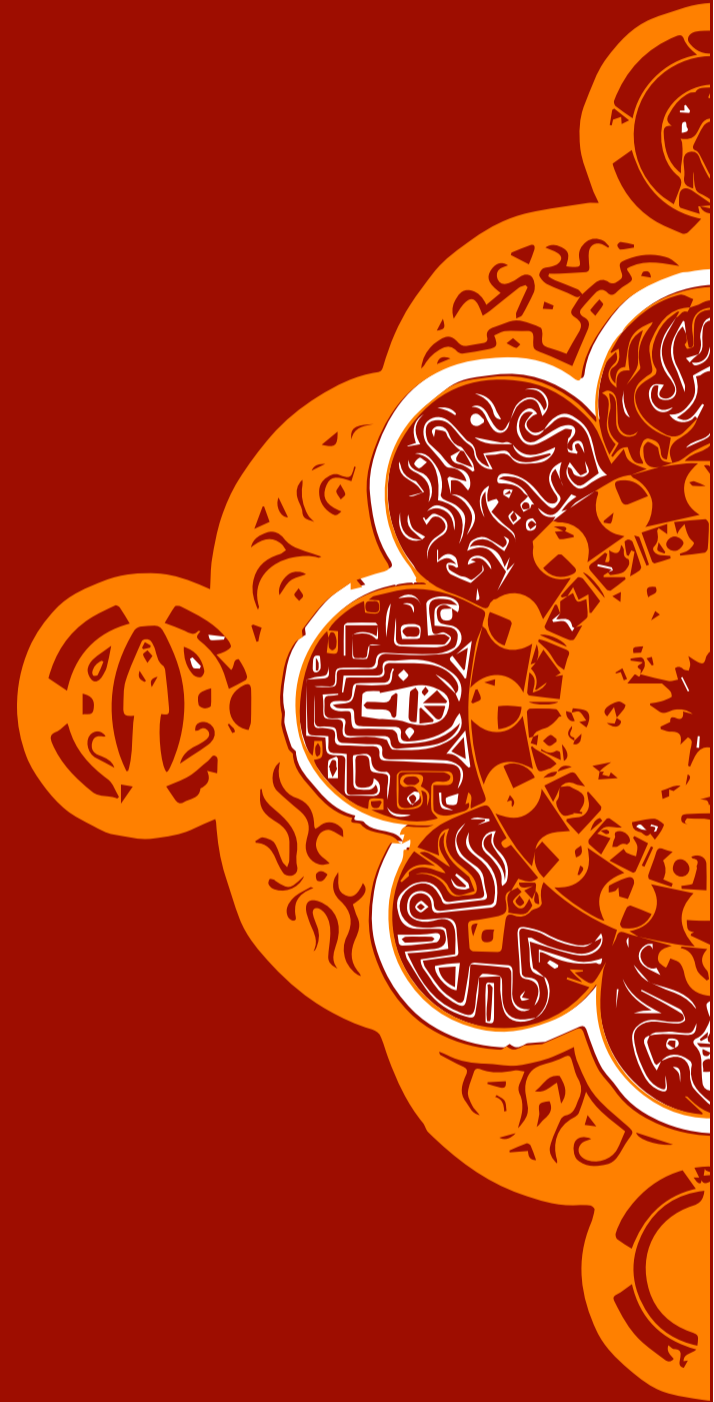


States of Consciousness and Shamanisms

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FUNDACIÓ JOSEP M. FERICGLA

PARA EL ESTUDIO CIENTÍFICO DE LOS ESTADOS DE CONCIENCIA Y EL DESARROLLO ARMÓNICO DEL SER HUMANO

I

To begin with the most important question of consciousness and shamanisms, I shall relate the story of the scientist Catalina Modik. The idea for this story came to me some time ago as I listened to a magnificent lecture by the German philosopher Thomas Metzinger, who in turn remarked that he had picked up the story from an Australian philosopher named Frank Jackson.

Has anyone ever heard of Catalina Modik? Probably not: Catalina Modik herself is the central theme in a thought-experiment which will help considerably in clarifying some factors related to consciousness.

Catalina's story is as follows: she is the great-granddaughter of the well-known Slovakian composer and theoretician of music, Nitrovich Modik. Catalina knows all one can possibly know about the physical and physiological substrates of sound in human hearing. Dr. Modik is the foremost neuroscientist in the world specialising in auditory phenomena and is the world's leading expert devoted to studying the relationship between the brain and sound.

Catalina herself is the first premise in this experiment concerning the working of human thought. She knows practically everything a scientist can know about the neurological and biochemical dimension of the process of listening to, and of hearing, sound. In any case, this scientist has never had the personal experience of perceiving modulated sounds.

Due to a pathological and extremely acute sensitivity resulting from some childhood allergy, this Slovenian scientist has been forced to spend her entire life closed-up inside a gigantic, soundproof and echo-proof chamber. That is to say, inside a space which no external sounds can penetrate, nei-

ther any internal sound produce the slightest resonance nor echo. In this sort of jail-cell, there exists no manner of sound or of sonic vibrations—such vibrations as even deaf people can perceive. Catalina Modik pursued all of her studies by Internet and, thanks to the elevated economic status of her family, she was able to have the best professors, who spoke to her only in a low and monotonous voice when visiting her in her chamber insulated from the sounds of this world. Her colleagues have likewise adopted the habit of writing to her or if, when visiting her, they should enter her echo-free place, they always speak in a low and monotonous voice. Her computer has an interface which can translate oral or musical information into written text and images. In short, Catalina Modik has never consciously experienced any sort of sound, apart from the monotonous tones of her tutors and professors, and the sounds of her own body. It is likely that some part of her subconscious recalls sounds she heard while within her maternal cloister, sounds in predominantly the low and middle registers, as the investigations of Dr. Tomatis have suggested.

Let us now pose the question which interests us. One fine day Catalina Modik is cured of her severe sonic allergy and abandons her soundproof and echo-proof chamber. The first thing she does is repair to a nearby church to give thanks for her cure. For the first time in her life, as far as she can recall, she hears the call of a bird and the initial stanzas of a religious piece played on the church organ, immersed in the typical reverberations of church architecture. Does Catalina learn something new about the world? Does she acquire some fresh knowledge about reality?

