Expansion in the types of merchandise offered would probably attract more downtown workers as well. Hardware and grocery stores are obvious needs, but there may be others. Downtown residents and those in the neighborhoods surrounding downtown also would be attracted to this broader range of goods, adding to downtown’s market potential.

If well designed, new transit systems could make downtown shopping more accessible and more attractive to people who now see downtown as too distant. An improved transportation system would make it easier for both an expanding workforce and potential shoppers.

But parking is the biggest problem for downtown shoppers. Price is part of the problem, especially with rates set highest for the first hour. Some new stores, Nieman-Marcus and Saks, are planning to offer validated parking which will pay the parking fees for those making a minimum purchase. Many ramps have lower prices on evenings or weekends, but more could be made available.

The other part of the problem is parking availability. And new entertainment opportunities downtown may even exacerbate this problem. Sometimes, as one circles unknown blocks (more than one wishes, because of one-way streets) it seems as though no place is available at any price. Some stores are considering valet parking, leaving a professional driver to find a place for your car. Part of the problem is that many downtown firms buy parking spaces for their upper-level employees, making these spaces unavailable to shoppers. New ramps are being built on the edge of downtown Minneapolis to provide inexpensive parking for car pooling workers. That will help shoppers by taking the pressure off close-in lots. Moreover, these new lots will offer shoppers a low rate of $1.50 after 4 p.m. on weekdays and all day Saturday and Sunday. Good security and good shuttle bus service will be necessities if these new lots are to attract shoppers. St. Paul already helps shoppers with their parking. Attractive signs direct the infrequent visitor to a number of locations, including the Civic Center parking lot. Low-off-hour parking rates are widely available in St. Paul’s downtown ramps.

The future of our downtowns could be bright indeed. Much hard work, and a fair bit of luck, will be needed to make the downtown of tomorrow a place where we all want to be, where we want to work, where we want to shop, and where we can all find a parking place (even if it is in a park-and-ride lot).

Establishing the World: Hmong Shamans
by Dwight Conquergood

Paja Thao, a Hmong healer, told his life story to Conquergood in 1984.

The Hmong are well known for their strong work ethic, independent spirit, and love of freedom. Outsiders call them Miao or Meo—pejorative terms that mean “barbarian” or “primitive”—but they proudly call themselves Hmong, which means “Free People.”... Like mountain peoples the world over, they have developed a culture of extraordinary integrity, communal self-reliance, intimacy with nature, and resistance to outside authority and official power structures. Indeed, one of their traditional proverbs reveals their resistance to (and sense of humor about) the homogenizing forces of lowland officialdom: “To see a tiger is to die; to see an official is to become destitute.”

Cosmology and Community

Much can be learned about Hmong society by examining their symbolic projections of the human body. Notions of physical health and illness draw on the most fundamental concepts about the body. According to Hmong cosmology, the human body is the host for an ensemble of life-souls. The number of souls believed to inhabit a human body depends on whom you consult. Some say seven, some nine, others twelve, or even thirty-two. The point is that the body is a site for multiple souls, whereas according to American cosmology, the body is a site for a single soul.

A human body is healthy when all the life-souls are centered in the body, cooperating interdependently and living together harmoniously as a group. Sickness is explained by the isolation and separation of one or more of these souls from the community of the body. Disease, depression, and death result from diffusion, dispersal, and loss of souls.

Therefore, the major restorative measures for this affliction, curing rites, are in fact, soul-calling rituals. The most common of these in Hmong culture is the Hu Pliga (Soul Calling). The ritual specialist summons the soul or souls who have become separated from their bodily community. Whether the soul became separated out-
side the body because it was frightened away or kidnapped by an evil force, or simply wandered off by itself, the message is the same: return to the body, reincorporate, restore the integrity of life. The ritual is climaxed when the ritual specialist ties strings around the wrists of the newly revitalized person, Hu Plig Khi Tes, concretely signifying the binding up and holding intact of the life-souls.

