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## Spiritual Power and Everyday Lives: James Bay Cree Shaking Tent Performers and Their Audiences

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### *Introduction*

While much of the literature on shamanism has focused on the spiritual dimensions of the performances, or on the social and symbolic power of the performers, I want in this paper to focus on the dynamic discourses and messages conveyed to the audiences. I am interested in exploring some of the meanings such performances convey through oral text, through ritual symbols, and through the social relationships which are acknowledged and created. One of the discourses carried on by those who perform the shaking tent ceremony in James Bay Cree society is about special spiritual powers and about everyday spiritual life. But these discourses are not only about spirituality, they are also discourses about the acceptability of the inequalities which are at the root of spiritual and other claims of extra-ordinary power. Thus the performers, as well as the symbolic structure of the performance itself, emphasize the services which they perform for the community. However, I want to suggest that while they demonstrate a form of special access to powerful knowledge, they also point to the power of everyday access to knowledge and insight available to all.

Differences in the ease of accessibility to sources of spiritual power in a society have been used by several authors to classify types of spiritual ritual and practitioners (cf. Hamayon 1994b; Hugh-Jones 1994), but my interest here is not in the classification or explanation of differences, but in the ongoing discourses about such differences, and how they reveal aspects of inequality and order in everyday social life (see also Irimoto 1994). My focus is therefore both on the structure of the ceremony and on the actual texts of the verbal communications. The latter have rarely been recorded or analyzed.

Inequality in hunting and gathering societies is typically accepted in certain forms and under certain conditions, and it is also generally

contested by ordinary people. Therefore claims to special powers must be continually asserted, legitimated, and downplayed. The acceptance of such claims is frequently put to the test of demonstrated consequences, and acceptance is almost always partial and subject to reconsideration. Where a claim works it may be acknowledged; where it serves others it may be accepted by them. In either case it always encompasses ambiguities of thought and feelings.

Such dialogues, and a constant testing and debate, may be explicit or implicit in the discourses, but they are a recurrent feature of claiming and demonstrating spiritual powers, as of other forms of social and political leadership. These dialogues over the value and acceptability of inequalities are, I will show, central to shaking tent ceremonies and performances. Indeed, ceremonies and performers are constantly referring to these issues, even if in the ceremonial setting itself the audience is more likely to be spoken for, and spoken about, than to express itself at the event.

In this paper I return to earlier discussions of the structures and meanings found in the James Bay Cree shaking tent ceremony (Brown and Brightman 1988; Feit 1994; Flannery 1939; Hallowell 1942; Preston 1975; Speck 1924; Tanner 1979; Vincent 1973, 1977; and for a recent compilation of materials see Colombo 1993), but I turn from considering ceremonial structures to themes in the text of actual performances (cf. Preston 1975). This allows me to examine what performers offered their audiences, how performers addressed audiences, what they anticipated of audience responses, and how they tried to structure those responses. I do this by considering the commonalities and contrasts that emerge from comparing two full texts of performances.

At a previous conference of the Northern Studies Association I presented an analysis of the structure and recent history of the shaking tent ceremony of James Bay Cree (Feit 1994). The next section of this paper draws from that earlier paper, and others, to set the base from which I go on to examine the particular performances.<sup>1</sup> My account moves from the generalized to the particular. The initial account of meanings that may be interpreted from the form of the ceremony focuses on structures. The summary account of another performance recorded by Richard J. Preston is schematically presented. In the following part of the paper I situate processes in a specific performance I observed and recorded and provide transcripts of discourses and reflections. In the conclusion I reflect on some possible meanings and contradictions implied in the events and the performers' discourses.

The shaking tent is the most well known of the ritualized ceremonies practiced by James Bay Cree, and earlier commentators have readily called it "shamanistic" and labeled its performers "shamans." I have chosen not to use the terms. Their utility here is problematic not just

because of the ongoing debates among scholars about the geographical extent and distinctive markers which should be used to distinguish shamanism from closely associated phenomena. As has been pointed out by both critics of the concept and some defenders of the use of the term, the generalized use of the category of "shamanism" is a product of a colonizing form of social analysis wherein shamanism was defined by the features which distinguished it from the great religious traditions, or religions with dogmas (cf. Thomas and Humphrey 1994; Hamayon 1994a; Harner 1988). As such, it is a concept which has been associated, implicitly or explicitly, with categorizing an "other" by the absence of features of the analysts' cultures, whether or not the differences were valued or denigrated (for parallels see: Berkhofer 1979; Comaroff 1985; Said 1989). For example, in the new-age popular movement of shamanic healing courses and treatment centers in North America, including some Indigenous healers, these differences are often positively valued and advertised, because they are perceived as separated from Judeo-Christian religious life (cf. Doore 1988; but also see Kehoe 1990). Other social critics, including some from Indigenous societies, note that in the wider North American society the term fails to put their religious practices on an equal footing with the great traditions, and they see it as demeaning (Forbes 1995). I have therefore chosen to avoid the term, while recognizing that it has specific meaning and use in some Eurasian cultures, and that it may be possible for it to have a broader and precisely defined meaning among communities of experts.

In this paper I am interested, based on what I learned from James Bay Cree people, in the everyday "ordinariness" of lives lived in spiritual awareness. And my understanding of parts of the meaning of shaking tent ceremonies is that they are constantly ambiguous discourses on different claims of access to spiritual knowledge in contemporary James Bay Cree society, claims which are continually explored, re-negotiated, and not easily closed.

### *Structures of the Shaking Tent: Ambiguities of Reciprocity and Power*

James Bay Cree shaking tent ceremonies incorporate and express both a dialogue on the place of humans in the world and also a dialogue on the standing of humans *vis-à-vis* each other. A shaking tent ceremony is typically performed at seasonal transitions between summer and winter, by a performer who has previously had a dream in which spirit beings have revealed to him or her the power to do the ceremony.<sup>2</sup> According to Waswanipi Cree familiar with the practice, a ceremony would often be performed as families returned from their summer residence at a fur-trade post and traveled toward their main family fall-winter bush residences. It might also be held on their going to visit the post in the spring.

It would generally be held away from the post, but at a site where many families would camp before separating for the fall-winter season. It might then also be done as circumstances warranted during the winter in smaller family groups.

The performer enters alone into a specially-built cylindrical, barrel-shaped, tent where he is visited by various spirit beings and by the spiritual helpers of other persons who are not physically present at the site; or he may visit others at sites far removed and return with news of distant people and events. The ceremony, held after dark, includes singing and verbal exchanges heard from within the tent, both in contemporary Cree and in various archaic or personal languages and Cree styles, as well as in several "voices" and voice intonations.

The audience sits around the outside listening, and may be invited to question the spirit visitors. The voices inform the audience of events in the future, or events which have happened at a distance and which are not yet known about. The performance is always addressed to those present, but it also addresses those who are not there. Ceremonies are an important topic of conversation and "news," and, at least in recent decades, when performances have been infrequent, news of a performance is widely circulated across many communities and considerable distances.

