
The Invisible Rendered Visible: The Art of Seeing Through the Shaman's Eye

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Abstract

Prevailing Western world view continues to interpret traditional Native North American shamanic art as simple, static artifacts disembodied from their natural cultural context and steeped in the concepts of permanence and display. This paper submits that a more accurate and delimiting view may reflect that the shamanic complex produced living and ephemeral art forms formulated as visible embodiments of individual spiritual experience. Traditional shamanistic art dynamically articulated and codified the underpinnings of the shaman's world view. Visual metaphors and symbolism within the design structure acted as metaphysical templates and cognitive maps to encode, embody and express the complex dimensions and interrelationships which ordered and defined the shaman's role as a religious specialist within the natural and supernatural worlds.

The concept of oppositional constructs as fundamental may be a given within Western perception and thought, but becomes problematic when applied to traditional Native North American art and culture. The Western interpolation of realism remains entrenched in physical matter and notions of spirit/matter dualism. A Native North American world view stresses a holistic complementary model of interrelatedness, where spirit and matter are simultaneous and inseparable.

In opposition to the Western aesthetic perception that continues to define traditional native art as "viewable", quiescent commodities, this paper will adopt the premise that the Western way of "seeing" the world and the "other" is inadequate for the interpretation of Native North American shamanic art. A more accurate view may reveal that these culturally contexted art forms blended sensory and experiential knowledge to mirror the unity of the universe and to reflect the epistemology and sanctity of the shamanic complex. The shaman's sophisticated visual creations were richly appointed cultural

messengers, which continue to convey an innate and palpable life force that transcends space and time.

The thrust of Western critical theory and art perception, based upon the conception of art for art's sake, has constructed a view of North American Native art as a decontextualized commodity. Oppositional constructs utilized in Western society to define Native art forms remain problematic. The connotation of hierarchy remains implicit within binary oppositions such as simple/complex, matter/spirit or body/soul, implying a superior status over the weaker secondary terminology (Churchill 1996:584). The inability of the Western establishment to understand Native visual expressions is compounded by its persistent attempts to categorize these art forms as handicrafts or as taxonomic specimens. Regardless of its implied cultural context or ritual purpose, Native art continues to be transformed by museums, art dealers and Western audiences to be utilized for one singular purpose: to be viewed. As commodities, reflecting the Western view of reality, visual expressions are preserved and enclosed under glass as curiosities or acquisitions and moved along carefully constructed commercial pathways to be bought or sold in a global market (Maquet 1971:4-6,13). Western society, in the past and more importantly in the postmodern landscape, is faced with the world view of the "other" and the legacy of imperialist, expansionist policy and the debilitating effects of acculturation upon the indigenous population. A Western orientation toward denial and ethnocentrism concerning the history of North America is challenged by the visual existence of traditional North American Native art and their cultural histories. The non-Native establishment has attempted to marginalize, exclude, and devalue the study of Native art (Young Man 1992:82-83).

Tiered levels of meaning are effaced when traditional Native shamanic art is uprooted from the continuity of its cultural framework. Complex multisensory and multivocal attributes are silenced or lost during the modification of the art form into an inert object for display (Classen 1997:402-403). Navajo sand paintings, as an example, exceed the singular role expressed by their visual design element. The sand painting, as an art form, serves as a spiritual medium of transmission for healing power. Sacred templates utilized for the emblematic designs are memorized and meticulously replicated (Pasztor 1982:24-27). The patient is seated in the centre of the sand painting as the shaman singer chants and applies sand to the body of

the participant. The visual, tactile, oral/aural and intangible nature of this creative composition builds a bridge between the cosmic and social realms and serves to demonstrate the hidden reality underlying this ritual art. Upon the completion of the healing performance, the shaman ritually disposes of the sand and erases the painting, effectively collapsing the bridge of communication between the sacred and secular realms. The ephemeral nature of the sand painting is requisite to the proper performance of the ritual. Traditional Navajo religion prohibits the preservation of intact paintings. Conventional Western ideology and perception views this process not as an act of completion, but as the destruction of an art form. Art dealers, collectors and scholars have replicated these paintings and removed them from their spiritual and cultural cradle to preserve, study and display them within a static format. Western models of textual analysis, spirit/matter dualism and themes of permanence applied to these perishable expressions serve to diminish and limit the complex dimensionality embodied by these visceral art forms (Classen 1997:403; Pasztor 1982:24-28).

