

Before the After-Dusk:  
Shamanism, the Subject, Music

By  
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The shaman is a figure in so-called primitive civilization that has the ability to will a journey between cosmological realms. It is my intuition that this ability was not erased in the transition to more modern civilizations, but remains as a practice with new words and understandings for the same technique. Through a discussion of Mircea Eliade's thesis on shamanism, in the light of the psychology of Freud, Lacan, and Bergson, I will show what shamanism holds in common with many musical experiences: a facilitating of memory with pathways that allow such a psychological momentum that the subject is vacated, and the consciousness of the present as representation melts. In other words, we cosmically travel.

One of Eliade's primary objectives in *Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy* is to distinguish the shaman from other religious and mystical practitioners in a given society. He compresses these distinctions into an equation: "*shamanism=technique of ecstasy.*" (Eliade, pg. 4) But one is lead to ask: What is ecstasy? And what might be its technique?

### **What is Ecstasy?**

Ecstasy is displacement, but shamanic ecstasy is a specific type. Etymologically speaking, we find the root of the word ecstasy in the Greek *ekstasis*, or, *displacement*. This leads us to tricky territory in a post-Freudian world. In Freud's thought, displacement is an operation in which all or part of the meaning of one thing is stripped from it and applied to another thing. It is a form of trickery that the dreaming person performs on the waking counterpart through the subconscious censoring process as a function of dream distortion:

In the dream *I* was a substitute for *him*... Here, then, in the process of changing the dream-thoughts into manifest dream-content, I have transformed cheerfulness into fear... This example proves, however, that the dream-work is at liberty to detach an affect from its connections in the dream-thoughts and introduce it at any other point it chooses in the manifest dream.

-Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*, 502

Displacement is possible here because the subject is part of a symbolic system. However, when we speak of displacement in shamanic ecstasy this model becomes problematic because it runs up against a non-interchangeability of psycho-spiritual state. The shamanic state can not enter a system of free interchangeability because, as will later become apparent, the shaman is no longer subject. You can not substitute the I for him because the shaman is neither. Rather than displaceability as a function within the symbolic system, we will see shamanic displacement as a displaceability from the symbolic system.

Ecstasy is journey. The shaman is the sole community member who possesses the ability to will him/herself to travel between cosmic zones:

Only [the shamans] know how to make an ascent through the “central opening”; only they transform a cosmo-theological concept into a *concrete mystical experience*. This point is important. [...] what for the rest of the community remains a cosmological ideogram, for the shamans (and the heroes, etc.) becomes a mystical itinerary. For the former, the “Center of the World” is a site that permits them to send their prayers and offerings to the celestial gods, whereas for the latter it is the place for beginning a flight in the strictest sense of the word. Only for the latter is *real communication* among the three cosmic zones possible.

-Shamanism, 265

Shamanic journey is mystical itinerary. The stops along this route are located in and among three cosmic realms: generally speaking, earth, heaven, and hell. However, I will argue that the itinerary is not just mapped onto a cosmological topography, it is

necessarily also mapped onto a psychological topography within/through memory.

Without such a mapping a shamanic technique would be impossible, the trance effect of music, narcotics and physical exhaustion inconsequential.

Ecstasy is not mimetic. Eliade offers a detailed description of a ritual horse sacrifice practiced by the Altaic peoples. The ceremony lasts three evenings, each building a drama off of the one before it. This drama involves an elaborate and complex network of imitations of various spirits and the shamanic ascent itself, each articulated with costume and poetry sung to different beats of the drum. Throughout the shaman is in story-teller mode, recounting his ascent and playing to role of the various spirits. Eliade's analysis concludes that:

The shaman laboriously mimes an ascent (after the traditional canon: bird flight, riding, etc.) and the interest of the rite is dramatic rather than ecstatic. This certainly does not mean that the Altaic shamans are incapable of trances; it is only that these occur at other shamanic séances than the horse sacrifice.

-Eliade, 200

This is an interesting distinction, and more deeply solidifies what Eliade means by saying that the ecstasy is actually happening. Here, the shaman is not only miming spirits and mythological characters, he/she is also miming him/herself. The ascent is retold, the trance mimed, the journey only represented and never actualized.

Ecstasy is not epilepsy. There is a long history of linking the onset of a seizure with a flash of ecstatic aura that goes through medical research dating back to the nineteenth century (Gastaut, 194). The history of the so-called "ecstatic seizure" is the history of attempts to overlap spiritual and religious feelings with scientific evidence. In the beginning of the twentieth century, epileptologists began using Fyodor Dostoevsky as

a case study to prove the existence of this ecstatic state. It turns out Dostoevsky suffered from very severe, and, often violent, seizures that would occasionally leave him unable to write for days or weeks. But, the seizures described that happen to Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* are accompanied by a fleeting feeling of intense unbounded joy:

He mused among other things about the fact that in his epileptic state, there was one stage, almost right before the fit itself (only if the fit came on while he was awake), when suddenly, in the midst of sadness, spiritual darkness and oppression, his brain seemed at moments to become aflame, and with an extraordinary burst, all his vital forces suddenly exerted themselves to the utmost all at once. [...] “at that moment I seem somehow to understand the extraordinary saying that *there shall be no more time*. Probably,” he added, smiling, “this is the very second in which the epileptic Mohammed’s upset pitcher of water had not had time to spill, though he had had the time, in the same second, to survey all the habitations of Allah.”

-Dostoevsky, 245

The Prince is referring here to the remarkably shamanesque tale of Mohammed being lead by Archangel Gabriel (his helping spirit) on a cosmic itinerary from Mecca to Jerusalem to heaven. This journey, over vast space that eventually leads to the infinite timelessness of heaven, happens within the time between when Mohammed knocks over a pitcher of water on his way out and before the water has completely spilled. This means that these two dimensions of time are coexistent, but more on Bergson’s cone diagram later...