What makes for a healthy human body also makes for a healthy body politic. The Hmong ideal of society is one in which individuals find their meaning and identity within the scope of the group and its various ramifications: household, lineage group, village, clan, and so forth. Productive relationships with others are healthier than singular achievements. Interconnectedness rather than competitiveness is the prized norm. A sick society, according to Hmong world view, is one that is fragmented, alienated, highly individualistic, and ruled by entrepreneurial competitive impulses, rather than communal drivers.

Hmong beliefs and values about what constitutes the ideal society, epitomized and enunciated in healing rituals that recall souls that have become separated from the body, offer an interesting contrast to an American cosmology that celebrates individualism. According to Robert Bellah and his colleagues:

Individualism lies at the very core of American culture.... We believe in the dignity, indeed the sacredness, of the individual. Anything that would violate our right to think for ourselves, judge for ourselves, make our own decisions, live our lives as we see fit, is not only morally wrong, it is sacrilegious. Our highest and noblest aspirations, not only for ourselves, but for those we care about, for our society and for the world, are closely linked to our individualism.

This commitment to individualism gets expressed in common sayings such as "God helps those who help themselves" and "Pull yourself up by your bootstraps."

Further, our rugged individualism is enacted in our myths about Horatio Alger and the restless frontier cowboy who never settles down but rides off into the sunset, away from settlements and communities that are seen as threatening to the autonomous self.... For the Hmong, standing alone, outside the village, cut off from the clan, is unthinkable as a moral alternative. Movement away from a communal center represents the loss of everything that makes one a viable person. It is a fate associated with death....

[In Hmong society] equilibrium, the coexistence of life-souls within the body, is matched by sustaining balance and meaningful communication with innumerable spirits that live outside the body. In addition to ancestral spirits who continue to interact with living descendants, the natural world is alive with spirits. Trees, mountains, rivers, rocks, and lightning are all animated by distinctive spirits. Nature spirits are generally good. Most animals are regarded as kindred creatures who share and exchange souls.

The Hmong celebrate their humanity, not as a discrete and impenetrable part of the natural order, but as part of the circle of life of all creation—caught up in the rotation of the seasons, and deeply connected with the configuration of the mountains, and the reincarnation of life from generation to generation, even from species to species. Life, in its myriad forms, is intimately articulated through souls and spirits.

The Hmong cosmos has its own coherence and internal logic. It is richly equipped to explain the mysteries of life and to enable meaningful action in the world. All the premises that support Hmong culture are rooted in a deep belief about the primacy of spiritual reality. The more you study and understand Hmong cosmology, the more impressed you become with the remarkable intricacy, beauty, and depth of their spiritual life. The Hmong have a highly developed spiritual system.

Westerners committed to a progressive ideology based on science and technology, often define the Hmong and other primal cultures as "undeveloped," "pre-literate," "pre-modern," "pre-industrial," or "primitive." Such labels define the people in terms of "absences"—relative only to the la-

Zoua Yang, a woman shaman, in ceremonial dress.


Shamanism: The Linchpin of Hmong Cosmology

The more I studied Hmong culture and shamanism, the more I realized that the shaman epitomized the Hmong belief system.... The practice of shamanism connects the Hmong to a host of other cultures across the globe and throughout history....

The distinguishing characteristic of shamanism that sets it apart from other forms of folk healing is the ecstatic trance the shaman enters to achieve a particularly intense form of communication with spirits.... The shaman is the one who can actually cross the threshold between earth and sky, and human and spirit, and enter the side of reality that is unseen, but nonetheless real, to rescue captured or fugitive souls, battle with evil ogres, or reconcile an offended nature spirit....

Shamanism is a vocation in the true sense of "calling." An individual does not decide to become a shaman as a career choice. One has to be called to shamanism through a special visitation of the spirits. This summoning is communicated through initiatory illness.... The shaman is the one who can wage lifelong battle against the God of Death on behalf of others precisely because she or he has confronted it personally and survived the encounter....