I believe that it appears instinctively to many of us that Catalina would indeed learn something new, something she had previously not known, that such acquisition of new knowledge would moreover be inevitable. Now one can understand the mental state—or type of consciousness—of some other human beings one had read about in texts describing their emotional and memorial experiences on hearing the whispering play of water in a mountain brook, or the first strains of Mozart's Requiem. Such experiences of sensorial and emotional synergy lie outside the scientific framework

in which Catalina had hitherto worked. They form part of the subjective world of each individual. Now one can comprehend how the soft sounds of the wind at sundown might be experienced by someone as the colour purple, or the music of Rimsky-Korsakov as having a bright red colour.

Here is the crux of the matter, however, and in a sense it is true: Catalina has learned something new about the world on being able to hear melodic sounds, but this something is not scientifically definable. Something new has been added to the luminous screen of her consciousness, something activated by a sonic image that had not been there before. Thence derives a new construction of reality to which current scientific theory cannot accede. In this sense, for example, we might analyse the rhythmic, melodic and musical constants of all of Mozart's work, we could programme such musical patterns and numbers into a computer pre-loaded with analytical and simulation-software. A computer so prepared might be able to recognise a new melody by Mozart which had not previously been entered into its sonic database, but it could never produce a new Mozart symphony, one that could cause us to tremble with emotion, as happens to many of us, for instance, when we hear the Lachrymosa movement of this universal composer's Requiem.

Precisely the same situation occurs with respect to shamanisms. There is in essence a void in the scientific world-view and the phenomena of shamanisms pertain precisely to this lacuna. The epistemological framework of scientific knowledge is insufficient to encompass a certain sphere of reality which is subjacent to it. Some things are only knowable through subjective experience. What is a warm embrace? What does an adult feel immediately upon experiencing the huge, open sky of a deep blue colour, or what does a child feel after hearing the strong and tranquil voice of his or her father saying "everything's all right"?

If it is true that Catalina Modik, the greatest expert ever in the specialised world of the biophysical structure of sound, really accumulates new information on being able to hear, this means there is something that can only be known through a conscious, subjective experience, and which cannot be formulated from the objective perspective of a third person.

There exist realities which are unknowable via some external scientific theory. I think we are all in agreement on this. Systems-theory has already underlined the fact that the process of illuminating the world works backwards: it is not that we walk with a lantern illuminating something already extant but still in the dark, but rather that nothing exists beyond the light of our lantern. Put in another way, every living being constructs the world in which it lives, out of its own cognitive territory. Science accordingly creates a world made to order, and cannot know that which belongs to a world created by intuition or by emotions. This, of course, in no wise detracts from the magnificent edifice we have constructed thanks to the accumulation of scientific knowledge.

This thought-experiment signals many important aspects of the problem of consciousness in reference to the field of shamanisms. The nature of consciousness is one of the thorniest problems facing humanistic and neurological sciences at the outset of the third millennium. This nascent century will likely be the Era of Brain and Mind.

The first category of problems which concerns us here is the set of epistemological questions posed by the subject of knowledge. What is knowledge? Is knowledge objective or subjective? What does it mean to have knowledge of consciousness from a first-person perspective (that is, of subjective experience)? What does structural functioning, or the neurological correlates of consciousness from a third-person perspective (from the scientific viewpoint) add to our studies of consciousness-states in shamans? Does this really clarify anything, or is this knowledge completely dispensable?

As the great exponent of classical ecstatic mysticism, Sta. Teresa de Jesús, remarked: “Understanding, if it understands, does not understand how it understands; at least it cannot comprehend anything it understands; it doesn’t seem to me that it understands, because (as I say) it is not understandable; this I cannot come to understand” (Sta. TERESA DE JESÚS, *Obras completas (Complete Works)*, BAC, Madrid, 1974). It is likely that this remark on the mystery of not understanding, understanding itself would be defended by many humble, traditional shamans.

If one is not a shaman, it is impossible to know everything implied by shamanic consciousness and in principle, to do so, one would have to have been socialised in a shamanic cultural context. Should an individual recognise all the cognitive territory which we call “shamanism” and live and react in accordance with this, he or she simply would be a shaman. Should a living being feel completely, perceive and act like a Persian cat, well... that being is a Persian cat.

Now we shall step back and penetrate another great problem posed by our study, one which is all too often overlooked, even in specialised texts: who is a shaman? Does this phenomenon we call shamanism even exist? If so, what characteristics does it have from a third-person perspective? What subjective knowledge does the shaman possess, and which distinguishes her or him from a non-shaman? We no longer speak of racial inferiority, thanks to the dreaded accusation of racism which will accrue to anyone who affirms that there are hierarchies among races. There are even reputable geneticists who postulate the existence of a single human race with local variations. Yet it is generally taken for granted, even among anthropologists, that the systems of knowledge of traditional peoples are inadequate for the modern world with its ideal model of scientific rationality: so cognitive racism does exist. Catalina Modik would have had a similar attitude, should she not have accepted the fact that subjective experience could give her new information on the modulation of sound, and so have refused to abandon her soundproof chamber. The attitude of deprecating traditional

epistemologies, which are based more on subjective experience than on the third-person viewpoint, entails a simplification of empirical reality and a consequent restriction or falsification of knowledge about it.

From the outset I affirm that there is no ethnographic reality beneath this treacherous generic denomination, shamanism. This conception was imposed by M. Eliade in his endeavour to create great, integrating classifications (a rather common effort, on the other hand, among scholars of the mid-twentieth century). What the ethnographic literature really shows us is a tremendous plurality of behaviours, variable in accordance with each cultural pattern, which at the cost of simplifying them, have been unified by the western world-view. Thus has a non-existing figure been created—the garden-variety shaman—which is operative within the context of pre-determined scientific thinking. From the subjective standpoint, we might understand this unifying reductionism as the projection of a very simple thought, but a thought lacking any correspondence with objective ethnography. Thus my continual interest in speaking in plural: shamanisms.

Based on the foregoing we can pose a more precise question: what central viewpoint can allow us to solve the problem of defining shamanisms? The central focus of the shamanic nature would be the states of consciousness that allow him or her to act as such, subjective experiences that construct her or his cognitive territory. Shamans are not defined by some unique state of modified consciousness—M. Eliade's famous archaic ecstasy—but rather by diverse qualities of consciousness produced by each particular type of shamanism and that only possibly might have some points in common. In what follows I shall endeavour to analyse these points.

