On Communicative Practice: The "Other Worlds" of Journalism and Shamanism

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Communicative practice provides a fundamental basis for understanding how public discourse works. Elements as varied as the social construction of reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966; Berger 1967), the thrust for self-externalization (Geertz 1966), and the need to control through explanation (Carey 1986; Guthrie 1980) have characterized the communicative practices of persons who regularly engage in public discourse. Mass media practitioners, in particular, have long been heralded as primary agents of all three activities (Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980; Gitlin 1980). Studies focus on how the media’s ideological effect is used to stitch people into preordained social and cultural categories (Hall 1977) or how journalists construct ideological messages in the news (Fishman 1980; Altheide 1976; Tuchman 1972, 1978; Molotch and Lester 1974; Bennett et al. 1985). Messages are seen as explaining the social order (Carey 1986; Jensen 1987) at the same time as they externalize the power, status and authority of speakers in public discourse (Golding and Elliott 1979; Hartley 1982; Gitlin 1980).

While these studies comprise but a fraction of the ongoing work on public discourse, they nonetheless suggest that discussions have moved from a focus on beliefs toward an emphasis on practice. The logic behind this shift—which recognizes the need for physical agents who form symbolic messages—recalls the work of Durkheim, who, in discussing religion, maintained that “it is by common action that it (religion) takes consciousness of itself . . . it is action which dominates the religious life, because of the mere fact that it is society which is its source” (Durkheim, 1915:466). This essay follows in such a spirit. Here, I compare the “high priests” of two arenas of public discourse—the journalist, a functionary of one genre of media performance, and the shaman,1 a parallel functionary of a specific kind of religious experience. The comparison is offered as an “informing metaphor” through which to consider more clearly those similarities linking the communicative practices of journalism and shamanism.

This essay’s focus on communicative practice necessitates definitions in terms sufficiently restrictive to stress the communicative aspects of practice,
yet general enough to extend beyond the specific milieus where they occur. Both shamanism and journalism constitute indeterminate and segmented occupations. Shamanism has been discussed as a combination of a range of activities, including mastery of spirits (Lewis 1971), experiences of soul-flight and ecstasy (Eliade 1964) or animal transformation (Furst 1973-1974). Overviews of journalism have stressed a similar range of activities—in-the-field reporting, reporting for briefings and press conferences, anchoring or page editing, news editing or newsreading. Discussions have also highlighted journalists’ range of interests—the beat reporter for specialized topics, local reporter for geographic areas, the general reporter for all purposes—or range of channels of communication—television, radio, or the written press (cf. Tunstall 1971; Weaver and Wilhoit 1986). In this essay, “shamans” are defined as persons who gain power from a supernatural world, that lets them travel to and from that world, and accords them control over its spirits in the realization of some social task. “Journalists” are defined in accordance with the practices of the investigative reporter as people who collect certain ongoing happenings in the field and narrate them for society within a recognized mass media framework set up to realize some social aim.2
Briefly, this model's more general parameters are as follows: shamans and journalists, in need of songs/stories to realize professional aims of communication, turn to spirits/sources in order to do so. Spirits and sources are situated in the "world of the other," and a rite of passage transports journalists and shamans to them from "this world." All of this takes place through a motif of exchange. Shamans activate exchange through trances; journalists through stories. Both return to "this world" laden with control and wisdom, as well as narrations that make happenings (either songs or stories) of "the other world" accessible or real in "this world." Journeying to the world of "the other" makes shamans and journalists into stabilizing agents, who solidify consensus and reinstate social order on their return. Two dialectical processes are embedded within these practices: the dialectic of seeing/not seeing, where the vision of journalists and shamans is predicated on a lack of vision within society; and the dialectic of public/private, through which the "otherness" of shamans and journalists is displaced onto their narrations.

Shamans and journalists constitute two populations that thrive on access denied others in the community. As Leon Sigal says of journalists: "what the news is depends very much on who its sources are" (1973). Thus, by serving to access other realms of political or social life (Gans 1979; Cohen and Young 1973), or—with shamans—other realms of consciousness (Drury 1982), journalists and shamans act as travellers or visionaries. They travel from one zone to another. This travel spatially constitutes them, in that it forces them both to act as agents of collective representation in each zone and to create a special place for themselves, wedged between two worlds.