Perhaps the exploration of North American Native shamanic art may best be accomplished through a brief preliminary overview of the shaman and his/her role as a religious specialist. The origins of shamanism predate recorded civilization and extend beyond proto history. Evidence of shamanic practices existing from the Paleolithic period link the shamanic complex to the animal hunt (Halifax 1982:5-6). Shamanism continues to survive within both non-literate and contemporary, complex state-societies. Although shamanism remains culture-specific, it expresses a commonality within clusters of cross-cultural traits. Trance (an altered state of consciousness) is critical to the role of shaman and defines and sets the practitioner apart from other religious specialists. During trance, the shaman leaves the physical body and explores the cosmic realms, controlling and manipulating the supernatural forces for human ends. Within his/her role as a religious specialist, the shaman may exist separately or along side other religious practitioners within the community but seldom assumes the role on a full-time basis (Furst 1994:1-6). As a part-time religious specialist the shaman must be in possession of a diverse set of skills but primacy is allotted to his/her talents in the realms of trance, curing, divining and art. Wadley defines the religious specialist as a conveyer of religious instruction or a ritual/ceremonial guide involved

in ritual practice or an individual who receives recompense from a client for ritual/religious services rendered (1988:36). Presenting as a dynamic agent who possessed the ability to “charm” and “work” the ritual through song, dance and art, the shaman assured and maintained his/her social status and public recognition through theatric ritual, art, apparel and demeanour.

The shamanic complex did not give credence to a hierarchical structuring of consciousness (Furst 1994:2). All realities existed simultaneously in time and space, interconnecting all human and non human existence. The shaman was a liminal character who constantly endeavoured to exist and maintain an equilibrium atop the razor sharp periphery between the sacred and secular worlds. The scope and trajectory of the life of the shaman conforms to the time-space process of van Gennep’s (1960) formulation of the rites of passage. The pre-liminal rites of separation experienced by the shaman begins with the trance journey, which separates the individual from the ordinary consciousness of the secular world. Transition from this liminal state reincorporates the individual into his/her new liminal status within the sacred realm. Each shaman who has experienced the ecstatic trance journey has undergone a separation from a fixed way of life and social status. Passing into a liminal existence, each has suffered a “metaphorical” death, ceasing to hold membership within prior secular social constructs and is projected into a new socio-religious landscape (van Gennep 1960:21,185). The shaman is a mediator between the human, natural and spiritual worlds and a seer whose trance, ritual performance and art continue to give symbolic meaning to the forces that inhabit and animate the cosmos.

Traditional North American Native shamanic art was not created as “art for art’s sake”: rather, it was art generated for ritual action, performance, curing, divining, and most importantly for survival. Shamanic art utilized an eloquent and complex visual dialogue to express the concept of stored cultural inventory and empirical knowledge within a non textual framework. The visual expressions of sculpture, carving, painting and pigment gave form and meaning to the ineffable and served to encode the shaman’s awareness of cogent cosmological precepts. As Johnson observes, “nothing could be farther from the spirit of this art than fragmenting it into a Western aesthetic framework of art for art’s sake” (Johnson 1973:22). Universal themes within the shamanic complex emerged as a unified

ontology embracing the fundamentals of individual trance states, curing, reciprocity, the integration of all existence, communication with and control over spirits, and the belief in an invisible, all pervasive divine power that permeated seen and unseen matter (Grim 1983:3,4). As with religion, there were no expressions within the Native North American dialects that paralleled the Western concept of art as unique or separate from the daily experience of life. Art was produced by craftspeople who worked within traditions or regional styles. The “potentiality of artist” existed within each individual (Feest 1996:9,14). Before proceeding further, it is important to be appreciative of the fact that any theory, analysis or methodology may offer tidy explanations and easy elucidations but may, in fact, serve only to obscure the complex underpinnings of shamanic art. Distancing makes any type of knowledge or explanation suspect and must naturally leave many questions unanswered.