II

As systems-theory decisively establishes, every living being is what it does. Period. Everything else is human fantasy. An individual who is called a shaman—or an equivalent term in the diverse languages of shamanic peoples—is so called for what she or he does. This fact implies a profound problem of definition which, if taken with due seriousness, will destroy a portion of the current belief-market which we have made of the world, and destroy the whole of our credulous and commercial neo-shamanism. If every living being is what it does, and so-called shamans from distinct cultures do quite different things, is it even legitimate to classify them in the same category? From another vantage point, we once again approach the problem of a falsifying simplification.

By way of very rapid illustration I shall mention a few examples of the terminology employed in this respect. In Brazilian Portuguese, the generic term used for shaman is *payé*, and for shamanism, *payelanca*. *Payé* means “one who knows” in a concrete sense, absent any fantastic abstractions. Among the Yanoamá of the Venezuelan Amazon (better known by the linguistic deformation *Yanomami*), the category of shaman is *ischapori* or *hekurá*. *Hekurá* also means spirit in the sense of a spectre. The Yanoamá speak of the *hekurá* of the toucan, the *hekurá* of the parrot, of the monkey... Therefore, what these people conceive by the term usually translated as shaman, is someone with a strong spirit, who can act under the effects of the potent psychotropic preparations which are consumed—particularly the pulverised, toasted seeds of *Anadenanthera* rich in bufotenine and other tryptamines—with certain independence from wisdom. In Colombian Quechua, the term for shaman is *táita*, a word with a sweet sound which means “good father”. The nature of shamanism is associated among the Quechua with a certain protective and paternal bounty which can heal under the psychoactive influence of *yagé* (NW Amazonian term for potions more widely

known as ayahuasca). Among the Kwakiutl of the NW coast of Canada, one speaks of pajalá, a term which literally means "he who fixes that which is bad". The Kwakiutl make a strong distinction between pajalá and healer: healers cure the body with herbs while the pajalá heals the soul using personal and inspired spiritual energy. These shamans from the NW coast of Canada neither ingest psychotropic plants nor seek ecstatic explosion, they are rather closely connected with their immediate environment, even with silence. They conceive of the origin of the power of the pajalá as being supernatural, having been acquired by prolonged and repeated meditation in the forest where these people will remain for days in solitude, in quest of inspiration.

This diversity of functions, the different terms used and, in consequence, the diversity of spheres of reality in which this profusion of shamans is said to act, can even be found within a given ethnic group. To cite a single example which is typical, the Arahucans or Mapuches of Chile distinguish many different types of shamanic activities. Among them, that person specialised in dealing with the alternative world is called machi, whether man or woman (and there tends to be a majority of women, unlike in the bulk of South American ethnic groups). The Arahucans distinguish several types of healing machi which—according to the classic work of Alfred Métraux—are called wilel, inaimawe, ramtú and kupolawe. This diversity of shamans encompasses as much difference as there might be between a micro-surgeon specialising in prostate-surgery, for whom the mechanistic view of the world is the only valid one- and a Lacanian psychoanalyst who argues that words do not mean what they seem to say but that one rather must hear what they hide, what they mean without saying so... because of self-censorship and slips of the tongue... In our societies, both are called therapists, but an abyss separates them. There are Arahucan machis, on the other hand, who have the specific capability of speaking with the spirits, and who are called dengulfe, a term usually translated as diviner, although dengún is the verb to speak, and so they would be speakers. Other machi are able to interpret dreams, these are the peumantufe. Then there are those

female machi with the ability to find lost or stolen objects in their dreams; such are called pelon. In the past there was another category of machi, the witantufe whose virtue consisted in being able to express themselves through all but imperceptible movements. Besides this bounty of activities and functions, among the Arahucans one speaks generically of lliva and vate, according as is accentuated the special gifts of each machi with regard to wisdom, lucidity and powers of observation. (LEIVA, Arturo, “El chamanismo y la medicina entre los araucanos” (“Shamanism and medicine among the Arahucans”), en: *Los espíritus aliados*, Abya Yala, Quito, Ecuador, 2000).

Returning to my initial question, then, if each one of these Arahucan specialists does something different, are they all really what we unite under the term shaman? Do they operate in the same cognitive territory? How much of this is objective?

Moreover, the rich variety of modes of shamanic activity which I have summarised here can be seen simply upon observing the South American continent, the cultures of which, as is well known, have deep and common roots. If we abstract our gaze and observe what takes place in African traditions of trance and possession, or in European shamanisms which survived until the modern era—for instance, the meigas of Galicia—or in the profound Celtic world, in musical Australian shamanic traditions, in the peoples of the eastern Pacific, and a long, ethnographic et cetera... we will discover cognitive territories which can be recognised only with difficulty as forming parts of a single activity: shamanism in the singular.

III

Human beings basically need to inhabit a world with meaning. We need to live in a world to which we can attribute some meaning; a meaning which, moreover, we believe we can understand. Every culture provides a meaning for life to those individuals socialised under its tutelage, and this is universal, although in the end the actual meaning varies greatly from one society to another. For certain peoples the most desired existential purpose consists of faithfully reproducing the profound religious values inherited from the ancestors, while for other peoples the meaning of life consists precisely in consumption and endeavouring to change as rapidly as possible. This aspect is called the quest for the ideal model of life, and acts apart from whatever an ethnographer might observe empirically.

Some realities lie at the limit of human capacity to live meaningfully, the culture cannot explain such activities in a completely satisfactory way. Among these luminal realities are death, the origin of life, love and the sense of pain. Each culture must thus articulate in a satisfactory way these limits to human experience, and it generally does so by placing them at the centre of its own values. The whole of the world-view is constructed upon the central axis of the ideas any given people have on time, on death—or the mysterious—and on the emotions. While being generalised, this is all reflected in the states of consciousness that each culture selects as principal and most useful. In this sense, the fact that traditional cultures in the process of disappearing place particular emphasis on keeping alive those values and methodologies associated with shamanism (symbols, chants, sacred territories) shows the crucial importance of this phenomenon: shamanism indeed was the first organised attempt by humankind to give meaning to life and to answer the great unknowns concerning pain, life and death.