Shamans and journalists are distinguished by their a priori marginality. Marginality partly emerges from the act of storytelling (cf., Ben-Amos 1976; Darnton 1975; Schudson 1982), in which both journalist and shaman provide what appears to be an outsider's view on the world.³ Marginality is also perpetuated by characteristics of each population. Shamans have traditionally been considered society's "fringe" (Eliade 1964; Lévi-Strauss 1963), an image enhanced by the nature of their communicative practices: shamanistic remedies are valued for their strangeness, and many traditional healers intentionally peddle their skills in unfamiliar communities (Last 1981). Lévi-Strauss (1963) argues that by being "outside," the shaman legitimates certain emotions for society "inside." Collective participation in shamanistic curing thus balances society while marginalizing shamans.

Journalists are likewise characterized by an otherness that balances society. Their marginality sufficiently distances them from society so that
they can see its foibles: it is the oddity, extravaganza or outrage that becomes news rather than the common or banal (Galtung and Ruge 1970). Journalism has thus been regarded as an extension into the "socially-unknown" (Alexander 1980). Moreover, certain journalistic behaviors such as eavesdropping and other techniques obscuring acceptable borders between private and public are ill-tolerated in other milieus. Journalistic marginality may thereby be derived from the journalists' image, categories they use for news selection, or procedures by which they collect news.

In both cases, however, marginality is tempered by a certain legitimacy accorded journalists and shamans within their immediate cultural environments. Despite apparently abnormal behavioral patterns, for instance, shamans appear to function well within their own milieu (Spiro 1965), and have been credited with tasks as central as compensating for women's misery (Kendall 1985), accomplishing social goals (Frake 1964), channelling antisocial drives into culturally-approved institutional behavior (Spiro 1965; Obeyesekere 1970, 1981), and providing channels for innovation (Ackerman 1981). The remarks of Barthes concerning witchcraft also hold true for shamanism: both are a means by which society works out its contradictions (1972).

In much the same fashion, society uses journalists for different social aims. While journalists do not traverse boundaries of normality as shamans do, they nonetheless serve as public muses, public interviewers (Blanchard 1974; Roshco 1975), ideologues (Hall 1977, 1982), and speakers of consensus (Tunstall 1971; Tuchman 1978; Fishman 1980). What is curious is that despite these wide-ranging roles, both shaman and journalist remain dispensable. Just as shamans are not needed in the religious life of a community (Eliade 1964), neither are journalists needed to oversee its socio-political life.

This brings us to a third point about journalists and shamans—their privileged status. Many journalists display an upward mobility that takes them from middle or upper-middle class homes to elite journalistic cliques (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986; Johnstone et al. 1976; Tunstall 1971). This is accomplished through many entry routes. Shamans also enter the profession through a variety of routes, including hereditary transmission, direct transmission from celestial spirits, or, at times, spontaneous vocation (Eliade 1964; Obeyesekere 1970). Once identified as professionals, both shamans and journalists actively perpetuate their images as members of an elite, with celebrity becoming a particularly integral part of journalistic practice.
(Zelizer 1989; Goldstein 1985). Elite status is thus derived from marginality, while acting as a partial corrective for it.

There thus appears to be a tension between "what is" and "what could be" within journalistic and shamanistic populations. Journalists and shamans are constituted through access, despite the fact that access is used to bridge gaps with other worlds. Both are regarded as marginal, despite their constitution as elites in nearly every society in which they are situated; and both fulfill basic social tasks, yet both are dispensable. Worth mentioning here is the fact that the communicative practices of journalists and shamans are initially realized vis-à-vis private idioms of communication. This initial privateness appears to set up contradictory tensions that motivate practices in both worlds.

An additional point of comparison between shamans and journalists is their reliance on reciprocity: both realize their professional communicative aims through a motif of exchange, or the tendering of one thing for the surrendering of another. Exchange is motivated by a lack in the personal repertoires used to do work. For the journalist, this means a lack of stories; for the shaman, a lack of songs (cf. Dundes 1962). Exchange is initiated through the spirits that shamans call forth in trances,4 and through the sources that journalists seek out in their storytelling.