Every time a Hmong shaman performs, she or he reenacts the myth of "Shee Yee and the Evil Spirits," which explains the origin of sickness and death. Evil spirits were hatched into the world because of the failings of a primordial couple: "All of these spirits came out of Nyong's egg, because he did not think of others, but instead, was self-centered and selfish, and would not let his egg be burned. Because of him, all these evil spirits entered into the world of men, and all those terrible diseases...." Horrible suffering and devastation afflicted the world for a while. But according to the cosmogonic myth, a deliverer in the person of Shee Yee, the first shaman, knows how to heal the sick, and provides protection against evil spirits.

To the present day, every shamanic performance opens with the invocation to Shee Yee, the primordial shaman....

A shamanic performance entails something much deeper than curing a specific illness. What is really being refurbished and recreated every time a Hmong shaman performs is the system of meanings and web of
symbols that grant coherence and comprehensiveness. Whether the sickness abates or lingers, the shaman’s real accomplishment in every performance is that she or he establishes the world.

Shamanism and Healing

Superficially glimpsed by rationalistic Westerners, the shaman might be construed as a very primitive form of medical doctor. Limiting the shaman’s role to ministrations of the physical body reflects the specialized differentiation and compartmentalization of modern culture. The shaman’s functions within a primal society embrace the combined roles of physician, spiritual minister, psychiatrist, and elder statesman. All these dimensions of human experience—physical, spiritual/religious, psychological, sociological, political—are thought to be interpenetrating and inseparable in a primal society.

The shaman rescues meaning from the diffuse, confusing, inchoate parts of existence. He or she wrests order from chaos, discovers pattern and continuity where before all seemed lost and incomprehensible. Physical pain and bodily ailments are explained as localized manifestations of cosmological imbalance and disorder. The back pain or stomachache is not the ultimate target of the shaman’s redressive rites. These bodily pains are but communications of a disturbance in the spiritual ecology of the world. The shaman’s healing rituals provide existence with a moral interpretation and meaningfulness....

The renowned anthropologist Claude Levi-Strauss...concludes that the primary function of a shaman is to reproduce and restore belief, not physical health. The individual cases of illness to which a shaman ministers are highly charged arenas within which shaman and audience attend to the shared system of beliefs that anchors their collective lives....

The dominance of logical empiricism in Western thought has produced a highly differentiated world with discrete compartments, specialties, and cause-effect relationships. Because our cognitive categories divide the physical from the metaphysical and privilege the former, it is difficult for us to grasp the way shamanism works in a primal society. We superficially observe shamans attending to sickness and then assess their interventions in purely physical terms, according to criteria derived from medical science. The shaman, to be sure, is concerned with physical ailments, but that is only half of the picture. His or her function is always to bring physical and metaphysical realities into intimate communication. Sickness in the fallen world provides the breach, the exigent opportunity to bridge these two worlds. Paja Thao expressed the relationship with eloquent simplicity:

The sky kingdom with its order and ways
The earth kingdom with its customs and laws
Mirror each other.

It is the special responsibility of the shaman both to celebrate and actualize the coincidences between these two kingdoms and to amplify their resonances, one into the other.

Perhaps that is why shamans do not resist prescription medicines and physical treatments. These forms of medicine do not directly compete with the shamans’ manipulation of symbols and management of belief....

Shamans are not threatened by the introduction of Western medicine because its physical treatments are not comparable to the shaman’s mode of healing. Indeed, even Hmong traditional medicine does not perceive all illness as supernatural and therefore susceptible to the shaman’s spiritual interventions. They do attribute some ailments to natural causes and treat them accordingly with nonspiritual methods....