By embodying the unknown into visual form and “rendering the invisible, visible”, the shaman demonstrated his or her own degree of axiomatic control over the transformative process and the forces of the macrocosm. These ritually charged transitional art forms were intrinsic to the equilibrium of the cultural complex and served as mediators, communicators and metaphorical agents to facilitate the shaman’s shifts in consciousness within the metaphysical, physical, and social realms. Shamanic art reinforced and reflected cultural solidarity and beliefs, and shaped the consciousness of the people involved shaman and audience alike (Halifax 1982:35). The employment of shamanic art assigned a measure of social order to the domains of real and mythic time and space. The art of the shaman was eminently personal, religious, and performance oriented. These visionary creations reflected the shaman’s ability to straddle the continuum between the secular and the sacred while moulding order out of chaos and linking strands of information to make the connections coherent. The individualized experiential process of the acquisition of personal power and spiritual alliances enabled a direct participation with verities beyond the scope of conventional empirical knowledge, providing the shaman with an extraordinary ability to actuate change within the medical, cultural, natural and supernatural domains.

The potency of the power accrued during this interiorized state of altered consciousness, or trance, was actualized through the

production of the art object(s) which it directly or indirectly denoted. These works of art expedited the cultural legitimacy of the shaman's role as a religious specialist. Serving as vehicles for the visual and symbolic display of the prestige and social status of the shaman, they spoke to the fact that if one were eligible to perform the ritual and had the spiritual expertise or know-how, one was in a position of power. Religious knowledge equates with worldly power of a personal or salvic nature, that in turn served to identify the shaman as either a malevolent force or a spiritual benefactor within the cultural complex. Each sacred art piece contained powerful metaphors and highly condensed symbolic imagery which reinforced and magnified the sense of secular and spiritual well being for the shaman and for the community. These creations projected the shaman toward the sacred and distanced him or her from the established social order of the temporal realm. Visual arts utilized by shamans reflected, conveyed and incorporated shamanic beliefs and values, which focused upon the variable and ephemeral nature of the ritual and ceremonial process, rather than quiescent concepts of display and permanence. As living communicators, this art placed a strong emphasis upon the subjective message with less concern generated toward formal attributes (Pasztesy 1982:9,14).

Sacred art should not be viewed as a souvenir or minimized as a commemorative of the visionary journey. These art forms embraced the power of the vision and projected the forces being replicated. Emulating spirits, plants, animals or humans in stylized, abstract or symbolic form, these visual expressions became an extension of the individual. The spiritual essence of the forms created could be influenced and appealed to through the reproduction of the image. Spiritual insights were generally of a private and secretive nature and although images or forms of this experience could be displayed, exact replication could diminish the power conferred. This prohibition may have inspired creative modes of expression but resulted in the cloaking of true form and meaning, thus precluding further attempts to fully understand the nuances and precise nature of the shamanic art form (Phillips 1984:26-28).

Revelatory insights captured by the shaman during soul navigated sojourns to the underworld and celestial realms had to be recorded, stored and disseminated. Shamans became master cartographers, mapping the design and topography of the cosmic

worlds visited during the shamanic journey (Halifax 1982:66-67). The art of remembering remains as an intensely personal experience, and for the shaman, his or her sacred art reflected complex mnemonic and cognitive mapping systems that served to identify the potentiality and danger offered by natal forces and cosmic landscapes. Downs and Stea (1977) suggest that cognitive mapping is a flexible mental process that occurs at a level beyond our conscious awareness, allowing people to develop a comprehension and perspective concerning the world around them. It may be explained as a simple model or representation of the personal environment which is displayed as a mental image within the brain and, most importantly, mirrors the world view of the individual. Constructed of representative symbols, which may be retrieved at will, it allows for the construction and generation of sequenced ideas, spatial mnemonics, mental images, models of the environment, and storehouses for memories. The process of spatial mnemonics fuses a well understood cognitive map with non-spatial information (Downs and Stea 1977:6,7,24,27,61,96-97). As an example, an Oregon rock carving depicting concentric circles and a skeletonized shamanic figure may have acted as a spatial signifier for a portal of entry or point of convergence within the natural world, that may have more easily facilitated a profound and powerful communication between the cosmic and earthly realms (Halifax 1982:76).