The shaking tent ceremony partakes of a metaphor of vision (cf. Hallowell 1942:9-10). In the shaking tent the performer sits at the bottom of the tent, where (it is said) he can see the various spirit beings which visit as "little lights" up near the top of the tent; the performance thus makes visible to the performer those beings which cannot normally be seen by ordinary people or in ordinary circumstances. This visual symbolism emphasizes the separation, and the unequal capabilities, of the performers and their audiences, for the latter can hear the spirits but not see them or the performer. It therefore also emphasizes an inequality between those who can "see," who have more or different power, and those who cannot.<sup>3</sup>

This inequality is also suggested by the possible meanings of the term for shaking tent, *koaspskikan*. As I reported in an earlier paper (1994) the linguist Christopher Wolfart suggests that the term for shaking tent has the meaning of "see, vision" combined with "try" (Preston 1975). A colleague, Brian Craik, suggests that the term *kos* may be more closely linked to the cognate terms *kostew*, "he fears him," and *kostaciw*, "he is afraid" (Craik, personal communication). Interestingly enough, I have found these different possible interpretations discussed by Cree families closely linked to performers.

When I asked Joe Ottereyes, Jr., of Waswanipi, the son of a performer, and the person who built his father's shaking tents, what the term meant he said:

Meaning for [the] name *koaspskikan*, [comes from] *kos*. "scared." [When] first they saw that, [like] kids when you see a scary sight, little kids used to be scared of it. That's why they call it that maybe (Fieldnotes, 1982/8/30).

But Joe's wife, and translator, Eva Ottereyes, added:

I think there is another meaning. When you get startled seeing something, surprised. [And] it means to me seeing the future, another meaning. Those are about the meanings, because many times they see the future (Fieldnotes, 1982/8/30).

It is said that a person who does the shaking tent has a personal spirit, *mistapeo* (literally "big man"). When the Waswanipi speak of these *mistapeo* in English, they use the term "helper," although the term does not normally mean they have an assistant, but rather that performers have a special spirit guardian. At Waswanipi having a *mistapeo* is a distinguishing feature of shaking tent performers, and a claim which highlights the difference between performers and other Cree.

The relationship of the performer to a range of spirit beings is ambiguous in the symbols of the shaking tent ritual. On one hand the performance is dependent on the spirit beings coming. Their willingness to participate is symbolized by the spirit beings placing themselves in unusual circumstances; they come *into* the tent, reversing the usual spatial order in which humans reside in tents and spirit beings outside. On the other hand, the reciprocal dependency of the performer is symbolized by the obligation that throughout his life he may be required by spirit being helpers to show special forms of respect and abstinence for their help. Nevertheless, the willingness of spirits to come distinguishes the performer from his consociates, and several individuals who decided not to do the shaking tent said they took that decision because they were not sure that the "tent would shake"—that is, that the spirits would indeed enter their tent.

The special forms of respect which performers must show, such as certain food avoidances, or avoiding the hunting of particular animals—although they are not unique to shaking tent performers, and are also found among other individuals with other special spirit guardians—are a feature distinguishing performers from other people in ordinary daily life. While other people may not know the specific form of a person's powers, the avoidances each person with powers must respect are generally known widely, or guessed fairly widely, as others try to respect those obligations by not offering them inappropriate food or discussing inappropriate topics. The result, therefore, is that performers and other people with spiritual power are distinguished and differentiated in everyday life from others.

Yet performers joke with *mistapeo* and other spirit beings throughout

the performance in the shaking tent. The performer treats the spirit beings who visit in a friendly manner, using highly informal conversational references, joking, and referring to the long duration of their relationship. Indeed, the ceremony is often described by the performer as something "like playing," and they may say that they are "playing" with the shaking tent when they perform the ritual. These friendly, informal, and even affectionate expressions of the relationship of the performer to the spirit beings are in sharp contrast to the dependency and obligation that also characterize the relationship.

This ambiguity conveys the dual aspects of the relationship of the performer and the spirit beings: while the former is dependent on the spirit beings and especially *mistapeo* for the ability or gift of performance, the intimacy of the relationship shows that the performer is worthy of receiving the gift, and that he has willfully sought the relationship and met the respectful obligations necessary to fulfill the demands of the spirit beings. From this viewpoint there is a willful taking and fulfillment of special obligations and reciprocities, and such obligations express and create intimacy.

Thus, a second metaphor central to the shaking tent performance is the concept of reciprocity; for the performance is spoken of as a petition of aid to the spirit beings on the part of the performer. When announcing a shaking tent, a performer typically gives a public reason for the ritual, and most typically he says he is responding to a request from a member of the community for some help, a request for information or understanding from the spirit beings. This request to the performer is echoed in the request which the performer makes to the spirit beings.

From another point of view, however, the ambiguity can be seen as encompassing personal power, not mutual dependency; for not only can spirits come to respectful performers, but also powerful performers can call on spirits to do their beckoning. Thus there is a series of Cree discourses about the duels that used to occur between "conjurers," and about the abuses of "conjuring" power, that make clear that Cree are concerned with both possibilities, and are as deeply concerned about the abuses of powers as with the benefits of power well used.

Thus, there is an active Cree discourse about performers in which the elders emphasize that these powers have been misused by some who seek control of others and self-aggrandizement. The great majority of the younger elders emphasize that they do not themselves perform the shaking tent ceremony, and that one of their reasons is that they fear the ceremony could be misused today.

Thus shaking tent performances and performers are ambiguous, in part because the powers are not available to everyone. Indeed, use of the shaking tent has been reduced significantly in recent years, partly because of the development of more widely spread forms of spiritual power and

success (see Feit 1994).

### *Cree Conceptions of Power*

Hierarchy and inequality are spoken of by the Waswanipi in English as degrees and exchanges of "power." In the hierarchy of spirit beings, the different ranks of leaders are distinguished by their degrees of "power."

Cree describe "power" as the link between what is thought and what is actually experienced to happen in the world. The contingency of knowledge and power is clear in the ability of many human beings to sometimes "know the future" or to "know what is happening far away," and the ability to do so is a demonstration of the relative degree of "power" a person has. The shaking tent is thus a specific instance of a more general form of power, possibly differentiated by the fact that it is a more public event and demonstration than many alternative forms, such as dreams, the discovery of "signs" in the bush, or thoughts and insights which occur to many people in waking life.<sup>4</sup>

The Cree have a term for this anticipatory knowledge: "*nikanchis-cheitam*," literally "future knowledge," which is explained as being able to "see ahead" or "know ahead." Humans get future knowledge from spirit beings through dreams, daytime thoughts, and ceremonies, and as they mature they know how to cultivate and interpret such communications. To have such kinds of knowledge one is said to be "powerful" or to have "powers." The implication in this conception of knowledge is that knowing the future is not simply an expectation or speculation; it is knowledge with substantial, if varying, degrees of certainty for the knower. This is partly because this knowledge comes from spirit beings.

Future knowledge is the key and unifying element in both hunting and the shaking tent ceremony, as well as in spiritual practices more generally. Thus among the most typical features of the shaking tent ceremonies are "future knowledge" that spirits give the performer, and the visits of spirit beings who may also tell what is happening far away in other bush camps or the settlements. These features of the shaking tent ceremony demonstrate its power, and the power of those who perform it.

