

THE WAY OF AN URBAN SHAMAN:
MICHAEL HARNER AND NEO-SHAMANISM

I first met Michael Harner in late January 1984, in California at the shamanism seminar in the Esalen Institute. He had invited me there and he received me with a smile on his face on the wooden terrace hovering almost over the water on the steep shore of the Pacific. We talked a lot over the two weeks I spent there and he gave me a copy of his book, *The Way of the Shaman*, already appearing in the second edition. At that time I had already been to Siberia once and I told him as much as I could about my study trips to the Soviet Union. He listened with keen interest for the information on Siberian shamanism, since I was the first scholar coming from the East who brought him word from the world behind the iron curtain. This was the time when he decided that, if possible, he too would visit Moscow in order to meet my Russian colleagues and see the material on classic shamanism – which decision he later fulfilled.

The shaman's way is full of journeying. They mediate between worlds, they carry information and messages. In this sense Harner is a genuine shaman, as his life course sufficiently proves.

The career of Michael Harner (1929) began in quite a regular fashion in the sense in which it is expected of an American anthropologist. A few years after graduation he had the opportunity to go on field work. In 1956–57 he worked among the Jívaro (or as they call themselves, *untsuri shuar*) Indians living in Ecuador, on the Eastern slopes of the Andes. The outcome of this work his book *The People of the Sacred Waterfalls* (1972).

His PhD was written about the spiritual culture of this small tribe of a few thousand people, and defended in 1963 at Berkeley. This famous university town is the home of one of America's best ethnographic museums, the Robert H. Lowie Museum of Anthropology. Here Harner worked as assistant director and thus had the chance to go on another field trip to South American in 1960–61, this time to the Konibo Indians who live in the Peruvian rain forests along the upper Amazon.

It was in 1961 that he went through the decisive experience which influenced the later course of his life. At this time he tried the drink of the shamans brewed from the plant called *ayahuasca* (*Banisteriopsis caapi*). This sacred hallucinogenic drink which the Indians call *natemä* has changed Harner's notions radically. He wrote that a few hours after taking the drink he experienced fantastic journeys in a state of waking dream, during which he encountered bird-headed people, dragon-like monsters, and the helping animals of shamans. In other words, as he wrote, during the trance, the altered state of mind, 'the supernatural appeared natural, and as an ethnographer I realised that we had far underestimated the role of drugs in the thought system of natives'.¹

In 1964 and 1969 he went on further trips to continue his research among the jívaro (since then there have been other scholars who have studied this tribe, e. g. Fericgla 1994). These field trips were sponsored by the American Museum of Natural History in New York and by Columbia University. In these years he taught at Columbia University, at Yale and Berkeley, and for a longer period of time, at the famous New School for Social Research in New York, where he was chair of the Department of Cultural Anthropology.

In 1973 he published an interesting collection of studies entitled *Hallucinogens and Shamanism*² in which three of the essays were by Harner himself. In the first of these three he gives an account of his experiences among the jívaro, particularly about the healing practice of shamans among this tribe.³ The other two studies written by him analysed hallucinogenic plants and the experiences occurring under their effect and described these within the practice of South American Indian cultures and in the history of European witchcraft.⁴ This period, the late 1960's and early 1970's was the period of the great drug cult, the time of beat music, student demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and of the 'flower people' (the flower generation and Woodstock). This was the time of the publication of Carlos Castaneda's massively successful books and, naturally, scholars of anthropology turned with deepening interest toward the research of peoples using psychoactive drugs.

From the early 1970's onwards Harner elaborated his own method with the help of which anyone could achieve an altered state of mind. He began to give public talks and to organise practical sessions. At these drumming week-ends he formulated a method with the help of which the participants could gain an

1 Harner, M. 1973a. 16-17.

2 Harner, M. (ed.) 1973.

3 Harner, M. 1973a.

4 Harner, M. 1973b.; 1973c.

experience of 'the other reality', the altered state of mind which he called a '*shamanic state of consciousness*' (SSC). His book on this subject was first published in 1980.

It is interesting to note that while in the 1970's Carlos Castaneda disappeared from the public view for years, but an endless succession of his best-sellers appeared almost year by year, Michael Harner did hardly any writing at this time. Instead he travelled as much as possible and devoted his life to practical shamanic instruction. Thus he can be seen as one of the initiators of urban shamanism in the United States.

