

**Conference: Trance Mediums and New Media
Cologne, June 10-12, 2009**

Two thresholds of globalization have been shaped by the appearance of new media – by analogue media around 1900 and by digital media in the present. In July 2008 the conference “Trance Media and New Media around 1900” tackled the ways in which globalized and sometimes “glocalized” debates on “modernity” and “modernization” of trance-practices took place. Recently and internationally, work in the field of media anthropology has demonstrated that similar debates can be observed since digital media have been adopted around the world. Current discussions take up discourses of exorcism and invocation that were as well characteristic around 1900. Once the interference of Trance Media and New Media comes into focus, narratives of modernity are at stake. The somewhat explosive nature of the debates over the quality and substance of trance and its medialisation obviously stems from the central importance of ecstatic practices in the dynamics of modern cosmologies, rather than from the supposedly remote character of esoteric circles.

Despite the fact that they are often labeled “archaic”, trance rituals are proliferated, reproduced and diffused via “Newest Media”, although these new forms threaten the secrecy of some of these practices, and adepts seem to perceive the omnipresence of New Media as a menace to their experiences of alien powers. It is precisely this entangling of intimate (body-) practices, media technologies and public spheres that make trance cults into an important object of political power games, and have turned them to a major object of scientific analysis. The increased mobility of the people, organizations and media that take part in or re-interpret trance practices has significantly widened their scope and outreach of the cult groups. Their (body-) techniques, symbols and artifacts play a major role in the manifold emergence of transnational publics. Often they serve as a resource to cope with the challenge of migration and the obstacles of everyday life. The cults (both traditional and constantly re-invented) are used to deal with foreign forces and images that affect — and adapt to — local life-styles and consumption habits.

So tackling the interference of New Media and Trance Media sheds light on the interaction of global, local and translocal experiences and the ways in which religious and secular publics are shaped, and conceptions of the common good are molded and contradicted. Furthermore, current debates deal with appropriate re-localization, nationalization or regionalization of already globalized (religious or secular) trance practices, whether these practices are cultivated among diasporic communities or are already part of a transnational commercial domain of religious consumption.

The conference will discuss these diverse trajectories of “glocalization” and thereby hopes to contribute to a “contrapuntal” perspective on processes of cultural integration and disintegration. Besides research on how the practitioners and practices are migrating, and the respective discourses are globalized and localized, the organizers particularly welcome reflections on the ways in which Trance Media and New Media fuse and pervade each other, thereby reshaping religious experience.

Over two and a half days, the conference will focus on:

1. Trance Mediums and New Media
2. Global and Local Operation and Circulation of Trance Mediums/Media
3. Restricted and Expanded Publics
4. Ciné-trance: Spirits, Media/Mediums, and Their Ethnographers

1. Trance Mediums and New Media

During their initiation, and while enacting a psychosomatic dissociation, Trance Mediums use various artifacts, including the newest technical media. What kinds of interactions occur between medium and media during a ritual? How do ritual experts perceive their “technologization”, and what kinds of personal, somatic, social and technological barriers are dissolved and erected? What kinds of transformation do locally embedded trance-cults undergo in the course of transnationalization, reinterpretation and translation? How do Trance Mediums create and maintain their networks by using New Media, and how is the experience of trance articulated in trans-locally circulating media? How is the experience of trance, the “*mysterium tremendum*”, invoked or (dis-)enchanted? How are mediation and its potentialities perceived?

2) Global and Local Operation and Circulation of Trance Mediums/Media

Trance practices play a major role, both on a local and a transnational scale, in the integration and disintegration of social relations, and are therefore politically significant. How are transnational movements shaped, and ritual practices transformed, by mediatization? In what ways do ritual experts act as agents of geographically dispersed people? How are media and mediating practices generated and transformed in migrant communities? How are they used for strategies of individual and collective (identity) regeneration? In what ways do religious and economic networks interpenetrate? How do New Media and trance cults shape conceptions of “alternative” (Appadurai) or “parallel” (Larkin) modernities for their adherents and opponents? How do they reshape, structure and question public spheres and shared concepts of a common good or a common worldview?

3) Restricted and Expanded Publics

European and non-European, religious and secular, past and present trance practices can be separated into i) public practices (by mass media or in the streets) ii) intimate practices (for a restricted public) and iii) secret (and prohibited) practices. On a different scale, individually produced and circulated New Media create and shape the public sphere in the same way as state or commercial recordings of trance practices. Both can be disseminated via mass media and find a great number of recipients all over the world. These productions provide and organize an access, whether or not authorized, to the supernatural and to the cultural imagination, and are therefore of great political significance. Increasingly, their actors operate within a transnational “religious field” (Bourdieu). At the same time the transitions between bodily experiences, individual life-worlds, local communities and transnationally discussed conceptions of a “common good” and “legitimate religious praxis” are polyphonic, and characterized by ruptures. How can we describe the mutual translations between (i) public and (ii) intimate practices of

trance and their respective forms of mediation? How do (iii) secret trance practices and their adherents relate to public debates and contribute to or question common conceptions of a legitimate good? What kinds of claims are made in favor of or against Trance Mediums in transnational publics? What stake do New Media have in these processes?

4. Ciné-trance: Spirits, Media/Mediums, and their Ethnographers

Ciné-trance was already used as a methodological principle by Jean Rouch in order to restrict his submission to the otherness of trance while he filmed. But even Trance Mediums oscillate between the experience and the controlled utilization of a ritual "unio mystica". The documentation and visualization of trance experiences and occult powers, both by ethnographers and by the practitioners themselves, not only enables the reflection and control of these states, but at the same time produce New Media, mediums and actors of possession. This mutual pervasion raises methodological questions and calls for a closer look at these techniques and the ways they deal with the forces of a contradictory world. What impact does digital reproduction and dissemination have on ritual techniques of ecstasies? Which experiences can be translated onto local, national and global stages? Do these processes bring about standardization, or do they produce new and deviant forms of religious sensations? What new kinds of media-enhanced control and inducement of trance states can be observed in the age of digital TV, internet and countless video recordings by both practitioners and laymen?

The conference will take place in Cologne and start Wednesday afternoon. After a keynote lecture on Wednesday evening there will be a reception. Thursday and Friday will be used for discussions. A publication of the papers is envisaged.

Conference Organizing Committee: Heike Behrend, Anja Dreschke, Erhard Schüttpelz and Martin Zillinger