The shaking tent ceremony not only exemplifies power; it illuminates and instructs the audience about the different Cree concepts of "power," conceptions which influence other aspects of Cree life. A central issue is how future knowledge helps to actualize what will come to be, either through the active participation in the world or through seeking control of others.

The first is clearly conveyed in the most central feature of the shaking tent ceremony, namely the fact that the performer does not perform; he sits still in the center of the tent while *mistapeo* and other spirit beings are active. Thus it is said that the performer does not shake the tent; the tent shakes because of the presence of the spirit beings. The mystery of how

the tent shakes, which is much emphasized in everyday Cree discourse, is directed away from the power of the performer and towards the other beings that must cooperate if a performance is to occur.

This first symbolism emphasizes that even with all his power, the performer is not in personal control. The performer does not construct the shaking tent; this is done by kin under his direction. And the first thing a performer does when leaving the tent, and receiving a gift of tobacco from a member of the audience, is to smoke the tobacco as an "offering" to the spirit beings. Thus a potentially ego-centric event, which ostensibly focuses on the power and capability of the performer, shows the event is dependent on social relationships with kin, audiences, and spirit beings.

But there are ambiguities, and the constant play during the ceremony emphasizes that human beings are active participants in the processes of power, that what actually happens is the result of the willful action of many powerful beings, and that some humans are more powerful. The de-emphasis on the personal is in tense dialogue with obvious and ritualized distinctness of the performer. When ordinary people go into the tent there are many jokes about the fact that they cannot make it shake, so here power differentiates people and highlights inequality.

In Cree discourses about the shaking tent ceremony, its benefits are in constant interaction with the recognition of its occasional and potential use to do harm to those who have in some way made a performer "angry." The view of power as respectful reciprocity with spirits is thus structured by its opposition to the view of power as potential personal control over others. There are in the Cree discourses on power two implicit alternative poles, one in which power is collaborative in the widest sense, and another in which power equals personal control used to dominate others. In these conceptions of power, control over others is an active possibility, a partial reality, and a constant concern to be resisted.

Thus, even if the symbols of the shaking tent ceremony are directed not solely toward the power of the performers but to the complex social inter-dependencies on which the exercise of human knowledge and will depend, they also emphasize the dangers which inequalities of power create.

Cree daily life is extensively, although not solely, organized around principles of community, egalitarianism, and reciprocity which have been found to be central in most hunting and gathering societies. It is also organized around a constant awareness of inequalities that exist and that are claimed, but which may, or may not, be accepted.

These discourses are present within the structure of specific performances of the shaking tent ceremony, either explicitly or in more implicit forms, as I will indicate below. In the following sections of this paper I examine two shaking tent performances, first summarizing the transcript and commentary published by a colleague, and then examining the full

transcript of a performance in which I participated as audience member.

### *Structure of a Community-wide Shaking Tent Performance*

Richard J. Preston has published the transcripts of a shaking tent performance held in the Cree community of Waskaganish (then Rupert's House) on James Bay, on July 26-27, 1965 (Preston 1975). It was the first performance in that community in about fifteen years, and was performed by a man who had recently arrived from another community (Preston 1975: 47).<sup>5</sup>

After Preston and I exchanged copies of the tapes and compared the transcripts of the performances he and I saw, he noted how many features were similar, and indeed how similar the tapes sounded. I too have found it useful to examine the two performances, both for the similarities that tend to strengthen the generality of interpretations, and for the differences that pose issues for analysis.

The text of the Waskaganish performance is rich in its exploration of the need for the audience not to fear the performance, and for the performer not to be angry, and in the mix of meanings it conveys to that audience about how the performer is on one hand powerful and therefore different, yet on the other just a member of the community.

The performance was held at night, and lasted about two hours. After the performer entered the tent, there was a period of silence, and then the tent started to move and sway before anything was said. Preston's published text begins with the arrival of *mistapeo*. There is an immediate friendly greeting from the performer's *mistapeo*, "Shake hands," and an almost slang joking reply from the performer, "'Get out, dammit!'" (Preston 1975:37). The performer calls for *mistapeo* to "'Be clear, dammit!,'" a teasing and intimate reply which is made repeatedly (Preston 1975:38ff.).

Preston notes that this "conveys to the audience a mood of congeniality, and that this communication with a powerful other-than-human person is done 'just for fun,' with no harm for anyone" (Preston 1975:39). I would add that the call for clarity of speech serves a similar purpose: it asserts that there is no hidden or ill-meaning activity going on. After the 1969 performance at Waswanipi discussed below, it was reported that one person who was not present "asked if they [those who were present] could understand everything [the performer] said, and [one of those present] said yes, almost all. [The questioner] said it must have been very good" (Fieldnotes, Eva Ottereyes 1982/8/30); here "good" includes a moral as well as performative commentary.

There follows some discussion of the poles which make up the tent, but the details are not all presented at once, and the subject is returned to repeatedly. It transpires that the poles were not all young enough for the taste of the *mistapeos*, and this they say explains why their numbers and

visiting time would not be greater. Later on the performer is advised by his *mistapeo* to "[b]e satisfied with the tent they made for you" and not to be upset or angry at those who built it for him (Preston 1975:48).

From the beginning *mistapeo* refers to the performer as "the-one-who's-kneeling-there," thus highlighting who is responsible for the shaking. This is later used as a term of self-reference. *Mistapeo* says he is there for a visit, for the performer's sake, and that other spirits will visit; he expresses his pleasure that the tent is still being built for him, and he predicts a long life for the performer. A second *mistapeo*, who is not further identified, arrives to similar greetings, and notes that the whiteman has brought a tape recorder.

The second *mistapeo* says, to the performer, the audience, or both, "Try to be just like these good people"—that is, as Preston notes, "be a member of the community and [do] not do anything to offend or threaten" (Preston 1975:41). The performer's *mistapeo* takes a smoke given by someone in the audience, and says he is "very pleased to see so many people here" (Preston 1975:42). And he goes on immediately to instruct that the "one-who's-kneeling there (JC) should look at it this way too. Because you don't know when it's your last day, you should like all the people who are visiting you" (Preston 1975:42). These passages acknowledge the audience, extend the friendly relations between the performer and spirits to the relations between the performer and audience, and link their good relations to their ultimate equality before death.

*Mistapeo* goes on to comment that the performer "really didn't want to make the tent yet, it's not the right time; too soon yet" (Preston 1975:43), and comments later that the performer wanted to do it "when all the leaves fall. He wanted to do it on his birthday" (Preston 1975:50). This emphasizes that performance is not the performer's self-interest but a result of his sense of obligation to serve the requests from among the community. Various repetitions follow. The second *mistapeo* says:

This is theirs. They wanted to see what it's doing. This tent is for the people here at Rupert's House. Go ahead and do what you like with it.

This is the tent for the people here, and not for the Nemiska people. This is not yours, its for the people here (Preston 1975:44-5).

