



**ALAIN DANIÉLOU FOUNDATION  
CENTER FOR TRANSCULTURAL STUDIES**

**ANIMISM AND PAGANISM: A TRANSVERSAL APPROACH**

**WORKSHOP WITH GRAHAM HARVEY**

**WITH A SPECIAL PARTICIPATION OF BARBARA GLOWCZEWSKI**

**Venue:** The Labyrinth, Alain Daniélou Foundation

Colle Labirinto 24, Zagarolo (Rome), Italy.

**Dates:** 29 September - 1 October, 2023

From Victorian to post-structuralist anthropology, the term “animism” has undergone a significant change. Armchair anthropologists understood animism as a belief in spiritual or non-empirical beings (Edward Burnett Tylor) or a religious practice related to that belief (James George Frazer). Thus, animism (or early religion) appears as an elementary form of thought within a cultural process that culminates in scientific knowledge. As opposed to that evolutionary tendency of the XIX century, fieldwork-based researchers in the second part of the XX century (from Alfred Irving Hallowell to Eduardo Viveiros de Castro) adopted another semantics of the term “animism” detached from its association with religion and based on the observation of human interaction with other-than-human beings. From this perspective, animism is a phenomenologically retrievable form of socialization transcending the human. This new way of conceiving animism was to a great extent the result of a less prejudiced approach to non-Western cultures privileging a broader understanding rather than a domination and subjugation of “the other”; but it was also triggered by the progressive disclosure of what could be deemed the “shadow-side of Western modernity”: the ravaging effects of so-called economic progress, the nihilistic

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consequences of secularization, the uncontrollable development of new technologies, and the progressive isolation of individuals in the social sphere due to increasingly abstract instances of institutional mediation (mainly as a result of the “virtualization” of reality).

In this context, alternative forms of religiosity emerged in the interstices of urban modernity focusing on a reconnection with the “sacred” i.e. the non-objectifiable dimension of Nature. Different movements emerged as a result, in which priestly elites, dogmas, formal creeds, and ecclesiastical hierarchies are mostly absent, and emphasis is laid on seasonal festivals, nature-related rituals, embodied – and erotic – sacrality. The common characteristics of such movements is their claim to draw on heritages from ancient “paganism”, a word referring to religious movements prior to the rise of monotheistic religions. Certain subversive elements of Paganism are supposed to have survived – although discontinuously and fragmentarily – in the splits and gaps of the dominant world-configuration brought about first by the Christianization of the West and later by modern rationality and industrialism. It is a reenactment of those elements along with more recent inspirations (including ecology and feminism) that constitutes the promise of a renewed and fulfilling bond between human beings and their living environment.

Both the new gaze on animism developed by the new anthropology and the Neo-Pagan movements flourishing in the interstices of Western modernity share, despite undeniable differences, some decisive features. This common ground enables a critical reconsideration of the heritage of modernity and new approaches to the global environmental crisis of the Anthropocene – which affects human beings on a global level in an unprecedented way. It is the purpose of this workshop to deal with those features transversally, that is, bearing in mind

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contributions cutting across disciplines like philosophy, history of religions, psychology, anthropology and sociology, as well as non-scholarly (native, alternative, subversive) practices out of which voices of dissent may take shape. This would enable thinking out ways of integrating those voices of dissent in new ecosophical “foldings” to offer another dynamics of relations and world configuration.

This workshop, inspired by Alain Daniélou’s vision of a de-centered humanity, his claim of a non-objectifiable attitude to Nature and advocacy of an embodied form of religiosity (cf. *Shiva and Dionysos*, 1979), will be focused on thematic complexes disclosed in the work of Graham Harvey (Open University, UK), notably in his books *Animism: Respecting the Living World* (2005) and *Contemporary Paganism* (2011), as well as in the collective volumes edited by him: *Shamanism: A Reader* (2002), and *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* (2013). Graham Harvey has been working on modern Paganism, indigenous traditions and new animism for more than two decades; he has developed – contrary to mainstream scholarship in Western universities – not only a theoretical and descriptive but also a practical and performative approach to some aspects of the traditions and movements included in his own research field. The workshop will also count on the special participation of Barbara Glowczewski (CNRS, EHESS, Collège de France), whose reinterpretation of Australian totemism through the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari – in books like *Totemic Becomings* (2015), *Indigenising Anthropology with Guattari and Deleuze* (2019) and *Réveiller les esprits de la Terre* (2021) constitutes a remarkably creative attempt at transversal thinking as well as an important voice in the fight against neo-colonialism and ecocide.

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**The workshop will count with the participation of:**

Molly Harvey (art historian, Hexham Abbey, UK)

Luis Eduardo Luna (Director of Wasiwaska Research Center, Brazil)

Santiago López-Pavillard (President of the Eleusis Society, Spain)

Adrian Harris (Director of Ecopsychology at the Synthesis Institute, UK)

Andy Letcher (Senior Lecturer at Schumacher College, UK)

Viviana Lipuma (Researcher at Labex Arts H2H, University Paris 8, France)

Linda Valle (Editor at the publishing house Mimesis, Italy).

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