

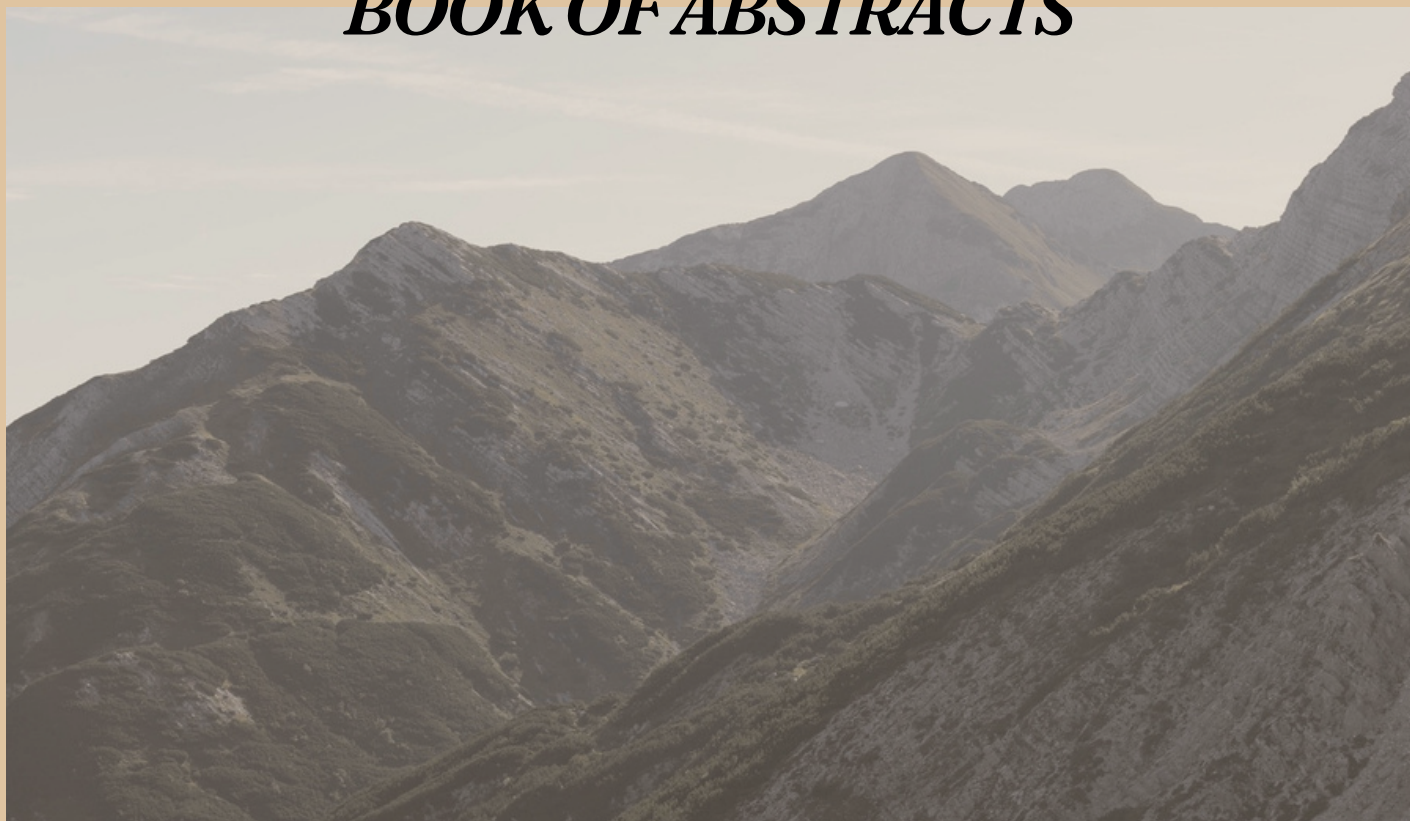
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OCTOBER 1-3, 2026

15TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF YOUNG FOLKLORISTS (YOFO)

TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES, CONNECTING WORLDS

BOOK OF ABSTRACTS



PLENARY SPEAKERS:

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Assoc. prof. dr. Kaarina Koski, University of Turku, Finland

Assoc. prof. dr. Jaka Repič, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

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15TH INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF YOUNG FOLKLORISTS **TRANSCENDING BOUNDARIES CONNECTING WORLDS**

Cartesian dualism, formulated in the seventeenth century and later embraced by Enlightenment thought, introduced into Western philosophy and ontology a radical distinction between reality and representation. This foundational dichotomy divided the world into paired opposites: the concrete and the abstract, the physical (external) and the mental, the material and the social, nature and culture, matter and spirit, body and mind, flesh and soul, emotion and reason. Meaning, once thought to reside in the world and in things, came to be considered the exclusive property of the human subject— and it was humans alone who were seen as bearers of interiority, consciousness, and intentionality.