Exchange has three characteristics: first, it is purposive. Shamans act purposively inside trance visions in order to effect social cures (Drury 1982). Journalists select stories in ways that best fit pre-established work routines and strategies, rather than adhere to conceptual parameters about what a story should be (Molotch and Lester 1974). Second, exchange is ideological. Exchange is enacted in a way reflecting predetermined contours that promise desired results (Molotch and Lester 1974; Fishman 1980). Ideological contours tell journalists and shamans what is necessary, possible, and optimum in their relations with sources and spirits. Third, exchange is unverifiable. Publics or collectives have little way of determining whether the communicative practices through which reality is constructed are real or merely verisimilar. Consultations between the spirit/source and the shaman/journalist are isolated, existing only for shamans and journalists.5

In both cases, the exchange is one of information. Shamans surrender "self" for illumination (Lewis 1971), while journalists surrender "time" or "energy" for coverage (Gans 1979; Epstein 1973). With shamans, exchange is realized through the trance itself, or the activity by which contact is made with spirits. Exchange of information is thereby constituted through actual
performance (cf., Lévi-Strauss 1963; Schechner 1977). Journalists begin the process of exchange on their way to performance: as soon as journalists decide to write stories they begin to secure contact with sources. Although the full exchange is accomplished only after actual interviewing, digging into records or observing is completed, it is nonetheless put into motion when journalists decide which stories to tell. Thus, the contractual tie between journalists/shamans and sources/spirits—purposive, ideological and unverifiable in both cases—assumes different forms according to whether or not performance, a signifier for publicness, is part of the exchange.

This contractual tie established with sources/spirits represents a link not only with “another entity”: sources and spirits constitute objects (or in the case of shamans, constructions) of unverifiable procedures taking place in “another world”. They are related to the narration as actors, and possess skills—of interpretation or talent—that are relevant to the stories and trances they promote. Spirits and sources are generally regarded as being knowledgeable (Sigal 1973; Lewis 1971; Strentz 1978; Gans 1979). Although both are invoked through images, slightly different strategies are used to do so. Shamans use subjective imagery or subjectification (the usage of cultural ideas to justify the introduction of innovation) to communicate (Obeyesekere 1981), while sociologically-oriented models of journalism hold that journalists communicate through objectification (i.e., Gans 1979; Tuchman 1978). At stake in both strategies is the degree of visibility that spirits/sources can make possible in their relationship with shamans/journalists. Certain journalistic strategies give sources direct visibility (press conferences, handouts or other official communiqués), others less visibility (background briefings), and still others (the classic one-on-one journalist-source meeting) encourage sources to actively demand the degree of visibility they want following the actual exchange (Roshco 1975; Sigal 1973). The “world of the other”, then, is a relative entity, dependent on the contractual relationship between journalists and sources. The same is not true of spirits: They appear only for the duration of the trance, and can choose to appear as gods, animals or ordinary housewives (Kendall 1985). Once the performance is gone, so are they.

Intertwined within this scenario is a delicate interplay of vision and lack of vision. Three givens characterize it:

1) Journalists and shamans see the object of their labors. With shamans, this refers to the world of the spirit; with journalists, the world of the source. Vision is central to role implementation: not only does it link journalists and
shamans to the "other world," but it allows them to function in "this world." Their vision thus allows them to function at the same time as it supports the public belief in the existence of spirits and sources. Among certain shamanistic cults, a ceremony called "seeing the spirits" draws the shaman (or shaman novice) into a ritualistic three-day acceptance of his or her role (Eliade 1964). While no comparable rite initiates journalists into journalistic vision, the journalist who does not "see the story" is promised a short-lived journalistic future. Mark Fishman, for instance, comments upon the "background knowledge one has to know in the first place to determine what's 'going on' in a setting in order to 'see' news in it" (1982:223).

2) The rest of the world may not see the object of the journalist's and shaman's labors (i.e., Mortensen and Svendsen 1980). Few outsiders see what journalists and shamans do during their isolated and unverifiable consultations. Shamans tend to privatize their consultations with spirits (Obeyesekere 1970; Eliade 1964). Journalists legitimate an unshared vision when they invoke newsgathering processes that reinforce the source's anonymity, such as "off the record briefings" or "deep background briefings" (Sigal 1973), and allow reporters to publish information without attribution. Moreover, what journalists present is often intentionally obscure. As James W. Carey says: "Washington news is valued precisely because it is an insider's conversation... [with] stories... only the sophisticated few can follow" (1986:157).

