Afterword

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There are as many authors as there are forms of shamanism, and as many points of view on the subject as there are authors. The fact that there is no consensus on the definition of the term shamanism is probably neither accidental nor much of a disadvantage. Is not a certain amount of vagueness appropriate to a phenomenon marked by so much diversity and vitality? For that reason, would it not be more profitable to focus the investigation of the term on the ultimate limits of its applicability? Primitive, shamanism continues to be reborn. Rooted in nature, it has blossomed in great industrial cities. Animistic, it has enriched the popular foundation of the great religions without modeling its own practices on them. Instead, shamanism has sometimes manifested itself in grand recurring rituals that celebrate ethnic identity; at other times, it has been an instrument used by private individuals to channel the course of events in a direction favorable to them or, more often, to make sure that their course is not unfavorable. To someone suffering from a psychic burden, shamanism can represent a priceless instrument that will offer relief, or help in being reassimilated into the community. For the expert practitioner, shamanism can be a means to personal advancement. Even when scorned by all and, in some cases, combated, shamanism has found a way to adapt itself everywhere.

The articles gathered in this volume cover a full range of contemporary manifestations of shamanism. Each of the articles can, in its own way, help to rekindle certain debates that have affected the way shamanism has been perceived since the beginning of its study. In this way the articles give double testimony to the relevance of these phenomena and of the interest they present for the social sciences.

For more than a century, interpretations of shamanism have been divided between religious and medical points of view, and the data continue to support both approaches. The religious nature

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of the phenomenon was never in doubt to its first observers, zealots of Orthodox Christianity, who immediately saw the shaman as a potential rival. Accustomed, however, to a more meditative spirituality, these Orthodox clerics could only see the shaman's wild and extravagant behavior as evidence of his service to the devil. Their successors, who were physicians, administrators and colonists, drew attention to the connection between shamanism and mental illness: in séance the shaman acted as if he were mad, and he was often called upon to cure madmen. It is of course true that shamanism changed under the dual impact of colonization and the penetration of the great religions: it had to cope with the social and psychic dislocations that were a consequence of this impact. Besides, for sociologists of religion shamanism remained elusive, since it had neither doctrine nor clergy nor even a defined liturgy. Finally, shamanistic practice was stamped with a disconcerting individualism that, it was believed, could only be accounted for through psychological studies. Therefore shamanism could not be spoken of as a religion at all, but only as "a type of men," as Van Gennep expressed it.[1]

Some judged the shaman to be a pathological "type of man" although others, conscious of the shaman's normalcy outside of the setting of the séance and of the responsibilities that his community entrusted him with, perceived him as a charismatic figure. There was, however, temporary agreement about what "type of man" he was, when the so-called "cured madman" hypothesis was generally adopted. This hypothesis, born of contacts with psychoanalysis, asserted that the source of shamanism was to be found in the shaman's victory over his own madness. Mircea Eliade went beyond this approach by defining shamanic practice as religious experience in its raw state; what made it accessible was a group of techniques he called "ecstatic" and which he found to be compatible with many kinds of religious beliefs.[2] This view is permeated by mysticism.[3] It contributed to the spread of the Western idea of shamanism as a form of personal quest. Along with other erroneous notions, it helped to expose shamanism to commercial misappropriation by the hippie movement and its successors on the West Coast of the United States and later in Europe. In this regard

1. A. Van Gennep, "De l'emploi du mot 'chamanisme,'" *Revue de l'histoire des religions*, 1903, XLVII, pp. 51–57.

2. M. Eliade, *Le Chamanisme et les techniques archaiques de l'exstase*, Paris, Payot, 1951.

3. This mysticism is latent in the Orthodox sources he relies on.

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Daniele Vazeille, in the chapter entitled "Exportation du Chamanisme" in her book *Les Chamanes*,[4] paints a useful picture for us. The author emphasizes the differences in practice between neo-shamans and authentic shamans; whereas the practice of the latter is a form of group therapy, the Western neo-shamans, in contrast, are trainers instructing adepts in exotic techniques. And, as R.I. Heinze points out, they often do more harm than good.