It is more common than not to find shamans alternating and combining natural and supernatural healing techniques. They will try first one technique, and then another, persisting until the patient gets relief. They see the two modes of healing, natural and supernatural, as complementary rather than contradictory....

The Politics of Shamanism

Some Christians associate shamanic trance possession and animal sacrifice with heathenism and link it with the devil. Too many interest groups claim that in the name of science, progress, and Christianity, shamanism should be stamped out. Sadly, the resistance to shamanism that the Hmong resettled in the United States now experience, recapitulates a history of oppression that traditional people everywhere have been subjected to when confronted with Western powers....

Paja Thao’s life narrative is filled with the terrors and pain of practicing shaman experiences in a milieu that assaults and erodes his core beliefs:

I still believe Hmong religion
In my country Laos none of my cousins changed to Christians
But now all my cousins come to America
And all of them change to Christian
Now only my son and I
Hold to Hmong religion
But I am sure how much longer
Before my son changes to Christian
As for me, I will never be Christian

Most shamans in the United States with whom I have talked actively resist the assid-
Conquer good videotapes a woman shaman sewing pandan in front of her altar.

uous attempts to undermine and disconfirm the ritual practices that enact and sustain the Hmong system of beliefs. You do not have to talk very long before the tensions surface. Here is a segment from an interview in Milwaukee with Yang Lau, the Hmong male shaman who performed the opening ceremony in the Between Two Worlds film documentary:

In the past, in Laos, we didn’t have any Hmong who were Christians, but recently in Xieng Khouang there have been a few families becoming Christian, but many still hold their own Hmong religious beliefs. Right now in the U.S., we Hmong are not against Christianity. Some of us are becoming Christians now because we think we must to be accepted by Americans. But as for myself, I will not become Christian because that means giving up my beliefs and the Hmong culture. If I become Christian there will be no one to pass on the Hmong culture to my children and their children. That is why I keep practicing Hmong religion... If all of the Hmong were to become Christians we would lose Hmong culture forever... We Hmong who believe in Hmong culture still have shamans... Now I’m very old but I hope my children and the generation following won’t forget Hmong culture. I tell you this to remember for the future generation... A long time ago we were born to have shamans. My grandfather was a shaman and my father

was a shaman also... I want to pass this on to the future generations so that they will know about the shaman. This is all I have to say.

One cannot help but be impressed with the articulate self-awareness and simple forcefulness of this old man’s words. He has a clear-eyed view of the present situation of his people. He understands the vital tie between culture and its expressive traditions. He firmly resists, therefore, all attempts to stamp out shamanism. It will be a sad day for Hmong people if the time ever comes when the last shaman dies.

People in the West need to understand that shamanism is not just some exotic, superstitious practice that can be excised easily to promote the Hmong’s adjustment to American life styles. Shamanism is deeply embedded within the tissue and texture of Hmong culture and belief.

What is needed is a dialogical understanding of and appreciation for cultural difference and diversity... Two excellent examples of dialogical integrity are found in the relatively brief history of the encounter between Hmong shamanism and American culture.

The first is in the Final Report of the SUNDs Planning Project. This exemplary project arose as a response to the crisis of SUNDs (Sudden Unexpected Nocturnal Death Syndrome) which has now claimed more than 100 lives in the United States since 1975; Hmong, mostly young men, have been the hardest hit ethnic group. SUNDS has reached epidemic proportions and is being monitored by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia. Under the direction of Dr. Neal Holtan, the investigative team drew on the expertise of physicians, scientific researchers, epidemiologists, and public health professionals to assemble state-of-the-art knowledge about the problem and make recommendations for research and community action.

In their pursuit of information and insights into this baffling health crisis, the team members did not limit their search to the knowledge and methods of medical science. They talked to Hmong suffering the effects of this epidemic and seriously considered their ideas along with the hypotheses and methods of scientific investigation. With extraordinary openness and balance between radically different world views and explanatory frameworks, the investigative team used the best of modern medical science and respected the authenticity of native beliefs. So extraordinary is their achievement of dialogical balance and cultural sensitivity, that their first three recom-
mendations merit quotation:

1. Further study is needed of refugee religious and traditional healing practices, so that cross-cultural understanding and improved quality and appropriateness of refugee health care can be achieved.