By way of example I will return to the machi or Arahuan shamans. The sacred post used by the shaman to intone prayers and to attain the ecsta-

tic state which characterises their practise, is known among these people as Rewe or sacred Canelo. The shamans alone are authorised to place and manipulate this post. Meanwhile, this sacred post is identified by every Arahuacan people with their political and territorial unity, and with the point where the supernatural interacts with the social solidarity of the community.

Based on the foregoing one must acknowledge that these diverse shamanisms are divergent forms of knowing, which allow reality to be organised in a certain way and in no other, which is the same as creating this reality. In this context I shall not embark upon a discussion of whether shamanism, as a positivist way of acting, is effective or not, in the sense in which we understand this.

Nevertheless, unifying or discriminating psychic from material reality is just as delicate as delimiting the subjective from the objective. For the majority of westerners in the post-industrial era, there seems to be a clear-cut boundary between psychic and material reality—this which lies before me is a metal table; what I am relating is my dream from last night—such a boundary simply does not exist for many other cultures. The state of consciousness or predominant style of processing reality in a given moment is a factor delimiting that part of reality in which the subject moves: but these are rooms inside the same house, not in distinct houses, however much our way of speaking incites one to understand the contrary.

In this sense, every culture delimits, nourishes, reproduces and orients itself in time, in accordance with particular states of consciousness. Here arises the big question which faces us: how can we organise objective reality subjectively, as shamans do, through emotions and states of consciousness? What path, if any, must subjectivity follow, in order to conform to objectivity?

Grandfather Oscar Ramón, uitoto shaman of the Enókayi people who inhabit the Araracuara community of the middle Río Caquetá, Colombia,

states that there are five fearsome diseases which hinder learning how to know and learning how to live and which, accordingly, are the origin of all other known diseases. This old man insists on the requirement that shamans treat these diseases, so they cannot affect existence nor infect others.

According to the uitoto shaman, these primary diseases are: fear, anger, laziness, sadness and envy. Oscar Román asserts that these abnormal forces exist in the universe and can affect the body at any time, can intentionally or unintentionally infect others to the point of becoming epidemic (TORRES, William, "Chamanismo: estética de existencia" ("Shamanism: aesthetic of existence"), *Visión chamánica*, núm. 2, p. 55, Santafé de Bogotá, Colombia, 2000). All other diseases stem from these. The particular sphere of action of shamanisms is determined precisely by these realities with indefinable limits and open procedural dynamics. This ancestral form of being and of doing is where one best can observe the relationship between emotions, consciousness and the world inhabited by every human being. The very same relationship can be found in a more highly evolved form in Buddhism; concretely, in the Confucian sacred book, *Tao Te King*. It is worth recalling that the complex oracular technique known as the book of *I Ching* is one of the most elaborate products of Oriental shamanism. One can only understand the *I Ching* on the basis of a world-view in which every aspect is completely open and totally related to all other parts.

I should like to give an example from our societies which is heaping discredit upon classical materialism. It is worth recalling the profound relationship being uncovered between cancer and the endocrine system (wherein lies the biological centre of the emotions); between stress, emotional depression and the immune system (the greater the stress, the lower is immune-competence), between physical allergies, now generally attributed to pollen, phobias and primal fears; or between placebo pharmaceuticals and cures attributed to presumed effects of the pharmaceuticals ingested. Studies conducted at Harvard University demonstrated that asthma and compulsive cough could be eradicated in 40% of sufferers by use of placebos...

another collective illustration was a famous correlation observed during World War II: wounded soldiers removed from the battle-front improved rapidly or remained stuck in a therapeutic sense according as their side advanced or retreated in the belligerent contest. These examples underscore how the mind regulates basic somatic processes from its emotional, subconscious vertex. Such empirical corroborations are arguments favouring objectivity in the workings of shamanism upon those persons (to use the terminology of Rupert Sheldrake, whose writings are appropriate to our field of study) who share with the shaman the “resonant morphogenetic field” constituting the culture, not to mention the restructuring experiences which every culture offers subjects living according to its dictates. Far from being some secondary backwater, anthropological research of shamanism is in this sense at the forefront of humanistic research where the subject—imagination and the emotions—is objectified in the form of social relationships and in the construction of objective realities.

IV

Having analysed shamanism, the first aspect of my article, I will now speak of the second: consciousness. As I have already remarked, study of consciousness places before us the great mystery representing the limit between the objective and the subjective, at once the central aspect of shamanic phenomena and of the paradoxical objective knowledge which derives from personal experience.

If we accept for the moment that consciousness is the invisible field upon which every human being generates reality, it will be necessary to define some minimal conceptual parameters. What defines consciousness, beyond the knowledge or the contents which make it manifest, beyond “I know my own state”? From a naturalistic and not moral or psychological point of

view, what are the characteristics of this mechanism? If the nature of every living being be dynamic and is accordingly defined by what it does and by the relationships it establishes with itself and with its surroundings, one infers, I reiterate, that what every living being does depends on the cognitive territory in which it moves. The next question is accordingly: what functions differentiate a shamanic consciousness from that of a banking accountant?

I shall commence by enumerating some of the basic characteristics of consciousness which cast light on our problem, as these have been listed by the philosopher Thomas Metzinger:

- 1) In the first place, consciousness is an integral function generated from the internal contrast produced by perceptual, chemical and endogenous alterations (memories, emotions, etc.). That is, at any moment we are only conscious of one thing at a time. Various experiments have been conducted, for instance, covering the field of vision of one eye with a card full of vertical lines, the other eye with another card filled with horizontal lines, and it was observed that the brain could not see both at once. There is a 50 millisecond delay on passing from the perception of one reality to another... this is a very rapid change, but still we cannot be conscious of both things at once. We cannot have two consciousnesses simultaneously, which is to say it is an integral function, which develops precisely from contrasts between its different states. Thus an individual knows that “this butterfly” being seen is part of a dream, because the person had once been awake and the way of perceiving a butterfly which also flew ‘round that person had then been different. The image does not change, but rather the consciousness from which the image is perceived. One we call oneiric reality, the other physical reality. Consciousness of oneiric reality allows us to recognise the waking state, and vice versa. We cannot be asleep and awake at the same time; neither can we simultaneously live trapped in a fantasy and in the most pragmatic here and now. It follows then that consciousness is an integral function that develops from contrasts.

