

## WILD MAN AS AN ANDROGYNOUS AND PSYCHEDELIC IMAGE IN CONTEMPORARY PERFORMATIVE ART



### ÇAĞDAŞ PERFORMATİF SANATTA ANDROJEN VE PSİKEDELİK BİR İMGE OLARAK VAHŞİ İNSAN

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#### **ABSTRACT**

Wild Man is a kind of archetype and a wild symbolic figure arising from the unbreakable bond of art with society and belief systems, and continues to appear both in cultural festivals and in the field of art with changing images and costumes in various societies and different cultures from past to present. Assuming the role of shaman or pagan, Wild Man's costumes and symbolic language are shaped by the natural structure of organic materials, expressing the figure's transitive relationship with nature and the supernatural. This expression is reflected in Wild Man's image and performative identity, giving it a psychedelic, androgynous characteristic. The present research examines the costume and performance works of avant-garde and contemporary artists such as Joseph Beuys, Fern Shaffer, Ana Mendieta, Cassils, Asher Woodworth, Nick Cave, Saya Woolfalk, and various artist collectives, which take on the image of Wild Man or evoke it, within the scope of their psychedelic qualities that become ambiguous, androgynous and provide transitions between the senses. Revitalizing cultural and artistic ties, Wild Man with its contradictory and psychic aspect, continues to inspire contemporary artists.

**Keywords:** *Wild Man, costume, androgyne, shamanism-paganism, contemporary art*

#### **ÖZ**

Vahşi İnsan (Wild Man), sanatın toplum ve inanç sistemleriyle kopmaz bağından ileri gelen bir çeşit arketip ve vahşi sembolik bir figürdür. Geçmişten günümüze çeşitli toplum ve farklı kültürlerde değişen imge ve kostümlerle hem kültür festivallerinde hem de sanat alanında karşımıza çıkmaya devam etmektedir. Bulgaristan'daki Kukeri etkinliklerinde, İsviçre'de Lötschen Vadisi bölge karnavallarındaki "Tschäggettä" figürlerinde, Almanya ve Avusturya'da Alp Dağları'ndan gelen toplum geleneklerinde yer alan "Perchten", "Krampus" veya "Knecht Ruprecht" olarak bilinen antropomorfik figürlerinde, Türkiye'de

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Balıkesir bölgesinde gerçekleştirilen “Tülütapak” gösterilerinde Vahşi İnsan imgesinin izini sürmek mümkündür. Burada örnekleri verilen kültür festivallerinde izleyici üstünde bıraktığı korkutucu, yabancı izleniminin yanı sıra Vahşi İnsan şaman ya da pagan rolünü üstlenir ve sanat platformunda açığa çıkar. Vahşi İnsan’ın ritüelistik sanatsal eylemleri, toplumdaki bireylerin psişik dünyalarının derin yönlerini keşfetmesine yönelik gelişir ve doğa ile bağ kurmalarına yardımcı olur. Şamanizm, doğa ve doğaüstü, “parapsikoloji” alanları arasında köprü inanç sistemi olurken, Vahşi İnsan da şamanist ritüellere katılım gösteren topluluğun gerçekleştirdiği manevi uygulamalarda katılımcının egonun ve bilinç ötesine geçmesinde yardımcı olan bir tür guru veya “tamamlanma” yolunda yol gösterici bir kılavuz olmaktadır: Üst-transandantal aracılık ve katalizör işlevine sahiptir. Aynı zamanda sanatın bir çeşit büyü olarak kabul edildiği süreçlerde, Vahşi İnsan imgesine bürünen şamanik sanatçı da, büyücü ve kültürel temsiliyetlerinin, ritüelistik edimlerinin, kültürel belleklerin bir aktarıcısı olarak benimsenmektedir. Sanatın kutsallığını ve iyileştirici-şifacı özelliğini, kolektif bilincinin derinliklerinde ve kültürel bellek haznesinin zenginliği içinde muhafaza etmektedir.

Hayvan postları, kuş tüyleri, boynuzlar, çeşitli çiçek, dal, lifler ve yapraklar gibi organik malzemelerin doğal yapısıyla şekillenen Vahşi İnsan’ın kostümleri, bu mistik figürün doğa ve doğaüstü ile kurduğu geçişken ilişkiyi ifade etmektedir. Bu açıdan kostüm, kişinin giydiği bir kıyafet olmanın ötesine geçerek, etno-kültürel veya sosyo-kültürel kodları yansıtan bir gösterge haline gelmektedir. Yaşadığı toplum ve grup içinde Vahşi İnsan’a saygın toplumsal kimlik ve statü veren kostümler önemli bir role sahiptir. Hem renkleri hem sesleri hem dokusu ile kostümler, çok duyumlu, sinestezik elemanlar olarak psikedelik uyarılara dönüşme potansiyeline sahiptir. Vahşi İnsan’ın doğa ve doğaüstü ile geçişken ilişkisi, bu psikedelik özelliklere sahip kostümler aracılığıyla kurulur. Sanatsal imge ve psişik enerji bedene, beden kostüme, kostüm Vahşi İnsan’a dönüşür ve doğa-insan biçimi ile iç içe geçerek bir şaman sanatçı rolüne bürünür. Vahşi İnsan, ritüelistik performanslarında uhrevi alana, doğaya ve doğaüstüne yaklaştıkça, dünyevi alana o kadar uzaklaşır ve toplumsal cinsiyet kalıplarından, cinsiyet rollerinden bir o kadar da soyutlanır. Mitsel ve sanatsal bir sembolik anlatım diline sahip olduğundan Vahşi İnsan’ın kostümü, performatif ritüelleri ve koreografileri androjen bir kimliği yani cinsiyetsizliği veya esnek cinsiyetliliği işaret etmektedir. Sanat alanında uzun zamandır kullanılan androjenlik, ilgi çekici görsel imgelere uygun bir özellik olup belirsizleşen sınırları ve çoklu özelliği ile yaratıcı perspektifleri beslemektedir. Bu araştırmada, Vahşi İnsan’ın imgesine bürünen ya da onu çağrıştıran Joseph Beuys, Fern Shaffer, Ana Mendieta, Cassils, Asher Woodworth, Nick Cave, Saya Woolfalk gibi avangard ve çağdaş sanatçıların, Ceschi + Lane, Universal Everything gibi çeşitli sanatçı kolektiflerinin kostüm ve performans çalışmaları, psikedelik niteliği kapsamında muğlaklaşan, androjenleşen ve duyular arası geçişler sağlayan sinestetik özellikler kapsamında incelenmektedir. Kültürel ve sanatsal bağları yeniden canlandıran Vahşi İnsan, yıkıcı, şifacı, çelişkili, mistik ve psişik yönleriyle çağdaş sanatçılara ilham vermeye devam etmektedir.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** *Wild Man, kostüm, androjen, şamanizm-paganizm, çağdaş sanat*