With the Enlightenment's elevation of reason, rationality, logical argument, and experimental proof, knowledge became increasingly subjected to the authority of law, science, and technology. In the Western thought, vernacular, embodied, and affective ways of knowing—those grounded in lived experience, practice, or collective memory—were devalued, suppressed, or excluded from dominant rational-scientific discourse. And yet, European vernacular, as well as non-European traditions have continued to provide alternative ontologies in which the boundaries between matter and spirit, life and death, nature and culture, body and soul, remain fluid and permeable.

Since the 1990s, however, various strands of scholarship across the humanities and social sciences have sought to revalue and overcome these dichotomies. The turn to embodiment foregrounded lived experience and the corporeal grounding of meaning, revealing the body as a site where cultural categories are inscribed and contested. Subsequently, affect theory and the study of emotions emphasized the relational, pre-reflective dimensions of experience that exceed rational control. Posthumanist and new materialist perspectives have expanded the field of inquiry beyond the human, recognizing nonhuman agencies - animals, technologies, objects, and environments - as active participants in the world's unfolding. The ontological turn, rejecting representationalism and its "epistemic intermediaries" between subject and object, has shifted attention toward what entities do in the world, rather than what humans believe they do.



The conference Transcending Boundaries, Connecting Worlds invites contributions that examine and move beyond entrenched divisions in thought, practice, experience, science, technology and culture. We particularly welcome papers that explore the relationalities between the living and the dead, the topic that has long been familiar to folklorists. A figure of a ghost, far from being a metaphor, a »matter of belief« or pathology, opens up space between subjects and objects, and challenges dichotomist divisions between the living and the postliving, between life and afterlife, between presence and absence, between past and present, oral and written, digital and nondigital space etc. Yet papers addressing any of the divisions in contemporary world, and reaching beyond them are equally encouraged.

CONFERENCE PROGRAMME

Day 1: Thursday, October 1, 2026

13:00-14:00 **Registration** (P1)

14:00-14:30 **Opening Ceremony** (P2 - live lecture; P3 - live stream)

Welcome speeches:

Prof. Mojca Schlamberger Brezar, Dean of the Faculty of Arts;

Assoc. Prof. Mateja Habinc, Head of the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology;

Prof. Mirjam Mencej, President of the International Society for Folk Narrative Research and
Principal Investigator of the DEAGENCY project

14:30-15:30 **Keynote Speaker** (P2 - live lecture; P3 - live stream)

Tok Thompson

University of Southern California, United States of America

A Posthuman's Progress: Adapting to De-centered Agency

Chair: Robin Tigran Keršmanc

15:30 – 15:50 **Coffee break** (P1)



15:50 – 17:20 Parallel sessions

P2 - PANEL 1 Folklore Across Digital Worlds I Chair: Jaka Aljec	P3 - PANEL 2 Tracing Function in Folklore Chair: Jana Rajh Plohl	P4 – Panel 3 Rituals of Death and Transition Chair: Michal Uhrin
Madelyn Marie Vacha, University of Tartu, Estonia From Spirit to Deity: The Online Pagan Discourse Surrounding Baba Yaga Natalia Rubio Cupalova, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain New Andalusianism: Asserting Andalusia's Cultural Uniqueness Through Folklore Mio Katsumi Linehan, University of Tartu, Estonia The Sunset of 40: Tradition and Ontology in Mourning the AI Companion	Rok Mrvič, ZRC SAZU, Slovenia In the Name of the Child: Cross-Genre Functions in Contemporary Slovenian Pregnancy Discourse Hanna Dudkowiak, University of Warsaw, Poland Words that work: Polish Narrative Charms and the Reactivation of Sacred Time Abdulaziz Hidić, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina The Fairy Motif in Bosniak Oral Literature: Functions, Meanings, and Interpretations	Vaios Kaminiotis, University of the Peloponnese, Greece The Pain and Hunger of the Soul: Rites of Passage of Death and Food Offerings Rika Tapper, University of Tartu, Estonia Death and the Ghosts from the Grave in Old Norse Sagas Berkcan Çıran, Ege University, Turkey Relational Ontologies of the Dead: Beyond Cartesian Dualism in Turkish Folk Culture