Despite the literal description of cosmic travel, we can call Mohammed’s journey shamanic if we know that he willed it:

It is not the fact that he is subject to epileptic attacks that the Eskimo or Indonesian shaman, for example, owes his power and prestige; it is to the fact that he can control his epilepsy. [...] the shamans, for all their apparent likeness to epileptics and hysterics, show proof of a more than normal nervous constitution; they achieve a degree of concentration beyond the capacity of the profane; they sustain exhausting efforts; they control their ecstatic movements, and so on.

-Eliade, 29

Whether Mohammed was a shaman or not, epileptologist Henri Gastaut supports an argument for Dostoevsky's shamanic characteristics in proving that he, in fact, did not exhibit "ecstatic" seizures:

[...] the famous "aura" of ecstasy, is in fact but the poetic and mystical expression of [Dostoevsky's] deep aspiration for such a world of bliss and love, for a theocracy founded on the Christ ideal, and for the earthly Paradise which he repeatedly describes throughout his writings. This leads me to add that Dostoevsky believed deeply in the reality of the experiences he described, and he was totally honest in his unconscious mythologizing.

-Gausat, 193

The ecstasy was his own making, constructed out of cosmological ideograms. Though he was unable to control the onset of his seizure, he did *control the effect*. His writing was his technique of ecstasy.

Ecstasy is not authored by spiritual/cosmological forces. The shaman collects guardian spirits and animal helpers, during the process of initiation, that have immense cosmological significance and power. However, when it comes to the itinerary they are along for the ride:

[...] guardian or helping spirits are not the direct authors of this ecstatic experience. They are only the messengers of a divine being or the assistants in an experience that implies many other presences besides theirs.

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This is an important point in distinguishing the shaman from the priest. When the priest enters a trance state his body is possessed by something other, while, in the shamanic trance state, the shaman is master. As anthropologist Rebecca Basso explains in her research of the Khond tribe of the Indian region of Orissa:

The priest does not employ the same 'musical language' of the shaman, thus he is not able to experience a voluntary possession and he always depends on the will of the deities. This figure is characterized by a lack of control over his possession:

when it occurs, the priest is not able to interact with the entity that has entered his body.

-Basso, 182.

Here Basso is attempting a very intricate distinction between categories of possession that is too specific for my purposes. What I would like to call attention to is the return of the idea of will. Again, without will the technique is inconsequential.

This leads to a discerning of spiritual directionality in ecstatic shamanic experience. Spiritual possession is the freezing of the subject by a spiritual power coming in from another cosmic zone and made present through the usurping of the subject's body. The directionality of cosmic travel is one way. In the case of shamanic travel, however, the travel is a willed back and forth—a free traversal over cosmic boundaries. The technique is not a preparation to be more susceptible to spiritual influence, but, rather, a motor to propel the journey. Or, to put this in psychological terms, the technique is not an inducing of a psychotic state, but, rather, a radical inner interrogation.

This shamanic directionality carries over to practices in which the shaman dons the hide of an animal.

Little would be gained by recording the fact that shamans dressed up in animal skins. The important thing is what they felt when they masqueraded as animals. We have reason to believe that this magical transformation resulted in a “going out of the self” that very often found expression in ecstatic experience.

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Read in the context of the above discussion of the mimetic and/or dramatic the following distinctions emerge. Here, the hide is not a costume. It does not represent something else—nothing is being re/told—it is actual lived experience. The hide is a new hide: The shaman actually becomes the animal. The shamanic technique is a skill that allows the shaman to displace. This power of displacement resides always in the technique—the

body of the shaman is not entered by the spirit of the animal—and, though the shaman may be using the technique to leave the self, the technique also allows the possibility of return.

At first glance the shaman seems a cosmic diplomat. Whether communicating a wish before a hunt, directly offering a sacrifice, dispel sickness causing spirits, or inquiring demands during drought, the community relies on the shaman to keep its relationship with the natural order in balance. But the shaman is more than his/her social function. Often, ecstatic journeys are taken “for the joy alone.” (Eliade, 291) In other words, the structure of the shaman’s ecstatic trip is both culturally functional and deeply personal. What might these personal motivations be? What is there beyond the shaman as symbolic cosmic link?

### **Explosion of the Subject**

Is ecstasy Nietzschean rapture? Nietzsche’s rapture is distinct from that of Wagner via Schopenhauer in precisely the way that shamanism is distinct from spirit possession. In Schopenhauer, the will, as thing in itself, overtakes the subject, it is the incomprehensible power of life itself and has a power to enter and displace the subject. For Nietzsche, however:

Rapture as a state of feeling explodes the very subjectivity of the subject. By having a feeling for beauty the subject has already come out of himself; he is no longer subjective, no longer a subject.  
-Heidegger 123

Heidegger’s summary of Nietzsche’s aesthetics as rapture and beauty allow us an opportunity to consider the possibility of shamanic listening. The relationship between



the two is this: “Rapture is the basic mood; beauty does the attuning.” Beauty is, in some ways, analogous to the mythology and cosmology used by the shaman as building blocks of ascent. For Nietzsche the two share the same space. However, in classic shamanism, while one requires the other, the rapturous explosion is the while the attuning of cosmological grammar is merely the means. This isn’t to say that the explosion of the subject is the single goal. It is one stop (though probably the most important one) on the cosmic itinerary—it is the point of departure, the opening to the center of the world, the puncture in the plane of the present—after which an entire journey ensues.

For Nietzsche, rapture is a feeling. Specifically it is a feeling of enhancement of force and of plenitude. But, Heidegger explains:

Enhancement does not mean that an increase, an increment of force, “objectively” comes about. Enhancement is to be understood in terms of mood: to be caught up in elation—and to be borne along by our buoyancy as such.

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This elation is a space. It is beyond objective increment. It is an opening through which that which displaces from the subject (whatever that may be) can cross. Caught *up* in elation a new cosmic substance facilitates free floating or, even, broad gliding. The cosmic itinerary plays itself out in this substance, its distances only possible with a specific buoyancy.

Despite criticisms of Heidegger’s inclusion of Nietzsche’s sketches and plans for *The Will to Power* in his analysis of that work (see Kaufmann and Deleuze) I will include here an interesting fragment, itself left out of many editions of his sketches. It is the last item on a list titled “Toward the Physiology of Art”:

Art as *rapture*, medically: tonic oblivion, complete and partial impotence.