## Introduction

*“Homo sum: humani nil a me alienum puto-I am a human being and nothing human is alien to me” Terentius<sup>1</sup>.*

Art has a social factor and forms dialogues. Michel Maffesoli has stated that works of art and the image have the potential to create bonds<sup>2</sup>. Art begins as a singular act and becomes a social phenomenon when society recognizes and assimilates it. No matter how communal the cultural pattern is in the context of the act of art, the connections that exist within the pattern represent the extraordinary action of a few individuals. Art is an instinctive force<sup>3</sup> and, as Marcel Duchamp noted, it is also seen as a game played between all people for all time. The forms, styles and functions of artistic activities can be thought of as a ritualistic game that constantly evolves, and can be said to have mystical and religious origins. In modern societies, the desire for the liberation of the individual has become evident in the political modernism that emerged with the philosophy of Enlightenment. With this motivation, the aim of artworks is no longer to shape imaginary or utopian realities, but to establish modes of existence or models of behavior within the existing reality by any scale or form chosen by the artist. In a world of constant motion, the aim of the artist is to transform the content of life into a permanent universe. As Michel de Certeau says, the artist, as the mediator of culture, is like a shamanic figure trying to capture this world in motion<sup>4</sup>. Art becomes a functional presence that reveals the appearance of the sacred and makes it a reality of everyday life. In this context, the [*shamanic*] artist casts spells and takes on the role of a sorcerer. This is not a deliberate choice but a role given to the artist by the community<sup>5</sup>. From primitive societies to the most complex, art had been seen as a means of magic, enabling humans to gain superiority over nature and develop social relations<sup>6</sup>.

Cultural representations, which are the identity markers of societies, are passed down from generation to generation through ritualistic acts and constitute the cultural memory of a society<sup>7</sup>. Victor Turner defines rituals as a series of activities carried out in a special place according to a specific set of rules to influence supernatural beings or forces through certain repeated patterns designed to coincide with the goals and interests of the actors [*the healer/shaman leading the ritual and the individual and community participating in the ritual*]<sup>8</sup>. The activities Turner observed in the rituals of the Ndembu people in Zambia reflected the complex structure of dominancy and the stratification

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1 Dutton, 2017, 40.

2 Bourriaud, 2005, 17.

3 Read, 2018, 21.

4 Bourriaud, 2005, 17-24.

5 Baynes, 2002, 25.

6 Fischer, 1995, 36.

7 Murtezaoğlu, 2012, 344.

8 Turner, 1972.

according to age and faith in a community. The Ndembu people had studied the colors of the “essence” of the human body, the trees and the earth as color symbols for their rituals. The essence in humans is black bile, red blood and white milk; in trees milky sap and red, charred resin; in the earth, black mineral, white and red clay. Drawing on these symbolic colors, Ndembu rituals are designed as complex representations of masculine and feminine spheres, and destructive and nurturing forces<sup>9</sup>. Rituals are seen to emerge from life in many ways, from seasonal and climatic cycles to individual or collective crises. Marking important life moments from birth to death, from adolescence to adulthood, from marriage to childbearing, individual rituals serve as the basic transitional forms of a person’s and society’s life cycle. However, ritualistic ceremonies are also used to heal suffering at the individual or community level. Other types of rituals include divination rituals, sacrifices to ancestor, god or goddess figures, and rituals for health, fertility, initiation, etc.<sup>10</sup>. Although Durkheim proposes talking only about social phenomena, his entire theory of the Sacred is based on two psychological factors. One is “*emotional euphoria*”, according to which rituals evoke violent and ecstatic emotions, such as mass hysteria, that convince the worshipper of the attraction of a power beyond and greater than himself/herself. The other is “*anger*”, caused by the violations of the sacred and its cherished norms. Anger and emotional ecstasy are psychological concepts, and Durkheim had brought them together to produce a theory of social solidarity: First, the loosely knit crowd realizes its unity through emotions aroused by rituals, and then it defines the whole universe through an intellectual impulse infused by the sacred, away from individual norms<sup>11</sup>. All human cultures, in their ritual-related forms, have a product of self-expression that the Western intellectual perspective would define as artistic. Of course, this does not mean that all societies have all forms of art. For example, the Japanese tea ceremony, considered by many to be a ritualistic art form, has no analogous form in the West. Although the Dinka people of East Africa have almost no visual art, their poetry is rich, depicting the natural patterns and colors on the cattle they need to live<sup>12</sup>.

Wild Man, also known as Wilderman, when viewed in terms of its social role and status as a form of representation, is a wild figure with a multicultural array of costumes and performances. From the past to the present, Wild Man has assumed different costumes and images in the social and artistic spheres, continuing its existence by transforming and preserving its wildness. Especially in primitive communities, where art has an unbreakable bond with the society and the belief system, this mystical religious figure - *shaman or pagan* - can be considered a guru. Since shamanism is a bridge between nature and supernatural, Wild Man becomes a guide that helps the community to go beyond the ego and consciousness in order to achieve success and completion. In his book “*Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*”, Carl G. Jung associates Wild Man archetype with the

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9 Douglas, 2018, 59.

10 King, 2014, 8.

11 Douglas, 2018, 17-18.

12 Dutton, 2017, 41.

concept of the shadow, which represents the repressed and unconscious aspects of the personality<sup>13</sup>. Jung saw the Wild Man archetype as a powerful and transformative symbol that could help people reach the deeper aspects of their spiritual world and connect with nature. However, anthropological studies on Wild Man have also shown that it has the role of a meta-transcendental mediator or a kind of catalyst in ritualistic performances. These rituals are aimed for people to understand the forces of nature and to live in harmony with them.

Costume is not only a garment, but also an indicator of ethno-cultural or socio-cultural codes. While defining Wild Man formally, it can be said that costumes have an important function in giving zir<sup>14</sup> a respectable social identity. Wild Man's close relationship with nature and the supernatural is achieved through the grotesque and natural structure of the materials used in the costumes. The preference for organic materials such as animal hides, bird feathers, horns, various flowers, branches, fibers and leaves determines its image and performative identity. By getting closer to nature and the supernatural, Wild Man reaches from the earthly realm to the otherworldly realm, and at the same time, moves further away from gender roles. In this way, its costumes, performative rituals and choreographies signify an androgynous identity.

