On the Subject of Spirit Mediumship in the Age of New Media

Rosalind C. Morris
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In this chapter, Rosalind Morris makes comparative reference to African and Southeast Asian traditions of mediumship in order to ask how mediums and mediumship are responding to contemporary transformations in the communicational and cultural network underpinning globalization. In general, she focuses on three issues: 1) the (partial) displacement of a concept of power based in force by one centered on the pursuit of renown and recognition; 2) the valorization of technique which has come to dominate conceptions of the democratic as a non-generalizable good; 3) the fantasy of communication without mediation, internal to both mediumship and new economic discourses. In exploring these issues, she seeks to both specify the current tropes and metaphors with which mediumship must deal and to offer a theory of mediumship as a theater of alienation in which the otherwise often imperceptible metaphoricity of the new is recovered and disclosed in its materiality. This process, she argues, enables a recognition of what, in another moment, we might have termed the ideological nature of the metaphors (the market, transparency, the network, etc.) which otherwise dominate and constrain perception, far beyond the realm of those who seek the aid of mediums.

Keywords: Rosalind C. Morris, Thailand, Spirit possession, Mediumship, Media, Globalization, Modernity

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