



Cosmic Dance

A Technoshamanic Journey through Consciousness

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ABSTRACT

From archaic contexts to current reconfigurations, the shaman, wrapped in magical-religious lineages, operates as a guiding element, inducer of ecstatic states, and mediator between worlds. Can technology allow these attributes when digital codes and organic webs spin together, fueling cosmological dances and transitions to altered states of consciousness? The project *Cosmic Dance, A Technoshamanic Journey through Consciousness*, explores the concept of technoshamanism, from which an allusion - possible or metaphorical - to the shamanic facet of technology is proposed.

CCS CONCEPTS

• **Applied computing** → Arts and humanities; Media arts.

KEYWORDS

Technoshamanism, Consciousness, Entheogenics, Trance, Generative Art

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1 CONCEPT

The basic idea of this piece is to establish a dialogue with the spectators through a visual and sound language, simultaneously manifest and subtle, challenging them to immerse themselves in a (techno)ritual and to be guided by an unknown (techno)shaman, between webs of codes that are both organic and numerical. The concept of this piece lies in the recreation of a ritual in the forest to provide a cosmic journey.

The rituals, from the ancestors to the contemporaries, mark celebrations of union with the cosmos, evoke the transition between worlds, and are motivated by the most varied intentions [1]. From the simplest and most private formats to collective and ceremonial ones, these events are usually conducted by the priest, healer, or shaman, the figure who guides the individual between the state

of *normal* consciousness and altered consciousness. In shamanic traditions, these altered states of consciousness, also called trance states, are often evoked [2]. On these journeys, the shaman and/or the participant-spectators embark on unknown journeys beyond the conscious boundaries of space and the sense of time.

From involuntary dreaming to trance induced by external agents, an altered state almost always presupposes a detachment, an alienation, or a dissolution of identity, which refers to ecstasy or other intermediate/transitional stages. However, the definition of an altered state of consciousness is not static and may vary depending on the context and how it manifests.

Shamans play a central role in these processes and master several facilitating techniques that can take different forms depending on the ritual's tradition, intention, or nature. Intense exposure to repetitive sounds and/or images associated with the consumption of entheogens - plants, fungi, or similar capable of altering consciousness and inducing trance states - are just some of the possible paths. In the Amazon and other places, mainly in South America, there are two plants - *Banisteriopsis caapi* and *Psychotria viridis* - that, combined, produce ayahuasca. Its ingestion facilitates trance states, understood by many as moments of divine intervention [3]. The research on these themes by the scientific community is not at all recent. There is evidence that entheogenics have been included in various cultures from the beginning as a form of ethno-social expression and associated with artistic expression. Gearing up in this artistic condition or expression based on pictorial representations, Lewis-Williams [4] states that in several Paleolithic cave paintings still visible in various parts of the world, there are geometric patterns that are pretty similar to each other, namely overlapping lines, circles, hexagons, and spirals. These patterns may be images generated in specific neuronal centers, most likely hyperactivated by entheogens. Despite the longevity of these practices, they have remained on the margins and have been ostracized and even criminalized by Western society over the centuries. However, at the end of the twentieth century, we began to witness these practices' revival and curious popularization. In 1963, in his book *The Doors of Perception*, Aldous Huxley argued that brains function as reducing valves of consciousness, limiting them to a so-called normal state and that consuming entheogens opens the human consciousness to new experiences of spiritual and intellectual elevation. In this logic, the (re)activation of tribal rituals in alternative communities, gatherings, and transformational festivals may be contributing to rescuing the missing link with nature *per se* as well with the complex nature of the human condition. In Morin's line of thought [5], in the complex view of the world and man, where permeability and

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change prevail, cells and machines seem to obey the same principles. If technology enables extended realities of human experience, altering the perception of space/time and being/being [6], what distinguishes it from other tools?