The word *androgynous* is derived from the ancient Greek word roots “*andr*” meaning male and “*gynos*” meaning female. Androgyny essentially refers to the coexistence of both sexes. The concept goes back to antiquity when thinkers defined it as the ideal physical appearance. The idea of merging into a whole/unity/oneness is well suited to forming compelling visual imagery and has long been used in art<sup>15</sup>. In today's terminology, “*androgynous*” or “*androgyny*” refers to the ability of a person to be both feminine and masculine [*flexible gender*], or the presence of both female and male gender identity traits in the same person [*bi-genderism*], or little or no gender identity traits [*neutral gender*]<sup>16</sup>. Adopting this concept neutralized, blurred or flexible gender identities, this research uses androgyny to describe the transparency and versatility created between male-female, human-animal, human-nature dynamics as Wild Man gets closer to nature and becomes free of gender roles. The Gallus, priests of the Mother Earth Cybele Cult, offered their masculine selves to the goddess by castrating themselves<sup>17</sup>, Buddhist priests

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13 Jung, 1959.

14 Zir (zir/zirs/zirself); a person with a non-binary gender identity that does not conform to the binary gender descriptions-pronouns commonly used in languages coded as masculine and feminine (such as English), such as “*she*” for female gender identifiers and “*he*” for male gender identifiers; is an alternative pronoun used alongside pronouns such as they/them/their/their/tehirself or xe/xem/xir/xemslef, which are used in the linguistic system for both male and female (bigender) androgynous or neutral gender identities (agender) and transgender individuals (Miltersen, 2016).

15 Braff, 1982.

16 Resnick, 2022.

17 Çapar, 1979.

choose to live an ascetic life “*en masse*”<sup>18</sup> and Christian monks and priests dedicate themselves to God by choosing monastic life<sup>19</sup>. Wild Man, as a shamanic and spiritual character that is isolated from worldly desires and gender roles and withdrawn into seclusion, in a way, shows a similar attitude of asceticism.

### **Plant and Animal Symbols in Shaman Costumes**

The shaman’s special costume reveals the “*manifestation of the sacred*” (hiérophanie), as well as certain cosmic symbols and meta-psychic paths that must be followed. At the same time, the costume itself represents a special religious microcosm, qualitatively different from the surrounding space<sup>20</sup>. It thus serves as a sign of the special spiritual bond between the shaman and the environment, and expresses the sacredness and cosmic forces that shape the shamanic worldview. The materials, accessories and symbols used in shamanic costumes are drawn from the animal and plant species that are considered sacred in the corresponding geographical region. Animal symbols and materials are more common in shaman/healer costumes from the Far East, Central Asia and Siberia to the Americas and Africa. In some shaman costumes, plant symbols and materials, especially images of trees and flowers, are used because they represent the universal cosmic structure of nature and the source of life: trees, roots and leaves usually symbolize growth and renewal; birds and feathers symbolize freedom and the ability to communicate with the spirit world; and animals such as wolves, bears and deer symbolically represent power and wisdom<sup>21</sup>.

Clothes can protect vulnerabilities, but when people wear certain clothes, they may be more concerned with creating a new persona than hiding under a mask. In a way, clothes and costumes are the guarantees of our personality. In Barthes’ view, fashion or costumes are not regarded simply as clothing but as a criterion reflecting the social and cultural structure and corresponding to a symbolic mode of expression<sup>22</sup>. Umberto Eco uses the term “*subcode*” for the ways in which clothes indicate meaning. According to Eco, clothes gain expression through a whole of signs and clues<sup>23</sup>. Donatella Barbieri considers costume as a means of transformation from cave paintings to contemporary performance and argues that costumes are an integral part of the act of performance; masks and costumes contain within themselves not only the bodies of the actors but also the act of performance<sup>24</sup>.

Trimingham, who examines how performance costumes connect the body with the material world like no other stage “*object*” can and how the material wisdom

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18 Güzeldal, 2019.

19 Baş, 2013.

20 Eliade, 1999, 175-177.

21 Eliade, 1999; Atsushi, 2019.

22 Barthes, 1990.

23 Harvey, 2008, 79.

24 Gall, 2019; Holt, 2020,192.

of costume shapes spiritual-abstract dance<sup>25</sup>, says: “Costume rejects thought and always returns us to the body in motion, to its cognitive effect on us [...] it becomes a somatic and semiotic, richly empathic means of communication.”<sup>26</sup>

### **Shamanism-Paganism and Wild Man Relationship**

In societies that do not have a social class specialized in religion, individuals with the power and ability to communicate with and direct supernatural beings gain importance. In a state of ecstatic consciousness, these individuals receive visions that give them the power to heal the sick, change the weather, control animals and see the future. People who develop such skills over time take on the role of shaman. The word shaman was first given to healer- spiritual leaders in Tungus and other Siberian semi-nomadic societies following the pagan belief system of Animism. Anthropologist Michael Harner defines Shaman as: A man or woman who voluntarily enters an ecstatic state of consciousness, using and communicating with an otherwise hidden reality to gain knowledge and power and to help others. In order to become a shaman, a person has to go through stages of learning specific to the cultural forms and teachings of each community by living an ascetic life, experiencing hallucinations and psychological hardship. The hallucinations and psychedelic actions that occur when the shaman goes into a trance state can be spontaneous or can be induced by stimulants such as psychoactive plants or mushrooms. This ecstatic state indicates a sense of traveling to the other world and interacting with spirits. In this process, the shaman becomes a wild and strange being, as if engaged in a dangerous struggle with the spirits. The trance dances performed by the Ju/’hoansi Bushmen [*Bush Men/Wild Man*] in the Kalahari Desert of Africa are typical examples of this psychedelic state.

