

The Artist as a Shaman

An artist is an individual in body yet also a part of the body of the culture within which the artist lives. Perhaps, the part of the culture that is its heart; often called the soul.

Today, in high technological societies, the individual, the artist, is usually controlled by people of wealth who determine for the society which imagery is appropriate and lucrative. The artist seeking to make a living makes every effort to satisfy those directives.

In comparison, the artist in low technology societies is a cultural guide who can relate to other than the physical dimension. Typically the connection is achieved through vocalization, sounds, visuals, and movement. Today we might call the forms of the connections poetry, music, visual art and dance. As a member of the culture the artist is a healer and a guide. I believe the name we recognize is Shaman.

The nature of a Shaman emanates from their intuitive connections allowing them to commune with the sharing spirits of animals, plants, water, earth, the weather and the ancestors. Their openness to the intuition provides them with the ability to receive visions, connect telepathically and to experience premonitions. The shaman, a spirit being, provides the community a way of connecting to the wholeness of life. The shaman seeks to promote a balanced life within their culture by acting as a medium through which the inner and the outer dimension manifests harmoniously. The empowerment of the shaman is enhanced by their willingness to provide their service freely to their community. They view their ability as a gift to be openly shared within the needs of their society. The shaman's ability to promote healing through chanting, through dance, and through painting is the actualization of the Spirits moving through the shaman, rather than the shaman as an individual artist doing the moving. As such, the shaman is the link, a medium through which the Spirits manifest. As Spirit translates into the physical world the shaman is seen dancing the images, painting the images, and chanting the messages of the Spirits that guard and guide the community.

Shamans are born into every society but in high tech. communities their existence is denied and as such there are no shamanistic avenues of growth available. Unless they are able to find a way to enter into the ways of a creative artist/craftsperson their ability to live a coherent life, given their nature being denied to them, often results in the development of serious mental issues. The outcome of having their nature denied to them with a lack of positive outlets for their expression is that their gifts turn inward. While they retain the ability to connect to the Spirits those voices are drowned out by the voices that now dominate, which shout out the society's denial of them and as such they hear only criticism and dismissal. As most people do, in direct relationship to how they are treated, they subconsciously start to act in the way that their society sees them; in their case as useless and disturbing and even so uncomfortable as to be threatening. In this progression the voices often take on a hypnotic resonance that acts as a compulsion for the denial of their self-worth such that they begin to act in a self-destructive manner. Being cut off by their society their existence of marginalization and isolation denies them access to the warmth and caring social recognition and interaction so critical in mental health. This creates a sense of social deprivation that leaves only their inner world active. For the denied shaman the drive for social connection causes their mind's to reframe their world and it is not uncommon to observe them talking with "invisible" people. To them these internal people and their voices are real and with no other outlet they become their social circle. The high tech. culture interprets these symptoms as schizophrenia, which leads to hospitalization and to an effort to cut off their connection to these aberrations through medication.

Let's take a look through the lens of the past and see this development in action. When technology advances within a culture a dwindling number of people remain in a close relationship with nature, the core environment of Shamanistic societies. Technology promotes gathering people together in a progression of ever more dense habitation starting with villages, then towns, and then cities. In this progression of a culture moving through advancing grades of technology the people shift from hunting and gathering to farming and herding. While the society shifted to farming the role of the shaman retained some value as the people still remained attached to the way of the sky, the earth, the sun, and the waters. However, when the people began to congregate within a village life, the role of the shaman in that setting became increasingly marginalized. As future generations moved further from a direct contact with nature and into the towns and cities the technological development required for industrialization was attained and so the detachment from the natural way became complete.

Also of importance is to recognize that along with technological development acting as a magnet for conglomerate living was the emergence of formalized religion and the establishment of an autocratic hierarchy ruled by priests that was centered within the temple. Where as the Shamans taught that the Spirits in Nature are everywhere, not so in formalized religion. These new teachings related that the Spirits only resided in the temple and the power of the Spirits could only be dispensed by the priests who required an offering for their services. The townspeople were taught and came to accept, then to believe that should they not offer sacrifices at the temple the Spirits would shroud those that failed in this "sacred duty" with disease and poverty.

While this was going on, at first not all shamans remained outside the towns. Those who were of a special nature chose to go with the people attempting to remain connected to them. At some point shamans found that regardless of their commitment they were unable to commune properly with the spirits in the old ways. What communion took place was also weakened by the gross energies of technology and the interference of the priestly caste. Given that the Shaman's empowerment is derived from Nature their ability to commune with the Spirits weakened so much that they eventually withdrew to live in small rural communities with those of the older generation in isolated valleys far from the townships.

