

Shamanic imaginaries and gestures on the contemporary scene

In the anthropological approach, shamanism is consensually defined as an immanent form of mediation between humans and spirits, provided by the shaman in the service of his community. It can be studied « as a technique of imagination, that is, as a technique of investigation and cognition of the invisible »¹. In the shamanic ritual, these invisible and imaginary beings become present².

Starting from the hypothesis of a correlation between ritual and theatrical performances³, this research questions the existence of shamanic approaches on the contemporary scene.

Since the end of the sixties, a growing interest in shamanic practices has been developing in some parts of the Western counterculture, with a tendency to idealize an art of « the origins » and to condemn the loss of the sacred in the Western world. I believe these postures forget to assess the renewal of the creative gesture and the mutation of the scenic practices which started in the second half of the 20th century.

In his paper *Children of Artaud and Nijinski*, Gérard Toffin writes : « Possession, in particular, supposes an efficiency, at least presumed, whereas in the performing arts the works are separated from their function and the aesthetic prevails over the ritual. The gods, present in the first case, disappear from the modern scene »⁴. I hope to nuance this observation by discovering contemporary artists who work towards the effectiveness of performance.

My research will be based upon theatrical works from the last thirty years demonstrating an immanent relationship to the sacred, as well as on performance art pieces who question Western theatrical conventions.

I will also draw from other performing arts such as puppetry, dance and circus since these practices are all emphasizing corporeality. Approaching shamanism through the prism of the imagination also allows for a rhizomic approach, where sub-cultures such as Jungian psychoanalysis, psychedelism, techno-shamanism, science-fiction and fantasy can also foster the research, following the path of the Cultural Studies pioneers.

1 CAVALLIN JEAN-CHRISTOPHE, *Walk on the Wild Side/Voyager dans l'invisible avec Charles Stépanoff*, [<https://epokhe.hypotheses.org/charles-stepanoff>], 2019

2 HAMAYON ROBERTE, « Esprit, es-tu encore là ? », *L'Homme*, n° 143, Paris, EHESS, 1997, p. 117 — 122.

3 HOUSEMAN MICHAEL, *Rituel, spectacle, spectacle rituel*, [<https://www.unicaen.fr/recherche/mrsh/forge/7000>], 2021

4 TOFFIN GÉRARD, *Les Enfants d'Artaud et de Nijinski Métamorphoses du sacré dans le théâtre et la danse d'aujourd'hui*, [<https://revues.mshparisnord.fr/ethnographie/index.php?id=976#bodyftn16>], 2021.