Shamanism creates a favorable environment for artistic expression. Compared to other venues of such expression in Western societies, Shamanism is unique in combining theater, performance, healing, psychological and spiritual dimensions<sup>27</sup>. The shaman acts both as an “*intermediary*” between the ruler and the ruled, and as a “*catalyst*” in the process leading from community to society-statehood<sup>28</sup>. The key element in the healing potential of shamanism is associated with the concept of “*dialectical image*” borrowed from Walter Benjamin, a Marxist philosopher associated with the Frankfurt School<sup>29</sup>. Wild Man’s bodily form as a dialectical image needs to be explained in terms of psychedelia and androgyny or liminality “*in-betweenness*” due to the attributes of shaman costumes and ritualistic performances. When evaluated through these concepts, it is seen that the artistic image and psychic energy transform into the body, the body into the costume, the costume into Wild Man, and then intertwining with its nature-human form into the role of

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25 Trimmingham, 2018, 137-138.

26 Holt, 2020, 192-193.

27 Haviland et al., 2008, 657-662.

28 Kalaycı, 2021, 1038.

29 Benjamin, 2014.

a shaman. The transitivity and destructiveness that take place during this transformation also reveals the primitive- spiritual “*creative state of being*” in which the healing power of the performative art that emerges. In this context, Kukeri events in Bulgaria can be cited as an example of performative artistic activities of modern societies that are fed by the pagan traditions and are related to both shamanistic and Wild Man forms.

Due to its historical background and geographical location, Bulgaria has been influenced by Greek, Slavic and Ottoman cultures and has become a melting pot of different traditions, rituals and superstitions. Kukeri Groups (Figure 1) are one of the most current example of this. Kukeri, literally meaning “*headdress*”, is a series of rituals and folkloric traditions performed in masks and costumes. Kukeri is a pagan tradition of Thracian origin. In ancient times, the Thracians organized Kukeri Ritual Games in the name of the god Dionysus. In these games, handmade and organic costumes and frightening masks were worn. Each costume also has a leather belt with large copper bells (*chanove*) tied around the waist. The bells are used to ward off evil and to communicate with the spirits. In addition, the sounds they make during the dance-movements of the ritual, combined with the extending sway of the costume, create a psychedelic and synesthetic performance. Due to the weight of these large copper bells, rituals are usually performed by men. Some Kukeri costumes and masks are decorated with various threads, ribbons and laces, often representing animals considered sacred, such as goats, bulls, rams and even chicken. Also, some masks have a double face. On one side there is a smiling face, and on the other side, an ominous face with an arched nose. These masks symbolize the dualistic nature of good and evil coexisting in the world, a kind of Yin Yang philosophy, and touch on the phenomenon of dialectical imagery<sup>30</sup>.

The Kukeri dancers correspond to the contemporary interpretation of the shaman-*and, indirectly, the Wild Man-* that continue in today’s festivals. The Kukeri tradition and the Surva Festival that take place in the village of Kosharevo in Bulgaria, has been included in UNESCO’s list of protected intangible cultural heritage in 2021<sup>31</sup>. In fact, Wild Man rituals



Figure 1. *The group of Kukeri*, photography by Aron Klein (Brown, 2018.)

30 Fang, 2012, 26.

31 Zytka, 2016, 298.





**Figure 2.** “*Tschägättä*” during their walk through the villages. Picture: Lötschental Tourism, 2011. (Kuhn, 2015, 205.)



**Figure 3.** *Tülütabak*, Balıkesir, Turkey (TRT, 2016.)

exemplified by the Kukeri groups, still take place under different names in various parts of Europe: “*Perchten*” [Pudeln or Glöcklerlauf], “*Krampus*” or “*Knecht Ruprecht*”<sup>32</sup>, in the Alps of Germany and Austria, and “*Tschägättä*” (Figure 2) in the Lötschen Valley region in Switzerland<sup>33</sup>. The costumes and dances of “*Tülütabak*” (Figure 3) of *Balıkesir* region of Turkey that date back to Central Asian and Anatolian mythologies, evoke the image of Wild Man with its wild and frightening image.

The materials and symbolic language in Wild Man masks and costumes establish a unique relationship with the collective identity of the society. Depending on the societies’ appropriation and interpretation of this cultural image, the character of Wild Man can show similarities and variations. Today, the masked and costumed performances of Wild Man, which are presented as folkloric dances and traditional rituals in different geographies, continue to enrich the cultural capital of modern.

### **Wild Man with Costumes and Performances at Art Platform**

Contemporary artworks have a structure that does not involve a rigid definition; such a structure is inherent to the existence of performance art. Expression does not have any specific completed-framed artistic form, it is like an endless manifesto and each performer defines what he/she does<sup>34</sup>. Performance art not only brings together different materials with different methods in contemporary art, but also combines different art approaches and disciplines. The blurring of the boundary between life and art and the multifaceted interaction of disciplines has enabled the Wild Man archetype<sup>35</sup> to appear on

32 Carter, 2016.

33 Kuhn, 2015, 206.

34 Goldberg, 1988, 12.

35 Early examples of the Wild Man archetype can be found in an esoteric scene from a night ritual depicted in the Spanish painter Francisco Goya’s “*The Witches’ Sabbath*” (1797-1798): In the center of the composition, a non-threatening but slightly satanic shaman, wizard or “Wild Man” figure draws the viewer’s attention (Tomlinson, 2005).

the art platform, starting with the historical avant-garde from the 1920s and continuing to the post-1960 art movements<sup>36</sup>

During the artistic transformation of Wild Man, the costume language and materials used by contemporary artists bring about psychedelic qualities, which in turn define Wild Man itself. The concept of psychedelia is generally used for the visual and auditory perceptions and effects created by colored lights, sounds, movements and costumes in artistic performances or concerts. *Psychedelic stimuli*, derived from the Greek words *psykhē* (mind) and *dēloun* (to make visible, to reveal), are multisensory “*synesthetic*” elements that allow us to enter a special state of mind in order to understand phenomena whose meaning we cannot fully grasp in the real world. In addition, the Wild Man costumes, which blend into the organic-indeterminate form of nature and prioritize spiritual action, acquire a genderless-androgynous feature. In this context, let us examine the image of Wild Man, with its psychedelic performance and androgynous costumes, through both known examples of avant-garde art and current performance examples of contemporary art.