Lets look at this process in what is now called Europe at the time of the introduction of Christianity by the Romans. In this example the exclusion of the role of the Shaman took a different path. In the missionary effort the Church well knew that they could not succeed while the spiritual life of the indigenous people whom they labeled as pagans was vibrant. They quickly grasped that this intense vibrancy was the direct result of the ability of the shamans. As Romans they knew the power of the Spirits from their own pagan days before becoming Christians. With this knowledge they were sensitive to the power of imagery and that the shamans channeled the will of the Spirits to the people through these forms. The Church assumed that should they gain control over the shamans then they could harness the power of the Spirits for their own purposes, which was, for them, to concentrate power into their hands and thereby seize control of the will of the people. So the Church conspired to first undermine the influence of the shaman, and then to take control of the shaman's power.

In the Pre-Christian era the world was populated by numerous cultures and many religions each claiming to be the best. However almost none of these cultures claimed that their religion was the only one. In Western Theology the concept of a Single God originated in Egypt but not successfully. During the time of the Hebrews, and specifically with Moses and the Gift of the Ten Commandments, the formalization of the One was in place. Between the time of Christ

up to the time that the Roman Empire took on the mantle of Christianity, the religion struggled to develop its legitimacy. It achieved this when Emperor Constantine claimed Christianity for the Roman Empire. In doing this, the Roman Church was empowered to claim that G-d had ordained them to replace the Jewish people; now with the Christians as the Chosen People of the One G-d. In this process Jesus Christ was to be viewed as G-d and the Son of God and that from there ever after Christianity was the only legitimate religion. They taught the concept of original sin and that the only way one could enter heaven was to be baptized. They then promoted themselves to be ordained to carry the word of G-d to all the non-Christians with the intent to convert them through missionaries, and when necessary, through military domination and subordination.

In seeking to convert the indigenous people, the Romans understood that conquering a people is made easier by dividing them. With this strategy they quickly determined which local tribes were in conflict with each other. They then promised one of the tribes that should they convert to Christianity that they would lend their military support against that tribe's enemies. However should any of the other tribes accept Christianity they were to be treated as allies. Using this approach Christianity obtained its foothold and spread as the Chieftains quickly agreed to this arrangement. Once a Chieftain was baptized all of his tribe had to follow suit. The Church taught that there is only one true religion and anyone who did not convert would live a tortured life, if not in this life, then in the afterlife. Once the converts were under the power of The Church they taught these converts that the Spirits of their ancestors were demons and could assume any guise to seduce the people. They taught that the shamans were the devil's priests on earth and as such were a threat to the welfare of the community. The Church condemned the shamans as witches and wizards, and dictated that the penalty for being such was death. Further anyone consorting with witches or wizards would be punished. Within those areas dominated by Christian converts the people were encouraged to identify the shamans and when captured the shamans/witches and wizards, through the love of Christ, were given a choice, either death or to recant and to swear allegiance to the Church. In areas dominated by the Romans the influence of the shamans were largely eliminated, and the people losing their spiritual leaders fell deeper under the sway of the Church's influence.

Many shamans perished during these times. In their demise, so died much of the knowledge of living a balanced life where the Spiritual and the worldly dimensions live in harmony and appreciation. It was in "capturing" the Spirits through the capitulation of the shamans who chose to live rather than to die that the power of the Natural Spirits was enslaved to the purposes of the Church and its glorification. The Church knowing that these shamans were mediums of the local spirits restricted their activity into the role of Church artists/craftspeople resulting in their skill and power of communion being thereafter harnessed to glorify the Church.

As the shaman/artists/craftspeople were integrated into the Church they assisted in the creation of the churches and endowed them with magnificent painting and sculptures that glorified Christianity. When the common people entered these churches they were overwhelmed with the imagery and the power, for the Spirits through the Shaman/artisans were trapped in these artistic creations. This experience of being among such glorious images and hearing the unworldly chanting was interpreted as proof of the Church's connection with G-d and the realm of "Heaven." This could not be but an overwhelming spiritual experience, and in this way the will of the people was captured. Thus through the shamans, now artists/craftspeople, the power of the Church was engendered in all of its "glory," to overwhelm the general population. Great art, the glorification of the values of the Church, in reality the capturing and the redirecting of the power of the Ancient Earth Spirits.

In the shamanistic experience imagery is sent by the affiliated Spirits through the shaman as a guiding message to the community. In the artist experience, as an individual, the artist becomes an employee of the social elite and their art, portrayed and enhanced their power seeking values.