John Blackned, who transcribed and translated the tapes for Preston, commented that it was not for the performer "or the other spirits in the tent" but for the people outside (Preston 1975:44-5).<sup>6</sup>

A third *mistapeo* enters and is greeted, and the performer's *mistapeo* notes that they all won't be in the tent too long, maybe the performer is tired (Preston 1975:46). But he also reminds the performer that "[i]t's you that said yes when they asked you to go in this tent. Don't be shy to do what you are supposed to do" (Preston 1975:47). Preston comments that the latter part responds to the possibility of unfavorable reactions to

the performance, and that "the *Mistabeo* is not going to be worried about that, especially because [the performer] was asked to do it. He did not do it on his own initiative, and so is not singly responsible for it" (Preston 1975:49).

Various joking comments are exchanged throughout succeeding dialogues. Five more *mistapeos* enter over the next period, and the *mistapeos* comment, "This is just like a radio" (Preston 1975:50-51); it is communication at a distance. They also approve where the tent was put, in apparent response to the Anglican minister who had complained it should not be so close to the cemetery (Preston 1975:53).

The performer's *mistapeo* says to him, "Don't care about the other man—what he is doing—against you—because it's not hurting you at all. That is the way the people are." Preston later asks the translator if this referred to someone working sorcery against the performer, but the answer he got was "not a full reply to my question" (Preston 1975:52-3).

A seventh *mistapeo* arrives and says, almost as if in response to Preston's as yet unasked question, "I'm just like anybody else, and I'm thinking the same to everybody, not one different" (Preston 1975:54). The performer's *mistapeo* follows this with a song he says he will sing for the performer about, "This is the way our tent is made, and everybody is coming all around it, and in it" (Preston 1975:55). John Blackned comments, "This is the way we are both coming, both the people outside and the ones that are entering there" (Preston 1975:54-55), i.e., together.

After various songs are sung by *mistapeo* someone in the audience asks about some moose that were seen up the river, and the performer's *mistapeo* says, "When I think of them, it's just like they are flying. It seems to me we're not going to eat them when they're gone." John Blackned comments, "Because they can't get them" (Preston 1975:57).

The *Mistapeo* changes the topic and comments:

Everybody think this way, when you see the-one-kneeling-in-here going in his canoe, that he'll come back safely for sure. This is the place where he [the performer] wanted his body to be covered when his last day comes (Preston 1975:58).

Here the audience is called on to wish the performer well in his travels, suggesting the goodwill they should have towards him.<sup>7</sup> The reference to death seems to lead *Mistapeo* to go on to link the performer with his audience:

Nobody will be able to do anything when his last day comes. He can't give himself more days. I guess when our time comes short, we'll all think back where we've been. Nobody can have his days longer than what they are set. He can't give himself more days. This means everybody, all around here (Preston 1975:58).



This statement, which seems to say, on one hand, that all are equal because life cannot be extended, still conveys on the other hand, in its context, an allusion to the potential abuse of power. The latter passages seem to deny any intent to use that power in harmful ways, and to refer to the responsibilities we will bear when we all will have to “think back” to what we have done. The performer’s *mistapeo* goes on:

You didn’t tease anybody since you were here, and nobody has done anything to you. Just keep it like that.

Do what I told you to do, and I guess you can’t work, the way others work. I guess you’ll just think back on what work you did. That’s all I guess you’ll be able to do now. If anybody tells you in the morning, that it’s you who went in the conjuring house, just don’t say anything, even if the boss [the Hudson’s Bay Company store manager] asks you what you have done last night—just don’t say anything. This doesn’t mean anything. It’s just like our own radio. That’s what it means to us.

Let’s call this good enough for now. I want to go out now. Good-bye to all my partners.

Everybody should be satisfied for what he did so far...

I guess we’re going to wake the minister for the noise we’re making now, and tell him we didn’t bring anything bad in here, to talk about anybody (Preston 1975:58-60).

John Blackned comments that “[h]e is afraid that somebody might ask him all kinds of questions in the morning” (Preston 1975:59), again anticipating criticism and conflict.<sup>8</sup> Another *mistapeo* echoes: “I’m sure that we didn’t bring anything bad when we came in,” and “[t]his is what this tent means, just to have fun with each other, that’s all” (Preston 1975:60).

The performer’s *mistapeo* then, somewhat enigmatically, says, “When the [performer] dies, the conjuring tent won’t sound as clear as this one. Maybe we can’t understand it” (Preston 1975:60). This might be interpreted as asserting (or, since it is *mistapeo* speaking, affirming) a claim about the performer’s power, for he was at that time one of the few active practitioners.<sup>9</sup>

This is followed by various teases, repetitions, and songs, which go on for a considerable time. A *Mistapeo* says they would have preferred to have a little drink, but Preston notes that this was unfavorably regarded by Cree community members later, who indicated that they never heard of drinking alcohol in a conjuring tent (Preston 1975:66-67). Preston notes here and elsewhere that this performance was not generally regarded as very remarkable (Preston 1975:74, fn. 4).

The performer’s *mistapeo* refers to Preston and says, “I know the brown-headed people don’t understand anything about this. Well, please don’t mind when you don’t understand what all this is about. This is all that it means. It doesn’t mean anything at all. This is the Mistabeo’s own radio.” He then goes on to indicate that having the tape recorder there

was not a bother: “I wonder why he didn’t put it right inside” (Preston 1975:69). The *mistapeo* reaffirms that the poles will be put away after the performance, and that all expect another performance soon (Preston 1975:67), although Preston indicates that this did not happen. And almost the last thing said by the *mistapeo* again anticipates potential dissatisfaction among the audience:

When I used to do it at Nemiska [the performer’s home community], nobody used to be satisfied. There’s a lot of people here. I guess there’s somebody here who’s going to make a complaint about it in the morning. Just stick your ears out in the morning. Just listen to the complaints (Preston 1975:70).

The last statement made is by the performer’s *mistapeo*: “I’m sorry for not doing what I was asked to do and I said I would do it” (Preston 1975:71). John Blackned notes that the performance was not made where the performer said he would do it, and where an old woman asked him to do it (Preston 1975:71). Preston adds that for “this performance, he [the performer] was asked by John, perhaps partly for my benefit, and he did it” (Preston 1975:71).

The overwhelming theme of this performance was the performer’s and the *mistapeos*’ concerns about audience responses. This may have a lot to do with the special circumstances of the performance: it was done in a village before an exceptionally large and diverse group; the performer was from another village; there were rumors that some had opposed the performance, or the location and conditions of the performance. All these circumstances could help to explain why the possible audience reactions to the performance overshadowed all other topics of discussion. But it is unlikely the topic would not be a common one in other performances.

The extensive discussions of potential audience reactions highlighted the constant interplay between the ambiguities in references to the commonalities that link and make all humans equal. Many of these references contained allusions to the power of the performer that differentiates him, and makes him a potentially dangerous source of bad luck, or death. For example, each reference to death as a common equalizer was associated with careful assertions that no intention of ill will or death was being alluded to. But, periodically the performer, or the performer’s *mistapeo*, could be read as asserting claims to power. Thus, despite the repetitiveness of the performance, the dialogue remained engaging and open-ended.

