

‘Those who go bump in the night’:

Shamans, Initiation and Masks

A panel proposal by Giovanni Kezich (Museo degli Usi e Costumi della Gente Trentina, San Michele all’Adige, Italy) and Cesare Poppi (SUPSI, Lugano, Switzerland) for the International Society for the Academic Study of Shamanism, Delphi, Greece, October 2015

A much debated issue in the study of shamanism is the relationship between shamanism, masking and other forms of ritualized behavior conducive to a variety of states of altered consciousness. In particular, the collective initiation in what are known as ‘secret societies’ of masks, by and large, appears to be somewhat in contrast to the individual experience of shamans in their initiatory training. The panel aims at exploring this and related issues with regard to:

1 – **Space**: if shamans journey out of the spaces of the living to interact with the spirits and the dead while masks are the dead/spirits/initiates who travel from the Otherworld into the spaces of sociality, what does this imply for the cognitive and epistemological foundations of either practice?

2 – **Place**: what are the respective places of initiation for shamans and the neophytes of secret societies of masks? How does the general notion of the aspiring shaman spending time ‘with the spirits’ compare (and contrast) with the seclusion of initiates in the bush or other similar ‘otherplaces’? How do differences in training relate to wider differences in the prerogatives of masked societies and shamans?

3 – **Power**: both shamans and masked societies patrol the outer boundaries of sociality, often with policing powers, to counter evil in all its forms. How does the collective dimension of the shaman’s engagement with crime and other forms of social distress compare to the masks’ prerogatives in the same field? Do the two functions somewhat overlap and complement one another?

4 – **History**: Do shamanism and secret societies of masks constitute steps in the developmental process of the means to interact with the ‘otherworld’ and, if so, what are their interfaces? Can they ultimately be understood as subsequent – if occasionally cumulative – steps in the passage from hunting and gathering social formations in the Paleolithic to the agrarian civilizations of the Neolithic?

The Panel welcomes both spoken/written and audio-visual contributions. Please send you paper title and abstract (max. 250 words) in a WORD document mentioning this panel theme by October 31st 2014 to:

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