Harner began by founding an institution called Center for Shamanic Studies (1979), and in 1985 he developed this into a non-profit establishment. In the past two decades a great number of people have participated at Harner's basic course, the '*shamanic training workshops*'. He consciously built up an entire movement and today we can say that tens of thousands of people have taken and continue to take part in the shamanic journeys of the drumming week-ends. First Harner led the sessions himself, but later he began to hold annual master training courses, at the beginning of each year, at the Esalen Institute, Big Sur, California. Many of the participants of these courses became masters over the years. (Thus, for example, Jonathan Horowitz in Denmark, Claude Poncelet in Belgium, Paul Uccusič in Austria, Yukio Fujimi in Japan, Leilani Lewis in Hawaii, Jill Bathgate in Australia, Christiana Buckbee in Finland and Alla Slobodova in Moscow hold regular training courses.)

Beside teaching the basics of shamanism throughout the United States, Harner also formulated an entirely new technique called *shamanic counseling*.⁵ This technique enables the participant or patient to take an independent journey into extraordinary reality. The aim of this trance is to provide the patient with the opportunity to gain answers to the questions and problems which most occupy their minds and to develop their own spiritual wisdom. The novelty of this method over traditional shamanism is that while in the past the shaman used to journey to the world of spirits, according to modern urban shamanic counseling the patient himself or herself is encouraged to make the journey. Thus the clients themselves become their own shaman-healers. Another innovation is that, adapting modern ways, it is possible to listen to the drumming from a tape, cutting out the necessity for live drum music on every occasion. An even further innovation introduced by Harner is that the experiences undergone during the trance-journey are recorded by the participants, through simultaneous narration, on dictaphones. The patient listens to the sound of the drum through

⁵ Harner, M. 1988.

earphones from one tape recorder and records their experiences with the help of another. This allows a later detailed analysis of the text of the narration.

Psychologists and psychiatrists who have analysed Harner's method have established that this technique significantly accelerates the process of personality development and requires far less time for the understanding of problems than traditional counselling does. The reason why Harner's shamanic method works better and faster is that it utilises the entire personality and particularly appeals to the individual's visionary capability. In other words with the help of a visual approach problems are far easier to tackle than with the pure use of analytic intellect.

Besides the basic training, Harner developed a number of specialised courses with the help of his colleagues, mainly Sandra Ingermann and his wife Sandra Harner. These include a Shamanic Extraction Healing Training Workshop, a Shamanism, Death and Dying Workshop, a course called Shamanic Healing: Journeying and Dreamtime Experience and one entitled Recovering Lost Rituals: The Dream Dance Workshop, a Five-Day Soul Retrieval Training, A Shamanic Divination Training Workshop and various advanced courses such as a Two-Week Advanced Course in Shamanism, Three-Year Program in Advanced Shamanism and Shamanic Healing).

A new stage in the activity of the foundation lead by Harner (Foundation for Shamanic Studies) is that he now strives to demonstrate the shamanic practice he has formulated to people among whom shamanism used to be a living practice until the early 20th century but has by now become extinct (thus among certain North American Indian tribes, Alaskan Eskimos, or the Lapps living in Sweden and Norway).

This is the way in which an ancient healing rite and technique of ecstasy can become a new social ritual. On the one hand this is part of the aim of social gatherings, since people come together in order to practice an element of the forgotten tradition which they consider particularly important. And on the other hand this is done through distinguishing a section of the past which is, or appears to the participants to be, suitable to express and maintain at a very high level the emotional ties of belonging to a community. In places where neo-shamanism re-instates disappearing practice into its social rank, this becomes an excellent symbol and technique for the re-generation of ethnic identity.

In the urban setting, on the other hand, where ethnic belonging is a thing of the past and even its traces have long since vanished, what becomes foregrounded is the therapeutic function of the one time ritual. This has two as-

pects. One is the promise held by the courses and practices advertised, namely that participants may learn a technique for comprehending their psychological problems and re-enforcing their self-appreciation. Here it must incidentally be mentioned that, on a minimum level, the practices ensure the appropriation of excellent relaxation techniques which may be of great use of people living under the stress of living in great cities. The other important aspect, which is rarely emphasised but which follows directly from the essence of the ritual technique of shamanism, is the experience of community. The very experience of being together and sharing in an activity is the source of a beneficial effect for the participants.