3) If the rest of the world could see what they see, the journalist and shaman would lose their functionality. Often journalistic/shamanistic vision can be neutralized if shared with others. Consider the possibly different outcome of Watergate had Woodward and Bernstein shared the identity of Deep Throat. As far as shamans are concerned, once someone sees their spirits, they cease to exist. By sharing vision, shamans lose their livelihood. This suggests that journalistic/shamanistic vision is often predicated on a lack of vision in the surrounding environment. If the vision is revealed or the dialectic otherwise disturbed, the journalist/shaman's power may be undermined. Such a premise raises a number of questions not only about the nature of communicative practices in both journalism and shamanism, but also about the social mechanisms that allow them to continue functioning in such an autocratic fashion.

Yet another shared pattern lies in the concept of return. Journalists and shamans re-enter "this world" from "the world of the other" by means of strategies of control. Control is managed in different ways. Shamanistic control emerges from the shaman's performance, with shamans needing
only to reappear in "this world" in order to be in control. Control of visions, for instance, "to begin, manipulate and end them at will" (Noll 1985:448), allows the shaman to break loose, end the trance, and return home. Control is thus engendered through the trance (Lewis 1971), where it directly indexes shamanistic authority.

Journalistic control, however, is antecedent, or simultaneous, to performance: journalists need to negotiate re-entry into "this world" through some form of public enunciation. Control functions as a merit system, awarded with the performance, or telling, of the story. Says Jack Zipes: "The telling of a folk or fairy tale involves an autonomous exercise of the imagination which endows the teller with a sense of his or her own power and challenges the self-destructive dictates of reason" (Zipes 1980:89). Storytelling appears to function similarly for journalists, in that "telling a story" allows journalists re-entry at the same time as it enhances journalistic control and authority (Zelizer, in press). If journalists cannot partially control what their sources say, they cannot create a story fulfilling anyone's expectations. Even the initial search for viable sources anticipates a journalist's need for control. Journalists seek out sources who support points they themselves need to make (Tuchman 1978; Mortensen and Svendsen 1980; Goldstein 1985) or who restate/reinforce points made in earlier stories (Molotch and Lester 1974; Sigelman 1973). Television journalists in particular often rehearse with sources the answers they want them to give (Tuchman 1978). Journalistic control thus depends on journalistic performance. It is possible that this in turn reinforces the reflexivity and self-consciousness of journalistic practice.

Inherent in the process of re-entry is provision for both cure and display. Journalists and shamans are reintegrated in "this world" in a number of ways. Mircea Eliade (1964) portrays the shaman's return as three stages of suffering, death and resurrection, similar to Van Gennep's "separation, transition and aggregation." Like Victor Turner's analysis of Ndembu rituals, where kusolola ("making visible") rites are prominent (1975), journalistic and shamanistic practices disclose what has been until then concealed.

A certain complexity in the relationship between shaman/journalist and society emerges when considering this return to society. Claude Lévi-Strauss was first to point out the three-point engagement among the shaman, sick person and public, which he called "the shamanistic complex". In his terms, this engagement extends some intimate experience into the public realm (1963). Intimacy ties down social consensus and gives shamans their power, with intimate and group connected via shamanistic cures. With
journalists, a similar maneuver connects the realm of individual with that of the social. The journalistic complex moves from a private hunch to a public issue through the journalist’s story. Power to decide which private hunches to process is an individualistic stance on what has been labelled the “agenda-setting effect” (McCombs and Shaw 1972) in institutional overviews of journalistic practice.

Perhaps the most important structural connection between journalists/shamans and society is what they do with this power. Often, they try to deflate crisis. If a woman’s anti-socialness is upsetting a collective, shamans work first to unfold her physical symptoms and, through them, the collective’s nonphysical symptoms. Shamanistic possession is thus a coping device for the individual turned outward: a cultural fantasy is substituted for a pathological fantasy, and then turned outward on society (Obeyesekere 1970). Shamans are thus constituted through the notion of curing. 6 Journalists, on the other hand, use their power to display an issue, object or problem. In the same way that shamans cure through trances, journalists display through stories. The basic premise of a free press is directed at solving communal problems. Both cure and display thus become explanatory devices which contextualize the crises or upsets of social groups (Carey 1986; Jensen 1987).