18:15 – 19:30 **Cultural programme** (Meeting point: Metelkova ulica 2, 1000 Ljubljana)

Guided tour of the Slovenian Ethnographic Museum

Day 2: Friday, October 2, 2026

9:00-10:00 **Keynote speaker** (P2 – live lecture; P3 – live stream)

Kaarina Koski

University of Turku, Finland

Belief Tradition in Social Media: Knowledge, Entertainment, and Affect

Chair: Ana Svetel

10:00 – 10:30 **Coffee break** (P1)

10:30 – 12:00 **Parallel sessions**

P2 - PANEL 4	P3 - PANEL 5	P4 – Panel 6
Folklore Across Digital Worlds II	Medicine, Experience, and Belief	Museums and Cultural Practices
Chair: Matej Mali	Chair: Pia Krampfl	Chair: Urša Valič
Anastasiya Fiadotava, Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia	Annabella Topos, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary	Hannah Daisy Foster, Museum of Ethnography, Hungary
“My Parents Are Dead!”: Power Structures, Localization and Meta- Commentary in the Batman Slapping Robin Meme	Alternative Ways of Medicine in the Kádár Era	Hybrid Collectives of Museums
Sara Vukotić, ZRC SAZU, Slovenia	Mila Santala, University of Turku, Finland	Hainan He, University of Leeds, United Kingdom
From Enchantment to Disenchantment: Fairy- Tale Memes and the Transgression of Folkloric Boundaries in Slovenian Digital Culture	Reconfiguring the Boundary Between Science and Experience: Elsa Heporauta’s Negotiations with the Spirit World	Calling the Eastern Homeland: Reconstructing Death, Loss and Living-Dead Relations Through Ritual Songs and Textiles in the Miao Guzang Festival
Michele Tita, University of Tartu, Estonia	Yifan Zhang, University of Tartu, Estonia	Amil Azimli, National Academy of Sciences Institute of Folklore, Azerbaijan
Humans and Cordyceps in Bhutan: Transcending Ecological and Social Boundaries and Connecting Human and Nonhuman Worlds	Negotiating the Dead: Female Ghosts, Print Media, and Living-Dead Relations in Republican China (1912–1949)	Hero Model in Azerbaijani and Slovenian Folklore: Comparative- Typological Analysis

12:00 – 13:00 **Organized lunch (P1)**

13:00 – 14:30 **Parallel sessions**

P2 - PANEL 7	P3 - PANEL 8	P4 – Panel 9
Music as Collective Practice	The Dead Among the Living	Fear, Care and Protection in Childhood
Chair: Petra Hamer	Chair: Ágnes Hesz	Chair: Jana Rajh Plohl
Aditee Sharma, Mahatma Gandhi University of Medical Sciences and Technology, India Green Singing in the Himalayas: Ecofeminist Reading of the Folk Songs of Kangra Valley Siyun Wu, Leiden University, The Netherlands Transcending Emotions, Connecting Sonically: Re-Reading Collective Singing in Laulupidu Ágnes Szabó, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary Singing Performances in Funeral Ceremonies	Simona Kuntarič Zupanc, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia Dreamscapes: Dreams as a Space of Encounter Between the Living and the Dead Ruibo Zhang, University of Tartu, Estonia “An Update Patch for the Underworld”: A Folkloristic Study of Contemporary Paper Offerings as Emotional Technology in China Natalia Matuszewska, University of the National Education Commission in Krakow, Poland Between the Living and the Spoken-Dead: Vernacular Ontologies in the Prose of Wiesław Myśliwski	Selma Çolak, Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University, Turkey Oh Child! Pray Before Sleep: Bedtime Prayer-Rhymes as Protective Practice at the Sleep Threshold Nina Anier, Åbo Akademi University, Finland Scared Vampires in Contemporary Swedish and Finnish Children’s Theatre and Film: Projections of Anxieties Related to Life Cycle Transitions Giedrė Raguotienė, The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania Being Together in the Song: Experiences of Mothers Singing to Their Children