The activity of the Foundation and the ever-expanding body of teachers, healers and counsellors also takes shape in remarkable research achievements. This happens along several avenues. Partly, it is one of the aims of the Foundation to rescue all the shamanic knowledge which has been accumulated in tribal cultures and which is under direct threat of extinction. This is the mission of the UTA program (Urgent Tribal Assistance) which comes to the rescue if (a) the practice of the ancient shamanic rites of the local population is suppressed or prohibited. If (b) the practice has been extinct for decades, the foundations sends one of its masters to hold a basic training course to the local population in order to teach them the elementary techniques of shamanism over again. This is what happened in Finland, Sweden and Norway,⁶ in the Northern parts of Russia⁷ and among the Indians living along the North West coast-line in the United States and Alaska. (c) The Foundation provides financial assistance to surviving old shamans who are usually living in conditions of great need.

The MONOR program aims to create a very special archive in which should be collected all those narratives which participants of the courses have given of their shamanic journeys and of shamans themselves. These narratives are excessively diverse, they include Near Death Experiences and other mystical accounts and form the basis for a later comparative, cross-cultural study to map out and perhaps come to understand universes hidem from everyday cognition. This 'other' world, the world of non-ordinary reality or realities was far from unknown for shamans themselves.

Michael Harner's recent studies aim exactly at processing these archetypal experiences. He had earlier recorded the narratives that people related during their shamanic trance-journeys that people related during their shamanic trance-journeys and so today he is in possession of several thousand of these accounts.

⁶ Harner, M. 1989.

⁷ Horwitz, J. 1992.

These narratives reveal that journey experiences are of three major types. The accounts of these people, in harmony with those of classic old shamanic narratives, state that journeys are possible to the underworld, to the upper world and to the middle world. These are the three strata of shamanic cosmology, of the world view or world model of people whose beliefs are determined by shamanism. This is also the organising principle of animistic mythologies. The essence of this character – the shaman – who is capable of creating a connection between the world of humans, the middle world and the upper world or the world of gods or spirits. Besides this, there is a very strange underworld which is perhaps the most easily accessible for the human mind when people are in this altered state of consciousness. This is the sphere, if you like, that is most available to human beings. What I myself found amazing is that during the drumming week-ends the majority of people found it relatively easy to enter the underworld. It was slightly more difficult to fly upwards and, strangely, it appeared most difficult to move inside our own world, the middle world inhabited by people.

I do not know the cause, nor had I given it much thought until this time, but I was now amazed by the degree to which all of us have the ability to distance ourselves from everyday life and find instant access to an underworld. Michael Harner's technique is to say to the patient, find a tree or a well or a cave and start your journey downward there. It was curious to see how most people are instantly capable of starting down into the darkness. They went without fear along a long dark tunnel at the end of which there was some dim light. Suddenly through this light they arrived into a vast brightly lit hall, where fear ceased in spite of the fact that they were now in a state of near-todeath. Most of the narratives describe the subject being overcome with a huge sense of peace. It is almost unbelievable that it was the mere effect of even, monotonous drumming that transported them into this altered state of mind. The other interesting aspect of Harner's neo-shamanic technique is that it does not include any form of drug use. In other words, ordinary people, any one of us, is capable of falling into an altered state of mind.

In 1991 one of Harner's students held a shamanic practice in Budapest. On this occasion we recorded a few 'journeying' accounts. We quote from three of these narratives.

"My access downwards was a window slit. I stepped across it and instantly started falling into a long dark hole. This hole grew wider and I could see a herd of deer, headed by a large male, moving upwards. After that I heard the

soft, distant sound of a recorder and found myself in open, beautiful moor land. Far away, behind a hill to the right I could see smoke rising. I could feel that that was where I would find the wolf Sama, my helping spirit. With some difficulty I managed to set out that way. (Then suddenly I saw before me the wolf Sama dancing to the rhythm of the drum while drumming himself.) I am standing in front of an abyss. It is gigantic but not frightening, there is a long white rope leading across it. I easily make it to the other side where I see lots of small white cottages with dark brown roofs. They look like so many mushroom-rooms. But I must go on, this is not the place I am looking for. I am standing in front of the entrance of a tall and wide cave. On each side there stands a white wolf. The hair on their necks is thick and grey. The wolf Sama appears again, wearing a wooden bear mask – I know that that has healing power. There are lights rippling along the cave wall and then a procession of lifelike animal-heads passes over my head: fox, deer, a bull which turns into a buffalo. White birds in two rows fly out of the cave while I go on slowly and calmly." (Z. N.)