Joseph Beuys, a versatile artist with “*an anthroposophical*” view<sup>37</sup>, is known for his various performances in which he includes materials from nature and live animals. Integrating these performances and his ideology into the role of a shaman, Beuys uses live rabbits, horses and wolves to represent the intuitive side and irrational spirit of humanity in the relationship between nature-art, nature-human and animal-human<sup>38</sup>. The artist’s performance titled “*I Like America and America Likes Me*” (Figure 4) is an appropriate example. During the performance, Beuys was wrapped in felt and waited without moving for a coyote to get used to him and his scent. He knew that felt, used in rituals as a means of psychic stimulation of the body, sensory-emotional interaction and bonding, could be

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36 The concept of the historical avant-garde, which Peter Bürger (1984), one of the best known of the avant-garde retrospectives and the basis for drawing an independent profile of the avant-garde, included in his theory of the avant-garde, is an attack on the autonomous status of bourgeois art detached from life and an attempt to re-integrate art into the praxis of life. In this attempt to construct an anti-aesthetic approach, the spiritual image of the wild and primitive, such as the Wild Man, is glorified. Which Bürger considers as historical avant-garde movements; the post-October Revolution Russian avant-garde, early Surrealism and Dada’s -destructiveness of anti-art movements-, expresses the wildness of the vital impulse of the Wild Man archetype (Scheunemann, 2005).

37 Austrian philosopher Rudolf Steiner’s understanding of anthroposophy is based on the philosophy of attaining knowledge of the supersensory world, spiritual life, cosmos, nature and reality through the etheric body and senses rather than experiencing the external world through one’s physical body and knowledge; it has esoteric traces, mystical and mythical connections. Following in the footsteps of Steiner’s anthropo-esoteric understanding combined with art, Beuys’ use of symbolic materials such as felt, honey and oil in his performances can be interpreted as the heritage of “*anthroposophical art*” (Steiner, 1922,6; Steiner, 2003; Amrine, 2019).

38 Fineberg, 2014, 219; Menay Mant & Özkan, 2020.

a healing, curative, catalytic object<sup>39</sup>. The presence of felt, which comes to the forefront in the performance with its ability to insulate the aggressive energy of the coyote in the initial process, also becomes a protective shield like a shell and a warm, archaic womb that preserves Beuys' energy throughout the performance<sup>40</sup>. The coyote began to aggressively circle around Beuys, constantly sniffing him and trying to recognize the stranger, the "artist". In fact, in these moments, the artist acted as a kind of Wild Man by building a bridge to the animal-nature through the coyote. During this completely intuitive interaction, Beuys used his costume of pure felt, as a buffer between him and the wild coyote-nature, and allowed the costume to perform "*the act of establishing a relationship with the coyote*" during the acclimatization. As in Shamanism, the costume became the connection between nature and the inner world. Beuys did not try to domesticate or imitate the jackal in order to communicate with it. Instead, he tried to adapt to its ambiguous, wild energy. By leaving his civilized human identity and assuming a more natural one, he creates a transformative space that gave a new form to the disrupted balance between animal-nature and human-culture. He realized this with an energy transfer that encompassed both sides<sup>41</sup>. During the performance in the same room for 3-5 days; Beuys' calmness and constancy accompanied the coyote's shifts from dynamic and uncanny-wild movements to a more peaceful and docile state. This "*transmission*", mourning and the healing of mourning [*mutual standing in the room, turning around in the room, shredding the felt/newspapers, urinating on the newspapers, etc.*] was realized in a cycle of pragmatic-metaphorical, pragmatic-metaphysical, shamanistic-symbolic, psychic and primeval actions.

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39 Joseph Beuys was serving as a fighter pilot on the Crimean front on 16 March 1944, during the period when Nazi Germany was fighting the Soviet Union in World War II, when his plane crashed and he was wounded for a while. This event became an important discourse in the artist's life and was the source of the connection between psychic and ocular/esoteric rituals and materials such as felt, suet, honey, etc. that he would use in his works. Beuys describes the process of salvation after the crash of his aeroplane as follows: "*If it were not for the Tatars I would not be alive today...I was unconscious...completely buried in the snow. A few days later the Tatars found me like this. I remember the voices calling "voda" water; then the felt of their tents and the intense, pungent smell of cheese, butter and milk. They covered my body with suet to restore its former temperature and wrapped it in felt to retain its heat*". In 1995, documents emerged about Beuys' experience, showing that on 17 March 1944, one day after the plane crashed, he was hospitalized and treated after a military rescue operation. There is no conclusive evidence that the Tatars rescued Beuys. Especially in the works titled "*Siberian Symphony Part I*", "*Strips from the Shaman's House*", "*How to Explain Painting to a Dead Rabbit?*" and "*I Like America and America Likes Me*", which the artist dealt with in the context of the concept of "Action" in Fluxus performances since 1961, the symbolic meaning he established with the objects constitutes the discursive source of the experience he claims to have had with the Tatars during the war. (Merdaner, 2016, 24-61.)

40 Suquet, 1995, 151.

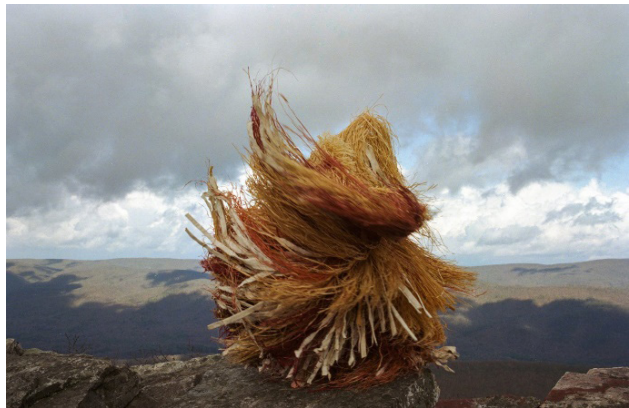
41 Akay, 2015, 43-44.



**Figure 4.** Joseph Beuys, 1974, “*I Like America and America Likes Me*” (Wolfe, 2019)

Fern Shaffer, an American artist known for her work in ecofeminism, had a series of ritual performances that began in 1995 at various locations around the United States and Canada, from the Death Valley desert to Green Point, Newfoundland within a period of nine years (Figure 5). With a genderless costume made of very organic and rough materials (raffia and canvas), the artist takes on the role of a kind of a shaman and Wild Man, who is instrumental in the resetting the disrupted balance between nature and human beings. The dynamic dual flow of psychic energy that Beuys shares with the “*coyote*” takes on a different form in Shaffer’s ritual performance series; the psychic transmission becomes a variable linked to the rich energy of nature, affected by the changes in nature at each performance location. Here, it is not only the artist’s dances or costume that provide dynamic spiritual energy; factors such as the cold of the snow, the howling of the wind can appear as elements that guide the shaking-rotation-oscillation movements in the dances and affect the moment of the shaman artist’s transition to the ecstatic state (the moment of encounter).

