

NOMADS

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Keywords: art, anthropology, aboriginies, indigenous people, philosophical application, nomads as a metahporical concept of art, theatrical performance of nomadic and hybrid kinds, La machine de guerre, ritual landscapes and landmarks, inuits, rock paintings

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Summary

The notion of nomads can be used in different contexts, like anthropological and culturally in the meaning of aboriginal people living transhumant or under nomadic conditions. Their art from past and present is being focused on, as well as there is a certain focus on the Sami people who is serving as some sort of a model for the development of independent cultural activities. Nomads can also be used metaphorically to describe the notion of artistic activities offside main centres, connected to the artistic migration and travelling, as well as artist migration from or inside different regions. Then nomads or nomadic becomes a hybrid catchword for some of the new tendencies in todays art/performance and theatrical activities.

1. Introduction

Nomads can be understood in different contexts, as in an anthropological sense, nomads as a new concept in philosophy and nomads as a real and metaphorical concept for new artistic praxis both in real and metaphorical senses. The real sense is referring to art among nomadic people and metaphorical is referring to nomadism in new artistic and theatrical creation.

2. Anthropological definition

Nomads is derived from the Greek nemo (to pasture), and the term is referring to lifestyles of groups of people and social types charactrized by by the lack of permanent residence or settlement. Nomadic groups are hunters and gatherers, and there is also a

type of nomads referred to as pastoral, which means that they live from crops which is cultivated on different locations. They are found all over the world, but there is a certain concentration of them in East Africa and the Middle East.

The main notion of nomads as a life form is connected to hunters and gatherers, but also of those who live from tamed animals that are followed to the spots where food for the animal is to be found at different seasons. Examples of the hunting nomades is the Inuit people of the Arctic in Greenland, Canada and Siberia. Aboriginal people of Australia and other part of the world like the buskmen in South Africa are examples. The Sami people is known to have long culture during which a transition from hunters to become tenders of tamed reindeers.

In the northernmost county in Norway, Finnmark, they would follow them from the winter quarters in the interior part of the county in this vast Lapland Area, and go with them to island along the coast of the arctic sea, like the island of Magerøy where North Cape is situated. Their special language and culture has to some extension survived in its authentic form especially among the Sami population in northern Scandinavia and some parts of Russia. According to the Macmillian Dictionary of Anthropology they are said to be transhumant, which means those who move around seasonally according to the pasturing needs for their animals.

To day the Sami people to a large extent has become settled, which means that only some few thousand out of a population of approximately 70 000 Sami people are still living as transhumant nomads. The Sami people in Norway has its own parliament, and many of them are living with a lot of their traditional values intact. After many years of linguistic oppression, the Sami language has been accepted as an official language in Norway. They have their own broadcasting, academy and many of the young urbanized Sami people have become cultural workers. Some of them also have worked in the Norwegian State Television company to produce entertainment series, like the one about a Sami president travelling around the world on official state visits and speaking about the Sami people as if it was a major ruling people of the world. The cultural profile of the Sami people has become a model for similar initiatives among aboriginal people elsewhere in the world. (see *Memorists*)

3. Philosophical application

The philosophical application of nomads is connected to metaphorical ways of thinking, like is demonstrated in the "Traité de nomadologie: La machine de guerre", by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari. They apply the notion of mobility connected to nomads as a war metaphor. It is linked up to the fact that historical nomadic war people like the Mongolians could move fast on horses and strike by surprise. The state making as such is due to the fact that war machines can be kept on permanent mobility. Paradoxically enough, the nomad were used by state founders who had learned how to handle metallurgical techniques, and historians seem to think that nomads and their war machines became instruments for them, like the Mongolians for the Chinese and the Tartarians for the Russians (Nomadology: The War Machine, p. 73).

This philosophical explanation, then, can be applied to art theory. Artist can be looked upon as movers, mobile people moving through different geographical areas to learn and to produce. It is also connected to the notion of aboriginal art, like in the concept of

songlines or ritual landscapes. The English writer Bruce Chatwin is well known for his book "Songlines" describing this phenomenon of aboriginal people in Australia develop invisible traces in landscapes, only to be seen or understood by those who know the codes. This knowledge could save people from getting lost in the desert.

4. Nomadic Art in The Past

Ritual landscapes can also be described among arctic people, like in the area of the Sami in northern Scandinavia, where tundra landscapes are scattered with burial sites and other landmarks of stone heaps that can be used as point of orientation. When the archeologists of Tromsø Museum first took interest in these sites, they were not able to describe them decently because of problems in localizing them. They need support from people who would have specialized in Sami society and religion to find them.