"I started down the usual way but I fell quicker this time because on the way my body knocked against stones – I was falling toward the light down a tube. When I arrived, I saw the monkey and the bird, perhaps this was a falcon. I asked them to help. The big lights around us had no way out – they ran into the wall and I followed them but hem I got very angry because they disappeared from my eyes. Suddenly I found a door in front of me, it was locked but I knew how to go on because there was light seeping out through the gaps but it was impossible to get through... As I got out of this wall I was in a forest – this is dark, too, and I am still running, there is a sleigh in front of me pulled by two wolves, that is what I am trying to catch up with. I now know why I am running, there is a pack of howling wolves behind me and I am trying to get rid of them. It is a long long road, it seems endless but still there is a light flickering at the end. This is the magic house from the fairy tales, I fall in through the door and leave outside the two grey wolves that were pulling the sleigh. Inside there is great light again. I am waiting for my eyes to get used to the light so I can see the old man, but there is no old man and the light does not get softer either, there is just one door and I can vaguely see through it, I am glad to see that there is somewhere to go on to, I enter but only find another bright room, with a door opposite, I enter, there is the door in front, I panic, begin to run, more doors – I realise that I am going round in a circle, I am in a labyrinth..." (T. B.)

"I descended along the inside wall of a well with a wheel, in the shape of a rabbit-man. Then my spirit moved into the rabbit, I scuttle along the passage in

therock until I reach a meadow bathed in light. I halt suddenly on the bank of a stream because the toy bridge that arches across it is not suitable to cross. I wait until it turns into a wooden bridge and I can set foot on it. Stopping in the middle of the bridge I see wild ducks below in the water. Reaching the far bank I start upward toward the head of the stream. In the distance I see a the bluish wall of a desert castle, which then turns into a yurt. On the peak of it there is a torn piece of tar paper burning with black smoke. The yurt is empty inside. I wait for a little while but nobody appears... I get back to the bridge. Stopping on my way across, I see that among the ducks now there are white swans swimming about gracefully. I have difficulty finding the way home. At first my way is blocked by walls, fences, wooden boards everywhere. But I find a small gap, I leap across it at start out homeward. I run all the way to the well along the narrox cleft in the rick." (T. V.)

Ethnographers who know the elements of Hungarian folk tales can easily compare these narrative details with Tündér Ilona's marvellous under-water castle where, following the long-bearded dwarf the White Horse's Son also descends, being let down into the narrow dark passage. It is worth mentioning here that those journeying narratives which participants of esoteric and other shamanism courses share with the other participants represent an entirely new and unique narrative genre. Narrative research has shown that there are numerous similarities between certain folk tale and mythic structures and these journey narratives to other 'worlds', alternative realities.⁸ Harner has promised for years that his next book is going to be one that compares the narratives of shamanic journeys recorded in different cultures. These stories may hide very interesting discoveries as on the one hand they may reveal the common elements shared in the depths of all these experiences and perceptions and on the other hand they may show the culturally encoded differences in our minds. Thus the MONOR research programme can certainly widen the boundaries of our knowledge as indeed real shamans were always envoys of the community travelling on the verge of the humanly inhabitable world.