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What are we to make of this paradoxical statement? If we follow the logic of rapture as ecstasy, that is, rapture as displacement, this statement becomes slightly more illuminated. That which is caught up in the ecstatic state of rapture is displaced from the natural order in which he/she is “mortal, sexed, obliged to work to feed himself, and at enmity with the animals.” (Eliade 99) Tonic oblivion is the state before the dawn of time. Impotence here should not be confused with castration. It is not a finalizing act but a feature of the moment of the rapturous state. Once the state is over the natural workings of the body manifested in desire resume, which coincides with the return to the subject.

We do not “have” a body; rather, we “are” bodily. [...] Mood is never merely a way of being determined in our inner being for ourselves. It is above all a way of being attuned, and letting ourselves be attuned, in this or that way in mood. Mood is precisely the basic way in which we are *outside* ourselves.

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Rapture is an enhancement of mood beyond the physical limits of the body into/onto the surrounding bodies. It encapsulates that which surrounds me. Music is a way to sustain this enhancement, which perhaps naturally occurs, for “unnatural” periods of time. At some point I loose grasp of the period. This moment, moment as act of intense focusing in, is the explosion, is the enhancement of mood, is, then, the explosion of the body. The moment of rapture is the celebration of excess.

Ecstasy is excess. Nietzsche’s rapture is enhancement *and* plentitude. The explosion of the subject is an overflowing of mood. But, for Nietzsche, excess is about more than this transcendence directed outwards. Like the shaman, transcendental motion is at least bi-directional. The excess is that which results from enhancement of the

subjective mood, but this enhancement is not fueled from within, nor is it the only excessive element. There is excess to be found in the world—the excess of moment.

Have you ever said Yes to a single joy? O my friends, then you said Yes too to *all* woe. All things are entangled, ensnared, enamored; if ever you wanted one thing twice, if ever you said, “You please me, happiness! Abide, moment!” then you wanted *all* back. All new, all eternity, all entangled, ensnared, enamored—oh, then you loved the world. Eternal ones, love it eternally and evermore; and to woe too, you say: go, but return! *For all joy wants—eternity.*

-Nietzsche, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, 323

Excess is affirmation. But where lies the affirmation in the shamanic structure? If the goal is cosmic travel, and this goal is desired above all else to the extent that the shaman puts his/her body in serious physical risk, then does this not seem the opposite of the affirmation of the love for the world? Only if we see the shaman as still within the symbolic chain or as part of a system of representation. To displace, to break from the symbolic chain, is to affirm the world. After all, cosmic travel is not science fiction—or is it? The itinerary does not take the shaman to other solar systems. The three cosmic realms are each completely tied up in the world, they are the world. Cosmic travel, as stated above, should not be confused with “freedom” and “physical departure.” In exploding the subject, and displacing from the symbolic chain the shaman visits other realms of the world. These realms are the excess of the real. Their affirmation is the explosion of the subject.

[...] I thought well as well him as another and then I asked him with my eyes to ask again yes and then he asked me would I yes to say yes my mountain flower and first I put my arms around him yes and drew him down to me so he could feel my breasts all perfume yes and his heart was going like mad and yes I said yes I will yes.

-Joyce, *Ulysses* 783

## Before the Dawn of Time

Before the dawn of time is before the separation of man from beast:

In numerous traditions friendship with animals and understanding their language represent paradisaal syndromes. In the beginning, that is, in mythical times, man lived at peace with the animals and understood their speech. It was not until after a primordial catastrophe, comparable to the “Fall” of Biblical tradition, that man became what he is today—mortal, sexed, obliged to work to feed himself, and at enmity with the animals. While preparing for his ecstasy and during it, the shaman abolishes the present human condition and, for the time being, recovers the situation as it was in the beginning. Friendship with the animals, knowledge of their language, transformation into an animal are so many signs that the shaman has re-established the “paradisaal” situation lost at the dawn of time.

-Eliade, 99

Before the dawn of time is before the separation of the sexes:

[...] the original human nature was not like the present, but different. In the first place, the sexes were originally three in number, not two as they are now; there was man, woman, and the union of the two, having a name corresponding to this double nature; this once had a real existence, but is now lost, and the name is only preserved as a term of reproach.

-Plato, *Symposium*, 15

Before the dawn of time is before the letter:

[The letter], said Theuth, will make the Egyptians wiser and give them better memories; for this is the cure of forgetfulness and of folly. Thamus replied: O most ingenious Theuth, he who has the gift of invention is not always the best judge of the utility or inutility of his own inventions to the users of them. And in this instance a paternal love of your own child has led you to say what is not the fact; for this invention of yours will create forgetfulness in the learners souls, because they will not use their memories; they will trust to the external written characters and not remember for themselves.

-Plato, *Phaedrus*, 87

Before the dawn of time is before mortality:

By the sweat of your face  
     you shall eat bread  
 until you return to the ground,  
     for out of it you were taken;

you are dust,  
                     and to dust you shall return.  
 -Genesis, 3.19

Before the dawn of time is before the gendering ritual:

Thus it came that every human being from the first was endowed with two souls of different sex—or rather with two principles corresponding to two distinct persons. In the man, the female soul is located in the foreskin; in the woman, the male soul resides in the clitoris. But man's life was not capable of supporting both beings; each person would have to merge himself in the sex for which he or she appeared to be best fitted. The Nummo pair circumcised the man, removing the femininity of his foreskin.

-Dogon creation myth (Nigeria), Leonard & McClure 49

A returning to a space before the beginning, before the dawn of time. The “Fall” is the dawn—the first *sunrise*. This site is a space of the double: ascent as descent; will to destroy as will to create; ground zero. The dawn of time is a rupture...

The primary process [...] must, once again, be apprehended in its experience of rupture, between perception and consciousness, in that non-temporal locus, I said, which forces us to posit what Freud calls, in homage to Fechner, *die Idee einer anderer Lokaliät*, the idea of another locality, another space, another scene, *the between perception and consciousness*.