In the meantime, however, this reduction of shamanism to a "type of men" only caused it to be tossed from one discipline to another, as P. Mitrani recalls in copious detail. As this author remarks in conclusion, the shaman could best be understood as a personage who assumes a role (this is of course true of the majority of specialists in our own societies), which is tantamount to denying the psychiatrist a special competence in his field. Nevertheless, it is not without merit to reaffirm, as R.I. Heinze does in relation to the cities of South East Asia, that shamans, like professionals in any other field, are normal individuals who suffer from no particular pathology. Yet such an affirmation has in no way ended the debate on shamanism. Psychological and symbolic aspects of the problem continue to interfere both in the data and the approach to the data. And this interference is far from being limited to the therapeutic domain. The fact, however, that this domain continues to play a special role in the studies must be attributed, among other factors, to the continuing Western tendency to "medicalize" the shaman and all shamanic practices. In this regard it is not insignificant that the name *curanderos* is still applied to healers who undoubtedly effect "cures" but at the cost of making one of the patient's enemies ill, and along lines, as J. P. Chaumeil demonstrates, that are analogous to the rules regulating conflicts between communities.

It should first be recalled that in shamanic societies anyone may "shamanize," that is, address the spirits with chant and dance like a shaman, without being a shaman; that is to say (like the shaman), entrusted with duties of collective interest.[5] These communities, however, never confuse the two,[6] and they demand of their

4. Les Éditions du Cerf, 1991, pp. 91–105.

5. The use by R.I. Heinze of the term "shamanic" to mean the activities of the shaman and "shamanistic" for those of non-shamans reflects this distinction (author's note).While respecting Heinze's distinction, the translator also uses, when helpful, the term "shamanic" to designate qualities of the shaman and "shamanistic" to designate qualities of shamanism (translator's note).

6. É. Lot-Falck, "Psychopathes et chamanes yakoutes", in J. Pouillon and P. Maranda (eds), *Échanges et communications. Mélanges offerts à Cl. Lévi-Strauss...* Paris/La Haye, Mouton 1971, II, pp. 115–129.

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shamans mental health and moral strength. On the other hand, they understand shamanism to be a behavior capable of channeling psychic disorders, to the extent that the cause of these disorders is attributable to spirits. For this reason this behavior can have a therapeutic benefit for any person who exhibits it. This was the case for a group of Canadian Indians observed by W.G. Jilek; thanks to their participation in a collective dance held annually in recognition of shamanic traditions, they were able to overcome their alcoholic despair; the ritual was not performed by shamans, although the participants are capable of becoming them. In addition, this case illustrates that the study of the therapeutic aspects of shamanism ought not to be limited to individual cures, since the benefit in this case results from a periodic collective ritual that in fact has other functions as well; indeed traditionally the purpose of this kind of ritual was to affirm the existence of the community, in one form or another: as Jilek reminds us, the traditional purpose of the Sun Dance was to foster the bison hunt. It is this that leads him, quite appropriately, to see in the therapeutic benefit of this contemporary ritual an echo of its traditional role as support of Indian identity. And it is precisely this that is forgotten and obscured by today's commercially-oriented neo-shamans when they invite their Western clients to imitate shamanic behavior in the United States and Europe. Instead they simplistically identify shamanic behavior with the role of the shaman. Although it sometimes turns out that this behavior, which is foreign to their own culture, manages to be beneficial to these clients of the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is for other reasons than in the case of the Canadian Indians. This behavior is taught to Westerners as a technique that merely needs to be applied; in truth it has meaning only in relation to a system of thoughts and images that attribute the origin of the disturbances (and hence their disappearance) to spirits. It is precisely this process, as it relates to the symbolic system, that S.N. Kim details in his description of a séance held for the young woman named Sunho: during the séance, Sunho's personal drama (her life as a factory worker far from her family, and the death of a friend) is symbolized in the form of romantic possession by a bachelor spirit who must be exorcised.

In another connection, the ethnographic facts demonstrate that the call to shamanic duties is associated less with illness in the strict sense of the word than with some form of misfortune; and this misfortune usually turns out to be the proof of shamanic quali-

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fication for the one who overcomes it. It is said by some that a person becomes a shaman because he has lost his family, has suffered in war or from famine, or, as in the case of the female shamans of Islamicized Central Asia described by V.N. Basilov, that they are childless. Clearly there is a compensatory side to shamanic practice: there is compensation for the would-be shaman, who receives emotional consolation and social assimilation by assuming the burden of his or her ills. There is compensation also for the death of kin, especially if they have died tragically or prematurely, since victims of unnatural death demand special care, as B. Michailovsky and P. Sagant have shown. More generally, there is compensation in the form of harmony with the ideas of exchange and alternation that are central to the shamanic conception of the world.

