



## **FIND FORUM 2021 - *TRANSCULTURAL ENCOUNTERS***

### **ALAIN DANIELLOU: LABYRINTH TRACES**

24 to 26 September 2021

Labyrinth, Zagarolo (Italy)

The seventh issue of FIND's Forum "Transcultural Encounters" focuses on Alain Daniélou's work in its manifold dimensions, with special emphasis on its singular dynamics of experience and thought and its significance for our present context.

Alain Daniélou's movement of life and thought is characterized by a double tension: the challenge of difference and the search for identity, the retrieval of tradition and the creation of new values. This is clearly visible in his Indian period: Daniélou was reeducated in traditional Brahmanism and at the same time studied the diversity of non-Brahmanical trends related to Dravidian and Munda peoples. He took the social structure of the second urbanization process in India as an exemplary social model to be opposed to the pitfalls of modernity (both Western and Indian), but he criticized the price of that process on the basis of earlier or parallel societies bearing witness to another kind of relationship between humans and non-humans (from plants and animals to intermediate beings and deities). He strongly criticized the modern drive to individual freedom as a project devoid of roots, but many aspects of his life were not alien to that dimension (as the reader of his Gangetic and Labyrinth Tales may note). He was initiated into Shaivism within a restricted community, but he amplified the Shaivite scope both by taking his individual experience of the past (even before his first stay in India) and by further developing its contents in another (nonIndian) context during his later years.

In fact, the most complex and controversial dimension of Daniélou's life and work is his own (re-)construction of Shaivism. It begins with a very concrete event in a local context: his initiation in Benares, out of which he incessantly worked on the retrieval of a world-configuration consisting of many elements and different religious aspects and traditions going not only beyond the Brahmanical setting of his own initiation, but also the Indian Subcontinent itself.

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In his later years, Daniélou created a conceptual dispositive out of which he developed an alternative model to that of Western modernity: the Shaivite-Dionysian philosophy of life. At this point, what he called ‘Shaivism’ became a spectrum of different cross-cultural components belonging to what may be termed ‘animistic world-configurations’ and also present in some classical systems of thought – though in a codified way. During the last part of his life, what was earlier specifically ‘Hindu’ gave place to a trans-cultural scaffolding he sought to retrieve, a religious substratum of experience capable of transforming the alienated human mind and preventing our species from falling over the edge of self-destruction.

FIND’s Forum 2021 intends to cover some of these aspects of Daniélou’s work and thought as if they were labyrinth traces to shed light on different paths approaching a center, from his Brahmanical and Tantric elements to the animistic turn and the re-appropriation of Shiva, from his voyage literature in search for otherness to the opening of a transcultural horizon including African and Amerindian cultures, without forgetting his special relationship to music and dance.

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