-Lacan, The Unconscious and Repetition, 56

According to Lacan, this primary process can be apprehended as the space between dream and waking life. He describes being awoken from a nap by a knock at his door. At first the knocking formed in his dream as something wholly different. “And when I awake, it is in so far as I reconstitute my entire representation around this knocking—this perception—that I am aware of it.” This between-state, before the self is reassembled into a symbolic system of oppositional representation, the space between perception and consciousness, has an analogue in the primal scene and the state prior to the dawn of time.

The cosmic itinerary that leads the shaman to the scene before the dawn of time has an analogous psychological itinerary that pushes into the space between perception and consciousness.

A subject originally represents nothing more than the following fact: he can forget. [...] Such is the first place, the first person. Here the appearance of the subject is manifested as such; and it makes us directly aware of why and in what way the notion of the unconscious is central in our experience. [...] those rite by which man in co-called primitive civilizations believes he must accompany one of the most natural things in the world, namely, the return of natural cycles themselves. [...] What is this, if it isn't the essential relation, the one which binds the subject to the production of meaning and which makes him from the beginning responsible for forgetting?

-Lacan, *Ethics*, 224

The space before the dawn of time is also a space before forgetting. The shaman, the dead man, the non-subject: the irresponsible for forgetting. What is it that he/she remembers?

Does not forgetting necessarily create a memory?

[...] shamanic ecstasy can be regarded as a recovery of the human condition before the "fall"; in other words, it produces a primordial "situation" accessible to the rest of mankind only through death.

-Eliade 493

Ecstasy is not merely a subset of pleasure. This is evident in the primordial destination.:

What is sought there is *beyond the pleasure principle*. At the point in Freud's text where he introduces this beyond as the death drive, he brings up a discussion on birds:

The same explanation [that they are seeking out localities in which their species formerly resides] is believed to apply to migratory flights of birds of passage—but we quickly relieved of the necessity for making further examples by the reflection that the most impressive proofs of there being an organic compulsion to repeat lie in the phenomena of heredity and the facts of embryology.

-Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 276

This compulsion to repeat is an instinct for restoration and conservation. Eliade brings up birds as well:

In South America the neophyte must learn, during the initiatory period, to imitate the voices of animals. The Pomo and the Menomini shamans, among others imitate bird songs.

-Eliade, 97.

Does Eliade's analysis of the frequency of birds as helping spirits among the shaman, as simply a metaphor for the possibility of flight, go far enough? Perhaps we should be using "migration" rather than "journey"? In learning to speak the language of birds the shaman gains access to a mass species consciousness lost at the dawn of time when man and beast were separated, the subject was created and, with it, forgetting.

The scene before the dawn of time is neither found in the past or the future. The return to this scene is travel but not through space or time. The shaman is no astronaut, nor is he/she a temponaut or spiritonaut, he/she is a cosmonaut or, to be clearer, a dimensionaut. These dimensions, the other cosmic zones, are always already happening outside and independent of space and time. Both space and time are constructed in human consciousness, which, as Henri Bergson explains in *Matter and Memory*, is the product of to meeting of perception and memory. Seen in this light, Eliade's claim that cosmic travel actually happens gains empirical evidence.

### **The Technique**

The technique in shamanism entails several elements. The techniques used during performances and séances include musicing, consuming narcotics, repeated physical gestures that bring on a state of exhaustion, and other practices that facilitate a trance state. But remember that this is not just any trance state, it is one in which the shaman is in complete control. This distinction is helpful in leading us to other things that a shaman is not: a psychopath, an epileptic... Though the shaman may exhibit a truly hysteric state

or fall into violent seizures, these phenomena are always willed and controlled, and are in service of cosmic travel.

Scholarship on shamanism seems to split itself into two groups: one that attempts to empirically explain the shamanic ecstatic state with western psychology; and another, represented in Eliade, that claims the ecstatic state can not be explained by psychological models and that cosmic travel is actually happening. Later I will show, via Bergson, that Eliade et al are right using Bergsonian psychology. But for now, I will focus on Eliade's argument against the shaman as psychopath/epileptic because it is inextricably tied up with his elaboration of the ecstatic technique.

The technique is as varied as there are cultures in which it is practiced and functions to which it is put. Shamanism has been known to have been practiced on all continents, using an incredible variety of mythological codes. The practice also functions as a practice of healing, cosmological diplomacy, and revelation. Obviously, to discuss all of the details in these variations would be beyond my scope here. Instead, I will focus on the underlying structure of the technique, as explained by Eliade, that flows beneath the technique in all cultures and functions.

### **Initiation**

Before the potential shaman may begin the learning of the technique he/she must receive/manifest an initiatory dream and/or illness. These dreams have a common imagery and structure across cultures that includes a choice from outside, a symbolic death of the initiate, a self-(re)birth, and a recruiting of animal helping spirits (Eliade, 33). Each of



these elements present fascinating conclusions in the context of certain psychological models.

“Choice” has a strange place in the initiation of a shaman. The “election” of the shaman is not granted by the community, not even in the case of shamanism being passed down hereditarily, but, rather, materializes in the initiate’s subconscious. Through the course of the dream the initiate is typically stripped of his/her flesh and organs, leaving only the skeleton, and then observes new, mystical organs being formed, apart from their own volition (Eliade, 37). During the self-(re)birth, these mystical organs attach to the skeleton, and along with their new mystical flesh they receive a new name. (ibid, 39)

Eliade maintains that this choice is from “outside.” But if we are to consider the vision as dream constructed within the subconscious of the initiate this dream becomes the bestowal of incredible social and psychological power: the shaman can name him/herself. In this renaming, this self-naming, the shaman is displaced from the symbolic chain that is the Name of the Father. And, in the self-(re)birth, the shaman is displaced from the repressed cycle of maternal desire.

What is sacrificed in the act of choice is of course the Thing, the incestuous Object that embodies impossible enjoyment—the paradox consisting in the fact that the incestuous Object *comes to be through being lost*, i.e., that it is not given prior to its loss. For *that* reason, the choice is forced: its terms are incomparable, what I cede in order to gain inclusion in the community of symbolic exchange and distribution of goods is in one sense “all” (the Object of desire) and in another sense “nothing at all” (since it is in itself impossible, i.e., since, in the case of its choice, I lose all).