But this compensatory function is surely not the fundamental motivation for the appeal to misfortune that justifies embarking on a shamanic career. The exploration of the Korean actress's past, carried out by the female shaman, is instructive in this regard; as A. Guillemoz underscores, the reason that the shaman wanted to make a spiritual daughter of the actress was because of the latter's dramatic talent and her star status. This conventional image is connected to others, equally based on experiences believed to have been painful. In the same way, it is through the manifestation of symptoms of madness in adolescence that the future shaman is identified in Siberian hunting communities; his refusal to eat in what is considered a human manner, his flights into the forest, and so forth, are seen as ways of expressing that he has been "chosen" by a feminine spirit who wants to make him her husband. Quite similar to this is the Central Asian idea of "re-creation" during adolescence as outlined by V. Basilov. In the traditions of many Indian communities of South America, the usual way a shaman makes himself known is by his ability to ingest what would normally be an intolerably high dose of a narcotic or hallucinogen or, to take another example, by his ability to drink a decoction of tobacco without vomiting. In brief, psychic suffering is but one of several possible ways of giving proof of one's qualifications – all of which amount to a process of selection, as V. Basilov's piece clearly demonstrates. What is remarkable is that the call to shamanic duties, in more or less all cases and everywhere, is presented as "free" but in actuality is reserved for certain individuals. It is equally remarkable that these individuals are said to possess a specific "gift" or "talent" or to be among the "chosen" of the spirit

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world. To be a special kind of individual is thus a given of the shamanic function. It justifies the idea of the shaman having the ability and obligation to represent his community in the spirit world; and it makes him, in a sense, an emanation of his community.

This debate is connected to another one that, although seeming to be of a more religious nature, is no less tied to psychology; this is the debate over the use of the terms "trance" and "rapture" [*exstase*]. As G. Rouget has demonstrated in his book *La Musique et La Transe*,[7] and, as R.I. Heinze points out in the present volume, only one of these terms, trance, applies to shamanism. But it is not the adequacy of the term that is so much in question here as it is the choice of making the behavior and state that it designates criteria of definition. Rouget repeatedly emphasizes that a trance is always "at the service of a belief" and can only occur if the subject is loyal to the belief. In this way, although music can, like other factors (fasting, alcohol, etc.) create conditions favorable to a trance, it is not the determining factor. The corollary question – that of the authenticity of the trance – is even more revealing. According to many authors (including A.L.. Siikala[8] and R.I. Heinze here), the ritual can be equally effective when the trance is simulated. This assertion by itself not only relativizes but annuls (even if not all the authors who make the assertion are aware of it) the importance of the state and conduct of the trance for the study of shamanism. This is because it is tantamount to saying that the trance is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for the shaman's ritual activity, that it is at most an element of the role that the shaman assumes. The study of the trance as a behavioral phenomenon is connected to the psychology of the actor. The study of the trance as an element in ritual role-playing is related to the study of what underlies the things represented – and these representations are precisely what the role strives to illustrate. This is, by the way, the same view held by the shamanic societies themselves; for them, the behavior of the shaman is a manifestation of his direct contact with the spirit world and constitutes the way he acts upon the spirits. For the anthropologist, the question this behavior raises is the following: What is it in the conception of these spirits that makes them demand of the shaman that he shout and gesticulate as he

7. G. Rouget, *La Musique et la Transe. Esquisse d'une théorie générale des relations de la musique et de la possession*, Paris, Gallimard 1980.

8. A.I. Siikala, *The Ritual Technique of the Siberian Shaman*, Helsinki, Academia Scientiarum Fennica 1978.

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does? It is at this point that it becomes imperative to clarify which physical movements the term "trance" encompasses; leaps and trembling, for example, correspond neither to the same kind of encounter with the spirits nor to an encounter with the same type of spirit.

In brief, the facts require that shamanism not be defined simply in terms of individual psychology. They also require that the shamanic "cure" not be viewed as its fundamental function. The societies that practice shamanism know this quite well; while making full use of medical doctors they do not cease having recourse to their shamans. Moreover, they expect from them many services other than the healing of the insane (bringing rain, finding lost objects, or, as among the Nganasan, aiding fishermen by predicting that the motor on the fishing boat will not have a breakdown in season). Even more than the diversity of shamanic functions, it is their ambivalence that argues against an exclusively or even fundamentally therapeutic interpretation. Wherever shamanism is practiced the shaman can also be a bearer of misfortune; and this is why he is as much feared as he is judged indispensable. In his hands a cure can border on a form of aggression; aggression can even be its actual means, whether it be in the name of the Central Asian expression "blood for blood, soul for soul," or because curing someone, as J. P. Chaumeil observes, demands that the shaman turn the illness back upon its presumed author. Chaumeil also identifies, in the Christianized context of South America, a moralizing tendency that is also used to justify this approach. It is significant in this regard that the help expected from the shaman is most often formulated in negative terms: to make the evil spirit renounce its plans, says V.N. Basilov; to avoid the vengeful pranks of a deceased young man, frustrated among the Limbu of Nepal; or, more generally, to limit or postpone fatal illnesses and death, as young Siberians try to do. In addition, the practices of the young Siberians also bring out – by the regular nature of the rituals they perform – the logically secondary character of extraordinary rituals prompted by disorders that need immediate remedy.

