

## **KENOSIS**

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*Kenosis* is a form of instruction/learning/wisdom associated with ascetic withdrawal.

Generalizing, it can define the aim and goal of personalization of the studio process as an open project, neither depending on external authority (although borrowing from it in eclectic and unpredictable ways) nor resulting in demonstrations of “content” obeying the rules of “form.”

The historical roots of kenosis go back to shamanistic practices, in particular the ritual relations with imagined spirits of the dead (“manes”) consulted at the hearth or grave — “sites of exception” — to foretell the future or secure help and good luck. Later domesticated as the Lares and Penates, the manes were the collective voice of the all those who had died, made authoritative through their “insider relationship” to Hades, which literally means “the invisible.” Every early culture developed its own procedures of spiritual consultation, and the “divine” of household and clan divination preceded the more “secularized” consolidations of gods with personalities. The manes remained at the level of the natural demonic — imminent but invisible components of visible nature that controlled each plant, animal, and inanimate object’s relation to each other and the cosmos in general. This element had to be “appeased” in order to incorporate the substance into human life without bad side effects.

In some cultures more than others, shamanism resisted domestication; just as some peoples resisted urbanization and settled agriculture. Their religions retained strong elements of nature worship and spiritualism, and the expert consultants on these matters combined magic with poetry, song, performance, and visual and costume art to create favorable conditions for medicine, romance, politics, and trade.

Where shamanism was consolidated into a form of occult knowledge, it retained its spiritualist topology while dropping its overt reference to ghosts. The topography was a “portable” internal frame, able to transcend divisions of scale. The cosmos could be found inside a grain of sand. All bodies contained minds (*dæmon*) but also were subject to collectivized dæmonic direction (*apophrades*). In the secularization of shamanism, popular culture picked up many elements of kenosis, but where these were consciously identified they were distorted, as in the case of New Age romanticized spiritualism. The practices of Voudoun and Hoodoo, derived from cultures of the West African diaspora, maintained a respectful distance from shamanism’s knowledge base and refined techniques that are still practiced today in some form.