-Zizek, 75

The initiatory dream is about losing all. Customarily, the initiate leaves the community to weather the dream in solitude in the bush. During this period of private

privation the initiate goes through a series of rituals that include dabbing the face and body with ash, symbolic burial, symbolic decent to the underworld, hypnotic sleep brought on by narcotics, self-cruelty and mutilation (beatings, feet to the fire, suspension, amputation of fingers etc.).

All these rituals and ordeals are designed to make the candidate forget his past life. This is why in many places, when the novice returns to the village he acts as if he had lost his memory and has to be taught over again to walk, eat, dress. Usually the novices learn a new language and have a new name. During their stay in the bush the rest of the community considers the candidates dead and buried, or devoured by a monster or a god, and upon return to the village regards them as ghosts.

-Eliade, 65

Not only does the initiate lose his/her heritage, but their entire memory. The initiatory dream functions as a deliberate destruction of identity. It is a wiping clean of all of the useless contingent stuff that has collected to clear room for a facilitory subconscious space within which the future shaman may practice the called upon vocation. In becoming a ghost, in making the one with the Name of the Father dead, the shaman follows Romeo and Juliet's suicidal gesture:

they *repeated* the fundamental choice into which they were born by disowning their respective Names, *separating* themselves from the totality of  $S_1$ - $S_2$  and thereby choosing themselves as "worse" [...] as nonsymbolizable *object*.

-Zizek, 76

The shaman's return as ghost (ashen skin and all) is *symbolically nonsymbolizable*. In considering her/him dead the community does more than view the shaman as an inbetween being, they also affirm the shaman's willed displacement his/her subject from the symbolic chain. Is this the real reason why anthropologists are so quick to explain shamanism as psychosis? Zizek goes on to write that:

[the psychotic] is the subject who has refused to walk into the trap of the forced choice and to accept that he has “always already chosen”; he took the choice “seriously” and chose the impossible opposite of the Name of the Father, i.e., of the symbolic identification which confers us a place in the inter-subjective space. Which is why Lacan insists that psychosis is to be “located within the register of ethics”: psychosis is a mode “not to give way as to our desire,” it signals our refusal to exchange enjoyment for the Name of the Father.

-Zizek, 77

We register the shaman as psychotic not just because he/she renamed him/herself, but because of the results of the initiatory displacement. The shamanic name, becoming a ghost, speaking in an animal language, all of these things set the shaman outside of the symbolic relation that is desire. They seem hysterical because, indeed, they do not speak our language. But...

Like the sick man, the religious man is projected onto a vital plane that shows him the fundamental data of human existence, that is, solitude, danger, hostility of the surrounding world. But the primitive magician, the medicine man, or the shaman is not only a sick man; he is, above all, a sick man who has been cured, who has succeeded in curing himself.

-Eliade, 27

One starts to wonder where the sickness lies.

The shaman does not speak the language of love. A non-universal, but, certainly, not uncommon, aspect of shamanism is transvestitism and/or androginization.

As for the bisexuality and impotence of the *basir* [Bornean shamans], they arise from the fact that these priest-shamans are regarded as the intermediaries between the two cosmological planes—earth and sky—and also from the fact that they combine in their own person the feminine element (earth) and the masculine element (sky).

-Eliade, 352

In the context of “primitive” society, neither impotence *nor* bisexuality is comprehensible within the symbolic order that is the language of love. Society depends on union as act, not as being. But, perhaps, even more poignant is the occurrence of both sexes organs in the decorations on the Altaic shamans costume (Eliade, 153). A mere footnote in the

Eliade, in the current context, becomes a powerful example of a central theme: the decorations are the symbol of displacement from the symbolic. In becoming both genders, the shaman is both Romeo and Juliet, the shaman becomes unsellable—uninterchangeable.

Let's go back to the idea of wiping clean. The initiatory dream is certainly the destruction of the subject, but what of the shaman's returning to the community?

If everything that is immanent or implicit in the chain of natural events may be considered as subject of the so-called death drive, it is only because there is a signifying chain. Freud's thought in this matter requires that what is involved be articulated as a destruction drive, given that it challenges everything that exists. But it is also a will to create from zero, a will to begin again. [...] Production is an original domain, a domain of creation *ex nihilo*, insofar as it introduces into the natural world the organization of the signifier. It is for this reason that we only, in effect, find thought—and not in an idealist sense, but thought in its actualization in the world—in the intervals introduced by the signifier.

-Lacan 212

As stated above, the shaman is *symbolically nonsymbolizable*. The initiatory dream does not forever displace the shaman—he/she is a traveler and diplomat, not an expatriate—it is, rather, an unveiling of the central opening, or, in the terminology to be later developed, of a puncture in the present. The shaman returns to the symbolic order with the ability to leave at will. But, in this light, the destination of the itinerary—the displace-mental destination—is more specific than simply “outside of” the symbolic chain. This ritual self-destruction doubles as Lacan's “will to create to from zero” and a ticket to before the symbolic chain. This space, before the dawn of time, before Theuth's invention, before Adam and Eve's discovery, before the Nummos' gendering circumcision, *is* the shamanic destination.

## Ascent

Eliade's term "initiatory" is effective in what it is not—consecratory. The dream is a confirmation of possibility of, not a providing of, the technique. After the initiatory dream the neophyte must go through a process of training in highly complex systems of knowledge. The shamans powers did not emit through during the dream, i.e., his/her spirit was not possessed, but were discovered. In order to return to the puncture point in the cosmic plane the possible shaman must cultivate the technique. And this cultivation will always be referring back to the dream—as Eliade puts it: "when he shamanizes he mentally *returns* to the cave." [italics mine](41) While the destructive act of wiping clean is a self-(re)birth of displaceable gender and heritage, it is also the self-(re)birth of a memory-space only now open to discerning organization. In losing his/her memory the shaman gains a subconscious realm that is no longer sloppily arranged by an inexperienced post-choice child but, rather, is, now, potentially a space without gravity in which memory-blocks float in pre-choice displaceability. This potentiality remains even after the technique becomes mastered in that "before the dawn of time" is *always* return.