In our societies we are dramatically losing our depth of consciousness: to the extent to which the process of globalisation and technologising advances—the process of cognitive unification—we have ever fewer opportunities to experience distinct and contrasting mental states. Even extreme emotions or emotional catharsis are subjected to rigid social conventions which convert them into something uniform and, I dare say, quasi-unknown: one no longer weeps disconsolately like before, we have forgotten how to roll on the floor, “dying with laughter”, hardly anyone will let out an explosion of anger, something which at one time was quite common... Mayhap the most popular differentiated states of consciousness are alcoholic inebriety on the one hand, and cinema on the other. On watching a movie, one will experience what may be called a cinematic state of consciousness, in which the predominant reality is that which each state of mind constructs from the reflection of simple light projected onto a white screen. One says that “a movie is good” if one has been able to fill one’s consciousness with the contents of the film: contents emotional, symbolic or rational... In the contrary case, it is not that consciousness is half-filled with the contents of the film and half-filled with other content, but that one alternates between one reality and another because the projection does not captivate the attention in a continual way. So we say the film is bad, has not captured our attention, has not filled our representation of the world.

2) Derivative of the previous characteristic of consciousness is another, the phenomenological presence of the subject in the here and now. Consciousness tells the subject (collects and exhibits) what is happening to her or him here and now. Shamans have profound training in not losing consciousness of the here and now, whatever might happen in their special way of operating. Some theorists, although they have yet to formulate it as such, use this characteristic to differentiate between shamanism and what they call phenomena of possession, wherein the phenomenological consciousness of the very subject seems to disappear. When consciousness loses its function of phenomenological presence in an individual, we say he or she has been abandoned to madness: going mad is losing awareness of who

I am here and now.

3) Transparency is the third characteristic of consciousness which I will describe here, and the most important with respect to shamanism. Consciousness is transparent. It is like an invisible veil made manifest, which is operative when representations of the facts are reflected in it. In other words, consciousness only acts when a model of the world is activated upon its transparency. This model of the world, as is natural, is simply a metaphor for whatever takes place. We can even come to be aware that this involves our metaphors, that with them and by them we give form to the world. The animistic individual has his metaphors and we have ours, science being the principle one.

This transparent curtain is being filled-up, thanks to the different restructuring experiences which conform individual existence: this is what I call the foundation of the cognitive territory upon which the individual constructs her or his reality.

Accordingly, the impossibility that Catalina Modik might fix knowledge derived from subjective experience of sounds: she lacked any representation of such, in the form of reflections in her consciousness. There likewise follows the impossibility of capturing a certain essence of shamanism without having been socialised in the model of the world which contains such representations.

To express this in another more pleasing and metaphorical way, let us endeavour to imagine life as if it were a theatre. The stage is the ecological or environmental niche, the external conditions in which a person is born and develops. Consciousness is a transparent curtain that covers the stage. Throughout life, everyone has certain experiences which modulate existence. I call these Restructuring Experiences. Each of these experiences is like a colour or a form which remains glued onto the transparent curtain which covers the stage. Some such spots or forms are common to all human be-

ings: walking upright, feeling erotic tension (although for some this is resolved in pleasure, for others in an unpleasant way), feeling affection and its want, and the seven basic emotions, etc. The remainder of the elements which come to be glued onto the transparent curtain of consciousness will depend on the culture and on each individual biographical history. The play which appears on each stage will therefore be somewhat or even completely unique. Envy is not acted-out on my stage, for instance, and I am very surprised whenever someone from my own society endeavours to harm others out of envy.

4) Another aspect of consciousness is that facts of consciousness come to form part of our conception of the world. Our memories and our feelings are alike operative in consciousness, inasmuch as these are two of the columns upon which we construct the world. In the case of the shamanic style of consciousness, as opposed to our style, which is based on rational logic and emotional repression, these two columns (memory and emotions) have acquired foremost importance. The shaman must always remember who she or he is, so as not to go mad, and emotions are the basic network upon which her or his reality is built. I wish to call attention to the fact that distinct states of great emotional tone, can of themselves constitute distinct states of consciousness. The flux of “loving”, for instance—and note that I use a verb here, and not a substantive-form—is a particular way of functioning in consciousness. Loving is a type of consciousness with its own characteristics, such as recognition of the other as the basis for the relationship, avoidance of what in psychology are called projections, the personal incorporation of the subject in the relationship, etc. By way of example, loving definitely implies quite a different state of consciousness from that which characterizes struggling for power or the act of envying. It is worth noting in this sense that consciousness is an integral function, the while each distinct state of consciousness is an integral process in and of itself, unique and at the same time open. When one loves, there is no struggle for power, nor is there the anger that derives from this. Where there is a struggle for power there cannot be love: these states of consciousness are mutually exclusive.

On the other hand, it seems that consciousness is individual. What is the meaning of the fact that consciousness, our most objective phenomenon, is interrelated with individual perspectives, which accordingly are subjective? One might ask a person experiencing something for the first time, for instance in Catalina's case: what does it mean to say that for the first time you have an individual perspective on experience, of sounds, as it might be? Everything you knew before leaving the soundproof chamber had been objective and scientific, but one dimension was lacking: the subjective dimension. This subjectivity of experience will teach things about sound which third-person study could never teach.

This is the crucial point upon which some academicians devoted to the study of shamanic phenomena have based their absurd criticism. Should one fail subjectively to experience shamanic ecstasy—or those states of consciousness pertinent to this human reality and which currently transcend our customary analytical framework—then one cannot grasp a set of essential dimensions which are objective and central to this phenomenon, albeit perhaps ineffable. When on the other hand the field-worker has submitted to the re-socialising process required to expand her or his everyday consciousness, to open this up to shamanic experiences, that is, when subjectivity has been thus modified, she or he will usually receive the most mordant criticisms from colleagues of the positivist and other schools: she or he has lost scientific objectivity (usually affirmed in absence of any real background knowledge). This is the most serious accusation that can accrue to any investigator who employs qualitative methodologies, the only valid methods for affording a holistic vision of the object of our study.