### *A Shaking Tent in a Fall-Winter Setting*

In comparison to the performance at Waskaganish, the performance which I witnessed in the adjacent Waswanipi region was done for a small group of kin in their fall-winter hunting camp. If the performance recorded by Preston at Waskaganish was done before a relatively large and

diverse group, that at Waswanipi was performed in a particularly small and intimate group. This may partly explain that the Waskaganish performance focused somewhat more on generalized audience reactions, whereas that at Waswanipi focused more on the specific personal relations between performer and audience. Nevertheless, similarities abound, and performer-audience relations are important in both. Given the differences, it is possible that other performances, done at more typical locations than either of these—such as at a large fall or spring temporary camp, away from the settlements, would actually combine some of the elements emphasized in each of these performances.

In October 1969, I was invited by Mr. Andrew Ottereyes, Mr. Joseph Ottereyes (Andrew's son), and Mrs. Eva Ottereyes (Joseph's wife), to go with them to their bush camp in northern Quebec to observe and to make a film record of a shaking tent ceremony that was to be performed as a part of the establishment of their fall/winter hunting camp. The ceremony was performed by Mr. Andrew Ottereyes, who was over 70 years of age at the time. He had not performed a shaking tent for about 20 years prior to this occasion.

The camp was approximately twenty miles from Matagami, in the Waswanipi and James Bay regions of northern Quebec. Travel to the bush camp involved the use of three canoes and extended over two days. On the first day we transported and portaged goods around a dangerous rapid in the Bell River, and returned to the summer camp outside Matagami. On the second day the lightly loaded canoes were run through the rapids, and the goods portaged the previous day were loaded into them below the rock outcrops. We then traversed the length of Lake Matagami with two outboard motors, while hauling the third canoe. (One of the men whose canoe helped with the move died in the turbulent waters of the rapids the following spring, when making the same journey).

Three days were spent at the camp. These involved preparing the camp for use and preparing a wood supply, setting and checking fish nets, water-fowl hunting, and checking for nearby beaver lodges. In addition, time was spent preparing for the ceremony itself, gathering the necessary variety of sapling trees, and re-laying the spruce bough floor. The ceremony was delayed one day because of the heavy workloads around the camp. The camp consisted of seven people: Andrew, Joseph and Eva, two of their sons, Johnny and Charlie, their grandson Tommy, and myself.

The ceremony took place on the evening of October 25, 1969. The shaking tent was built by Joseph, who used the occasion to teach his stepson how to do it. Joseph, 48 years old at the time, had traditionally built the tents for his father, although he himself chose not perform the shaking tent ceremony.

On this occasion he built a canvas covered, six-pole, two-hoop, barrel-shaped tent. It was built inside the main tent, because it was said that the

weather was too cold for Andrew. It had a covered top, which I think was done in part to reduce the impact of the film lights, as the top is often, but not necessarily, open.

The ceremony lasted a little longer than an hour and a half, from 8:00 to approximately 9:30 p.m., and involved communications with three visitors, including the performer's *mistapeo*, a second unidentified *mistapeo*, and the *mistapeo* of a deceased friend and relative. During the ceremony, singing and verbal exchanges were heard from the tent in Cree, some of which could not be understood by those present.

Among the topics and information disclosed during the ceremony were: the performer's anticipation that death was near, and his instructions on how and where he wished to be buried; his hope and instruction that Indian and White people be friends and live in harmony; his hope that his grandchildren would continue their way of life and traditions; his desire and plans to turn his spiritual powers over to his grandsons; his desire for young people to see a shaking tent ceremony; the reasons for joining his son in the bush that winter; and the reasons for holding the shaking tent ceremony.

The performance also contained a number of predictions about future visitors to the camp, and about the course of the weather over the next month. Most important, *chuetenshu*, the personage of the "north wind", informed him that although the lakes would freeze over, they would then thaw, before freezing solid for the winter. Also people were warned of the great dangers this uncommon weather pattern would cause, especially for traveling.

*Translated Transcript of a Shaking Tent Ceremony. Performed by Mr. Andrew Ottereyes, in the Waswanipi Cree region of Quebec, October 25, 1969*

In the following translation of the tape recording of the ceremony, prepared by Eva and Joseph Ottereyes in 1982 and 1984, the spoken sounds from inside the tent appear in a regular typeface. The name of the speaker appears in boldface. Comments made by Joseph and Eva Ottereyes during the translation appear in an italicized typeface. The author has added notes on the sounds made by the shaking of the tent which are clearly audible on the tape, in boldface. And the footage on the tape where various passages begin is noted in boldface as well, to give an indication of the relative temporal duration of different passages.<sup>10</sup>

69 Tent starts moving occasionally and rubbing canvas is heard

118 First strong shake

123 Strong shake

125 Andrew: This is what I've been doing during my younger days. And now that I'm growing old I cannot do it much longer as it is leaving me gradually. I'm going to try to play with my toy here. I think the



- same about these little poles as I did when I first started going in that shaking tent. I won't be able to stay in here very long. But I'm doing my best again, just to show this whiteman what some Indians do and know, and what he wanted to see. You must all try your best to be good friends with this whiteman, think of him as you think of your own people, that he may do the same to you. (repeat)  
*Starting off the shaking tent, starting with a song.*  
*Sings about poles like they were people.*
- 196 **Strong shake**
- 197 **Strong shaking**  
*Mistapeo sings a song—first part not understood, up to footage 253.*
- 253 **Mistapeo:** Someone is coming in the shaking tent to visit the one that's crouching. Now he'll sing about the dawn, how many sunrises he's seen. He hopes for his grandchildren and his children to see as many as he has seen since he was living on this earth.  
*Hopes his children will see many days and live long lives.*
- 301 **Mistapeo:** Even though you see the way the weather is, it is not really going to be winter yet. It is just a sign, the North Wind is showing his grandchildren, all the people, to be prepared for the coming cold weather.  
*Now he is talking about how it is cold already and freezing along the shore. But it's not really winter yet, it's going to freeze and then thaw. He is telling his grandchildren to be ready, not to put their canoes or paddles away, to be careful on the ice, until winter comes for real.*
- 317 *Singing—can't understand, no words.*
- 342 **Andrew:** Another thing I want to say is that I just thought I would look around again, just to see where I used to hunt and trap. You won't be seeing me around very long standing on this earth. So be sure to do what I asked you all, to bury me where my hunting ground is, on this end of the lake, where we are now.  
*Talking.*
- 364 *Singing—can't understand, no words.*
- 390 **Andrew:** It's no problem when I see the light [from the camera]. I don't mind. There is nothing to it.  
*Talking.*
- 400 *Singing—no words, can't understand.*
- 425 **Mistapeo:** Greetings to all of you, who are sitting around the shaking tent. Greetings, that you may all have luck in the future.  
*Talking.*
- 462 **Strong shake**  
*Singing—no words, can't understand.*
- 3 **Andrew:** I just thought I'd sit here for a while, and sing about some other things. I've been alone for quite a while now.
- Singing.*
- 29 **Strong shake**  
*Singing.*
- 102 **Strong shake. Another Mistapeo**  
*Another Mistapeo. Singing—no words, can't understand.*  
*Talking.*
- 141 **Andrew:** The only thing I can do now is sing little songs.  
*Talking.*
- 150 **Andrew:** I'll sing about something else, something that takes you on a journey by water. I always hope and pray that you will have a safe journey wherever you all want to go, without any harm coming to you, that you safely reach wherever you intend to go. As long as I can remember, no one in our family has had an accident by drowning. No one knew what I used to think when I saw them getting ready to travel by canoe. I thank our Creator, that he gave me what I asked him, the One who watches us each day and night.  
*Singing—[run-down battery distorts sound].*
- 160 **Andrew**  
*Singing—continued—Repeats song. There is an old saying that the canoe is very important to them. Maybe it is because in the old days canoes were small and they had no motors. He had to be very careful on a big lake.*
- 180 **Andrew**  
*Talking—repeats the song in ordinary speech in case we did not understand him.*
- 197 **Strong shake**  
**Mistapeo of old friend:** I've never let go of my friend yet. How we used to go around together while we were still both young, and I hope and pray that our friendship will last as long as we both live. My friend here will not be able to sit too long. I know how it is to get along with everybody, even a whiteman too, even though I cannot speak to him, I'm good friends with him just the same. That's all I want to say, the reason I came to visit my old friend.  
*Someone comes into the shaking tent, Mistapeo of an old friend who sings a visiting song. We think it was Wally Ottereyes, the old man. Their fathers were brothers. Sounds like that old man Wally. There were three of them that did the shaking tent, Wally, Joe (Andrew's brother) and Andrew. Andrew said the same about whitemen earlier and his friend says it now.*
- 223 **Mistapeo:** Maybe you think my friend is not still around, but he is still around and he is singing. Maybe you thought he wasn't around any more.  
*Talking [Battery change]*
- 226 **Mistapeo**