The technique allows both ascent to the "central opening" between cosmic realms and control of that ascent. All of various mystical, medical, and cosmological applications of the technique that become available post-crossing are beyond what I can accomplish here. However, I do believe that these applications do have direct correlations to contemporary musical experience.

Eliade explains that the ascent is symbolically represented as mapped onto a mountain, tree, etc., but this symbolic surface is also a memory space. In turning back to

the cave the shaman is retracing his/her steps to the summit. The initiatory dream is a discovery of the “central opening”, the technique is a retracing and perfecting—a making efficient—of the path discovered.

It is such a Cosmic Mountain that the **future** shaman **climbs in dream** during his initiatory illness and that he later visits on his ecstatic journeys. Ascending a mountain always signifies a journey to the “Center of the World.” As we have seen, this “Center” is **made present** in many ways, even in the structure of the human **dwelling** place—but it is only the shamans and the heroes who *actually scale* the Cosmic Mountain, just as it is primarily the shaman who, climbing his ritual tree, is **really** climbing a World Tree and thus reaches **the summit of the universe**, in the highest sky. [italics original, bold mine]

-Eliade, 269

The actuality of the scaling is what differentiates the initiate from other members of the community. In fact, it is common that many members of “primitive” societies can easily achieve the trance state. However, mirroring the earlier distinction between spirit possession and shamanism, no matter how convincingly they trance they do not actually ascend. This actuality is both culturally objective and personally subjective: the culture reads the shaman’s trance state as having a different cosmological meaning than their own, or their friend’s; and the shaman experiences his/her trance state as something very different.

One important distinction, discussed above, is the shaman’s complete control over the on-set and movement of his/her own ecstatic state. Control is Eliade’s central refutation of shaman as psychopath. The shaman’s control over his/her state is expressed both culturally:

Psychopaths or not, the future shamans are expected to pass through certain initiatory ordeals and to receive an education that is sometimes highly complex. It is only this twofold initiation—ecstatic and didactic—that transforms the

candidate from a possible neurotic into a shaman recognized by his particular society.

-Eliade, 14

and subjectively:

The only difference between a shaman and an epileptic is that the latter cannot deliberately enter into trance.

-Eliade, 24

The question of whether this is “conscious” control moves our discussion of ascent into the realm of will and memory. Control is possible only through a technique practicable only through a repetition findable only through a dream willed at the dawn of the technique. This conception of control is musical. Those of us musicians who disdain the culture of the virtuoso understand this: music has no end.

### **Ascent ~~in~~ Through Memory**

Control, whether referring to that between a shaman and his/her ecstasy or a musician and his/her music, is a positioning of/in memory. A positioning in respect to what? In *Matter and Memory*, Henri Bergson elaborates a deeply powerful theory of perception that, in its attempt to reconcile a truly epic debate in western philosophy between the idealists and the realists, opens, through a philosophical “compromise”, a dimension itself revealing, always/already, a subset of dimensions. Though I plan to focus heavily on this theory, in no way do I intend a reading of it. And now, disclaimers aside, let’s continue with the ride: mapping Bergsonian memory onto the shamanic cosmological mountain.

Ascent is not real action. Ascent is not directed away from the present, but to it, with such a momentum, that the shaman may fit through the puncture point in the plane of the present. Bergson sees memory as the intersection of mind and matter. Matter is the

“aggregate of ‘images’”. “Images” are neither the realist’s “thing” nor the idealist’s “representation,” but, rather, a compromise between the two. Mind, however, is a much more difficult concept to compress. It is more than simply a brain state, or even a mental state: it is the whole of the nervous system working in tandem with the world around it. Perception is not “to know”, nor is it action; it is a reduction of the aggregate of images, a bringing together of points into relation with one another; it is a spatial art that unites subject and perceived object into a spatial whole. Action, on the other hand, is a temporal art; it is what distinguishes subject from object; but it, itself, becomes a perception, and can only exist, as such, in the immediate past; it is also a becoming in that memory is made present via the transition of virtual action, emerging out of memory, to real action. The body, then, is a “center of action” reflected in its surrounding objects as possible future action, this future being drawn from a collection of virtual actions.

It should be obvious from above that memory is more than just this intersection. Deleuze reads Bergson’s memory as virtual coexistence—a totality unconsciously always there, but consciously in conceivable. Bergson claims that consciousness is restricted to “real action and immediate efficacy.” We become conscious of our act in general as an approaching “condensing cloud” as it passes from the virtual to the actual.

One must avoid an overly psychological interpretation of the text. Bergson does indeed speak of a psychological act; but if this act is “*sui generis*,” this is because it has made a genuine leap. We place ourselves *at once* in the past; we leap into the past as into a proper element. [...] There is therefore a “past in general” that is not the particular past of a particular present but that is like an ontological element, a past that is eternal and for all time, the condition of the “passage” of every particular present.

-Deleuze, Bergsonism, 56



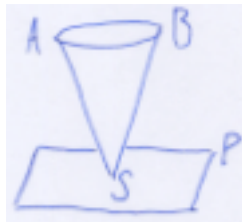
Past is a primordial substance. Through memory we place ourselves in it via discontinuous leaps:

The past, it is true, seems to be caught between two presents: the old present it once was and the actual present in relation to which it is now past.

-58

The leap is a call beckoning forth the condensing cloud. The call and the cloud cross each other at this space between where becoming happens. Like Eliade's cosmic zones, the past coexists with the present, and perception lies in the space between.

