Schlosser, *Rameaus Neffe: Studien und Untersuchungen zur Einführung in Goethes Übersetzung des Diderotischen Dialogs.* Forschung zur neueren Literaturgeschichte, Vol. 15 (Berlin, 1900) 11, 29, 108.

gripped by the spirit of his famous uncle's work at the opera. At first Rameau's nephew paced up and down, humming some arias. Then, he began singing louder and louder as the spirit took greater hold of him and deprived him of his wits. He imitated the voices, the gait, and the gestures of several characters, changing his mood in quick succession.

The chess-players in the café were joined by passers-by whom the commotion had attracted. They guffawed at first, but strangely enough, they began paying attention, until he won them over completely:

> Lui n'apercevait rien; il continuait, saisi d'une aliénation d'esprit, d'un enthousiasme si voisin de la folie qu'il est incertain qu'il en revienne, s'il ne faudra pas le jeter dans un fiacre et le mener droit aux Petites-Maisons. En chantant un lambeau des *Lamentations* de Jomelli, il répétait avec une précision, une vérité et une chaleur incroyables les plus beaux endroits de chaque morceau; ce beau récitatif obligé où le prophète peint la désolation de Jérusalem, il l'arrosa d'un torrent de larmes qui en arrachèrent de tous les yeux. Tout y était, et la délicatesse du chant, et la force de l'expression, et la douleur. Il insistait sur les endroits où le musicien s'était particulièrement montré un grand maître. S'il quittait la partie du chant, c'était pour prendre celle des instruments qu'il laissait subitement pour revenir à la voix, entrelaçant l'une à l'autre de manière à conserver les liaisons et l'unité du tout; s'emparant de nos âmes et les tenant suspendues dans la situation la plus singulière que j'aie jamais éprouvé [. . .].[40]

This performer managed to enchant the spectators who had at first mocked him, to transmit his trance to them, and to unite them in a grand tribal-kind of totality: "il sifflait les petites flûtes, il recoulait les traversières, criant, chantant se démenant comme un forcené, faisant lui seul les danseurs, les danseuses, les chanteurs, les chanteuses, tout un orchestre, tout un théâtre lyrique, et se divisant en vingt rôles divers, courant, s'arrêtant avec l'air d'un énergumène, éteincelant des yeux, écumant de la bouche." Diderot strikes at the very heart of the aesthetic paradox when he writes,

[40] *Oeuvres,* ed. André Billy, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade (1951) 455. Herbert Josephs, *Diderot's Dialogue of Language and Gesture: Le Neveu de Rameau* (Columbus, Ohio, 1969) 172-173, argued that Rameau's gestures are ritualistically spellbinding and suggest a primitive ceremony; he did not, however, pursue that line of investigation. Compare, on the other hand, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel's citation of Rameau's nephew in his interpretation of the madness of the musician, *Phänomenologie des Geistes,* 5th ed., J. Hoffmeister (Hamburg, 1952), tr. Arnold Vincent Miller (Oxford, London, and New York, 1977) 317-318.

"C'était la nuit avec ses ténèbres; c'était l'ombre et le silence, car le silence même se peint par des sons."[41]

The description of Rameau coming out of his trance-like experience contains ideas and images that repeatedly appear in critical writings dealing with the highly sensitive, extraordinarily creative performing artist:

> Épuisé de fatigue, tel qu'un homme qui sort d'un profond sommeil ou d'une longue distraction, il resta immobile, stupide, étonné. Il tournait ses regards autour de lui comme un homme égaré qui cherche à reconnaître le lieu où il se trouve; il attendait le retour de ses forces et de ses esprits; il essuyait machinalement son visage. Semblable à celui qui verrait à son réveil son lit environné d'un grand nombre de personnes dans un entier oubli ou dans une profonde ignorance de ce qu'il a fait, il s'écria dans le premier moment: 'Hé bien, Messieurs, qu'est-ce qu'il y a? D'où viennent vos ris et votre surprise? Qu'est-ce qu'il y a?' Ensuite il ajouta: 'Voilà ce qu'on doit appeler de la musique et un musicien.'[42]

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[41] Ed. Billy, 455-456. Susan Sontag, surprisingly enough, wrote of silence as "a leading motif of modern art" and called it "the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture"; see her "The Aesthetics of Silence," *The Discontinuous Universe,* eds. Sears and Lord, 52-53. Sontag, whose essay first appeared in *Styles of Radical Will* (New York, 1967), went on to claim in that essay, "Silence is a prophecy, one which the artist's actions can be understood as attempting both to fulfill and to reverse," 62. Hassan, *Orpheus,* 15, wrote at length about the modernity of silence, asserting that "Silence shifts in the perspectives of various thinkers yet remains even at the threshold of awareness. It is a category of the intelligence of the 20th century, and particularly of its *avant garde* imagination." See also, Hassan, *Paracriticisms: Seven Speculations of the Times* (Urbana and Chicago, 1984) xiii-xiv. Silence, with whatever its meanings might be, I should like to report, has been acknowledged throughout the centuries as something profoundly significant. Eighteenth-century thinkers, especially theorists of music, understood that very well and expressed themselves about the subject quite often.

[42] Ed. Billy, 456. John Neubauer, *The Emancipation of Music from Language: Departure from Mimesis in Eighteenth-Century Aesthetics* (New Haven and London, 1986) 114-120, presents a succinct summary of the scholarly discussion engendered by Diderot's work.