Today, we are witnessing a growing fluidity of concepts. Where does the body begin and end, when constantly questioned, dismembered, virtualized, and transposed? What about consciousness? Today's computers can already be defined as machines of rhetoric, grammar, logic, and dialectics rather than mere numerical machines [7], which leaves room for these questions. Will the natural world that we transpose through software and its languages remain the same after this transposition? Davis [8] designates the polarity between machine and man as an altered state, a technomysticism that refers to an increasingly hybrid existential condition with diluted boundaries. Can the induction of altered states of consciousness using digital equipment be defined as technoshamanism? Can we presume the shamanic facet of this piece in its attempt to absorb the participant/spectator into a cosmic dance mediated by a digital language?

2 THE CREATIVE PROCESS

The creative process of this piece was inspired by visionary art aesthetics, in the sense of transforming the idea into an artistic object that could take on the complexity of the narrative through *Processing*.

The sound component of the piece is fundamental since the dynamic articulation between image and sound guides the *Cosmic Dance* narrative. This original sound component was produced through sampling, collage, and editing sound fragments collected and generated in field recording, organic instruments, and synthesizer. The gradual evolution of the image represents the rhythm of the journey - the *trip* - and the complexity of the forms represents the intensity - the pinnacle - of the ayahuasca effect. The code was changed with different sizes, colors, and times until a visual and dynamic result met the piece's concept. At the base, a spiral is presented that is transformed through slow movements and unfolds into other geometric patterns, intending to provide a hypnotic visual experience. The creation process included several steps: declaration of the variables to be used: definition of colors in several different sets of possibilities; definition of the parameters of the environment; definition of iterative cycles; a counter in milliseconds, and audio file import.

The chosen shades are based on palettes of 5 colors (option 1 - shades of pink / option 2 - shades of green) with variations that follow the evolution of the shapes.

Following the sound component, the shapes gradually grow until the middle of the piece, regressing until the end. The evolution of forms has six more evident phases and others more subtle, some with smoother transitions and others more abrupt, depending on the cadence of the sound.

The piece is an audiovisual installation and has a duration of 4 minutes (Figure 1, Figure 2, Figure 3, Figure 4, Figure 5, Figure 6).

3 CONCLUSIONS

The piece *Cosmic Dance* aims to invite the audience to experience a cosmic journey or to alienate themselves from the surrounding