In another context I might discourse at length on the grave personal problem implicit in being within two worlds at once, or likewise of the enormous enrichment such would imply for science and for the evolution of human thought. As I have said, consciousness cannot act in simultaneous service of two masters. To mention an historic and famous case by way of illustration, let us recall the Mazatec mushroom-priestess, María Sabina.

This shaman-woman repeatedly stated that she had had to change her practise from the moment scientists and other westerners had come to her to ingest psilocybian mushrooms, derrumbes (“landslides”) in local terminology. Henceforth she needed a translator, inasmuch as María Sabina only spoke Mazatec. From that moment forth, the visions and states of consciousness that facilitated her revelations and cures had lost power (for a detailed biography of María Sabina, see the book by the bilingual, all but unknown Mazatec youth from Huautla de Jiménez, who had served the priestess as translator for many years, up until her death: GARCÍA CARRERA, Juan, *La otra vida de María Sabina* (The Other Life of María Sabina), probably self-published in Mexico City, as no publishers’ imprint appears, 1986). This is what I meant by saying that consciousness was an integral function or, as the famous Christian leader put it: render unto Caesar that which is Caesar’s and unto God that which is God’s. From Caesar’s viewpoint one cannot judge, much less dogmatise about, what happens in God’s house, because one simply doesn’t know.

By way of summary of the foregoing, then, every day we traverse thousands of distinct states of consciousness, the majority of which we fail to recognise, because each culture trains the subjects socialised within its reality to forge and foster, to give form and function to particular mental states, and not to others.

Between the waking-state prior to sleeping, and the same waking-state after some hours of sleep, every person passes through at least four distinct states of consciousness. There are physiological specificities which characterise each, to wit: 1) hypnagogic state—this is cultivated in other cultures and called something like “reverie-phase”; 2) state of active sleep or REM phase, in which considerable variation in neuronal function is observed; 3) non-REM sleep, in which neurons fire in synchrony, in an undifferentiated way, a state very similar to that observed during epileptic attacks; and 4) the hypnopompous state just before awaking, in which oneiric visions abound, although not dreams per se. Our societies only favour the waking

state and, in exceptional cases, dreams or REM consciousness, so that a psychoanalyst might have subconscious material from a patient for analysis and so be able to help in the curative process. Other societies, in contrast, accord great social importance to hypnagogic consciousness—which may be translated as “daydreaming”—and relate intuitively, via intuition, to the information obtained, and such consciousness is encouraged, sought and cultivated, has social utility and forms part of one’s experience of the world (see my narrative work *Los jíbaros, cazadores de sueños* (Jíbaros: Dream Hunters), Integral, Barcelona, 1994).

Should a European be waiting for a bus, and her or his mind go blank for an indefinite period of time, to the point that the awaited bus might pass by and not be seen, she or he would just have passed through a distinct state of consciousness. She or he simply does not know what to do with the reality experienced, does not know how to use it.

V

Apart from the examples cited above, there exist other representations of the world that likewise correspond to events fixed on the screen—consciousness—but which are much more translucent, sometimes, indeed, it may be difficult to recognise these as representations of the world, as opposed to essential reality. Only a comparative study permits one to recognise that this does not involve a part of the same transparent screen upon which the facts will become fixed, but rather something additional. I am referring, for instance, to the experience of the ego itself. In many traditional societies the experience of the ego is not developed to the extent that it is among us. Should one ask an Indian from the Upper Amazon, as I have done in more than one occasion:

What do you think of my style of dress? Would you like to dress as I do?

He most likely would answer:

We like to dress another way, wearing a tipi...

If one insists in asking in the first person:

Fine, but as for YOU, how do you like to dress?

He would probably answer:

We like to wear a tipi, not trousers.

Should one persist with the question, emphasizing the first-person singular: Well, I know you people like the tipi and it is your custom... but AS FOR YOU, how do you like to dress?

In all probability the individual will feel slightly uncomfortable because he would lack a conscious representation of the ego, so highly differentiated as in a westerner. His ego would be merged into the “we” of his family, clan, tribe or ethnic group. The assertion “we like to eat this or that, in such a way” is a representation of the world that for me, as a westerner, occupies the place overtaken by “I like it so”.

In this sense, then, shamanic societies invest certain cognitive styles which encompass different consciousness states, they nourish them and they learn to endow them with phenomenological contents and external referents; to differentiate them, and give them meaning and social utility. Not all shamanisms, on the other hand, nourish the same styles of consciousness, although in the end they indeed seem to have some common generic factors. I shall endeavour to synthesize and enumerate these.

1) Shamans act on the basis of emotions. Emotions—not feelings—are the basic field upon which a network of connexions and social practises is raised, and which become cultural systems and contents. Emotions are the matrix upon which social life moves, they are the basic types of relational behaviours about which will ensue the communication needed to create diverse human worlds. We must understand emotions in this sense as impellers of diverse consciousness states. In a contrary manner, indeed, each psychoactive substance known impels a distinct emotional experience and allows the elaboration of a different representation of the world. An interest which impels me toward field and other investigative work, is to create the theoretical bases for an Anthropology of Emotions; in following this research-path, I have come to the conclusion that there are six basic or biological emotions, plus a neutral emotional state: in all, seven emotional patterns. These six basic emotions cannot be experienced directly, but only during extraordinary states of catharsis or ecstasy. Catharsis—understood in the profoundest sense—means cleansing emotional tensions, letting the emotions escape to the point of separation and becoming cleansed of them (assuming these have accumulated to uncomfortable or pathological levels).

After many years of having observed thousands of people exploding in personal cathartic experiences during Living Experience of Personal Death Workshops, I have come to the conclusion that the six basic emotional impulses upon which the relational network of human life is built are: anger or ire, fear, sadness, mystical ecstasy, orgasm and joie de vivre (happiness is an ingredient of joie de vivre, which is a more profound emotion). It is not our human lot to live these emotions in a pure form, excepting in determined moments in life; the rest of the time we transform them into feelings. To put this in another way, feelings (a cultural product) are different means of expressing and representing each of the pure emotions (which are biologically based), having first passed through the sieve of each particular culture. We thus see that every cultural milieu possesses different feelings which cannot be translated into another culture (among Catalonians one

knows and lives *seny*, *morriña* among those from Galicia, people in the Colombian Andes suffer from *tuza*...), but these emotions are universal. In still another sense, we must distinguish love and the struggle for power, which are not emotions but counterpoised states of consciousness (the first, love, being open; the second, the need for power, closed), and we must also distinguish between basic affection, pleasure and displeasure, which are not emotions, but feelings (for further information, consult my article “Las emociones en la cultura. Manifiesto por una antropología de las emociones” (“Emotion in culture. Manifiesto for an anthropology of emotion”), in the journal *Cultura y droga*, núm. 7, year 6, Universidad de Caldas, Manizales, Colombia, 2002).