Other aspects of nomadic art in the past is related to the stone paintings like they are found in South Africa, in Scandinavia and other parts of the world. In Johannesburg in the Africana Museum there is a stone painting collection which clearly documents the ritual function and the sites for the stone painting dating from stone age periods unto the discovery of Africa by the Europeans. This will come to expression by for instance ships of European origin being reproduced as stone paintings.

As a past and present activity one could mention the figures made as bone carvings, like in the Canadian Inuit societies. These are figures of a strikingly stylized and abstract character. The American Indians Totems made of wood are very much connected to American Indian historical settlements like in for instance British Columbia. Their almost monumental carving techniques and wooden constructions and architecture were well documented in the huge exhibition at the Museum of Man and Civilisation/Musé d'homme et de civilisation in the City of Hull in Québec, Canada, in 1995.

The powwow is a congregation of festive occasion that Indians of North America have been organising to celebrate friendship and social exchange, by dancing and drumming in given spaces. White authorities would worry about them, because expensive gifts were given on a large scale, and there was the fear that they would waste their fortunes this way. In our days powwow has more and become a tourist attraction.

Greenlandic mask dancing, like it is presented by the Greenlandic actress Makka Kleist, living in Tromsø, is an example of how ritualistic dance and performance expression would be an integrated part of the culture. They were masks that were used for shamanistic purpose, but also had the function to scare children.

Shamanistic activities is a topic on its own, but here it should be mentioned as widespread in the whole arctic region. The shaman in Sami language is noaide, and his way of getting in touch with the animal souls would be by drumming which created a trance. This trance would enable him to get in touch with especially the bear souls. It was necessary to stay in reasonable touch with the animals that were hunted, because they were basic for how to get food and other materials. Bear-rituals are especially known in and described from Siberia.

5. Nomadic Art in The Present

Nomadic art in the present is either the continuation of traditional techniques of handicraft as the above mentioned bone carving, which are made for sale. It also deals with the continuation of the traditional rituals as far they have not been taken away by the forthcoming of external religious practice. This has been the case with the Sami people and their shamanistic traditions, being prohibited by the Christian Lutheran church. Their drums were almost all of them destroyed by Christian missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries. But the rediscovery of this historical culture give new inspiration to present day artwork.

Nomads in literature is a wide area that has yet to be investigated, but in dramatic writing several Canadian/American-Indians and Canadians-Inuits have contributed, alongside with Norwegian and other Scandinavian Sami writers, both in past and present. In this context, however, I would especially mention the Canadian writer of drama Thomson Highway, whose plays have been performed at some of the cultural centres for indigenous art like in Toronto. The Sami musical form Joik is widely known and has some excellent exponents like the Finish-Norwegian Nils Aslak Valkeapää, who also is a poet. Marit Boine is a Norwegian music artist who has gained world fame, and her musical technique is building on the Joik tradition. It can be defined as a melodic singing of verses explaining moods and situations.

5.1 Art/performance and film

In a Sami context there are some visual artists of significance, like Iver Jåks who is a through nomad in the sense of working with stray wooden material found along the seashores. He has made sculptures from such materials in a combination of wood carvings and installation art. His exhibition in the Tromsø Art Society in 1999 did show the excellence of this kind of art work, mixed up with different identities of both a formal artistic background and the specific arctic context. Wooden materials left stray can float all the way from Siberia to the shores of Finmark.

Let us have a look at art/performance of a nomadic kind in the sense that they are produced by a historical seen predominantly, nomadic people as the Sami. The Sami theatre group Dalvadis Teater from Karesundö in Northern Sweden, was to me the first example of this kind, in the sense of mixing means of expression from ritual to performance, and with elements of nomadism. This was in 1987, and I saw them giving a guest performance in Stockholm. They were very clearly mixing performance art techniques with ritual approaches, in the intersection between different traditions.

The name of the production in Swedish was "8 minuter från solen" (8 Minutes before the sun), and there was a striking contrast between attachment to a theatre of bodily energies, reminding of the Greenlandic theatre group Tukak, and a play with non-acting and of performance art character. The ground structure of the action was dramatically seen fragmentary, dealing with the relationship with two Sami girls, *vigjheamit* in Sami language, and the shaman, *noaide*, who at the same time was acting as the wild animal, the coyote. On the other hand he represented the threatening urban, industrial culture of the majority, subverting the Sami, native culture. This production was directed by Ida-Lotta Backman, and with the American, Iroquois Indian, Norman

Charles in the part of the double shaman/coyote. Irokese Indian traditions of shamanism had been mixed up with Northern Scandinavian Sami shamanism, and thus making different, "migrating" traditions coming together, with some kind of a circuit effect of the Northern Hemisphere traditions. Dalvadis was probably the first Sami theatre group, but has been closed up some years ago because of lacking cultural support from the Swedish authorities.