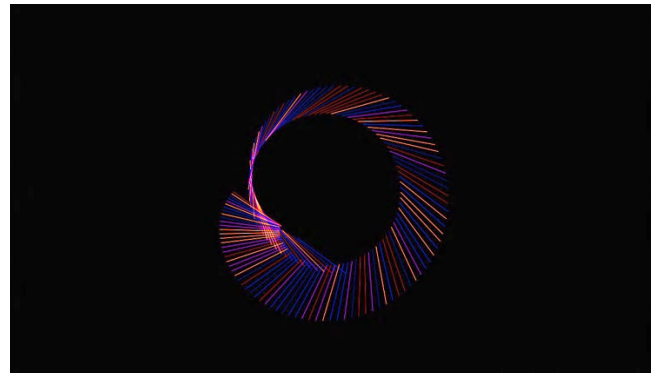


Figure 1: Cosmic Dance - stage 1

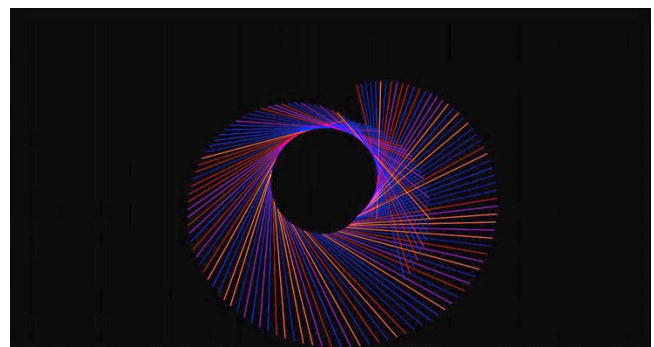


Figure 2: Cosmic Dance - stage 2

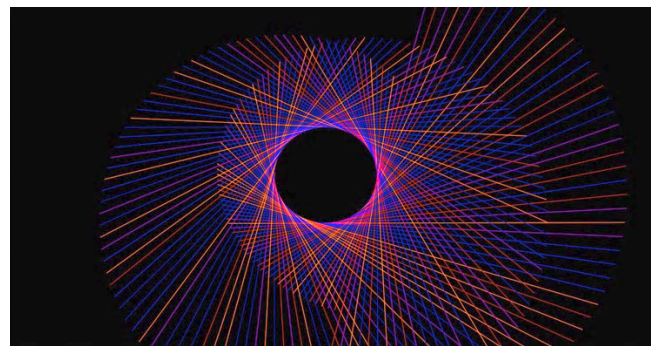


Figure 3: Cosmic Dance - stage 3

environment, surrendering to the ambulatory unpredictability of visual and sound effects.

The piece was presented at *Galeria do Paço*, in Braga, Portugal, in June 2023 for three weeks, in a considerable projection. Their observation and hearing caused an illusion in space as the generative graphics contracted or moved away. These contractions and distancing caused vertigo sensations in the spectator.

Returning to the initial question, which also fits into the concept of this work, can the induction of alternative states of consciousness mediated by a digital guiding element be assumed as a shamanic practice? Is it possible to frame this piece in the territories of

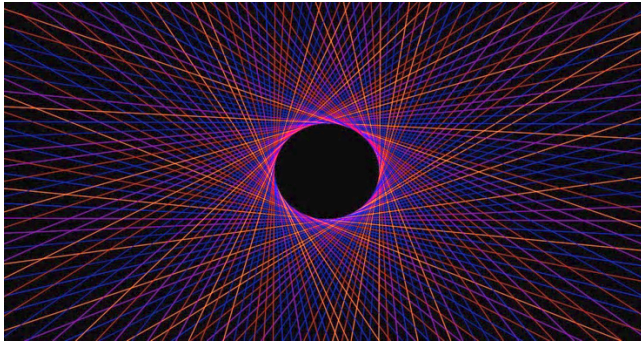


Figure 4: Cosmic Dance - stage 4

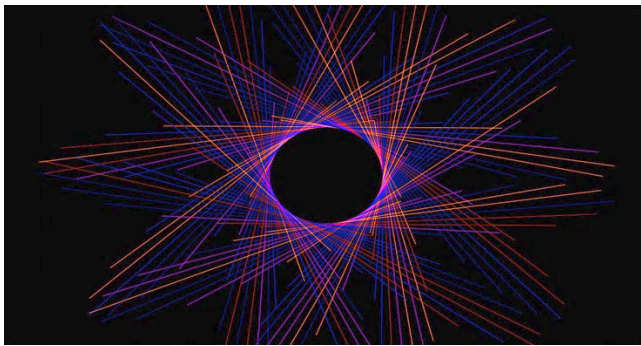


Figure 5: Cosmic Dance - stage 5

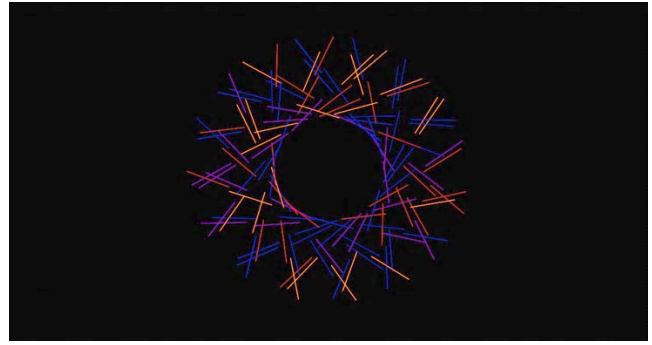


Figure 6: Cosmic Dance - stage 6

technoshamanism? If that is the author's intention and the viewer experiences it that way, we can assume it is. On the other hand, considering that the interaction between an artistic object and its audience is always different and subjective, it is likely that this experience will also be different.

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