



ALAIN DANIELÉLOU FOUNDATION
CENTER FOR TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES

FORUM *TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS* 2022

“IMAGINATION AND RELATION”

Venue: Labyrinth, Zagarolo

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CONCEPTION

In modern Western culture, imagination has been mostly conceived within the framework of a representational theory of mind. Its relationship with perception and cognition is not only one of mediation, but also of tension. If imagination has been understood as a kind of synthetic bridge between sensory data and rational judgements, its spontaneous and creative aspect shows nonetheless a form of de-realization which is at the same time connected with beliefs, desires and fantasies – as ways of stepping out of the ‘hard-core reality’. Where imagination is enacted, new possibilities are envisaged, alternative states and attitudes emerge and articulate themselves, but the passage from the imagining attitude to concrete action – which implies the creation of a new situation – stumbles upon the ontological limitations imposed by the so-called ‘external world’ upon the re-presentational impulse.

Since Western culture is the only civilization project to think itself universally valid, centuries have elapsed without significant attempts to question ontological certainties of the type that was ascribed to concepts like ‘nature’, ‘objectivity’ or ‘knowledge’ – three key-concepts in delineating the solidity of the ‘external (or factual) world’. The only radical exception was the arts (especially poetry), in which another kind of world-relation was propounded, based on totally different parameters of sensitivity, reflection and action. These parameters found no resonance whatsoever in the sphere of socially codified behavior; for this reason, the activities emerging from them were condemned to marginality – usually of a pathological nature. If the approach to reality was not

Residence – Rome:
Colle Labirinto, 24
00039 Zagarolo (RM) - Italy
Tel: +39 (06) 952 4101
Fax: +39 (06) 952 4310

Representative Bureau - Paris:
3, rue de Venise
75004 Paris
France

Head Office - Lausanne:
Place du Tunnel, 18
CH1005 Lausanne
Switzerland





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scientific, but mythic and ritualistic, or if the relational field of the subject was extended between the limited human interactions approved by the social system from which science emerged, the condemnation (illusion, delusion) was inevitable, and attempts were made to reconstitute the set of relations back to so-called universal criteria of ‘normality’.

The situation has changed with the development of an anthropology moving away from evolutionist and ethnocentric prejudices, a form of Depth Psychology bearing in mind certain ‘regression mechanisms’ through an amplification method considering integration attempts stemming from other cultures, a philosophy more focused on phenomenological descriptions than on metaphysical postulates, and cross-cultural artistic impulses which force to rethink Manichean oppositions like ‘reality/fiction’, ‘belief/knowledge’, ‘subject/object’ and even ‘nature/culture’. Gradually, the modern world-configuration – which dominated the West and was colonially expanded in the whole world – began to lose its taken-for-granted universality and started being deconstructed through an increasing exercise in perspectivism. It was not any longer self-evident to say that Siberian or Amerindian Shamans are mentally deranged, that Hindu mystics are hysterical or psychotic, or that traditional religious practitioners in West-Africa are primitive or superstitious. The way of posing questions regarding such collective exercises of assimilation related to what the West would call ‘excessive imagination’ transformed itself considerably. The starting point was not any longer an individual (human) subject with a clearly delimited mental sphere in the face of an external world, and the setting was not any longer an objective (non-human) nature to be described by means of scientific (or ‘neutral’) procedures. It was rather a space where different (human and non-human) agents come together and interact in a way that, for the parameters of modernity, would be regarded – to a great extent – as imaginary cultural patterns.

This Forum is inspired by the founder of our Center for Transcultural Encounters, Alain Daniélou. His book *La fantaisie des dieux et l’aventure humaine* (1985) is a clear example of an alternative treatment of imaginary cultural patterns – in his case related to Indian traditions. Daniélou attempts to re-think notions like perception and intelligence on the basis of energetic relations and their rhythmic patterns, the source of which is non-human but affects and engages human thought

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and action in a specific way. In the context of Daniélou's book, imagination does not appear as an exclusively human faculty caught between sensory perception and intellectual elaboration, but as a bridge between human and non-human agency, a connecting principle scanning rhythmic patterns and leading to the articulation of what is called (a) 'world'. This intuition was further developed in Daniélou's fictional writings, especially in *Les contes du labyrinthe* (1990). The Forum Transcultural Encounters 2022 intends to explore the transformation of imagination from a (reproductive) mental faculty related to an individual human subject to a specific dynamics of (human and non-human) form-giving behavior demanding a reconsideration of the certainties that populated the modern Western mind

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