Journalism and shamanism do, of course, fulfill other functions for society. For instance, the explanatory function is closely linked with the promotion of consensus and unity, where shamans and journalists use their privileged access to socially-important backstage areas to stabilize collectives. In a Goffman-esque sense, they assure the rest of us that things are O.K. back there. Shamans use the trance to anchor social support for a hierarchial system of spirits and spiritual powers that keeps primitive societies intact (i.e., Lewis 1971). Journalists often select and construct stories along consensual lines (Fishman 1980; Tuchman 1978). Robert Manoff (1989) shows how in reporting the Strategic Defense Initiative, journalists begin to speak for the times rather than, in true journalistic form, to them. Upholding consensus is therefore central to the practices of both journalism and shamanism (Hall 1977, 1982; Lewis 1971).

Shamans and journalists appear to uphold consensus in five main ways: 1) Maintaining order: Although shamans contain threats to public order (i.e., Lewis 1971) and journalists display them, both harness the insecurity of disorder. For instance, the institution of journalism is seen as a means of sustaining social process (Weaver and Wilhoit 1986; Johnstone et al. 1976). Inspirational possession among shamans similarly orders consensus around
moral issues (Lewis 1971), with shamans acting as society's safety valves: "As soon as the shaman exists, the spirits are not free to do as they like, and consequently they leave the people alone" (Honko 1969:32). 2) Shaping moral conscience: This assumes a number of forms. Among Eskimos, shamanic trance fulfills the "function of public court, investigating the causes of affliction, apportioning blame, and purging the affected group through fervid confessions of guilt" (Lewis 1971:168). Similarly, journalists can act as judges of public doings, prosecutors of transgressors or attorneys for the wronged (Sigal 1973; Carey 1986; Goldstein 1985). 3) Naming phenomena: Journalists and shamans make events of the other world real by naming them in this world. Language is uppermost here, with both shaman (La Barre 1970; Bolinger 1980) and journalist (Darnton 1975; Roeh et al. 1980; Glasgow University Media Group 1976, 1980) considered experts in its resources. As Lévi-Strauss (1963:198) says: "The shaman provides the sick woman with a language, by means of which unexpressed and otherwise unexpressible states can be expressed." Through language, concepts are transformed into experience (Rothenberg 1968), and shamans make mystical experiences real in much the same way that journalists concretize ideas. By making the inaccessible accessible, both journalists and shamans combine unconnected parts into one meaningful whole. 4) Providing egalitarian means of expression: That shamans and journalists broaden existing channels of expression should be obvious. The sar, for instance, is a specialized shamanistic strategy in the Somali Republic that forwards the interests of women (Lewis 1971). Discussions of "participant" or "new" journalism (i.e., Janowitz 1975; Weaver and Wilhoit 1986; Johnstone et al. 1976; Fishman 1980; Wolfe 1973; Eason 1984) suggest that certain journalists approach their stories through a predetermined perspective derived from "alternative" sources. 5) Serving as public memory: Richard Noll maintains that it is the shaman's responsibility to "remember for all the others" (1985:450). Among the Akawaio Indians in British Guiana, shamans record and interpret public opinion (Lewis 1971). Journalists similarly serve as chroniclers of public events (i.e., Gans 1979). Through them, events are recorded as eventful or discarded as unimportant (Zelizer, in press).

In sum, then, the rites of passage bringing journalists and shamans back to society are realized through different strategies. Journalists "travel" behind the displays they construct, while shamans shield themselves with curing. At heart in both, however, is the degree of consensus their activities promote. Both journalists and shamans re-enter society as consensual functionaries.
The final element within the model of journalistic/shamanistic communicative practices brings together two opposite sides of the continuum: private and public. Movement from one to the other embodies what journalistic and shamanistic communicative practices in fact constitute for society.

I have already implied that the notion of two worlds constitutes a balancing act. Barbara Meyerhoff (1976) maintains that balance is not achieved by compromise or synthesis, but by recognition of the tension between two opposing forces. Lévi-Strauss (1963) was first to show how shamans use spatial distinction to inform social distinction, with Us versus Other extended into Culture versus Nature (Leach 1970). Journalism has also been called a “bridging occupation” (Tunstall 1971), with journalists seen as giving society equilibrium by acting as intermediaries between sources and audiences (Strentz 1978). In both cases, the shaman’s and journalist’s recognition and “proper” contextualization of society’s anxieties earn them their livelihood. These activities take place at least initially in private, away from the public eye.