In following centuries the controlling position of the Church and their nobility weakened. This occurred as they gradually became more dependent upon raising funds not from military conquest alone, but from the commercial endeavors of the merchant class. Through the centuries the merchants were gradually able to accumulate vast wealth. In doing so they were able to establish an independent, separate, and financially powerful identity from the Church and their nobility. As this occurred there was a shift in power with the Church and the nobility losing their absolute power to control the society. With their rise to power the commercial elite could not help but to begin to believe that their ability to accumulate wealth was a God given right, and each Trader came to view themselves as a “church unto themselves.” The commercial interests being made up of individuals not completely beholden to the old hierarchy competed not only with the Church and the nobility for power, but with each other for dominance.

The vibrant and growing commercial interests became so powerful that they were able to give only a bow to the Church on Sunday and the rest of the week live by their own avarice standards. With their wealth they were quick to extend their hands into the real power of the Church by also hiring the artists/craftspeople with the purpose to glorify their wealth and status by building homes that bordered on being palaces. As a result of this trend the concept of individualism became ever increasingly elevated, so much so that its core became as a religious value. The brightest of the commercial titans fully realized the power of art and its ability through imagery and sound to mesmerize the public. The commercial interests competing for the power that art can deliver to the holder were clever and increasingly controlled the artist's livelihood. Thus the Spirits within art itself came to be used to package the products with beautiful colors and forms to increase their attraction. The more capable artists were highly rewarded and in this position came to be a role model for future artists who of course also wanted to make it. The shift of the power to the Merchant Class led to other innovations that led to a further degradation of the artists, originally Shamans, the channels for the Spirits' nurturing engagement with humanity.

The spirit, the soul of “Art” is a focus for the immortal power of the Spirits, and while the true nature of the Spirits is to commune with humanity and to provide encouragement and guidance, when misappropriated that power can be diverted for the welfare of the individual.

In time art was further commercialized and a new art form was created. Through the generations art became not a value in itself, but the value became how much it was worth in the market. The greater the price, the “greater” the art, and of course the “greater” the artist. With the advent of the modern age, marketing, the art of commercial persuasion was created in order to give any commodity its stated value. So, works of art become a commodity to be purchased and sold as an investment and a sign of wealth and prestige. The work of the artist became desirable just by the fact that people of wealth purchased their work. By the wealthy person buying their art the artist was made and became famous. Of course, ownership gave the holder of the art the power of the Spirit trapped within the artwork.

Art, now being under the control of commercial interests was guided to promote works that glorified the values of capitalism, which is the religion of the individual. In individualism it is critical that people accept that “what ever is best for me is righteous.” In individualism the welfare of the community is subordinated to the goal of the strongest individuals, and to promote this the wealthy encouraged the acceptance of abstract art. Abstract art is the art in which the images are undefined and this allows anyone to see what they want. In this way art ceases all attempts to portray identifiable subject matter and their attached values and in their place art now fosters absolute individualism. With the wealthy promoting this depth of individualism, they hoped to escape the religious conventions of morality in business and politics. The commercial interests created an unethical but legal framework where the strong have all the advantages, where there is no sense of fair play, and where the boundaries of morality and ethics become abstracted. Thus Reality became a complete abstraction allowing a new foundation of “ethical life” that allows someone to say, “Who are you to tell me how much I can take?”

Artists in our society are relegated to a minor function, being under the control of the highest bidder. Only the artist that fits within the limited boundaries set by the wealthy are rewarded with consignment work and or with their own creations purchased. The rest of the artists languish in poverty unless they find a day job. In this way the up and coming artists are conditioned to seek and respond only to the images the wealthy allow to reach the people. This propagandizing of art is a total corruption of the artist’s gift of being the channel of the Spirits, whose guidance is so essential for the welfare of society and culture.

So many artists are damaged by their disconnection from the awareness of their proper function, that of being a Shaman, a function that is an essential element of any healthy society. Because of this disconnection, with this loss of conscious personal awareness, intuitively many artists nonetheless rebel against the chains of society. This leads to the artists being viewed as unusual, weird, highly emotional, poorly disciplined, self-satisfying, undependable, unpredictable, often idealistic and unrealistic. Yet ironically at the same time because of their unusual behavior, artists are also seen as exciting, stimulating, unusually attractive in their “liberation,” amazing in their entertainment value, able to live lives with undefined boundaries, seen as true individuals, permissive and accepting, and liberating to be with. Because of their unusual nature, being that their emotional state is so powerful, artists are seen as notoriously poor mates, best to have an affair with rather than a long-term relationship. Many artists have become emotionally unstable, are at high risk of attempted suicide, seek solace in drugs, alcohol and sex. Living a life of decreasing boundaries their behavior ultimately undermines relationships with those they care for and who care about them. This is a far cry from being a Shaman, a respected and revered member of the community who integrate their gifts solely for the welfare of their culture.

