

Everyone is a shaman

The prevailing image of the shaman until the early 21st century was of an individual aloof from society, cared for by the community and responsible for its care in return. In popular films the shaman lived on the edge of the village, chanting, enveloped in smoke, maintaining an isolation which rendered them spiritually pure and ready to commune with the Other Side. Medicine men, witch doctors, rain dancers and other pejorative and simplistic terms ironically provided a nuance in terminology not usually reflected in the monolithic, traditionally held definitions of shamanism proper in popular culture, where it was assumed that shamanic practices were all part of the same system of beliefs, whether in North or South America, Africa or India. Shamanism was a primitive, pre-Christian, non-European religion: deformed through the lens of cultural stereotypes, persecution and oppression, with an added dash of redemptive New Age Noble Savagery: a mystical practice which years of social exclusion and hallucinogen abuse were required to perfect.

This arrogant, patronising and lazy definition of shamanism has in recent years been replaced by a more considered viewpoint. The shaman is now understood to be an integral member of the community, fulfilling a role which was rarely full-time: living absolutely *in* society; carrying out various healing and divining functions for their community besides the daily round of jobs and chores; helping fight the community's enemies and, crucially, mediating their relationship with the spirit world. Gaining their power from popular respect, shamans embody and synthesise elemental cultural codes to provide for the complex spiritual and psychological needs of their group. In all activities, the shaman maintains and cultivates a close link not only to their social but also their natural environments, bonding individuals, the group and the world.

In the 1960's Beuys asserted that *everyone is an artist*, causing no small controversy amongst those who mistakenly thought he was advocating for an increase in amateur artistic production. Perhaps it is better to consider Beuys' later shamanic affectation, whilst bearing in mind that many societies believe that *everyone is a shaman*. Even the simple act of daydreaming has shamanic significance, and allows even the uninitiated to make contact with higher forces and powers. By remembering this, we can shift the ground from arguments for the preservation of a traditional cultural hierarchy that removes personal responsibility for art; that maintains artists as gatekeepers of cultural production; that guards the myth that artists are special beings detached from society and charged with its social health. Perhaps then we can remember that the 'art world' is but a tiny part of society, integrated and provocative, but also interdependent, symbiotic and *everyday*.