For the shaman, realms of power which were not mapped had not been personally experienced or mastered. Cognitive maps were graphic notations of remembered spiritual experience, with the abstract or figurative form instantly recognized as "stills" or "snapshots" preserved from the journey. The shaman engendered selective and highly complex cognitive maps which articulated the religious and sociocultural structures reflective of the society in which the shaman-artist and his or her audience lived (Fischer 1971:158). The Dieguenos shamans of Southern California created an ordered universe and assumed control of the elements through a ground-painting ritual utilizing design elements which fused cosmic and temporal topography. Enclosed within a circle representing the horizon, images of celestial bodies, earthly landscapes, power allies, reptiles, animals and ritual paraphernalia set the stage for a male puberty ritual (Halifax 1982:66). Shamanic societies such as the Great Lakes Ojibwa Midewiwin or Grand Medicine Society, utilize the process of cognitive mapping and spatial mnemonics to record sacred art. Birch bark and

incised wooden boards are repositories for cosmogony charts, curing techniques, songs and rituals. These scrolls or boards have become sacred archival tools utilized for shamanic initiation, memorization and ritual performance. Metaphoric imagery, sacred pictographs and totemic markings are crafted into a functional mnemonic system of notation and transformed into a complex graphic art form. Some Ojibwa song boards are framed by symbolic otters (Phillips 1988:64-65). The otter may have served as a visual metaphor for the sacred "megis" (cowrie shell) of the Midewiwin (Hoffman 1982:372-375). The Midewiwin was dedicated to curing, but it also promised its members a safe journey to the afterworld. The society held annual initiation ceremonies, during which the new members were "shot" dead by the sacred cowrie shell contained within an otter medicine bag, and were then mystically reborn into a "new life" (Phillips 1988:64).

Washburn observes that metaphoric thinking is perceived to be a highly sophisticated thought process innate to human cognitive ability. Metaphor is a figurative representation that demonstrates relationships through the dissonant juxtaposition of concepts or objects from differing sectors, illustrating special intuitions about the world. Representational and nonrepresentational images and patterns explicit within art expressions become powerful metaphoric vehicles that serve as viable transformers and custodians of cultural memory. These art objects share culturally contexted experience to encode, communicate and preserve the consciousness necessary for cultural distinction, adaptation, unity and survival (1999:548,550,553-554). Rich symbolism and visual metaphors, woven together by the shaman, create a luminous tapestry, which demonstrates an intricate synthesis of multiple realities. The expertise and skill of the shaman shines with the production of a finely crafted Northwest Coast Tlingit Raven rattle. A frog with its tongue resting in a shaman's mouth is carved into and supported by the raven's back. The interactive interplay of the linking of tongues may be a metaphor for the transference of sacred power. The rattle itself is a messenger and a signifier of symbiotic relationships and direct contact with the earthly and cosmic realms. The symbolic raven is a cultural ideal, a mythic benefactor to humankind and a metaphor for shamanism, curing power, the sun, and health. Raven and his proxy, the shaman, metaphorically merge to effect the spiritual healing process (Obomsawin 1977:50; Johnson

1973:4,13-15).

Shamanic attire was the manifest form of the art of creative composition. Art that was portable, wearable, visual and tactile reinforced the personal autonomy of the practitioner and crystallized the hegemony of the shamanic complex. In his classic work about shamanism, Mircea Eliade clearly articulated the intrinsic meaning and intent behind shamanic dress when he wrote, "the shaman's costume itself constitutes a religious hierophany and cosmography, it discloses not only a sacred presence but also cosmic symbols and metapsychic itineraries" (1964:145). Eliade goes on to succinctly express that "one becomes what one displays" (1964:179).