*Singing—Repeats song of friend. Someone that's in the shaking tent, it's his Mistapeo, the one that knows everything, that's who is singing for that guy that's dead now. That's the one that knows everything, what is going to happen, tells the stories, that's his Mistapeo, big man. Some are bad, they conjure somebody. The shaking tent goes any way when they want to do something to somebody. But Andrew's just went the same way. You can see it.*

## 304 Strong shake

Andrew: That's me singing, it's my own song. (repeats)

That is me sitting here inside with you. I just wanted to go in there and play. So I just came inside here to go where you made a toy for me. Although it is almost leaving me, I almost stopped doing the shaking tent. I'm doing my best again to show this whiteman what he wanted to see. I think of a whiteman as I think of my own people. You should be good friends with him, never say anything mean against him. I don't want to tease or say bad things to whitemen, I think of them like I think of my own people. I knew what we were told, how to live on this earth, to be good friends with everybody. Our Keeper in heaven, that's our Friend, that's the whiteman's Friend, because are all the same to Him, he doesn't think any different about another people. At times I get unhappy because I cannot talk to my friends the whitemen (repeat).

*Singing—think he repeats song of friend, words not all clear. Shaking tent is just like his toy. He knew he would retire pretty soon. Saying the same again as he said at the beginning.*

## 1 Andrew: I am glad to be here around my grandchildren where I used to hunt. I am glad to see Johnny grown up. I just thought I'd have time on this side of the lake for the shaking tent. I just wanted Johnny to stay with us for a while. I am glad to see Johnny, how he treated us, and how he helped us. I brought him up. When I come out of the shaking tent that's when I'll have a talk with you again and tell you what I wanted to say.

*Singing—about Johnny.*

*He was talking to Johnny because when Johnny was one year old they took Johnny and brought him up. And he may be like his grandfather. And because he was hoping that he would leave some of his days, how long he lived, to him. Not to mind everybody that was trying to abuse him. And he was hoping that Johnny would have many days more to live on this earth... And if Johnny had stayed in the bush he'd be able to do what his grandfather used to do in hunting. But Johnny can't stay in the bush.*

46 *Singing—short—no words, can't understand.*

## 51 Andrew: That's all this crouching person can sit here for. Now I'm gonna come out very soon. I don't know when I'm gonna see these

poles around me again.

*Talking.*

## 77 Strong shake

## 100 Andrew: I, the crouching person, am all ready to come out now. First of all I'll sing about the animals I knew, for the last time. First of all I'll sing about my easiest prey, the long legged moose.

*Talking.*

## 104 Andrew: This is what I thought about the moose in following him (or her). I knew which way to go. It seemed like I was taking off his snow shoe straps and putting them on, then he'd slow down a little. Many times I killed a moose even if the snow wasn't very deep or if there was no wind. I knew which was the easiest way he'd choose, which trees he'd pass. That's when I'd see it very soon and shoot it. I can also sing about the moose for you, so you can have an easy time to catch it. I cannot do what I used to do, any longer, so I'll pass it along to you. How happy I used to be to see the tracks of the moose and I used to be happier when I killed it, so my children would have to eat. That's all the song I'll sing about the moose.

*Singing.*

*He was an expert at running after the moose. That's what he used to do when he went after a moose. He'd know where the moose would run, he didn't have to follow the tracks everywhere. Moose goes kind of fast, and he tries to catch him. He doesn't want moose to get away, he was thinking this. He was good at chasing moose. No wonder he was singing about the moose, he was so good at singing about it.*

245 *Singing. No words, can't understand.*

## 279 Andrew: And now I'll sing about the black animal, the bear. This is what I thought about the bear when looking for him under the snow, it seems like I was holding onto a string tied to him, and I used to go straight to his den. Then I went straight there.

*Talking.*

*So bear knew somebody was going to come and get him. He didn't know how many bear he killed since he was alive. He used to call the bear his dog.*

## 288 Andrew

*Singing. Repeats what he said about bear.*

## 332 Shaking change

Andrew: I'm gonna come out now. Mistapeo's gonna come out too. *Talking. Then singing, repeats bear song.*

## 372 Andrew

*Singing. Repeats bear song.*

## 376 Shaking stops

## 380 Shaking begins

Andrew: I'm gonna go out. The Mistapeo already went out. That's enough for me sitting here so long. I'm gonna let you know when I want to play again, to go in the shaking tent. The ones who came to see me in here, they are going to come again. (Repeats).

*Singing(?)*

*He did it one more time, I think in the spring of 1972, south of Matagami. They put the poles away in a shady place, where there is little sun or rain, a little ways out from the camp, where nobody will touch them or play with them. Where Joe put them, maybe they are still there, but he doesn't remember where he put them.*

458 Shaking, then quiet

*Quiet.*

487 Shaking begins

505 Song. No words, can't understand.

**End**

*Andrew Ottereyes died January 26, 1977. He was in the bush the fall before he died, at the camp near the one used in 1969. He was buried in the spring on the trapline where he wanted his body to rest. At the grave, we put up a fence and a pole with an embroidered cross on a cloth.<sup>11</sup>*

### *Similarities and Contrasts—Ambiguities of Everyday and Special Powers*

There are a number of striking similarities in the texts of the two shaking tent performances. The familiar and joking relationships expressed between performers and their personal spirits and other spirit beings that attend the ceremony are richly encountered throughout both performances. And this comfortable familiarity permeates the relationships with the immediate audience in the Waswanipi performance.