2. Traditional rituals should be considered therapeutic. Shamans should be befriended to gain their assistance in reducing refugee stress.

3. Compromises can be found so that refugees interested in animal sacrifice can be accomplished [sic] while abiding by legal restrictions.*

This kind of tough-minded commitment to difference and dialogue should serve as a model for any group working cross-culturally.

The second positive example of dialogical understanding is found in a sensitive report and discussion of a Hmong shaman's cure published in the American Journal of Orthopsychiatry. Following an excellent dramaturgical description of a ceremony that included the patient crawling through a hoop and between two knives to divert the afflicting spirits, the authors, Tobin and Friedman, offer this insightful interpretation:

...we should not let the exoticon of Mrs. Thor, of Vang Xiong, and of people like the Hmong interfere with our appreciation of the transcultural, universal aspects of anguish and cure. In many ways Mrs. Thor functioned in a manner analogous to that of Western psychotherapists. She represented herself to Vang Xiong as a specialist, a professional with long years of training and experience in dealing with similar cases. She showed compassion, but maintained a professional detachment, neither pitying nor scorning her patient. She avoided making premature diagnoses, she offered herself as the chief instrument of care...As is so often the case in Western therapy, her ability to help her patient understand (become conscious of) mysterious (unconscious) forces proved to be the key to the cure.**

By bringing Hmong shamanism into dialogue with modern psychotherapy, both practices are rendered "anthropologically strange" so that new insights and fresh perspectives can be mutually achieved and sharpened. The similarities enable comparison, but the differences challenge and stretch understanding.

The capacity to hold different ways of knowing in productive tension is both possible and desirable. Tobin and Friedman encourage this struggle to embrace difference in the mode of "both/and" openness rather than "either/or," which eliminates categories. They confirm that from the patient's point of view, the shaman's "interpretations and ministrations on his behalf were intelligible, desired, and ultimately successful." (p. 441). Nonetheless, they insist that this openness to "the other" does not entail a denial of one's own beliefs. One can embrace "the other" without forsaking one's own convictions:

But how are those of us who do not believe in spirits...to view Vang Xiong's illness and cure? Cultural relativism requires that we acknowledge and respect beliefs that differ from our own, but not that we necessarily subscribe to these beliefs. We can appreciate Mrs. Thor's skill and recommend her to our Hmong clients without agreeing with her understanding of what underlies her clients' suffering, or why her cures work (p. 442).

Actually, this willingness to articulate different world views in a way that respectfully preserves the integrity of both is epitomized by the Hmong shamans who place bottles of prescription medicine alongside the spirit baskets on their altars.

To acknowledge respectfully the beliefs and practices of people different from ourselves is simply human decency and deserves no special praise. To use these other beliefs to question our own assumptions is a step toward the development of a critical consciousness. Ultimately, a genuinely dialogical encounter with "the other" should deepen self-understanding. Lemoine takes the dialogical encounter between shamanism and Western psychology to this next level of self-critique:

Comparing his work to psychiatric procedure, I noticed that while the analyst tries to provoke self-analysis by soliciting the wounded part of the self, a Hmong shaman will provide an explanation which avoids all self-involvement of the patient. He is always represented as a victim of an assault from outside powers of an accidental separation from one part of his self. When this situation has been identified and overcome by the shaman, health is recovered. At no point has there been a feeling of guilt associated with suffering. Maybe in the healing power of the Hmong shaman's art there is a lesson which the psychotherapist could learn.*

We enlarge and enrich ourselves through dialogue with others—others whose differences challenge our compaiencies and open up new boundaries of human experience in our shared world.

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