Celestial images of stars, moons, and suns were worked into the interior of a Miami shaman's buffalo robe to protect the secrecy and potency of the sacred vision. Vestments crafted in this manner may have been utilized as instructive cosmological charts and cognitive maps of personal trance journeys. The symbolism along the robe's quilled border may have served to mnemonically demarcate power zones and shamanic access points between the upper and lower worlds (Phillips 1984:28). During Naskapi (Innu) and Cree observances, a specially prepared and pigmented ceremonial caribou skin was hung at the eastern door to absorb the first dawn light in reverence of the sun, the animals and the spirits. When worn, the sacred, white hide conveyed the stored power and ensured a successful hunt (Tanner 1979:101-105,170-171; Burham 1992). Carved Northwest Coast shamanic charms were finely crafted from natural bone, stone, ivory or antler in the form of the shaman's spirit helpers. These dimensional, carved sculptures were worn as necklaces, concealed within the shaman's dress or kept in a box, as protective amulets or curing helpers. Charms were visual metaphors for light or fire and particular ones, if laid against a patient's body, would exhibit a luminosity if good health were predicted (Johnson 1973:10). The charm, as an art form, was an animate projection of the shaman and his or her spirit allies. As living art it could be perceived as a tactile, sensory map employed within the ritual processes for protection and curing.

Woven pouches that functioned as receptacles for medicinal ingredients and ritual paraphernalia were common to many Eastern Woodland Nations including the Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Menomini. The uncommon paired imaging of the supernatural Thunder Bird from the upper world and the Underwater Panther from the lower world

appeared to be unique to these twined, fibre bags. Acting as metaphors for parity, the combination of the feline and bird motifs demonstrated the inalienable power of the shaman to effect and maintain a balanced tension between the cosmic forces of the upper and lower worlds. Ingenious visual metaphors informed the observer that although these bags were functional storage containers, they may have belonged to the shaman, a powerful religious specialist who possessed the ability to balance and control the supernatural forces of the upper and lower worlds (Wilson 1982:429,433,439,440).

Shamanic art had to accurately duplicate cosmic order to successfully construct viable avenues of communication to the spiritual domains (Phillips 1984:25). Conventional cosmological models of the universe section the cosmos into three zones: the sky, earth and lower world. The centre of the world or "axis mundi" joins each topographical layer and passes through an opening that serves as a point of access for the shaman's soul flights (Eliade 1964:259-266). Each spatial zone provides a point of orientation within the shaman's perceptual matrix. Shamanic art produced innovative patterning techniques or metaphysical templates to facilitate the shaman's dialogues and journeys within the sacred worlds. Diverse visual expressions were arranged and positioned to reflect harmonious order and balance. The shaman artist proficiently mapped the divine realms and demonstrated a parodistic balancing of cosmic direction, colour, form, and design.

Salish shamans make descents to the underworld for the retrieval of a patient's stolen soul. The shaman's journey becomes a "live" ritual performance which utilizes a house and shamanic art to form a metaphysical template for the creation of a spiritual pathway. Pasztory (1982) describes the ritual installation and placement of the shaman's painted and designed wooden planks (the canoe and spirit helpers), and post figures (passengers), in the house or "spirit canoe". The wooden art forms become visual metaphoric agents for canoe passengers and spirit allies while the shaman controls the "boat" or journey with sacred staffs that represent oars, bows, spears, or poles (Pasztory 1982:9-10). The ritual process often lasted for days until the religious specialist could capture the soul in a small, shamanic bone sculpture known as a "soul catcher", that stored the patient's essence until it could be returned to the individual to effect a spiritual healing (Johnson 1973:10-11). The art forms and metaphysical template

created by the shaman for this ritual drama were never intended to express a static display or any lasting degree of permanence. The props, which may have encapsulated negative spirits or illness during the journey, were destroyed. The belief that no two shamanic experiences were identical was clearly articulated by the innovative and ephemeral nature of Native North American shamanic art (Pasztory 1982:9-10).