Indeed, travelling is a key word in our culture and some of our contemporaries feel the need to partake, not only in mass tourism but in some other not very closely defined spiritual journeying as well. Unfortunately in most cases they try to achieve this with the help of drugs. Fortunately, an opposite process is also gaining force at the same time, in the wake of the increasingly strong European and international Green movement and people's scepticism regarding

8 Wienker-Piepho, S. 1996.

the almighty power of science and technology is increasing day by day. More and more try to turn toward natural healing methods. However incredible it sounds, a stage in this process can be recognised in the event when, contemporaneously with the spreading of microcomputers, the Tirol village, Alpbach became the scene of an international convention with barely a hundred participants devoted to the theme of 'shamanism and healing'. Guests at the convention included Rolling Thunder the famous North American Indian shaman and healer' and arriving from Brussels, Jóska Soós shaman-painter who was born in Hungary in 1921 and who, besides painting, holds shamanic sessions where he demonstrates and teaches to his students a journeying and healing technique that he had formulated himself.⁹ It must be noted that the émigré Hungarian shaman-painter developed his healing technique (initially a self-healing method) entirely independently of Harner and still he is a typical representative of the same world-wide tendency, the emergence of urban shamanism.¹⁰

Self-healing, in other words the balancing of inner powers and possibilities present in everyone, is one of the aims of modern urban shamanism. The aim is to find and develop the 'latent, inner self' with the help of various shamanic helping spirits (animals and plants) and of various rites, symbols and devices.¹¹ Kenneth Meadows recommended the path or the way of shamans in an earlier book¹² as did Gini Scott Graham who used the shaman metaphor in at least three books merely to ensure success and finally, in a fourth book, to prepare readers and clients for technique which is meant to ensure business success. Naturally, better quality popular educational works¹³ were also published alongside these more superficial efforts at presenting shamanism. These former contributed to increasing the popularity and deepening the understanding of the activity of urban shamans.

Of special importance in the world of urban shamanism is the life's work of Felicitas D. Goodman. He, too, began his career as an anthropologist, examining the phenomena of 'speaking in tongues' as well as various techniques of trance and extasy,¹⁴ within the Pentacostal congregations of the South of the USA and in Central America. These investigations, together with the systematic research carried out in the Cungamungue Institute founded by her in 1979, lead him to the conviction that certain body postures assumed under the conditions

9 Hoppál, M. 1989.

10 Hoppál, M. 1992.

11 Scott, G.G. 1991.; Chail, S.-Halpern, J. 1991.; Meadows, K. 1991.

12 Meadows, K. 1990.

13 Drury, N. 1989.; Walsh, R.N. 1990.

14 Goodman, F. D. 1986.; 1988.

of religious rites and experimental states of trance produce distinctly definable experiences and visions.¹⁵ These were such novel recognitions and achievements which open entirely new prospects to further comparative studies. Felicitas Goodman carries on his research with the untiring powers of the ever-young with the help of volunteers arriving in Institute in the middle of the desert of New Mexico. Besides, he is always travelling, lecturing all over America and Europe. (She has held regular courses in Hungary, too, almost every year since 1991, the more so as she speaks, beside other languages, excellent Hungarian.)

Some of Harner's students have also contributed interesting works to the description of urban shamanism. Thus for example the Norwegian Arthur Sörensen (1990) described his experiences gained in Big Sur, California, including that of the ritual initiation undergone at the shamanic courses at the Esalen Institute. Jonathan Horwitz has regularly taken part at international conferences and held informative lectures on the experimental character of urban shamanism¹⁶ and also highlighted the fact that the essential element in shamanic rite is not the 'performance', the spectacular strain but the ability to emanate power and thus perform healing. In another article he relates one of his neo-shamanic journeys among the Kola Lapps of the North of Russia and tells about the way in which he helped resurrect shamanic tradition among these people.¹⁷

"The course itself was a very powerful experience, not only for me, but also for the others. Working in Eastern Europe for some years now, I have often felt that whole countries were suffering from soul loss. The eleven Sami participants were eager to regain journeys, and the exercises Nature did just that. Not surprisingly, Reindeer, Raven, Bear, and Salmon eagerly connections to the Spirit world. I noticed with interest and pleasure that immediately after the first journey to the Lower world, Nadia began drawing pictures on her drum as a way of recording her journey. One of the participants met one of the ancient helping spirits of the Skolta Sami, the Reindeer Man, half man, half reindeer, who volunteered to be his teacher. Already on the second day of the course I was asked, 'It is allowed that we make our own drums and start a drumming circle after you have left?' I promised them that it was more than allowed.