In this sense, emotions are the network which constructs the world of shamans and which directs their actions. As I explained above, the origin of diseases according to the uitoto tradition as explained by the aged shaman Oscar Román, is an example of this. Those who act by shamanising tend to ask not “what causes what?” but rather “what likes to happen with what?”.

2) Shamanism works from the inside towards the outside, from the subjective towards the objective. It works precisely in the opposite direction as does our logical/rational world-view. Shamans arrive at objectivity by sinking deeply into their own subjectivity. In Jungian terminology one would say that they attain to the collective subconscious by going deeply within their own psychic contents or, in other words, the subjective perspective of the individual himself is the point of reference. A common factor throughout, despite the differences between the distinct worlds which are constructed and inhabited by persons acculturated in distinct shamanic traditions, is that these are charismatic individuals whose social power derives from their own power over themselves—and not the converse, as is the case among the politicians and social leaders in our societies. They must become specialists in altered or modified states of consciousness in order more deeply and extensively to know their subjectivity than their fellows do, so to be able to objectify their own subjectivity, to be able to go from inside to outside.

3) The third important and generic characteristic of shamanic cognitive processes is dialogical consciousness. In the course of different voyages to the otherworld or during ecstatic experiences, the visionary individual un-focuses everyday attention which is functionally directed towards a single point. This manner of working with consciousness, this focused cognitive style is the typical, and the only one valued by our societies. Upon removing the weight of attention from the single point that fills the entirety of consciousness, shamans allow the emergence of internal beings, different voices from their imaginations and subconscious memories: censored memories, messages from the collective subconscious, biographical review, intuitions... During this dialogical state of consciousness—consciousness in dialogue with itself—the individual may become conscious of and review psychic contents, listen to the voices speaking one to another without one becoming predominant over the others, as happens in the ordinary mental state, where the dominant ego-structure imposes its own messages and criteria over all other impulses, perceptions and memories.

There comes to mind an anecdote from my own life, which I sometimes relate to friends. It serves as an illustration of the dialogical consciousness proper to shamanisms. For several years in the Upper Amazon of Ecuador I was a foreign observer and apprentice of an aged Shuar shaman of charismatic renown, by the name of P. Juanka. Throughout the period of this apprenticeship I took ayahuasca with him during many healing sessions, while in others I accompanied him in quest of oracular inspiration. In every occasion, Juanka insisted that I see with my physical eyes the magical darts that enemy brujos had shot at his people, causing illnesses. He described the appearance of more than twenty different types of magical darts—called *tséntsak* in the Shuar language—darts which were invisible to the profane. It was precisely the ability to see and manipulate these *tséntsak* which distinguished the shaman—*uwishín* in Shuar—from a person lacking his powers (greater detail on the entire initiatory process appears in the second part of *Los jíbaros, cazadores de sueños* (Jíbaros: Dream Hunters), Josep Maria Fericgla, Ed. Integral, Barcelona, 1994). Given their nature and the

way such spirits or magical darts were described, I suspected these might be projections in the psychological sense of the term. Nevertheless, I followed his instructions to the letter. After a period of training and pursuant to the continual insistence by Juanka that I make an effort to see these darts invisible to the profane, I came to the conclusion that something in my own primary process of socialisation hindered me from doing so. Juanka always spoke to me in an austere way, without rhetoric and absent any lying. I had no reason to suspect that he could not see such spirits or powers, inasmuch as he was able to describe them in such detail, the while he insisted that I likewise remember every one of the attributes of each different type of dart: thus might I be able to recognise them the moment I saw them. Two years after the “compacting period”—this would be the most literal translation of the way the Shuar denominate the process of apprenticeship in shamanism—when I once again visited my mentor, who invited me to participate in a nocturnal curing session, we took the appropriate dose of ayahuasca to impel a state of consciousness appropriate to the occasion and we held the session. On finishing, Juanka praised me. He said my ability to move fluidly through the states of consciousness characteristic of shamanism had greatly improved (I stress, such states as these are understood by the Shuar). I thanked him for his compliment and added that I still, nonetheless, had never seen the *tséntsak* or invisible darts he had so insisted I distinguish through the darkness while under the potent influence of ayahuasca over my mind. He answered me without flinching, now as a friend instead of as a teacher, that I should not worry about that; that he had never seen them either, and thought that neither had any other *uwishín* or shaman ever seen them. In the end I think I understand that this is a case of the dialogical consciousness being projected without: the voices of the shamanic mind itself are anthropomorphised and converted into external elements.

4) The fourth universal characteristic of shamanisms is the quest for Holo-rhenic Consciousness or a state of the mind in which is sought the totality of itself and the totality of itself in the Cosmos. The wisdom of indigenous communities of the past and present differs from the modern wisdom/

power in that it does not separate human beings into objects and subjects of knowledge. It is further distinguished in that it does not regard Nature to be an object of study, but rather as a portion of the Cosmos integral to culture; nature is the one and indissoluble reality of human beings; we and all our cultural output are a part of this unity. The diverse shamanic consciousness-forms agree, insofar as people, animals, plants, water, light and soil all enjoy their own identities, they exist in the same way that exist other beings who are fantastic or imaginary to us, inasmuch as they have human and animal features, and are conceived as being the souls of the sun, the rain; at once masculine and feminine. Holorrhenic is a neologism which I coined in 1989 to describe this way of using consciousness, which endeavours to capture the totality of the systemic order in which it is immersed, a totality including itself (see: FERICGLA, Josep Ma, “El sistema dinámico de la cultura y los diversos estados de la mente humana” (“A dynamic system of culture and the diverse states of the human mind”), Cuadernos A, Anthropos, Barcelona, 1989).