During the pervasive period of Euro-American colonialism and the acculturation of the Plains people, Wolf Collar, a Blackfoot shaman created dynamic and corpulent images of Thunderbirds on his personal medicine shields (Brasser 1977:39). This intense visionary art may have been produced and envisioned as an attempt to reify Plains culture. Brasser goes on to write about Wolf Collar's art, "...his fat painted Thunderbirds, original and vigorous in the context of the weakening art and culture of his contemporaries, but like ancient Blackfoot Thunderbirds and like thunderclouds, represent the retrieval of life that is the power and duty of the artist and medicine man alike..." (1977:39). Conceived and given birth by the vision quest (an individual rite of passage for the pursuit of visionary experience), Plains shields became potent repositories for acquired spiritual power. Elaborate or unalloyed culturally defined rituals validated and governed the creation, care, and use of the individual's shield (Mooney 1964:417). Sacred ceremony and imagery ritually charged the shield with power that was utilized to protect and meet the requirements of the visionary as well as the community (Petri 1938:196,201).

The ability to decode and interpret Plains shields may remain tenuous at best, due to the skilful artistic techniques employed to conceal the true nature of the spiritual experience. Complex design layout incorporated abstract representational, geometric and naturalistic elements. Linear bisections of the design field could indicate dual forces in opposition, while images depicting Thunderbirds or tadpoles may have been visual metaphors demonstrating the power of transformation and the ability to transcend the natural world (Taylor 1994:13,15,30,41). Appendages and symbols were often ritually attached to the circular rawhide to complement and strengthen the protective functions of the shield. Cheyenne cosmology subscribed to the concept of a multilayered universe. Colour values utilized in shield design could have had implied meanings relating to these parallel worlds and the individual's spiritual vision. Blue-green

may have articulated the seer's position on the earth plane while the colour red could have implied visionary experience or shamanic power (Kan and Wierzbowski 1982:240,242).

Some shields were moistened or fed with water prior to use, and all were sustained and activated by a daily sun ritual (Petri 1938:204; Taylor 1994:14-15). A dark figure with a knotted hair emerges from the centre of a Crow shield. The subject's hairstyle may signify a holy man, shaman or pipe owner (Taylor 1994:26). Convergent lines could symbolize the "axis mundi" and the spiritual access point for supernatural communion. The Crow buffalo shield (1800-1834) is painted red and the subject exhibits a skeletal or x-ray design, perhaps indicating shamanic qualities. Pasztor observes, "these designs, given by the initiating spirits, are necessary as a form of visual validation of the spiritual encounter which took place in isolation, and cannot be repeated in public" (1982:23). Plains shield art possessed a powerful animate nature, clearly expressed through the resonance of its visual, tactile, auditory and kinetic qualities. The shaman artist, prior to the introduction of European spatial perspective, managed to transform a three dimensional visionary experience into a sophisticated two-dimensional art form (Kan and Wierzbowski 1982:242). Most importantly, the metaphysical templates inherent within each shield created a pathway or portal which allowed for a continuous rapport with the spiritual powers.

Montagnais-Naskapi (Innu) shamans continue to cure illness utilizing the tradition of vision or trance induced dream patterns. Male or female shamans relay their secret vision to a female, who reproduces the pattern with a beaded necklace known as a *natutshikan*. Beads utilized within the design elements are recognized as "spirit berries" and are viewed as symbolic food offerings for the cosmic forces. Prior to the introduction of beads, the shaman's visions were painted in symbolic colours on a caribou skin necklace. These curative metaphysical templates diagram and image the physical topography of the patient's body and illness, the healing pathways to be followed by both shaman and patient, and the cosmological and spirit allies controlled by the shaman. This curative art form is worn by the patient for the remainder of his/her life. Taking up residence within the patient's body, the shaman becomes rooted within the *natutshikan* and assumes complete control during the healing process (Webber 1977:118,120-121).