Before coming to Kola, I was told that they had thirteen days of sunshine there each year. We experienced three of those days while the course was going on. Realizing that this was an unusual opportunity, I decided that we should do as much outside work as possible. Afterwards, one of the participants told me, 'I always knew that the Birch was powerful, but how powerful I never knew

15 Goodman, F.D. 1988.; 1990.

16 Horwitz, J. 1989.; 1993.

17 Horwitz, J. 1992.

until today!'. Later she showed me the tree. It was small, and twisted, one of its branches having been ripped off some time in its past. But it had survived, still strong and proud on that beautiful sunlit autumn afternoon, wearing a crown of golden leaves backed by deep blue sky. I could not help comparing it to the beaming person who stood beside it, and to the Sami culture."¹⁸

Among Harner's direct colleagues perhaps the most interesting research work is done by his wife and Sandra Ingerman. Sandra Harner has been examining the effect of shamanic drumming for years, more closely the impact of the sound of the drum on the human organism, particularly the immune system.¹⁹ Sandra Ingerman concentrates on the problems of soul retrieval. Since the mid-1980's she has devoted her attention to the way in which shamanic techniques may be used in preventing the emergence of traumatic damage.²⁰ In 1991 she published her pioneering book called 'Soul Retrieval' which is about the possibility of retrieving lost souls or parts of souls. This originally North American Indian visionary technique is a very effective method of reducing the negative effect of stress situations in the case of people living in large cities.²¹

In the 1980's and 1990's several books were published, mainly in English speaking areas, whose authors turned consciously to the ancient model of shamanism. These authors believe that the wholistic approach of shamanism is an allpowerfull potential, capable of healing our entire planet²² and that these techniques overarch the history of mankind from the stone age to our postindustrial days. Whether these writers are ethnographer-anthropologists, like Harner himself, or fiction writers or practicing psychologists, their books very rarely refer to authentic shamanic literature but all the more to Indian philosophy, Chinese sages, the teachings of the Indian Don Juan,²³ to mysticism, the chakras and radietyes.²⁴ The secret of shamanism is, as suggested by titles and subtitles, that the possession of the ancient knowledge can enable anybody to improve and enrich their own lives.²⁵ Shamanism gains especial importance in the age of Aquarius²⁶ in which epoch the ancient know-how is rediscovered within the European pagan tradition, thus for example in the Celtic heritage.

18 Shamanism. 1992-3. Vol. 5. No. 3. 3-4.

19 Harner, S. - Tryon, W.W. 1996.

20 Ingerman, S. 1988.

21 Ingerman, S. 1980.

22 Grosinger, R. 1980.

23 Castaneda, C. 1968.

24 Hartman, J. E. 1987.

25 Stevens, J. - Stevens, L. S. 1988.

26 Lörler, M. 1989. , originally published in German a few years earlier

Celtic shamanism is probably one of the earliest European pagan traditions. One Oxford researcher has been studying the old British, Irish and Welsh poetic folklore tradition for decades and published three books on the subject in 1991. Taliesin Celtic shaman and bard lived in the sixth century and it is from his poems and the legends surviving about him that ancient Celtic shamanic tradition can be reconstructed both in terms of its cosmology and of its practice.²⁷ The manual of Celtic shamanism informs the contemporary audience about the mythological background and the poetry and it also enables the reader to create the necessary equipments and learn the rites himself or herself, or at least their version according to the enthusiastic Matthews.

A young Irishwoman living in the United States, Geo Cameron promises practical initiation into the secrets of ancient Celtic shamanism, during which, as a descendant of female shamans she teaches participants old forms of divination in an old castle on a remote Hebridean island. She does not write books but provides instruction in ceremonial practice instead, similarly to many of her urban colleagues whose number is far from low in our contemporary world.

Urban shamans, as we have seen, are of two types now, at the end of the 20th century. One is the tribal shaman who is still tied to or has recently left behind their original organic society, living in cities but maintaining the old traditions. Ruth-Inge Heinze (1991) deals with these people in her excellent book in which she provides portraits of a Haitian voodoo priest, a Hawaiian *kahuna*, a South Korean *mudang*, a Malayan healer from Thailand and a Chinese healer from Singapore. These shamans, although they live in the big cities, often use their traditional healing techniques most efficiently, healing their patients without any pain or any physical interference whatever, simply with the help of healing visualisation.²⁸

The other characteristic type of the urban shaman is the intellectual or aborted artist who winds up an adventurous life course living in the city, drumming, singing and playing music and believing meanwhile that he or she is a shaman or, at least, finding the ancient model for their way of life in the old time shamans.²⁹ One of these ecstatic dancers of artistic claim is Gabrielle Roth who has created a shamanic theatre but has also written a book on the power of love, knowledge vision and dance,³⁰ in the title of which she calls herself an 'Urban Shaman'.