5) An open procedural style of consciousness is another universal characteristic of shamanisms. The Cosmos exists to shamans in a state of perpetual motion and flux. In our societies it is likely that it would be difficult to capture this dimension of consciousness, precisely because it seems to be understood without great difficulty, but this is not the case: it is not understood. Because of unbridled consumerism—to the point that one no longer speaks of a consumerist society, pursuant to the fact that a fish would be the last to be aware of living in an aquatic environment—we as individuals live in a world of “finished products”. Whatever it might be, experiencing any “process” has all but disappeared from the transparent curtain upon which are stuck the phenomena which constitute life. We lack any representation of the world in which every object, act, emotion, relationship or belief is a part of a process. In our post-industrial societies, one expects everything to be a product ready for consumption, without any intermediate processes. I will illustrate this with two extreme examples from human reality: birth and death. The biological process of birth has

been practically annulled, along with the odours and fluids which accompany parturition, having been transformed into a “finished product”: the pregnant woman enters the operating theatre with a distended abdomen at the moment fixed by the obstetrician, she loses consciousness with the general or epidural anaesthetic administered and, some time later, leaves the operating theatre having a practically normal abdomen, with a clean baby in her arms that smells of infantile cologne... as though the newborn had fallen from the sky. The same notion of “finished product” can be seen with dying: we have lost the process of dying well. The moribund of the past are not allowed to exist, those individuals who were experiencing the process of corporeal extinction and were, as it might be, enjoying that fact, since it gave them the great opportunity to reconcile themselves with their descendents, to wrap-up their earthly affairs and apportion their worldly goods, to finalise unfinished emotional matters, so to face the trance in peace... this process no longer exists. A sick body, however gravely ill, is a battlefield between medicine and illness. So long as the physician has not given up, the patient is not moribund, but rather one of whom one does not even mention death, because attention is fixed on prognoses of chances for recuperation. As soon as the medical team has given up and so abandons the patient, he or she is still not a dying person—that is, somebody in the process of dying—but has rather been transformed into a dead person who is still breathing, into a bothersome anomaly with which one knows not what to do. Once finally dead, the body is made-up in such a way that there are no signs of death: the economy of death and of thanatological consumption converted into theology.

I need not give further examples of this. All available goods are ready to consume, no mistakes, nothing unfinished is allowed: this is what we pay for. Even human beliefs and relationships follow a similar pattern, are understood to be yet another “finished product”: either a person is my friend, or she isn't, but we scarcely conceive the process—which is what really exists—of friendship, of making friends. “We are becoming friends” is an expression which has fallen into disuse. Shamans, on the other hand, cons-

truct their world from a permanently open state of consciousness: this is always in the process and is very rarely closed, as though it had arrived at a finished state. Nature, animals, relationships with other human beings, social equilibrium... to be able to adapt and to survive, everything exists in a continual process of adaptation and change.

Thence the importance of oral narrative, of the mythopoetic discourse or of writing and symbolic iconography, communicative spaces where the written word (as such, fixed and immobile) does not exist, nor finished products, words and things are rather conceived as dynamic, living and fluctuant energy.

6) The sixth distinctive and universal quality of modes of consciousness proper to shamanisms is a social consciousness based on helping relationships. The shaman is not a self-centred mystic but rather exists to serve the community with which she or he identifies, and forms a part of. The shaman struggles against spiritual evil for the benefit of her or his fellows, shoots purportedly invisible, poisoned darts at the enemies of the community and in its defence, enters into contact with the spirits of defunct ancestors in service of members of her or his family or clan. Thus the spirits which are friendly to one are hostile to another, such that the connexion between shamanism and violence is more evident when two communities are at war (VITEBSKY, Piers, *El chamán (The Shaman)*, Ed. Debate, Madrid, 1996; FERICGLA, Josep Ma, *Los chamanismos a revisión (Shamanisms Reviewed)*, Kairós, Barcelona, 2000). The shaman is intimately involved with the conflicts of her or his own society, and with the search for effective resolutions. She or he does not then follow a fixed model of reality, but rather acts according to distinct models of reality, pursuant to states of trance and the use of entheogens, or of visionary or inspired states, a fact which implies considerable cognitive dynamism, all of which has been underscored by symbolic anthropology.

Accordingly and in conclusion, open cognitive processes, a profound relationship between compromise and assistance, a tendency towards an objective totality generated from a subjective perspective, the dominion of dialogical consciousness, emotions felt and conceived as the basic network upon which social life moves and diverse states of consciousness contrast among themselves to give depth to the experience of life... these are the basic factors which define fluid states of shamanic consciousness. To be sure, such are the very factors which we must now foster in our societies, if we wish to escape from the trap of being unsatisfied, from the lack of meaning in life, and the armament-based perspectives which pretend to be the only viable path of evolution and of globalisation.

Perhaps we need to find again the most ancient path travelled by shamanisms, except this time free of exotic trappings—as spectacular as they are empty—from other times and places, nor the immature credulities belonging to the beliefs-market into which we have transformed our societies.

As goes the seventh poem of the classical book of Lao Tse, Tao Te King:

Heaven is eternal and the Earth permanent.

*They are eternal and permanent because
they do not live for themselves.*

Thus they long endure.

*By the same manner the sage, putting himself behind,
places himself before.*

Losing his ego

he preserves his identity.

*Is it not that in renouncing his individuality
he realises his individuality? (2)*

Footnotes:

(1) This text corresponds to the lecture given by Dr. Josep Ma Fericgla during the conference-series *Els xamanismes* (The Shamanisms), financed by La Caixa bank between 17 and 18 November, 2001. The conferences were held in Palacio Macaya, Barcelona, headquarters of Fundació Cultural de La Caixa. Also participating as lecturers in this series were Dr. Piers Vitebsky (Professor at Cambridge University, England), Dr. Mihaly Hoppal (Director of the European Institute of Folklore and Member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences), Jorge Ronderos (Professor at the University of Caldas, Colombia), Jonathan Ott (ethnobotanist, independent writer and investigator from USA residing in México), Dr. Stacy Schaeffer (Professor at the University of California, Chico and Director of the Museum of Anthropology of the same institution, USA), and Dr. Josep Ma Fericgla (Director of the Society for Applied Ethnopsychology and Cognitive Studies and Professor of MSG, University of Barcelona, Catalunya) who acted as Director of the conference series.

(2) Translated from the Castilian version of the Tao Te King, published by Ed. Oasis, Barcelona, 1995.