This sense of deterioration is an outcome of how our ancestral shamanistic cultures were overwhelmed and our lives were threatened and then to be able to continue to live we had to accept being manipulated into serving the powerful. In order to survive we eventually had to disconnect from our heritage. Instead of communicating as the medium of the guiding Spirits we were coerced to satisfy, to enhance, to excite the urges of humanity under the overall direction of the social elite. This led to a loss of purpose, direction, and function, and for the individual and the society, it represents a culture without the Shamanistic ability to determine its proper direction. In short, culture becomes a ship without a navigator speeding along blindly into the abyss of chaos. What is most disturbing about this is that in order to cope, we subconsciously had to become the strongest advocate and Priests for this self-serving attitude that has, maybe,

the unintended affect that it subtly eliminates social consciousness. By doing this we became anesthetized to the outreaching of our Souls. As we took on this role we inadvertently began to strip the community of its Spiritual Foundation leaving it defenseless against the Avarice Investors and their demand for, “What’s New? What’s Next? Yes, all of this while they greedily jack up the prices on what they had already grabbed by selling and reselling to each other. Profits, profits, profits and none of which, by the way, were shared with the artist.”

This results in a certain degree of psychological disruption within culture. Our culture’s ability to foster the disconnection of the people from their innate relationship with Nature is the trigger for the fall into a diseased state of purpose in which we feel the compulsion to consume all resources and thus we allow ourselves to also be consumed in the name of progress.

It is the imprisonment of the Shaman within the distorted role of the artist that represses the proper expression of the gift of communion with the Spirits, and which causes such dysfunction and personal destruction. Actually, the Shaman is not an entertainer, nor an artistic employee. The Shaman is a person who being born with Spirit Gifts provides an essential function for culture and has the ability to enter into a communal relationship with the Spirits to channel the power of the Spirits to enhance the health and welfare of the community. The Shaman shares this gift through healing, guiding people to live in harmony, alerting the people of danger, teaching nature balancing methods of sustainable agriculture, the gathering and preparation of medicinal herbs, teaching and initiating the young into their adult role, providing solace for the families of relatives departing the physical life, divining omens and visions, and by anchoring the foundation of love and care through which the Spirit’s flow. Being of either gender, Shamans are a focus for the complete expression of Spirit within the community and promote the value of a person’s worth being not measured in how much they accumulate, rather personal worth is defined in how much an individual shares of their efforts with those less able to provide for themselves.

In the few remaining remote indigenous communities where Shamans have a role there is no poverty, no one goes hungry, no one lives without shelter or clothing, and no one needs to be alone and hopeless. Compare this to our culture and society and then meditate upon its significance. So for myself and artists that can still relate to what is shared here, the commencement of healing starts at the moment one recognizes the value of gradually reframing one’s role. With this in place, the journey of re-establishing one’s essential cultural identity begins.

Amazingly, regardless of our disconnection, we none-the-less innately retain Shamanistic tendencies. We have It beating in our Hearts. As in Nature the fruition of growth is the passing of life and life’s knowledge to the next generation. It is a process that does not usually require cataclysmic change; rather it progresses gradually through phases. Like a tree, it adds limbs and branches as it grows and one day it bears fruit. In this growth the first branches broaden and become strong and rigid holding the form, while the ones that grow later are less so and more flexible. In this image the Nature People understand that inter-generational respect is critical to the welfare of the Whole. The youngest are the leaves in that that they seek the new and in doing so capture the energy from the sun and pass it on to the lower limbs, the middle aged parts that give the tree its shape and purpose. Through the bark the energy from the leaves is passed into the oldest parts, the trunk and the roots, which holds the foundation in place. In the reverse flow the earth’s nutrients and moisture drawn up from the roots passes up the tree to all its parts and

thus the cycle of life fosters growth and flourishes. As in the grand cycle of Trees after sleeping in Winter, so in Spring there is an awakening. Now is our time and so too in transitioning in a natural way, we Artists must awaken and in becoming conscious we can choose to resurrect our innate Shamanistic identity. In this way we release our natural gifts to more freely express our unity within our being and within the Being of All and so our culture is revitalized.