It is also important to bear in mind that the shamanic "cure" is only part of a far broader symbolic system. This is made quite clear by the fact that in many societies cures are either sometimes altogether forbidden, are allowed only in certain seasons, or are allowed only the year following a sufferer's recovery. Shamanism surely has, or can have, a therapeutic effect; but it is not its *raison*

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d'être. In addition, there is another activity that is both part of the same symbolic system and generally associated with the inventory of shamanic activities: divination. The "small séances" of the Nganasan shaman are derived from this: Their smallness is in relation to the "greatness" of the cures. They aim not for "knowledge" of events distant in time and space, but only to arrange it so that these events are consonant with the interests of the participants. And it is from this perspective that the apparent banality of most of the statements made during the séances can be explained: these statements are presented as little more than auxiliaries of a symbolic action directed toward future events. Divinatory activity is thus as inherent to shamanic duties as is therapeutic activity. For this reason it too can be a basis for comparisons with other specialists scattered throughout our own societies: the shaman can as easily be compared to the seer as to the psychiatrist.

Finally and especially, psychology and the symbolic analysis of shamanism must not be presented as competitive approaches: they are complementary. The study of the functions of a ritual, although capable of explaining the ritual's role in individual and collective life, cannot account for the forms by which these functions are realized – especially not dance, which constitutes an organic part of the ritual both in the collective framework, as can be seen in the Canadian, Siberian, and Central Asian examples, and in the personal one, as is demonstrated by the cure of the young Korean worker and the Limbu funeral in which the shaman, incarnating death, dances with a feather headdress on his head. On the other hand, the analysis of images is a necessary but not sufficient means of accounting for the ritual efficacy of shamanism; the path leading from the description of separate occurrences to systems of belief, and from belief to its corresponding conduct, must be attributed to the psychic order (certain aspects of such a path are brought to light in the Korean cases described by A. Guillemoz). More generally, even if anthropology confers primacy to images, it must analyze them in such a way as to be able to account for the facts that give rise to the psychological interpretations of shamanism. This is because the facts remain: there indeed is a resemblance between the shaman's ritual conduct and certain psychotherapeutic modalities; there is indeed a personalization of shamanic practices; and this personalization is in fact a means of self-expression and even of self-definition.

Equally important, the impact of shamanism on individuals pre-

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dominates not only in the various Western analytic approaches to shamanism but in its actual contemporary practices – in particular, shamanism's adaptations to the urban environment. It is from this point of view that most of the articles gathered in this collection proceed, whether or not they treat individual cases. The impact on the individual shaman is usually studied from the point of view of his personal advancement, while its impact on the individual clients who appeal to him is studied from various points of view: as therapy in the broadest sense, as a means of social assimilation, as it relates to success in business or on a trip, and also, quite explicitly, in the settling of scores – the settling of scores between the young deceased Limbu tribesman and the living whom he left behind; between Sunho and the society in which she lived (Kim's article); between Bobkov and the justice system (Helimsky and Kosterkina); and also between the Indian tribesman and the white culture that marginalized him (although Jilek does not define the conflict in these terms). This settling of scores seems, at first glance, to be of a purely personal nature. In fact it is part of a broader shamanic function that is valid on the societal scale as it is reaffirmed for each of its individual members. The purpose of settling a score is to restore an equilibrium, and the equilibrium of each individual contributes to the equilibrium of the whole; the public affected by a cure cannot be limited to those who are directly treated. This sliding from the particular to the general (and vice versa) is well illustrated in the correlation between the dead friend and the stereotyped figure of the romantic bachelor spirit *toch'aebi* who appeared during the ritual held for Sunho. Through it a kind of regulatory social order is achieved, as valid for the living as it is for the dead. On the one hand, this order is presented in the form of norms to be obeyed and offenses to be atoned for; on the other, as compensations to be conferred; and the whole expresses the necessity for a certain redistribution – even if posthumous.

