

## **The possibilities of an encounter: Differing realities, shifting contexts**

Research as the encounter between the researcher and his or her subject inevitably brings the researcher to partake in differing contexts and realities, in which different perceptions and notions apply. This panel looks at cultural analyses of differing ontological, epistemological, and ethical contexts and realities, where finding adequate tools for analysis poses challenges. The research data, for example, tends to be translated into existing fields of science, with their own language, discourse, and paradigms, but in order to make appropriate analysis of cultural experience, assemblages, actor-networks, or different onto-ethico-epistemologies (Barad 2007) requires sensitivity to shifting contexts.

Previous studies have already addressed questions related to these issues, such as what in fact are the contexts to be compared. *Shifting contexts* of knowledge-production include broader and narrower formations, between which the scientific analysis draws comparisons and moves during the research process (Strathern 1995, 2014). Yet, collaborative, engaged, and experimental research has altered the 'sites' where research is being carried out, and the boundaries of difference are constantly on the move. These shifting frameworks often overlap and encompass each other. Research collaborators may have divergent perspectives and positions for constructing both cognitive and social contexts for interaction, and they may emerge differently in individual's everyday lives. Diverse non-human entities, such as objects, animals, and plants, and other life forms exercise their social power in ways that are challenging for a scientific analysis wishing *not* to explain away these kinds of phenomena in a reductive manner. Meanwhile, the contemporary 'west' has been labeled by some as living a post-secularist era characterized by a search for re-enchantment.

In these new shifting contexts of research, the notions related to subjectivity and agency are tightly connected to places and territories, to time and space, and to how social relations are produced and interpreted. In the process, the purpose remains to enhance understanding and not reduce difference. This panel invites papers to discuss, but is not restricted to, the following topics:

- How can we make productive analysis of different onto-ethico-epistemologies?
- How can shifting contexts of research be experienced by researcher and research collaborators?
- How are (non)human agencies included in the making of the research process?
- How to do justice to differently conceived ontologies and contexts in a scientific analysis?
- How to gain, find, and produce appropriate relations, categories and concepts during the analysis?

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## **Participants:**

- 1. Terhi Utriainen** (University of Helsinki) & **Peik Ingman** (Åbo Akademi University): **The Relational Dynamics of Enchantment and Sacralization: Changing the Terms of the Religion vs Secularity Debate**
- 2. Jamie Barnes** (University of Sussex): **The Speaking Body – Metaphor and the Expression of Extraordinary Experience**
- 3. Lea Kantonen Pekka Kantonen** (University of the Arts Helsinki): **Negotiating with ancestors in the planning of a community museum**
- 4. Riitta-Marja Leinonen** (University of Oulu): **“Straight from the horse’s mouth” – Uncanny experiences of communicating with non-human animals**

## **Abstracts:**

- 1. Terhi Utriainen** (University of Helsinki) & **Peik Ingman** (Åbo Akademi University):

### **The Relational Dynamics of Enchantment and Sacralization – Changing the Terms of the Religion vs Secularity Debate**

This presentation serves to inform about a forthcoming edited volume with the above title (October 2016, Equinox).

The volume revisits the concepts of enchantment and sacralization in light of perspectives which challenge the modern notion that man (alone) is the measure of all things. As Bruno Latour has argued, the battle against superstition entailed shifting power away from God/the gods to humans, thereby disqualifying the agency all the other objects in the world. We ask, might enchantment and sacralization be understood in other ways than through this battle between almighty gods and almighty humans? Might enchantment be understood to involve processes where power and control are not distributed so clearly and definitively?

Like social constructionists, Latour emphasizes that things are constructed, yet, like many other new materialists, such as Jane Bennett, Manuel De Landa and Karen Barad, he emphasizes that this construction is not the result of projecting meaning onto a passive and meaningless world, but a matter of compositional achievements, whereby assemblages of actants co-compose each other and frame, enable and delimit one another’s agency. This move recognizes the active participation of players beyond the humans versus God(s) framework that informed the modernist project. Understanding enchantment and sacralization as compositionally and relationally constructed does not mean the same as understanding them as constructed by humans alone. What it means is one of the main questions posed in this book. In other words, if enchantment and sacralization are not understood (solely) in terms of projecting anthropocentric meaning onto mute objects, what are some promising alternative approaches (old and new) and what are their implications for how we understand modernity and for method and theory in the study of religion?

Discussing some key concerns and themes in the book, two of the co-editors will note the relevance of the volume for the present conference theme(s) and respond to questions concerning the contents of its 12 chapters. The presentation will also present the arguments posed in the introduction regarding the benefits of directing the focus of religious studies onto the relational dynamics in diverse compositions involving enchantment and sacralization.