This leads us to Bergson's famous cone metaphor. There are two distinct types of memory: habits fixed in our organism that act "out our past experience but not call up its image"—the repressed in Freudian psychology—; and "true memory" which organizes past states, "truly moving in the past and not, like the first, in an ever renewed present." (151) These two types are linked through the body, which, itself, also doubles as a part of the world of representation and as a filter through which that world passes. And, without further ado, the cone:



If I represent by a cone SAB, the totality of the recollections accumulated in my memory, the base AB, situated in the past, remains motionless, while the summit S, which indicates at all times my present, moves forward unceasingly, and unceasingly also touches the moving plane P of my actual representation of the universe. At S, the image of the body is concentrated, and, since it belongs to the plane P, this image does but receive and restore actions emanating from all images of which the plane is composed.

-152

Keep in mind that “actions emanating from all images” here is the reflection of the body in the objects around it. This back and forth between bodily memory and true memory allows the past to “*insert itself* into the present” [italics mine] (225). In fact, “our body and all that surrounds it [is] the pointed end ever moving, ever *driven* into the future by the *weight* of our past” [italics mine] (243). While the totality of past is an unceasing driving weight, memory is a discontinuous series of leaps along links of a chain in our past: “our memories form a chain of the same kind [as the chain that links me to all objects of which my perception is only one link], and that our character, always present in all our decisions, is indeed the actual synthesis of all our past states.” (146) Memory is not a regression into the past from the present, but a progression from the past into the present. This directional motion of the virtual action into the real is a descending one, pushed by the weight of the totality of pure memory. And yet we are, some how, despite this incredible “dead weight,” able to leap upstream against the current.

...Ascent is not real action. In returning to the initiatory site, the shaman leaps to the base—where all was destroyed in order to create *ex nihilo*—a superhuman feat of skipping links in the chain of memory. This is where the ascent begins. I offer my metaphor of the cosmic mountain to compare with Bergson’s cone.



After losing all to be reborn the shaman returns to the community. He/she relearns the cosmological and mythological grammar that is shared by the community. However, what

separates the shaman is that he/she now has a traceable path through that grammar. In returning to the base of the mountain, by effortlessly taking the inhuman leap, the shaman re-finds the departure point for an itinerary that has been worn into memory:

Only [the shamans] know how to make an ascent through the “central opening”; only they transform a cosmo-theological concept into a *concrete mystical experience*. This point is important. It explains the difference between, for example, the religious life of a North Asian people and the religious experience of its shamans; the latter is a *personal and ecstatic experience*. In other words, what for the rest of the community remains a cosmological ideogram, for the shamans (and the heroes, etc.) becomes a mystical itinerary. For the former, the “Center of the World” is a site that permits them to send their prayers and offerings to the celestial gods, whereas for the latter it is the place for beginning a flight in the strictest sense of the word. Only for the latter is *real communication* among the three cosmic zones possible.

-Shamanism, 265

The “central opening” is now the point S. By ascending through point S the shaman is traveling beyond the Bergsonian “image” of the body, but also breaking through, at that point of his/her own representation, the totality of images. But how is this possible? And, if it is, what is on the other side of the universe?

Just because the point S is now at the top does not mean that we have reversed the directionality of the weight of past into present; this pressure remains, but it is no longer “dead weight.” In retracing his/her path through memory the shaman is both riding this momentum and avoiding the numerous eddies and whirlpools that cycle virtual into real actions and back again. The intense focus of the shaman is precisely about keeping from being caught between Deleuze’s two presents. It is with this momentum that offers the shaman the ability to travel through the point S, to explode the subject, to push through the puncture in the plane of the present.

This retracing should not seem new to any musician. We know the experience of trying to start playing some piece that we have memorized at some point in the middle and quickly becoming totally lost, and, then, immediately playing the same piece from the very beginning and finishing without hitch. Or the experience of being stumped as to what chord comes next, picking up our instrument, playing chord we know and everything that follows comes shooting back. Songs, pieces, instrumental technique are all paths through memory; but these paths can only be trod with the participation of the body.

But what of the occasions when we are not timidly pausing to re-find our place? Aren't those performances, during which we ride the memory-current straight past each whirlpool, the ones that we long to repeat? Can't we all remember our first performative experience that fits this description as *the* musical experience that turned us into musicians without consideration of alternative? And at this moment, immediately after your first performance riding the momentum of memory, didn't you feel as though a choice had been made? And did you not have the same sense of bewilderment that accompanies waking up from a particularly vivid dream and feeling that your bed is less real than the dream? Did you briefly try to recall what had happened during the performance and notice that you couldn't remember any bodily sensations, and that the only way you could understand what happened was to re-visualize it as though through the eyes of an audience member? Where was I? Where *was* I? Where was *I*? Where was I.

The thing that doesn't fit is the supposed reliability of shamanic ascent. Though I have had, and continue to have, musical experiences that are remarkably shamanic, during which my sense of self and the objects around me melts and I do travel to another cosmic

plane, the same music does not facilitate every time. If I were to play the music (by “music” I mean something very specific in this context: music is a structure for momentum in memory) that I was exploding myself to when I was fifteen now there is no way the experience would be close to as intense. And so, I am constantly in search of new music that can facilitate this phenomenon. I wonder if this is the same for the shaman. I wonder if this is why so many musicians develop drug addictions.

### **Iggy Pop: Shamanic Prophet of Punk**

Nightclubbing we're nightclubbing  
 We're walking through town  
 Nightclubbing we're nightclubbing  
 We walk like a ghost  
 We learn dances brand new dances  
 Like the nuclear bomb  
 When we're nightclubbing  
 Bright white clubbing  
 Oh isn't it wild...  
 -Iggy Pop, *Nightclubbing*, track 2 on *The Idiot*

Iggy Pop was checked into a mental hospital in 1974. The hospital really functioned like rehab, and when he got out he was straight. He released his first solo record, *The Idiot*—a creepy, vaguely disco, noisy, but definitely poppy work produced and co-written by David Bowie—in 1977. At this point “Iggy Pop” had reached iconic cult status, and word that he had just been released from the insane asylum only intensified this. When he took a new non-Stooges line-up on tour believers, old and new, showed up ready for mutilation, disease, and destruction. One of these people was *NME* journalist Nick Kent:

Yeah I'm happy and I'm sad, y'know. Happy because here's this guy I love and

he's fit, well and pumping iron again. He may even end up rich, which is fine by me because too many have stolen from him already. Besides, he's one of the only "real men" in rock, blah blah blah... And yeah, I'm sad because it was all too damn well-rehearsed – and a great, great performer is cutting off several dimensions of his talent and power. Iggy, to the converted, has never just been an entertainer, he's struck home on truths and energy sources that most rock bands and artistes don't even know exist. I missed those spontaneous moments when Iggy could be as funny as Lenny Bruce. I missed him shaking down the audience for being creeps (particularly those turkeys in the front at Aylesbury who thought it cool to spit at him and throw beer-cans), working the old one-to-one *real* heebiejeebees.

