

Research among spirits, ghosts and deities – How to study non-ordinary realities

Panel at the BASR 2014 conference at the Open University, Milton Keynes

Panel organisers: Dr Bettina E. Schmidt and Dr David G. Wilson

Though anthropologists have discussed the study of experiences “behind the veil” of non-ordinary reality over a number of decades (e.g. Harner 1982, Turner 1993), it is still regarded as contested field. On one perspective it is not for scholars to judge, as Lewis maintained (1971), but, as Glass-Coffin recently wrote in the *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (2013) cultural relativism has ‘allowed a side-stepping by the more fundamental question of the transpersonal’.

Anthropologists tend to contextualise the local accounts, ‘domesticating and dismissing them, colonializing knowledge even as they claim to honour the truth of the Other’ (2013: 117).

In this panel we want to discuss this problem, which is at the cutting edge between anthropology and study of religions. The failure to contemplate the possibility that non-ordinary realities might be real inhibits the development of appropriate methodologies for exploring them. Arguably, this failure contributes significantly to the continuing difficulty in defining religious studies as a distinct academic field by creating a knowledge boundary that excludes from study potentially core phenomena. We therefore welcome papers from scholars who seek to explore and present new ways of studying non-ordinary realities.

Please submit an abstract of app. 200 words by 1 June to b.schmidt@tsd.ac.uk and dgmw63@gmail.com.