Yet it is these private deliberations that set both journalism and shamanism in motion. Ironically, they induce the most public of activities: the promotion of group/public consensus, and the reintegration of shamans and journalists in society. By relying on processes privately constituted elsewhere—in a world inhabited by sources and spirits—journalists and shamans displace their own marginality onto their narrations. Via “stories” (display behavior) or “cures” (curing behavior), they return to “this world” armed with wisdom and control, their “otherness” left behind them in the other world. One example is found in Norman Mailer’s coverage of the first Washington march against the Vietnam War. Mailer’s otherness as a writer was displaced onto a story which stressed the otherness of hundreds of Vietnam war protesters. The story, rather than keeping him marginal, dwelled on the marginality of the marchers. At the same time, it ushered in an eventual stream of similar chronicles which came to be known as “new journalism” and established Mailer as one of its leading scribes. This movement from private to public thus allows journalists and shamans to transfer their personal private “otherness” onto their public narrations.

Following Turner’s work on rites of passage (1969), I contend that the move from the private otherness of journalists and shamans to the public otherness of their stories and songs turns the private idioms of communication—through which journalists and shamans initiate their practices—into public ones—through which they perpetuate them. Transferring personal
otherness onto their public narrations transports journalists and shamans into the public sphere, where they act effectively as consensual functionaries that keep us in place. In certain cases journalists displace the visibility of (newsmaking) process onto the visibility of person, a process often realized among TV journalists. The Dan Ratheres or Ted Koppels are certainly more visible than the stories they tell (Zelizer 1989). Displacements such as these help enhance the effectiveness of shamans’ and journalists’ communicative practices, in that they focus public attention on what is public and obvious in news-work and shamanism and deflect attention from what is less obvious and private.

The argument contained in these pages is in need of certain qualifications. While much of the difference between journalistic and shamanistic communicative practices emerges from the obvious distinction between “fictive” and “non-fictive” worlds, I have tried to argue here that this distinction may not be so clear-cut, and that shamans and journalists may be more similar than assumed until now. To an extent, this is implied by existing research, where shamanistic practices have been regarded as actualizing the fictive much like journalistic practices fictionalize the actual. For instance, shamans use the conception of a sacred tree, growing at the mid-point of underworld, real world and sky, to concretize their travel between worlds (Vastokas 1973-74), while “facts” and “fictions” are no longer seen as givens in news but the changeable work of interpretative communities (Eason 1986). Journalism—and shamanism—thus revolve around repairing the authoritative base for accounts of “the way it is” (Eason 1986; Zelizer, in press; Schudson 1982; Darnton 1975; Epstein 1975, 1973). This has bearing on collective experience and renders publics unable to differentiate between what is “real” (non-fictive) and “constructed” (fictive) (cf., Gerbner et al. 1982). As long as communicative practice engages two worlds, it thus may make little functional difference whether these worlds are real or not.

It is important to note that the traditions of both journalism and shamanism are beginning to disintegrate. Last (1981), for instance, argues that traditional medicine’s fundamental premise—that spirits control illness—is giving way to spirits being characterized as theatrical, non-functional figures. Shamans are seen as so distanced from their spiritual connections that Buryat shamans now receive utcha (shamanic divine right) from ancestors rather than divine spirits (Eliade 1964). A similar distancing characterizes ties between journalists and sources. Technological advances have helped journalists rely on wire services, dispatch reports, agencies such as Visnews or UPITN, or other forms of second-hand reporting, often to the near total
displacement of first-hand investigative journalism (Zelizer 1990; Goldstein 1985; Golding and Elliott 1979; Roeh et al. 1980; Gans 1979).

The communicative practices of journalists and shamans may thus have exceeded existing sources of inspiration and information, rendering "first-hand" consultations with spirits and sources anomalous to "proper" communicative practice. That journalists and shamans nonetheless continue to invoke sources and spirits to justify their unshared private visions, however, suggests that "otherness" may be an ideological device used to authorize journalists and shamans as speakers in public discourse.

This raises questions about communicative practice which go beyond journalism or shamanism. In a sense, all mediators in public discourse act in certain ways as shamans. Just as journalists and shamans mask the ideological implications of their practices by accessing specialized bodies of knowledge that only they can fetch, so may other professionals. It may be that by legitimating private "otherness" through a "non-seeing" public (and opening it for public inspection at predetermined junctures), journalistic and shamanistic practices perpetuate themselves as an ontological reality. In other words, by appearing to be visible and self-consciously public, the communicative practices of journalists and shamans seem legitimate. This underscores the need for further study of other practitioners of public discourse. How public speakers and performers in other modes of discourse purposively blur distinctions between real and unreal, fictive and non-fictional, public and private and public may be one of the major keys to understanding how they enhance their authority as speakers in public discourse.