**Figure 5.** Fern Shaffer & Othello Anderson (1998, April 9) The fourth ritual, Performance costume made from canvas and raffia Blue Ridge Mountain, Virginia.



Ana Mendieta, a Cuban-American artist known for her performances centering on nature and the human body, frequently uses ritual practices and symbols of primitive and indigenous cultures of the Americas, Africa and Europe in her work; she creates multifaceted performances that combine different disciplines and ideas such as *Conceptual Art*, *Process Art*, *Land Art*, *Performance Art* and *Feminism*. In the “*Siluetas*” series, which uses references from the concepts of personal identity, nature and eco-feminism, the artist produces earth-body and human-nature works in which she uses her naked body to leave traces on the skin of nature with the aim of integrating with it. In “*Image from Yagul*” (Figure 6), the flowers and soil envelop almost the entire body of the artist, transforming into an organic costume that cover and androgenize gender, bringing the artist closer to a more natural identity image, that of Wild Man. Rather than the movement in Shaffer’s ritual dance, the immobility of the body in Mendieta’s performance evokes the trance state of the shaman or the catatonia state of mourning; of the schizophrenic subject who has lost communication with nature and points to



**Figure 6.** Ana Mendieta, *Imágen de Yagul* (*Image from Yagul*), 1973 lifetime color photograph 19 x 12 ½ inches (48 x 32 cm) © The Estate of Ana Mendieta Collection, LLC, courtesy Galerie Lelong & Co. Photo: courtesy Galerie Lelong

a much more internal, intense psychic and traumatic process. Like the transformative practice of the shaman, who uses the experience of an illness or injury to find a method of “cure”, Mendieta relives the trauma of human disconnection from nature to find ways of re-identification. As the artist herself states: “*My art is the way I re-establish the bonds that unite me to the universe.*”<sup>42</sup>

*Ceschi + Lane* collective, a collaboration between contemporary performance artist Valentine Ceschi and interdisciplinary artist Kate Lane, examines the relationship of the characteristic and potential properties of costume with the body, and the simultaneous interaction of the kinetic empathy processes of costume with space and nature. The character of *Ghillie* (Figure 7), who is based on Ghillie Dhu or Gille Dubh, a nature fairy that originates from the wild characters in Scottish mythology, becomes a kind of

42 Perreault, 1988, 10.

Wild Man with its costume and performance<sup>43</sup>. Gille Dubh is also the name of the ghillie costume and corresponds to the camouflage clothing used in the military. The costume provides an advantage to the soldier by allowing him to adapt to the environment and hide from enemies and targets<sup>44</sup>. *Ghillie's* costume, which consists of various straw fibers and dry branches, acts much like the camouflage of military uniforms. Ghillie's feral appearance and the red strips of fabric hanging from its head to the ground evoke the image of a plant-animal hybrid creature that will at any moment resort to violence. This frightening appearance reinforces feelings of uncanniness and terror in the viewer. The *Ghillie* costume, which has become an image of the Wild Man archetype, creates alternative transitions in the dialogue established with the body and nature. At the same time, it represents the duality of love-hate and constructiveness-destructiveness between man and nature, and by its mere presence triggers the psychic pre-process "prime-effect" of a highly provocative, contradictory, subversive and creative performance. In this way, a critical intervention/confrontation scene enacted and the spatial traumas experienced are transformed into the image of Wild Man by mixing with the body and nature, than a unique costume language is created.

The imagined clash scene with the Ghillie Dhu became a real battle when Canadian artist Cassils, known for durational art performances, fought with a 2,000-pound clay block in the live performance, "Becoming an Image Performance Still No. 1" (Figure 8). Even before entering this battlefield, the audience was warned: "Do not enter if you are prone to epilepsy or claustrophobia, lean against the wall and do not head towards the front, you risk getting punched, the performance is violent." The performance, which took place in complete darkness and in an uncanny environment, was illuminated only by the flashlight of a camera, and the audience was given the opportunity to experience-look-see these scenes with the punctum effects evoked by instant photo frames. In this performance, Cassils questions the subjective, implicit, psychological codes of punctum and the cultural and sociological codes of Studium in regards to body-gender-violence<sup>45</sup>. The artist's costume differs from the ones we have



**Figure 7.** *Ghillie*. Photo by Camilla Greenwell (Ceschi & Lane, 2021, 240.)

43 Ceschi & Lane, 2021, 239-240.

44 Amerland, 2017, 53.

45 Barthes, 1982, 26-27.

examined so far: Cassils' own body is used as a tool going through stages of gender reassignment and becomes an experimental field, so the artist's skin-costume for their performances always remain variable and uncertain. As one of the most important building blocks of nature, soil or clay has been the source of inspiration for many works of art. It is used as a material in *Land Art*, *Art Povera*, *Happening Art*, *Process Art*, and also accompanies Cassil's fierce performance. In fact, clay has a strong potential with its mineralogical and symbolic properties and physical possibilities: "Its plasticity, easy shaping and combining, its structure that allows many different techniques and its suitability for recycling make it a rich material"<sup>46</sup>. As one of the common symbols of world mythology, earth represents the cycle of life, birth-death or revitalization rituals, fertility, reproduction, the origin and the core<sup>47</sup>. In this respect, while the clay in Cassils' performance points to the artist's connection to nature, turning their performance into a boxing duel with this material emphasizes the abuse of the self and private space, trans psychic and physical violence, and transphobic violence in their own gender identity change. Cassils describes their own state of gender reassignment as "a process-oriented way of being that operates in a field of constant becoming, uncertainty, spasm and slipperiness"<sup>48</sup>. The artist's invitation into a dark room of uncertainty is also an invitation to experience the violence of spasms and the state of being trans. At the beginning, the bandaging of the artist's breasts is a figurative representation of transmasculinity<sup>49</sup>, but after Cassils' struggle with clay, the artist becomes almost a clay-earth human, and that the violence and dynamism of this transformation is identified with the transcendental position and androgynous energy of Wild Man.

Portland artist Asher Woodworth, known for his postmodern choreography, drama, performance and video works on visual culture (Figure 9), was arrested in 2016



**Figure 8.** Cassils, "Becoming an Image Performance Still No. 1" (Edgy Women Festival, Montreal), 2013, c-print face mounted to Plexiglass, 36 x 24 in. photo: Cassils with Alejandro Santiago, Courtesy of the artist.