-Kent

A shaman is not an entertainer. A entertainer is outwardly well rehearsed. An entertainer sees his reflection in the bodies that surround him in his audience; this is part of his training, to perfect his art he must learn to read his audience and anticipate their desire. Did Iggy Pop lose his shamanic powers? Did he ever have any in the first place? Or is this just another rock critic over-romanticizing his hero in the melancholy of jealous desire?

Iggy Pop was born with his fathers name: James Newell Österberg, Jr. By becoming Iggy Pop he put himself outside of the chain of the Name of the Father, but he and The Stooges also put themselves outside of the Name of the Generation. When everyone else was getting together and loving one another The Stooges were committing acts of real destruction. In an era that idealized new beginnings The Stooges advocated destruction to ground zero—a before the new beginning.

But it's just rock and roll, right? Anyone read as entertainer cannot be read as shaman, and isn't it entertaining that Iggy Pop had been doing all along? It would be hard to argue that Iggy was not reading his reflection in the shocked eyes that gazed at him as he mutilated his flesh with broken glass. But, then again, it's not just this reading of

reflection that makes a performer, but the projected well-rehearsedness; and The Stooges were not this. While Iggy may have been getting off on peoples reactions, the mutilations were never planned. Before the show everyone knew that he *might* end up mutilating himself, but no one, including him, knew when or how that mutilation would happen. These acts were the excess of a general positioning—of their performative thing.

At this time, The Stooges era, he was addicted to a wide range of hard drugs. Kent recalls running into him in 1972:

[...] he was crawling down the stairs with some dumb-eyed rich-bitch nymphette from San Diego, a look of pure horror-mask terminal screwed-upness on his face that was frightening because it went so far beyond all that wasted elegance crap the rock vampire press (me included) love to dote over. He looked like death – like a man utterly bereft of spirit, all burnt out, I felt very depressed and kinda knew something tragic was bound to snap down on this loser-champ's destiny.

-ibid

It's hard to read this and not recall the shaman's return to the village, covered in ash, unable to speak or walk, like a ghost. Why can't Kent read Iggy's post-drugged out performance as shamanic technique? Is he addicted to the raw initiatory illness on display that was The Stooges? Is this why the shaman makes sure to go through the initiatory rituals in total privacy: because otherwise any return to the initiatory state would read as "faking it"?

I saw Iggy Pop perform in 2000 when he was 53 years old. In the first song he stormed on stage, moving like he was 20 younger than he was. Near the end of the song he dove out into the audience. No one caught him. He split open his head on the floor and the show was over. We all left cussing and proclaiming that "if I were in the front row I would have caught him," but I think that all of us were really disappointed because he

didn't keep going. It wasn't until much later that I realized how lucky we had actually been: we got to see Iggy Pop mutilate himself. It occurred to me that this mutilation was really no different than the mythologized ones in that it was the excess. But, then again, it was never really allowed to fully become as such because he didn't keep going—what could have been excess became mere accident.

Iggy Pop's acts of self-mutilation came out of a subjective thing. No one knew that these mutilations were going to happen, but, when they did, it made sense. If he had convinced every member of the audience to mutilate themselves with broken glass the event would have been wholly different. The difference between the two scenarios is not that of quantity, but that of quality. Iggy transcends spectacle through his primitivism. The rest of us can sit here and see him, either in person or on video, and read it as either comment on spectacle or spectacle itself—and it is both—however, his is also beyond spectacle. I don't see Iggy as struggling with the “becoming popular” problem. He is dressable, he is filmable, he is repeatable, he looks good with his shirt off, but he is not marriageable. It's not the physical danger of his practices or the distinction of his intonation, but the refusal to emit—to possess. Everyone wants to be a shaman: It is, now, to our “modern” society, as *symbol* of primitive bliss, also a promise of impossible freedom. But, as with early shamans, the modern shaman is not an escaper, nor is he/she a projector. Modern rapture is always navigating an extended moment post nuclear Armageddon: destruction as a wiping clean. The modern itinerary leads to after the dusk of time:



[The Time Traveler], I know—for the question had been discussed among us long before the Time Machine was made—thought but cheerlessly of the Advancement of Mankind, and saw in the growing pile of civilization only a foolish heaping that must inevitably fall back upon and destroy its makers in the end. If that is so, it remains for us to live as though it were not so. But to me the future is still black and blank—is a vast ignorance, lit at a few casual places by the memory of his story. And I have by me, for my comfort, two strange white flowers—shriveled now, and brown and flat and brittle—to witness that even when mind and strength had gone, gratitude and a mutual tenderness still lived on in the heart of man.

-Wells, 76

*Back to the Future, Apocalypse Now, etc...* These are all more than last minute maternal advise—be careful when you cross the street...don't take a ride with a stranger...don't blow each other up—they are the specter of the end. Isn't it funny that this rhetoric is out of fashion? What does it mean to be in a post-nuclear world that never saw the nuclear holocaust—a post-post-nuclear world? Certainly, we live in an unsure era: we don't know if we're thankful that it never happened; or if we made a grave mistake by not making it happen. We long for the after the dusk of time as much as we do the before the dawn. Is that what makes Iggy's, or any other “modern primitive's”, itinerary so opaque? Iggy recorded *The Idiot* in 1977, Dostoevsky wrote *The Idiot* in 1869—both before the dissolution of the promise, only the former post promise. And yet they both aim despite the odds. They both affirm. They both say “yes”, not to what is, but, to what is immanent.

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