This notion corresponds to another, equally inherent to shamanic symbolism: the quasi-ecological notion that the natural world on which we depend is innately limited. In the archaic context this notion is embodied in the idea of the prey, but there are others; the rain that causes crops to grow and the fertility that results; health and other personal assets that improve life: in short, everything that can be understood as resulting from chance. In this conception there is never more than enough for everyone at all times, and the one who collects in order to hoard is pillaging someone else. The

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result is jealousy and envy, and there exist many procedures to limit and channel these emotions – procedures that complement rituals held to give luck to an individual who has until now been unlucky. In such cases the ritual is addressed to the spirits of the natural world; it is they who, in this "ecological" conception of the symbolic sources of life, apportion the vital force. One expression of this is the way South American shamans turn to the forest for protection (Chaumeil). Another is when North American Indians attribute their ills to the staining of the natural environment by the white man. In both cases nature is seen as the ultimate resource and, it can be said, over the course of the evolution of shamanism there has been a growing appreciation of the continuity between the discovery of prey, vital force, and a feeling for the wholeness of identity – a journey summarized by the Siberian "games," which illustrate equally how physical activity, sport, and dance, can have an identity-giving function. More generally, shamanic rituals express the linkage between two aspects of society that help to perpetuate it: its internal regulation and the maintenance of a harmonious relation to the environment. This explains how rituals concerned with the hunt or with war can be the source of individual cures, as in the Canadian case. Personal and collective accounts are settled and equilibrium restored by the combined efforts of spirits of two categories: the souls of the dead and spirits of nature. This accounts for the polyvalence of shamanic rituals and their role in supporting ethnic identity – a role that is currently growing in Canada and Siberia.

Why then is it that shamanism is never institutionalized (because surely it is reputed to be such)? And why can it so easily be permeated by the "great" religions, as Basilov demonstrates for Islam, Chaumeil for Christianity, and Guillemoz for Buddhism? The question here is not whether recurrent rituals, like the ones described by Jilek, can be codified (Would they not then lose their efficacy? Heinze and others have shown that such is the cost of codification); nor is it to determine whether Islamicized shamanism (permeated by Sufism) or a Catholicism with prophetic and spiritist tendencies, can still be considered shamanism at all. Rather, along with these authors, we would be more inclined to try to specify some of its properties and limits by observing how shamanism – so resolute and tenacious – evolves, resists, and adapts to all circumstances.

We will limit ourselves here to one theme: the conception of the

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supernatural powers involved in shamanic activity. The conventional term "spirits," which has been generally adopted to designate them, implies, on the one hand, a relationship with the beings, phenomena, and things in which they (these spirits) reside; and, on the other, that they are neither self-created nor transcendent (in contrast with the gods), but statutorily equivalent to the soul that resides in the body of the person. This equivalence is the basis for the idea of direct contact with the spirits and makes possible (since equivalence does not mean equality) the action of a person upon them, either through barter, negotiation, threat, or the play of the varying relations of power. It is up to the shaman to make the best use of them.

This equivalence gives rise to a general pragmatism. A few hundred more rupees will help the shaman feel more confident of being able to appease the vindictive deceased (Michailovsky and Sagant); one more glass of vodka poured for the Nganasan shaman will better the mood of the spirit who is being consulted for a prediction – in this case Saint Nicholas (Helimsky and Kosterkina). This consultation is possible because shamanic pragmatism extends to borrowed Saints; in shamanic logic they are viewed as the souls of those who have died particularly tragic or premature deaths. It is on this grounds that Jesus Christ can be asked to speak, just as Korean spirits are asked to speak, or treated in the same way as the spirits released by hallucinogens in South America. It is for this reason too that Saints can be made the object of shamanic practices while simultaneously being the object of Christian or Muslim rituals; thus shamanism can co-exist with the veneration of a transcendent monotheistic God.

Not only the notion of pragmatism but other characteristics of shamanism depend on this statutory equivalence of man and spirit (the length and quality of each person's life depends on it, for instance.). One such characteristic is a relativist morality, which is opposed to the absolutism of the principals of Good and Evil that the great religions espouse (this is why there exists the problem of "moralization" in South American shamanism); but this same relativism allows for the treatment of any kind of problem or event, even the most trivial. It is an open morality, capable of integrating ever new dimensions, including relationships with occupying powers (evoked, for example, by the Nganasans in the metaphor of "The Iron Horse"). Above all, it is a morality of efficacy, giving to man power over his world and a place for the individual. It is the

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pluralism and mobility of this ethic that prompts shamans, in an acculturated setting, to disperse themselves into a multitude of counter-powers rather than uniting themselves into a single one; and this contributes to its capacity for perpetual resurgence and innovation. Is it any wonder, then, that shamanism's vitality arouses the infatuation of many in our liberal Western societies?

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