The opening references to the poles of the shaking tent, one or more of which in each instance had some green twigs and needles left on the upper tip, were important opening and closing discourses in both performances.<sup>12</sup> The poles, cut from young trees, are symbolic intermediaries with the spirits and thus of concern to the visiting spirits. Trees, and poles, are partly of the world "down here" where humans live and partly of the world "up there" where spirit beings reside. They thus link humans to spirit beings both in the shaking tent and in the daily experiences of hunting and living. For example, the bones and especially the skulls of many animals are disposed of by hanging them on trees, to show respect, and so that they can be seen by the spirits of the deceased animals to have been properly treated. And the bones and remains of a bear are typically placed on a platform built on four poles in the bush, where they are open to be seen by those "up there," but protected from disturbance by other animals or inadvertent disruptions by humans and other animals "down

here."

Poles were discussed at the end of each of the performances, referring either to future ceremonies or to their treatment after the event. The poles which were used in the shaking tent are to be carefully stored after the ceremony, where they "will not be disturbed." This replicates the treatment of animal bones, and their respectful treatment is a precursor to future performances, just as placing animal bones in the trees is done to both thank the spirit of the animal and call on it for continuing help and generosity. The poles however are put away in dense bush, where strong direct sunlight cannot reach them.

The performances thus play on the relationships between the world of humans and animals and that of celestial personages and spirits and their connections, and what is omitted from explicit reference in the structure is the "underworld" of animals and malevolent spirits that live beneath the earth. Indeed I am tempted to speculate that the freshly cut evergreen boughs on which the performer sits, and which provide the odoriferous flooring in those Cree camps which have no wood floors, are symbolically means to separate the human and spiritual space from the world below. Yet, the placement of the poles used in the ceremony in dense dark bush may not only suggest that they are objects of the night, but also that the regeneration of trees takes place underground in the earth "down below." In this sense trees may not only explicitly link the world here with the world above, they may imply or allude to the connection of all three worlds, thereby suggesting both the good and the bad connections which are potentials of the ceremony, and which can be expressed in audience reactions and performer disclaimers.

The Waskaganish performance was replete with extensive foreboding of negative reactions. Similar concerns are more subtly articulated in the Waswanipi text, but they are nevertheless present, as in the calls for everyone to get along. Joseph and Eva Ottereyes' comments note that when a shaking tent is done to conjure someone the tent shakes erratically, whereas here it swayed and bent in the same direction for long periods. Their comments both anticipate and respond to community queries of concern about whether there were any bad intentions expressed by holding the ceremony, and whether it was solely a good thing.

The ceremony carries an ambiguity with respect to how much it is part of everyday life, and how much it is an assertion of exceptional power. Both performances contain elements that are clearly distinctive and set apart from everyday life, as well as elements which are drawn from the daily spiritual lives of hunters. *Mistapeo* remains an essential spiritual guide for shaking tent performers, and the visit from the *mistapeo* of a particular relative (who was a performer when he was alive) suggests a certain relationship among performers, as opposed to others. Yet both performances drew heavily on the hunting songs of the performer, songs

which are not different in kind from those which many, indeed probably most, hunters had at that period. Songs could be given to any respectful and attentive hunter by animal spirits, in dreams or by other means, and the songs articulate the close relationships which developed for hunters with particular kinds of animals and animal spirits. Here the performer sang his songs in a context of explaining how successful a hunter he was, and what a specially close spiritual tie he had to the game animal spirits. The use of songs in the shaking tent is not unlike the use of spiritual songs outside this context, but the ceremony simultaneously differentiates as it links with everyday practice.

It is improper for hunters to brag or self-aggrandize, and thus stories and songs recounting the "luck" that hunters have had acknowledge that their success depends on the game animals themselves and on the spirits. Nevertheless they assert the worthiness and good fortune of the hunter. Performers' songs thus celebrate and thank the spirits while celebrating the hunter. Andrew sings about the moose to celebrate his skill and success. And he sings "for you [his grandson] so you can have an easy time to catch it," but it is he and his *mistapeo* which can pass this luck on to others. As the commentators indicate, "He used to call the bear his dog." These appreciations and assertions are all potentially within the repertoire of all hunters who attend to the spiritual dimensions in Cree hunting, but the context makes them important claims, and potentially public claims. Here the ordinary and the "extraordinary" are in a rich but ambiguous relationship.

Andrew Ottereyes' performance was also rich in personal meanings and concerns. Performed in the setting of his family, the ceremony addressed intimate personal concerns touching on each person, and creating a moving and deeply felt experience. Anticipating his own death, Andrew prepared for the time to come, and affirmed to his son and daughter-in-law where he wanted to be buried. This echoed aspects of the Waskaganish event.

Addressing the anthropologist, he offered the ceremony itself as a response to a wish I had never explicitly announced, but which was evident to all. He also affirmed that the very bright lights needed to secure motion picture images were no bother to him, they were "nothing."

He called on all present to be friends with this and other whitemen, and to treat them "as you think of your own people, that he may do the same to you." This call was repeated by the *mistapeo* of an old friend and relative, and thereby echoed for and by other participants. And Andrew then generalized to relationships with all whitemen, for God, the Christian God for Andrew, "doesn't think any different about another people."

Here the basic call for mutual respect and acknowledgement, because of our ultimately common being before God, is held out as a goal for what was to be hoped for and sought out with whitemen, and demonstrated in

Cree relationships to whitemen. The difficulties are alluded to as the *mistapeo* of Andrew's old friend takes some of the blame but says: "I know how it is to get along with everybody, even a whiteman too, even though I cannot speak to him, I'm good friends with him just the same." And Andrew responds shortly after, alluding to the difficulties with good grace, "I don't want to tease or say bad things to whitemen, I think of them as my own people." These are widely shared visions among Cree elders, and ones which implicitly operate in a world where the hope implied in such visions has yet to be broadly fulfilled (cf. Scott 1989a).

He also invites those present—given the context, mainly the whiteman present, although possibly his grandchildren and great-grandchild as well—to believe in the spirits and the performance. He notes specifically that while his friend is dead, "he is still around and he is singing. Maybe you thought he wasn't around any more."

Addressing his grandchildren, Andrew wishes them a long life; he says he wanted them to spend time with him in the bush camp, and offers them continuing help, including his hunting powers if they live by hunting. Joseph and Eva note that this wish was not entirely fulfilled.

But beyond these intimacies, the performance also had a wider purpose of broad community concern and interest. In the week before undertaking to do the shaking tent for the first time in about two decades, Andrew had a dream in which he learned that the big lakes would freeze up, but then thaw again, and that they would therefore not freeze solid until weeks later. This was an unusual, and potentially dangerous situation, for many families were still traveling out to their fall-winter camp sites in the bush from the summer settlements. The fall is a period of extensive travel from newly re-occupied camps as families identify the active beaver lodges and animal signs in order to plan their fall and winter hunting strategies. Such travel was largely by canoe and by snowshoe, as snowmobiles were not in common use at that time, and the waterways were the routes, alternately, for both canoe and snowshoe travel.

Andrew's dream message was quickly known throughout the village, and a lively topic of conversation. This was an important message, and I think the shaking tent ceremony was a way to both confirm this information and memorialize the occasion. The weather pattern was the first theme dealt with fully in the performance.