46 Atalayer as cited in Baklan Önal, 2018, 71; Yılmaz & Gökbel, 2023, 167-168.

47 Aça, 2018.

48 Cassils, 2013 as cited in Steinbock, 2014, 266.

49 Steinbock, 2014, 266.

for disrupting the traffic by walking very slowly across a busy intersection dressed as a pine tree. The contrast between the impatient people-cars trying to get from one place to another in the daily rush against the human-tree and human-nature figure showing slowness and calmness reveals the dialectical relationship between human and nature. Woodworth shows a provocative and contrary attitude to the socio-cultural patterns of modern life by referring to the stagnant psychic energy of nature through the static attitude exhibited in the performance as a tree. Perceived as a threat to the system and subsequently arrested by the police, the artist's attitude is therefore associated with Wild Man's image of the wild, uncanny and disturbing rule-breaker. On the other hand, the fact that the performance is realized in public space creates anachronistic impressions of space in the audience. This coincides with the spontaneity and unpredictability of shamans in their ritual performances.



**Figure 9.** Asher Woodworth, “Wild Man” Costume (Rahman-Jones, 2016.)

Some of the 2015 *Tribes* project (Figure 10-11) performed at various locations in Prague resemble the surprise interaction of Woodworth's Wild Man with the public. These costume performances are reminiscent of a Wild Man tribe that has accidentally landed in civilization. Within the scope of the project, the potential to create a social and political spectacle and a space for questioning was utilized with the masks and costumes exhibited. The performances carried the concept of tribe to the artistic platform. The artists attracted the attention of Praguers with their costume-body presence by appearing in public spaces such as buses, markets, open sports venues. The interest, astonishment and curiosity directed by the public towards the androgynous Wild Men with the desexualized body-costumes resembling flowers, enabled a momentary disconnection from the daily life in the city and a shift in consciousness towards experiencing genuine feelings of contentment or discontentment.

Lise Klitten, one of the performance artists involved in the Tribes project, states that when they boarded a tram or the subway they were no longer “*the other tribe*”. Due to the common sharing of public space both the tribe and the public acquired a heterogeneous structure<sup>50</sup>. The dynamics underlying the collective harmony attained after interacting with these body-costumes, is closely related to spiritual position of Wild Man in the collective memory of human beings and the unbreakable bond they have with their wild, instinctive, intuitive side.

50 Pantouvaki & Lotker, 2017, 45.



**Figure 10.** Lise Klitten (2015, June 19) Para-dice Return by Photo: Daniel Suška, PQ Archive, Denmark. (Pantouvaki, 2016, 38.)



**Figure 11.** Mette Sterre (NL/UK) “*Hummelmania*”, photo: Marek Volf (Pantouvaki, 2016, 85.)

Nick Cave, who draws attention to the phenomenon of identity with soundsuits made of various colors, textures, and materials, created the first soundsuit (Figure 12) by drilling holes in the ends of branches and connecting them with wires. This led way to other soundsuits when the artist realized that the branches hitting each other made a rustling sound when he moved<sup>51</sup>. In performances with soundsuits that resemble shaman costumes, a spiritual-psychedelic and dreamlike space is created. These performances leave a kind of ritualistic, carnivalistic and psychedelic visual impression on the audience<sup>52</sup>, while the vibrant colors of some costumes evoke feelings of mysticism and at the same time curiosity and fun. According to Cave, who does not describe these costume-performances as “*fun*”,

51 Değirmenci Aydın, 2021, 29.

52 Wilson, 2015, p. 90.

the viewer's sympathy comes from the archaic connotations caused by the costume and the nostalgic quality of the Wild Man image. As Trimmingham puts it: "*The kinetic empathy of a performer wearing a costume on stage echoes with the kinetic empathy in the audience. It is a lived process in time, a shared community, felt experience.*"<sup>53</sup> The gender identity labels and cultural judgments that melt with the multi-sensory properties and complicated assemblages of the soundsuits act as an armor that protects Wild Man and preserves its natural-wild-psychic dynamics.

The international artist collective *Universal Everything* is known for its digital video works that bring new perspectives to human experience and contemporary forms of expression by centering on the concepts of human, nature and technology. The Collective's video and installation "*Infinity*" represents a parade of unique personalities generated from never-ending code (Figure 13). Exhibited from 2022 onwards in a subway station in South Korea, the floating and twisting hair-figures passing through this parade are reminiscent of Nick Cave's soundsuits and Boccioni's futurist sculptures with their different colorful costumes and characters. Like subway people trying to move from one place to another, these "*infinite*" characters are in a transitional space, in constant motion, participating in the dynamism of life. The fact that these figures evoke the image of a Wild Man that is in constant change point to the cycle of nature, which is the same and yet different every day. Like the unique code map that Nature preserves within each living being, each character in the procession has an abstract and fluid form with its own soul. The fact that these random figures are in "*infinite*" digital transformation creates an intermediate space, an alternative fictional reality parallel to the organic transformation of nature. This intermediate space can be identified with Wild Man's transcendental dimension; it can be defined as a psychedelic field where Wild Man's power of spiritual communication as a superhuman mediator is revealed.

The Collective's "*Superconsumers 4: Floral*" video shows similarities to "*Infinity*", with the Superconsumers' flower-like body-costumes evoking Wild Man (Figure 14). However, the content of the video differs in that the "*Superconsumers*" series was commissioned by Hyundai to be projected on the facade of a South Korean luxury shopping mall and is a response to the company itself. Superconsumer figures, which have emerged as a side effect of today's unbalanced economic system, represent the ostentatious, flamboyant and exaggerated desires of the few rich while the majority of society