We, who are called artists in our society, whether we are recognized or not by investors, are an inherently integral part of the culture within which we live. Let's look at the passing on of the culture's knowledge in a Shamanistic manner. In native indigenous societies when one of us is born our community Shaman(s) intuitively recognizes us from birth and as we grow, takes us under their wing. Under the guidance of the Shaman who is innately gifted with the ability to relate to other than the physical dimension, we are provided training so that our gifts are developed through a set of skills that are based upon the value of supporting the health and welfare of our family and village. We learn as we mature that our gifts originate in multiple dimensions, which are channeled through us and into our community. Typically the connection to these dimensions is initiated through ancient forms that are integrated within the sounds, visuals, and movement of nature. The Shaman and the apprentice share a common life together and through the years with the onset of puberty the gifts are enhanced to the degree that we as adolescent Shamans can begin to provide our contribution to the promotion of physical, emotional, and spiritual health and when necessary, healing. Because all Shamans are connected to The One and thus with each other, the very presence of the Shaman is often sufficient to encourage a balancing of the energies with the beneficial outcome of an increase in health and harmony within the individual and a warm rippling affect throughout the community. As a member of the indigenous culture the Shaman is viewed as the anchoring Spirit Person.

Today, in our Western culture there are those of us who are re-discovering our Shamanistic potential as a result of having met with those of the indigenous people who have nurtured our joyful experience of being this part of the Whole. Today, we are most easily recognized as writers of fiction and fantasy who share stories in which The Torch is held high. We are investigative reporters who alert the community to social ills and the need to focus our joint healing energy. We manifest with a focus on social issues. Most of us have lived under a disguise, within a veil that protects our integrity and safety while we struggle to find a voice that allows some degree of recognition. In my quiet moments I feel the energy of life pulsating and I feel it in you like the first awakening of a volcano with such deep channels to the core of heat that defines our planet. Our culture needs us in order to shift and support priorities that are sustainable and which enhance a balancing synergy between the individual and the community within which we live. Artistic expression must be courageous so as to manifest this vision so that it is recognizable and easily understood. Most importantly we artists must learn the skills that will allow us to provide the expressive support that will help culture to navigate away from the ever expanding competitive extremes of conflict back onto the shores of community sharing where one's value is determined by how much we are willing to share rather than in how much we can accumulate.

This experience of resurrecting the Shaman into Western Culture is a fantastic and challenging journey. Because our physical domain requires a core investment in making a living, this process of emerging awareness must sustain the requirements of our effort to obtain sufficient resources to maintain ourselves and our families. Thus keeping our day jobs. Sudden and cataclysmic change is to be avoided for such a transition is like a shooting star; brilliant...while it burns up in the atmosphere and yet when it hits the earth great damage can be

caused. The essential element in sustainable growth is the conscious support of our mind's effort to develop the required neuro-software to allow for the reconnecting and rejuvenation of Shamanistic consciousness. As this gradually develops and with each other's support, we are able to ease into action as we already have the artistic skills that this development requires in order for us to be able to focus our consciousness into our various social communities.

In this initial phase of development we seek to recognize our Shaman Self and then to recognize it in each other. In this way we commence the process of empowerment where we begin to assert our historical role in society. We feel an impulse to discover that which is missing and learn how to integrate our findings into our Self. This process of discovery will encourage the awakening of that part of our selves that has been dormant. We need time to open ourselves so that we can discover a modern pathway of introducing ourselves as Shaman Artists to our culture so we are not limited to being only entertainers and creators of artistic commodities. Our Art has something to say. Let us find and then project our collective voice that resonates to the needs of our community and which allows the community to embrace us as navigators of social harmony.

Do we do this alone? While most of us have been alone I am feeling that it would be perhaps a step into healing to acknowledge the benefit of some of us working together to establish a focal point of awareness and the openness to share ideas on how we can better balance our lives so that we have greater freedom to promote our own and thus our culture's recovery. How do we do this? Well, for me, it has been to recognize that due to my being born into our culture, which is increasingly separating itself from its core of shamanistic creation, that in my lifetime I have taken but the first step into Spirit. In being committed to this relationship I have been blessed with one shamanistic element of the whole and it is my work to reach out to the others who I don't yet know who have in their life connected with their one part. It is a vision to unite with them in some conscious manner. Should we be able to connect we have much to teach each other. Some of us are healers. Others are clairvoyant. Some of us have special gifts with animals and plants. There are those of us who have a connection with our ancestors. Some are storytellers and some artists, dancers and musicians that receive and share earth's resonations. Also walking among us are Spirit Guides and holders of our indigenous memories. For those of us who are willing and able, let's gather together in some manner and explore this pathway of unification. We are Creative as well as highly skilled and by focusing our attention on this we will be guided to the pathways that take our creations back into our lives. *IN A GOOD WAY*, together we become empowered to promote the correction of our position in society and thereby openly influence the reframing of our culture's focus and priorities to the safeguard of *ALL FORMS Of LIFE*.

I look forward to our time of gathering. Contact me should this resonate within you:

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