In the ceremony Andrew's *mistapeo* said that it is "not really going to be winter yet," and that *chuetenshu*, the North Wind personage and the most powerful of the hunting spirits, said to be prepared. At the time ice had formed along the shores of the big lakes and rivers, and the smaller bays were already frozen. As Joseph and Eva commented: "He is telling his grandchildren—all the people are *chuetenshu*'s grandchildren—not to put their canoes or paddles away, to be very careful on the ice, until winter comes for real."

Andrew then went on to sing about the canoes and safe journeys, wishing everyone well, and saying that this is what he always thought and prayed whenever he saw people getting ready to travel by canoe. This was probably both a prayer for future safety and an explanation that the ceremony was being held to help people.

I left the bush camp the day after the ceremony was performed, in order to beat the freeze-up, and return to my campus-based research for a period. When I returned at Christmas I was told by several people that the weather and ice pattern had been just as Andrew had said, and that the full freeze-up of the big lakes did not occur until late November, a full month after his announcement. The weather records and the water flow measurements made by the Government of Quebec in the region were consistent with this unusual pattern.<sup>13,14</sup>

While Andrew's dream vision was no different from that available to many other hunters and elders, his shaking tent confirmation of the knowledge was a very distinctive marking of the events in a community where such performances had become relatively rare. Publicly the ceremony was both a source of knowledge of community-wide importance and an indicator of social and spiritual difference.

It was for some a demonstration of the capacity of elders to convey knowledge which only they are likely to be able to share with the community at large with confidence. Knowledge of the future is highly respected, practically valuable, potentially awe-filled, and capable of leaving a deep sense of wonder. Elders who convey such knowledge are respected and treated with a respect that implies caution as well as admiration.

### *Conclusions—The Limits of "Seeing Through" the Everyday World*

We have moved from the structural analysis of the ritual, and the schematic analysis of performance, to a much more situationally located processual analysis based in the events and discourses of ceremonial life and everyday contexts. And in this process we have seen how the multi-voicedness of ceremonial structures, the uncertainties of performances, and the ambiguities of discourses inform complex claims to both being connected to everyday spiritual power and being set off as different and having access to unique means of spiritual knowing and power.

I would argue that these continual ambiguities, communicated and richly elaborated by performers, encourage a self-conscious understanding of social life among both practitioners and audiences which serves as a critical counter-force to the taken-for-granted everyday social world. The contrary and open-ended messages invite reconsideration of interpretations which simply take for granted the development of inequalities, of the uses, and potential abuses, of power.

The multiplicity of messages, mixed with a sense of awe, which Cree elders construct in the shaking tent performances, as in hunting, emphasize the inherent uncertainty of all human knowing. I would argue that this use of multiple ambiguities and unexpected connections makes it easier for Cree individuals to develop self-critical understandings of all claims to social power, even those of the Cree elders.

The actualization of this possibility by Cree of many ages is confirmed in the occasionally meditative discussions generated by initially simple-minded anthropological questioning, and by the facility of various Cree to explore questions about processes of symbolization and meaning. Each of the shaking tent ceremonies reported here reflected on the meanings of death, the unexpected events in human lives, the nature of social relations, and the risks of power. There is thus a widespread awareness that there are different ways to see reality.

This facilitates for many Cree a "seeing through" the social construction of reality, which is a counter-weight to the power of the elders within Cree society who play dominant roles in reality construction through their authoritative statements and influential decisions as spiritual and hunting leaders.

On the one hand, it is clear to many that the elders teach and legitimate social metaphors that value equality; but on the other hand, in that very process they also reconstruct the social order and the social hierarchy, because even when they point to the ambiguity of experience and structure, they reaffirm their privileged position as bearers and teachers of this knowledge, and as the most accomplished "sources" or providers of knowledge about the surrounding world. Inequality thus becomes discussable without being reduced to a structure without substance. What seems to be said is that inequality must continually be viewed as a process, and judged by whether it remains socially appropriate.

Thus many Cree struggle, as do social science analysts, with the awareness that it is never possible to stand outside a socially constructed reality. Neither the Cree performers, nor the audiences, nor the observer/analyst can ever point to inequality or authority in a final sense that dissolves it. Nor may that be desirable as a goal. In analyzing and discussing it we re-create our own authority, difference, and inequality. We can, however, enrich the process, and acknowledge doubts and reversals. Nevertheless, the ongoing everyday Cree practices remind us that while complete analytical solutions are elusive, practical compromises are made or resisted every day, in ceremonial performance and discourse, and in daily life, as in scholarship.

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### Notes

1. Readers familiar with my 1994 paper will find these first sections of the present paper to be substantially similar. I have included them both as essential background to later portions of this paper and because I have taken this opportunity to add or emphasize some elements which were not included or not clear in the earlier accounts.
2. Performances by women take place, but they appear to be infrequent. I have little data on the subject, but Hallowell (1942) indicated that performances by women were treated more skeptically than those by men. In the text of the paper I use the male pronoun not to indicate exclusivity, but because I expect the features which I am discussing might occur differently had the performances been by women.
3. Indeed, it is said the spirits would depart, and the performance would stop immediately, if a member of the audience were to try to lift the canvas and see inside the shaking tent without an invitation to do so.
4. Other more public forms of knowing the future, such as scapulamancy or other divinatory practices, also exist, although as has been noted they are often playful in the sense that the knowledge remains highly contingent until confirmed by events (Tanner 1979). Nevertheless, all knowledge of the future, whatever its source, can be publicly announced.
5. Regina Flannery has also published a description of a ceremony she saw at Waskaganish in 1938 (Flannery 1939, 1995).
6. It also makes clear that the performance is a response to the local community and not for people of the performer's home community of Nemiska.
7. The reference to safety in a canoe is discussed below. Preston notes that the reference to where the performer wants to be buried may be connected to the fact that his wife is buried in Waskaganish (Preston 1975:58).
8. Another *mistapeo* comments that the performer "can read the Bible, too," in Cree syllabics (Preston 1975:60).
9. Preston asked John Blackned if the *mistapeo* would be dead too, and the interpreter suggests that *mistapeo* grows weaker when a performer dies.
10. Tape footage returns to 1 with each new track recorded. When tapes were changed or batteries replaced, brief passages of the performance were not recorded. Several photographs of this shaking tent ceremony were published in Time-Life Books, eds., 1995:49-51.
11. Joseph Ottereyes passed away in 1985.
12. Flannery (1939) notes a mention of the poles at the ceremony she described

as well.

13. Records were not of sufficient historical depth to estimate the frequency with which a pattern of freezing-thawing-refreezing occurs on the large lakes. Some people suggested it happens every ten years; others, once or twice in a lifetime.

14. In addition to the weather forecast, I was told after the performance that Andrew also said that one of his other grandsons would (although it had not been planned) accompany the canoe scheduled to come to the camp to pick me up the next day. This anticipation does not appear in the transcript of the ceremony, possibly because it occurred during a tape or battery change, or possibly because Andrew said it at another time. The visitors arrived as he said they would.

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# Circumpolar Animism and Shamanism

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Takako Yamada and Takashi Irimoto

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