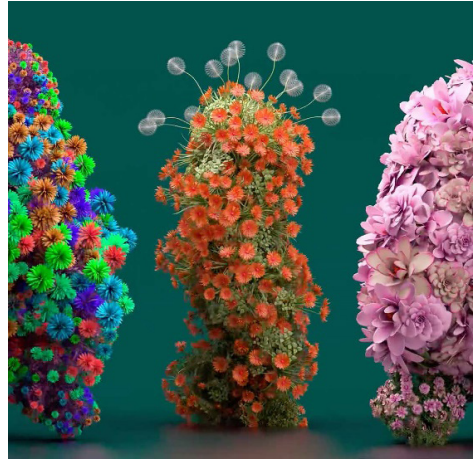


**Figure 12.** Nick Cave's first Soundsuit, 1992. (Değirmeci Aydın, 2021, 297.)

53 Gall, 2019, 611.



**Figure 13.** Universal Everything, “*Infinity*”, 2021, 8K generative video, stereo sound.



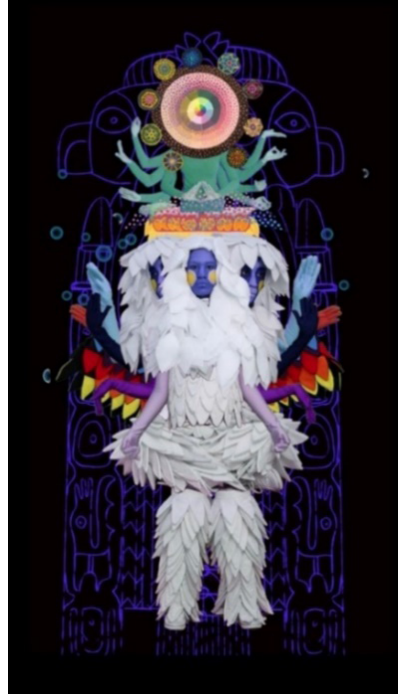
**Figure 14.** Universal Everything, “*Superconsumers 4: Floral*”, 2019, Video loop 40” Edition 1/6, Erol Tabanca Collection (GRIEF AND PLEASURE Exhibiton e-catalogue p.1)

struggle with poverty. The Superconsumers present the viewer a mixture, partly human with their desire and partly Wild Man with their flower body-costumes. The floral costumes preserve the underlying subversive-unbalanced aspect of the work behind their “playful” appearance and contain the delicate dynamic of Wild Man as a catalyst in the nature-human relationship. Unlike “*Infinity*”, this vision of ornate floral costumes-bodies walking and running is a parade towards riches that is only within the reach of the wealthy. Although the figures have an androgynous appearance, their walking style and gestures reflect feminine and masculine characteristics. Superconsumers resemble but do not represent Wild Man. They are mutant versions that had lost their inner balance-energy under the influence of human desires.

Saya Woolfalk, describes herself as an African-American, European and Japanese multinational and multicultural artist, and focuses on the concept of “*hybridity*” as a means of self-expression. Among the artist’s long-term projects, “*The Empathics*” (Figure 15) refers to a fictional hybrid species of plants and humans that blends a multiracial structure of heterogenized identities, cultures and myths with a wide variety of traditional artistic motifs. These beings represent a fictional hybrid female gender that can change its genetic structure and fuse with plants.

Empathics, which can be interpreted as an alternative utopia of ecofeminism, remind the viewer of a Wild Man. Even though based on the female gender, thanks to their versatile characteristic that can weave new identities, Empathics capture an androgynous image by making their gender identity and dominant features transparent through their direct relationship with nature. In Woolfalk’s video work *Empathic Series Chimera*, this an-

drogynous quality is strengthened by images that resemble human beings but at the same time blend into birds, animals, plants and nature, becoming a symbol of a god. The video composition, which depicts a temple and a sacred throne, contains projections from the philosophies of various religions such as Hinduism, Taoism, Shamanism and Buddhism. The fact that the image resembling a bird's head is at the top of the composition supports the message of holiness. In Buddhism and later in Shamanism, birds are seen “as gods, representatives of gods and guardian spirits.”<sup>54</sup> The ecstatic shaman's act of looking up to the sky and making sounds can be read as a sign that the power of existence and eternity comes from the sky and the birds surrounding the sky.<sup>55</sup> The portraits on the right and left sides of the figure refer to the balance of opposites, the Yin Yang principle, the “*philosophy of opposites*”. This balance also includes Wild Man's opposites such as man and nature, human and divine, instincts of aggression and instincts of life. The image of Shakti on the Empathic figure's head symbolizes the power of creation. The bird/bird head motifs surrounding the right and left sides of the Shakti figure represent universal wisdom, spiritual freedom, divine guidance, transformation, healing in Shamanism and are harmonious additions to the Wild Man figure.



**Figure 15.** Saya Woolfalk, “*Chimera from the Empathic Series*”, 2013 © Saya Woolfalk. Photo courtesy Leslie Tonkonow, Artworks + Projects, NY  
Saya Woolfalk Performance and Video Art

### Conclusion

The Wild Man or Wilderman is a mystical figure in many cultures and has been expressed in different costumes and images in social and artistic fields from past to present. The symbolic use of natural materials in these costumes and the prioritization of spirituality and creativity they bring, allow the patterns of gender identity to become transparent and give the Wild Man an androgynous characteristic. The multiplicity brought about by this transparency is reflected in the language of the costumes and transforms into psychedelic stimuli with the colors, sounds and textures of multisensory, synesthetic elements. The heterogeneous structure of Wild Man's performances and the dynamics of transience, uncertainty, ambiguity, uncanniness and destructiveness emerge as a creative

54 Halıcı, 2014, 72.

55 Yonuk, Altunöz & Özçelik, 2021, 252.

state of being in performative art. The blurring of the boundary between life and art, the multifaceted interaction and transitivity of disciplines enabled the Wild Man archetype to earn a place on the art platform. With the kinesthetic and synergetic characteristic of Wild Man performances and the costume language that diversifies depending on the artist's idiolect, the viewer becomes a participant in the creative process of this powerful archetypal image. Both in avant-garde art works of artists such as Joseph Beuys, Ana Mendieta, Nick Cave and contemporary performance examples by artists and artist collectives such as Ceschi + Lane, Cassils, Asher Woodworth, Universal Everything, Saya Woolfalk, one can observe the savage nature and the creative destruction of the Wild Man and understand the healing aspect of the shaman with its psychedelic and androgynous characteristics.

The contemporary art performances with the Wild Man archetype play on the collective memory of human kind in order to achieve new ways of interacting with art. Art is no more an isolated work that the viewer observes detachedly from a distance. It is as real, and awe-inspiring and scary as the shamanic rituals our ancestors participated in. This regression to a primal state is also enhanced by the use of crude natural materials in the costumes. The androgenous character of the Wild Man is a direct result of this regression to a point of ambiguity and fluidity of the first moments of creation. It is a moment of wholeness, almost an ideal mode of existence. It is quite possible that Wild Man, challenging gender binarism, will become a cultural mascot to be embraced by Queer-art theories in the future. In the words of Hakan Günday: "*Ze/They was a leader because of zirs/their uncivilized. Ze/they could rule because still be carried within zirs/their minimal savagery inherited from ancestors...*"<sup>56</sup>

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56 Günday, 2017, 108.

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