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NOTES

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1. Because traditional shamanistic functions have been divided in contemporary society among priests, poets, teachers, doctors, and psychotherapists (cf. Honko 1969; Kirby 1974; and Meyerhoff 1976), shamanism neither ends with the modes discussed here nor favors them. Certain modes of shamanism do correspond best with those of journalism, and the modes highlighted here concern the intrusion of religious mysticism (and detachment from "the right to know") inside a public process that has traditionally been envisioned as a safeguard for conceptual sovereignty.
2. Investigative journalism is relevant to this discussion for three reasons: a) it gives journalists a frame of reference for realizing communicative practice. As Michael Schudson says of the era following Watergate: “Never before has there been a national symbol of enterprise reporting of even remotely comparable substance and scope—and effect. . . . What is likely to happen in schools of journalism and in newsrooms around the country as new recruits enter the field is that they will be told to forget the romance of newspaper work and to learn the same old basics of who, what, where, and when reporting” (1978:191-2); b) it has catalyzed the evolution of alternate journalistic practices, such as “new journalism” (Eason 1984); and c) it refocuses discussions of journalism upon the “source phase” of journalistic practices, whose role in indexing authority and ideology has been largely understated (cf. Mortensen and Svendsen, 1980).

3. There are different layers of “being an outsider” (Ryan 1980); and hence, different ways of providing an outsider’s view: Journalists convey an outside point of view from the standpoint of “this world” (as speakers, they enunciate from within “this world” using the viewpoint of another world), while shamans, situated a bit farther out, convey an inside point of view from an alternate world (they enunciate from an alternate world a viewpoint of “this world”).

4. It might be prudent here to distinguish between spirit mediums and shamans. Certain studies maintain that while spirit mediums remember nothing when they awake from a trance, shamans remember everything (Drury 1982). In such a case, the trance constitutes a culminating point of the shamanistic process. A similar comparison might link journalists with messengers: both embark on journeys in order to “pick up” information. Messengers attend only to the point of “picking up” and pay little attention to either the process or context surrounding the information, while investigative reporters consider both context and process. Thus, both act out the same process, but they attend to different things while inside it.

5. This is obviously a question of degree. Journalists try to maintain a public appearance of verifiability, with journalistic practices actually constituted along such a continuum (i.e., public interviews, public identification of sources, anonymous sources). Anonymous attribution (“informed sources”, “high officials”, “background sources”, “on the record” or “off the record” briefings) most concerns us here: Unnamed sources have been found in 54% of stories used by elite papers (Strenz 1978), with 80% of newsmagazine stories containing anonymous attribution (Wulfemeyer 1985). While source anonymity is often requested by sources as a protective device (Strenz 1978), with the “reporter who consistently refuses to use unattributed or unverified information . . . soon [finding] himself uninformed about highly newsworthy items” (Roshco 1975:89), a number of studies suggest that journalists themselves are reluctant to particularize their methods, largely because their authority is derived from the mystique which evolves from “not-knowing” (cf. Sigal 1973; Tuchman 1972, 1978; Fishman 1980). That publics would accept such an exclusive practice concerning information is supported by models of doctor-patient relationships: A lack of explanatory models is seen as enhancing the authority of spiritual healers (Finkler 1984), with “not-knowing”, or “not-caring-to-know” an institutionalized part of any medical culture (Last 1981), and a certain inappropriateness characterizing the requests for clarifications of method from practitioners.

6. Lévi-Strauss (1963) discusses three types of shamanistic cure: That which involves the sick organ; that which evolves around a sham battle with harmful spirits; and
that which is constituted through the prescription of recitations/incantations for the officiant to take part in. Very loosely, these three categories might correspond with three kinds of journalistic stories: That which halts a transgression by the fact of its publication; that which discusses the existence of a transgression without halting it; and that which editorializes, or takes a stand for/against, a transgression without discussing its details.

7. This naming phenomenon differs in the amount of closure it provides. Each shamanistic act is a whole in itself, in that it generally provides total closure to the illness or problem at hand, while each journalistic act is rarely whole. It generally unfolds meaning in a gradual way, and dissolves the problem at hand only over time. Gaye Tuchman (1973) calls this work strategy “continuing news.”

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