27 Matthews, J. 1991a.;1991b.

28 an interesting work on healing imagery has been done by Achtenberg, J. 1985.

29 See Berenholz, J. 1993. with Richard Erdoes's preface

30 Roth, G. 1990.

Serge Kahili King who, similarly to many of his fellow shamans hold a PhD in psychology, went to Hawaii to retrain himself as urban shaman and professional adventurer, as the title of his book reveals.³¹ This work, called *Urban Shaman*, is the manual of personality formation which he had compiled on the basis of the knowledge of Hawaii *kahunas* (shamans), primarily, of course, for American use. King took part in the 1991 conference of shamanistic researchers in Seoul where he performed his dance but, more interesting is what he writes in his book about the Hawaiian native ideas about healing. He describes the ways in which, according to these, it is possible to create harmony inside the body, the way in which intuitions can be used for generating changes, the way in which inner peace may be established and he also writes about the healing power of symbols and about dreams.³²

Another PhD in psychology is Arnold Mindell who is a specialist in dreams and had introduced dream work into his psychoanalytic practice (under the name neo-shamanism) which can be of help in processes of building health, community and human relationships.³³ The almost uninhibited ease with which basic elements of shamanism are used as metaphors is almost incredible – the are extended to all situations and used to alleviate the pressure of all forms of diseases, from insomnia to forms of cancer. This is what the community of the great city demands of the urban shaman – instead of healing, an explanation or at least a conscious processing of the situation.

In the 1990's a new, supra-cultural interpretation of neo-shamanism has come into the fore, which means that the shamanic ability is deemed to be present in all people ('...shamanic ability is an innate part of our inheritance as a human being...'³⁴), and one without which we would be impoverished. Various shamanic healing techniques and rites cannot be expropriated and can be used by white man as much as by 'natives' – argues Hal Zina Bennett who is one of the disciples and propagators of this inter-cultural neo-shamanism. 'The value of neoshamanism lies in providing us all with tools and methods for better understanding and integrating the wisdom our predecessors held in the land under our feet. Surely, isolating ourselves from shamanic traditions allows our society to continue thoughtlessly abusing Mother Earth, even to the point of endangering our own survival. Embracing neo-shamanism may be our greatest hope for healing the separation that we suffer in our relationships with each other, our

31 King, S. 1990.

32 King, S. 1990.

33 Mindell, A. 1993.

34 Bennet, H. Z. 1996. 6.

planet and Spirit.³⁵ Variations on this message can be detected in the works of all urban shaman authors.

Reviewing the incredible conquest made by urban shamans we will find that not only do they lack ties with any form of cultural tradition, but their healing know-how is also rather limited. Eleonor Ott held an excellent lecture at an international conference of researchers of shamanism held in Budapest, Hungary, in which she raised with sharp emphases the question of neo-shamans and ethics. According to her the main problem is that many urban shamans believe that healing knowledge and the art of the shaman can be learnt from books, through second or third hand sources.³⁶ At the same time she also raises the problem that the shamans of our day have to rise above their ethno-centric ties since the entire world has become their habitat and the scene of their activity, so that they must step over national and cultural boundaries. These thoughts are in harmony with the notions of Harner and his best disciples and also with those of other responsible neo-shamanic authors.

'Every people today is inter-connected with every other people around the globe. The shaman today, if there are to be shamans today, must break free of the limited, restricted, ethnocentric view of the past and must regard the whole world as the home place. They must go beyond all national, cultural and ethnic barriers. The term 'shaman' may no longer be able to carry the additional meaning of the person whose community is the world, and whose duty it is to engage in helping to heal the world. Even if we have some uncertainty minded person, we have no hesitation in declaring that all of us who live on this planet are in separate need of such healing persons, no matter what they are called, to help us stop our wanton destruction of the world. This is the most important meaning we can learn from shamans of old. The world is us, and we are the world.'³⁷