To assume conferred power and achieve success, Naskapi (Innu) tradition asserts that images, colour and materials that are revealed to an individual in a dream or trance state must be faithfully reproduced by symbolic or graphic means (Speck 1977:197,199). Natutshikans may be embellished with the semi-realistic beaded motifs of birds and worms. The vermiform may be a metaphor for the shaman healer, Manitu (the unseen force) or the miut mivit, the mysterious supernaturally crafted shaman's bag (Webber 1977:120,121). Shamans deftly constructed powerful dream patterns into living, breathing, art forms. Each natutshikan reaffirms the cultural status and absolute authority of the shaman within Montagnais-Naskapi (Innu) culture.

The shamanic art form was made manifest in a pluriform way to reveal the expansive and pervasive influence of the spirit world. Art and tiered systems of meaning fused to create art-as-event. The fabric of the corporeal world offered an abundance of visual tropes for the immanence of supernatural force in the earthly realm. Certain elements within nature possessed unique attributes that expressed potent spiritual meaning for the shaman who, in turn, utilized these substances in his or her art to symbolically open a way of communication between the earthly and spiritual domains. Veiled cosmic forces were revealed in sacred geography and celestial manifestations. As Furst observes "... all phenomena of nature including ... plants, animals, rocks, rain, thunder, lightning, stars and planets ... are animate, imbued with a life essence or soul ... generally speaking the origin of life is held to lie in transformation ..." (1994:2). Visual expressions transformed temporal topography into a microcosm of the macrocosm and showed the interrelatedness of sacred and secular times and spaces. Art constructed from the shaman's dream scape depicted all life as a sentient, sacred, purposive whole.

The North American Native shamanic complex produced living ephemeral art forms that were formulated as visual embodiments of individual spiritual experience, eloquently articulating the world view and role of the shaman as a religious specialist. The shaman artist employed complex visual metaphors, symbolism, cognitive maps, and metaphysical templates within the design structure to encode a holistic complementary model of universal interrelatedness, where spirit and matter were a simultaneous occurrence. There were no hierarchical constructs of consciousness. Traditional shamanic art was not created as art-for-art's sake, it was art-as-event, envisioned within a culturally

contextualized form that evolved from ritual action, curing, divining, and for survival. These visual expressions were storehouses for cultural inventory and empirical knowledge within a non textual framework. Serving as mediators, communicators, and metaphorical agents to facilitate the shaman's shifts in consciousness between the metaphysical and social realms, these ritually charged transitional art forms were intrinsic to the equilibrium and wellbeing of the shaman and the cultural complex. These forms replicated the pattern of the cosmos, embraced the power of the vision, and projected the spiritual force being mapped. As with spirituality, there is no concept of art as separate from daily existence. In a Native world view there is no dualism, the sacred is sovereign and omnipresent and the model for perception is the holistic interplay of the senses (Smith 1998:412,427-428).

The Western world, in contrast, looks for meaning in the visible world. The real world is conspicuous, and can be seen and easily touched. Entrenched in spirit/matter dualism, reality is segmented, and spirituality and art are separated and compartmentalized. The full sensorium offered by the art form of the visionary is abrogated and denied. Native shamanic art has been given reductive treatment by the dominant society. Perhaps the combination of themes inherent within Western perceptual orientation, critical theory, the legacy of imperialism or ethnocentric attitudes have worked in unison to diminish and transform shamanic art into culturally disenfranchised static commodities. As Johnson observes "Westerners are accustomed to seeing shamanistic objects in museums and it is all too easy to forget that this was once a living art, an applied art, with the word applied indicating additional skills and talents beyond those necessary for physical creation" (1973:3). The aesthetic framework and the use of a linear, textual language for an interpretation of the art of the non-literate "other" is inadequate and untenable. It appears there may be insufficient interest within the non-Native culture to penetrate, on a deeper level, the consciousness of the people who created this visceral art. A higher form of reflexivity and objectivity must be adopted, otherwise only a distorted and incomplete picture of this sophisticated art form will emerge. The cues are at variance because the meanings and referents are different.

The multidimensional and multi vocal nature of shamanic art iconically connects the ritual process, strengthens the legitimacy of the

shaman as a religious specialist, and assigns a symbolic presence to the dynamic unity between the shaman and the cultural complex. Perhaps the Western world may pause, reflect, and turn to give primacy to those who are practised in the art of seeing through the shaman's eye.

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