**2. Jamie Barnes** (University of Sussex):

### **The Speaking Body – Metaphor and the Expression of Extraordinary Experience**

In this paper, building upon recent ‘ontological’ imperatives to take seriously the worlds of research participants and drawing upon anthropological work on the senses enabling us to conceive ‘alternative’ sensoriums not necessarily conforming to those dominant within secular societies, I argue that experience ‘in the body’ often acts as a powerful grounding force in both one’s sense of *being-in-the-world* and *that-which-is*. Events which may seem unusual or extraordinary within secular paradigms are not necessarily conceived as such within worlds where non-corporeal beings are not only thought to exist but also constitute vibrant aspects of one’s lived experience. However, in order to convey, and indeed make sense of ‘alternative’ experiences, actors often move or translate these experiences through metaphor into more familiar domains. Often one metaphor will not do, as it only translates one dimension of the experience, and as such obscures other elements. This paper considers one person’s metaphorical moves in order to convey an ‘extraordinary’ experience, namely a highly sensorial encounter with the divine. As the subject slides from one metaphor to another, for the listener, an increasingly lucid impression of the encounter emerges. And yet the experience itself, wrapped in human subjectivity, always remains beyond our grasp. The metaphors stretch toward the experience without ever being able to adequately express it. This paper argues that, in considering the architecture of religious experience, sensitivity to the use of metaphor (both its powers and its limits) is essential. Those seeking to take seriously and understand the ‘extraordinary’ experience of others need to appreciate how metaphor ‘works’ and how, within any social matrix, a *listener’s* experience of the ‘extraordinary’ – or lack of it – plays into the space of interaction, continually shaping the metaphors the ‘speaking other’ employs in order to make him or herself understood. Finally, entertaining a different notion of *that-which-is* invites us to reconceive our ideas about the nature of the sensorium by which that ‘reality’ is experienced and sensed and the nature of the body that conceives it. Through opening up our ideas about a) the sensorium, b) what exists that might be sensed, and c) the nature of the body that conceives it, we come closer to answering the ‘ontological’ challenge to take seriously ‘alternative’ domains of human experience.

**3. Lea Kantonen & Pekka Kantonen** (University of the Arts Helsinki):

### **Negotiating with ancestors in the planning of a community museum**

In the process of planning a community museum in the context of the Wixarika community-based school Tatuutsi Maxakwaxi (Our Great-grandfather Deertail) together with the Finnish NGO CRASH and Mexican university ITESO we need the permission of the community

authorities as well as that of the deified ancestors (*kaka+yari*, plur. *kaka+yarixi*) for staying in the community, conducting art workshops and filming videos for the museum collections together with the teachers. The *kaka+yarixi* are usually benevolent, but some of them can be capricious at certain times. They communicate their wishes through dreams and chants of a *marakame*, shaman-priest and through omens, for example sudden appearance and disappearance of certain animals and objects. They accept offerings in exchange of success, well being and good health. They may send sickness and misfortune if they are not venerated as they should. We, the *teiwari*, the non-wixarika, are not expected to give offerings to the *kaka+yarixi*, however, we should show them respect.

Our relationship with our informants, *marakame* and community musician Niereme and craft teacher 'Utiana, has an aspect of collegiality since we collaborate as museum planners and art teachers. However we sometimes have difficulties in mutual understanding: they tend to see omens and interventions of *kaka+yarixi* where we only see coincidence, and it has implications for the museum planning. When this happens we need stop to discuss before we can proceed in our collaboration. Niereme and 'Utiana then explain events, interpret omens and negotiate with the *kaka+yarixi* for us.

Diana Espirito Santo ja Ruy Blanes apply the term "*evidentiary regimes*" for studying experiences of interaction with spirits. We relate to these regimes through practical cases. In this paper we refer to Niereme's and 'Utiana's experiences as evidence of *kaka+yarixi*. The cases studied are a videoed pilgrimage with offerings to the sacred place Turamukameta, an appearance of a scorpion, and a disappearance of two suitcases during a museology workshop.

#### 4. Riitta-Marja Leinonen (University of Oulu):

##### **"Straight from the horse's mouth" - Uncanny experiences of communicating with non-human animals**

Anthropological evidence suggests that humans across times and cultures have experienced deep connection and communication with nature and non-human beings. (Plec 2013; Hurn 2012; Nadasdy 2007; Ingold 2000; Viveiros de Castro 1998). Today animal communication, which is understood here including acoustic, visual, tactile and telepathic communication, is considered part of the 'New Age' movement. However, it is also practiced by some animal healers (e.g. physiotherapists and energy healers) as a way to diagnose the animal's condition.

The view presented in this paper locates within the emerging field of *internatural communication* which explores interactions among and between humans, animals and other forms of life (Plec 2013). The theoretical-methodological approaches utilised in this research situate within the approaches of *posthumanism* and *ethnography*.

The goal of this paper is not to prove that telepathy between humans and animals exists, but rather open up discussion on what people experience as telepathic communication with animals. In other words, what is the ethico-onto-epistemology (Barad 2007) behind animal communication. The research material includes in-depth interviews and written accounts of Finnish people who have experience of telepathy with animals. I inquired of them how they communicate with the animal. How do they explain the phenomena of telepathy? What makes it

possible for them to “read” animal minds or receive telepathic information from them? What is their idea of the human and non-human mind?

**Key words:** animal communication, internatural communication, experience, telepathy, posthumanism, ethnography, ethico-onto-epistemology

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