In Norway an official strategy for Sami culture was more elaborately developed than in Sweden, enabling a Sami theatre group to exist, supported as a regional, professional company in the Sami village of Kautokeino in the County of Finnmark. This was started some years after the Norwegian professional company had been founded in the arctic region's capital Tromsø by the early seventies: The Hålogaland Theatre, named after the old historical name of the region.

This happened in connection with the discovery of a strong regional, cultural identity, something that also went on into the Sami population. But as far as the Norwegian language theatre of Norway could nourish itself from the fact that Norwegian professional theatre had already existed for more than 150 years in the south, the new Sami theatre had to draw from more or less different sources. One of the persons advising the new Sami theatre as a dramaturg, was the Danish playwright and philosopher Ulla Ryum. Per Brask from the Drama department at the City University of Winnipeg, Canada, has published an interview with her on aboriginal theatre.

Ulla Ryum is pointing out that aboriginal people, the so called fourth world people, has started to use theatre and urban media to express their selfrespect. Sometimes, like in the film by Nils Gaup, "The Pathfinder" from 1987, using a standardised dramaturgical scheme from the Aristotelian tradition. But in theatre other dramaturgical schemes would be preferred, due to more unconventional structures in both working processes and in the fact that their own myths often are of a non-realistic character. "Cultural archeology" is an expression that Ulla Ryum is using to understand the complexity of ethnic cultural traditions as it is pointed out in *Interculturalism and performance* in B. Marranca and G. Dasgupta (pp 160/161).

Beaivvás Sami Theater was established as a free group in 1981, and has from 1990 and onwards been running with a permanent state subvention. In the winter of 1991 they participated with other partner theatres, like the Hålogaland Teater, in making an arctic version of Bertolt Brecht's "The Good Woman of Sezuan", using ice sculptures as installations and acting outside in very cold winter temperature, and the actors moved around on snow scooters.

The director was Dutch Jos Gronier. Another Beaivvás production was "Narukami" based on a Japanese legend, already dramatised 600 years ago. They managed to perform it in a genuine Sami way, based upon Sami ritual traditions emphasising magic and poetry. Significant to their intercultural approach, is the fact that their director in chief during several years, the Haukur J. Gunnarsson is from Iceland. It seems clear that the turning points of this kind of arctic theatre, are of both regional, national and international or intercultural character. It is not isolated, and inspiration and materials is taken from different parts of the world.

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Biographical Sketch

Knut Ove Arntzen is since 1983 lecturer and associate professor of theatre research at the Department of Cultural Studies and Art History, Section for theatre research, former Department of Theatre Research, University of Bergen, Norway. He was a theatre critic in the Oslo-based paper "Arbeiderbladet", and since 1984 he is a consultant to the Bergen International Theatre. In 1994/95 he worked with *Les 20 jours du Théâtre à Risque*, Montréal, Canada. He has specialised in modern/post modern theatre, which he has been teaching on a permanent basis in Bergen, as well as in Antwerpen, Frankfurt am Main, Kaunas and Oslo. He also attended many international conferences like the International Federation for Theatre Research (I.F.T.R) world congresses for theatre research in Stockholm, 1989 and Moscow, 1994 as well as "The small is beautiful" Congress in Glasgow, 1990, and the "New concepts for theatre" in Amsterdam at the Felix Meritis Foundation, 1993, and the I.F.R.T. conference in Cholula-Puebla, Mexico, 1997 as well as the Canterbury World Congress, 1998, and the same year at the SAVAL conference in Johannesburg, "A Sense of Spaces". He participated in conferences organised by the INST, like in Riverside, 1995, and several times at the Burg-Schlaing and in Innsbruck, 1997, and with UNESCO in Paris, 1999. He has published a series of articles in periodicals and on internet dealing with

a visual kind of dramaturgy as well as post-mainstream directions and new contextuality in the arts. He is a co-editor of the book *Dramaturgische und politische Strategien im Drama und Theater des 20. Jahrhunderts*, St. Ingbert - 2000, based on the 1995 Bergen conference. He has written a book, *Theatre, art and context from euroesthetics to marginality in a northern hemisphere*, which first will be published in Norwegian, and containing some of the analytical positions that have been published in articles and on internet in English and German languages.

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