Thus, for example, a special place is occupied in the world of new age shamanism by the journal *Shaman's Drum* edited with much circumspection by Timothy White. This quarterly journal is a good example of how it is possible to keep a balance between the innumerable advertisements of shaman-training courses and 'pilgrimage' tours and interesting and colourful articles, travelogues and valuable popular scientific informative articles and book reviews. Advertisements for shamanic equipment (drums, crystals etc.) and for shamanic coun-

35 Bennet, H. Z. 1996. 6.

36 Ott, E. 1993.

37 Ott, E. 1993. 12.

seling seem to live side by side with the protection of American Indians' minority rights and the sacred shrines of individual Indian tribes and their natural environment. This is no marvel since in most cases it is the shamans themselves who raise their voice for the protection of their tribal areas, the burial places of their ancestors and holy springs and powers-places where, in no way accidentally, state or private companies try to produce gold, oil of 'only' wood.

Similar tendencies characterise the activity of the Foundation for Shamanic Studies established by Harner which has been publishing an elegant, beautifully printed Newsletter. Since 1992 this quarterly publication has been appearing under the title *Shamanism* and contains an increasing number of valuable articles and studies and, naturally, the full calendar of shamanic trainings (thus, if nothing else, these newsletters can serve as a source for a history of American neo-shamanism to be written at a later point in time). One of the most significant efforts made by Harner and the Foundation is to support surviving old shamans. The programme entitled 'Living Treasure' so far has provided financial help to a Tibetan and an Amazonian shaman and a Nanay shamaness living in the Amur area. Besides, they offer rewards to scholars whose work has enriched our knowledge of shamanism. Support of this kind has mainly been granted to Russian researchers (L. P. Potapov from Saint Petersburg and M. B. Kenin-Lopsan from Tuva) but the Foundation also supports field work. Thus, in the late 1990's when, after the collapse of the Soviet Empire, this was most acutely necessary several Russian researchers have been given the title 'field associate' which entails financial subsidies for research.³⁸

Michael Harner visited Hungary in the summer of 1986 at the invitation of the author of these lines. On this occasion he held a basic training course which was one of the first neo-shamanic drumming sessions in Hungary. It took a decade before his book, which has since appeared in half a dozen European languages (Finnish, Danish, Russian, German and Swedish) could also be published in Hungarian. Harner's introductory practice was attended by the famous group of musicians 'Vágtázó Halottkémek' who were very impressed with the American urban shaman and it was after this time that their music became more consciously penetrated with shamanic symbols. It was also on this occasion that the theatre director István Somogyi, who uses the techniques of shamanic initiation in his theatrical work, in his almost trance-like performance methods, first encountered shamanism. He also constructed methods, first encountered shamanism. He also constructed performances out of the reconstructed pieces

38 c.f. *Shamanism*. 1992. 4: 4:15.

of historical ritual fragments on the basis of the information gained from the 'journey'.³⁹ Somogyi also studies the transporting power of the ensemble of music, song and drumming, together with Mihály Sipos and Éva Kanalas. For this he uses a special method: during his trance journeys he travels in order to 'solve' concrete problems and thus, in a way, improves on Harner's technique because he is rooted with every nerve in the soil of his own cultural tradition. While the American anthropologist-urban shaman's method is a supra-cultural world-shamanism assembled from several cultures, the Hungarian efforts, no matter whether they are musical, dramatic or artistic, always refer back to the original pagan pre-history. This is a significant difference. While in the Western world urban shamans cultivate a supra or inter-cultural shamanism, in the East, especially in Siberia huge efforts are invested in the resurrection of a shamanism based on ancient local traditions.⁴⁰ And if they use the elements of shamanism on contemporary artistic activity, then they reach back to their own cultural roots.

The significance of Harner's work thus has a double effect. On the one hand, in the urban setting he spreads the simple natural healing methods of shamans. On the other hand, among the people who had lost their ancient shamanic culture, he tries to make these traditions conscious. Thus he is a real mediator and so a real shaman, as he mediates between peoples and cultures, traditions and communities, past and present. It is worth starting out on the 'shaman's way', since this not only leads to the knowledge of realities different from ordinary experience, but also gives assistance to the understanding of our inner world. This is the message of the urban shaman.

39 Somogyi, I. 1996.

40 Hoppál, M. 1996.

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