

Ehler Voss (2013)

Authentizität als Aktant. Schamanismus aus Sicht einer symmetrischen Anthropologie, in: *Paideuma* 59, pp. 103-126

[Authenticity as actant: shamanism from the perspective of a symmetrical anthropology]

Abstract

This paper explores shamanism as an object of dispute and identifies authenticity as the controversy's central category, which forces anyone who enters the field of shamanism to adopt a special stance concerning it. Furthermore this paper shows how detecting authenticity in shamanism generally means asymmetrically distinguishing real from sham shamanism (a matter of cultural purity as well as efficacy); the paper also shows how in this field, academic and shamanic practices are inseparably interwoven and how this results in different ways of understanding authenticity, both currently and historically. Commonly the history of shamanism appears as a history of Western imaginations, of a pure counterculture or of primitivism, as well as appearing as a history of symbolic struggles for different types of capital. In addition and indeed primarily, by applying a symmetrical perspective, the history of shamanism turns out to be a history of mutual mirroring and mimetic practices. Thus, the figure of the shaman, which is usually conceptualised as a medium of different spheres, allows one to understand the central role of authenticity as an inevitable, irritating and partly bodily tangible actant in the field of shamanism.