14:30 – 15:00 **Coffee break (P1)**

15:00 – 17:00 Parallel sessions

P2 – Panel 10	P3 – Panel 11	P4 – Panel 12
Encounters with the Dead in Fairy Tales and Material Culture	Crossing Boundaries	Dreamscapes and Extraordinary Encounters
Chair: Mirjam Mencej	Chair: Veronika Zavratnik	Chair: Simona K. Zupanc
Tanya Buchkova, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria Relationships and Interactions Between the Mythological and Real World in the Mid-19th Century (Based on Folklore Materials from Newspaper "Tsarigradski Vestnik" 1848-1862) Darya Bazylchuk & Michaela Hruzov, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia Death and Enchanted Body in Slovak Fairy Tales Mathilde Yakymets-Lind, North House Folk School, US & Vassa Yakymets, ; University of Eastern Finland, Finland Material Collaboration for Thorough Representation: A Ukrainian Folk Dress in Estonia Luca Radler, Moholy Nagy University of Arts and Design, Hungary & Anna Zsoldos, Eötvös Lóránt University, Hungary Material Thresholds: The Ordinary and the Magical in the Hungarian Vernacular House	Ilga Vālodze Ābelkina, University of Latvia Latvian Folklore in Political Protests Ján Dubravčák, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia Living Boundaries: An Ethnographic Case Study of Identity Shaping in a Folklore Group Sindija Anča, University of Latvia, Latvia Commodification and Sustainability of Ornamental Traditions in Latvia Jaka Ajlec, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia Language as a Connector of Worlds	Robin Tigran Keršmanc, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia DBeyond Comfort: The Ambivalence of Dream Encounters with the Dead Kristel Ruutma, University of Turku, Finland UAP Stigma on the Screen Michal Uhrin, Comenius University, Slovakia; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia Encounters with the Dead in Rural Slovakia: Memory, Counter Intuitiveness, Agency, and Transmission Sreenandana Cs, University of Delhi, India & Anil Sethumadhavan, Ambedkar University Delhi, India Many Lives of Ghostly Gods in South Asia: A Study Based on Karinthandan and Kappiri Muthappan Worship in Kerala

Day 3: Saturday, October 3, 2026

9:00-10:00 **Keynote speaker** (P2 – live lecture; P3 – live stream)

Jaka Repič

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The Forensic Turn in Research of Mass Graves: Materiality, Agency and the Political Life of Human Remains

Chair: Tomaž Simetinger

10:00 – 10:30 **Coffee break** (P1)

10:30 – 12:00 **Parallel sessions**

P2 – Panel 16	P3 – Panel 17	P4 – Panel 18
Language, Translation and Folklore	Liminality in Narrative and Ritual	War, Death and Memory
Chair: Tomaž Simetinger	Chair: Rok Mrvič	Chair: Jaka Repič
Jana Rajh Plohl, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia	Mariya Slavcheva, Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria	Greta Petruskeviciene, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania
Interworlds: Translators, Liminality, and the Ontological Diplomacy of Language	Regulating the Threshold: Sensory Mediation and Relational Ontologies in Bulgarian Folk Narratives	Between Life and Death: Premonitions, Dreams, and Emotional Survival in the Lithuanian Partisan War (1944–1953)
Eirini Stergiopoulou, University of Ioannina, Greece	Susanna Jurvanen, University of Helsinki, Finland	Petra Hamer, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia
Fairytales in Performance: Rethinking Genre Beyond the Archive	Between Body and Landscape: Multimodal Representations of the Helka Festival	Presence, Absence, and the Dead at the Tomašica Mass Grave in Bosnia-Herzegovina
Santosh Kumar, University of Delhi, India	Judit Hollos, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary	Dora Bednjanec, University of Zagreb, Croatia
The Transmission of Fables in the Indian Folklore: The Oral Tradition of Panchatantra in Indian Subcontinent	The Tibetan Buddhist Delog Story of Nangsa Oebum as a Tool of Education	Capturing the Atmosphere of the Cemetery

12:00 – 13:00 **Organized lunch** (P1)

13:00 – 14:30 Parallel sessions

P2 – Panel 19 The Presence of the Dead Chair: Tatiana Bužeková	P3 – Panel 20 Living with Things, Spaces and Environments Chair: Nežka Struc	P4 – Panel 21 Souls, Heroes and Sacred Narratives Chair: Robin Tigran Keršmanc
Meltem Buzkiran Sap, Ege University, Turkey Death and Resurrection in Turkic Epics: Sacred Matter and Cosmological Order in Altai, Tuva and Khakas Narratives Coireall Kent, Aalto University, Finland “My Eye, Though Red Its Hue”: Adapting "Betha Cranatan" ("The Life of Cranat"), Queered Hagiographies, Postliving Dialogues and Entangled Griefwork Nina Čolović, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Croatia The Ghosts of Dead Languages: Tracing the Path of Tuone Udaina Burbur and Vegliot Dialect	Sanni-Maaria Puustinen, University of Eastern Finland, Finland Transforming Cultural Conceptions of Nature: Everyday Practices, More-Than-Human Relations, and Climate Adaptation Emilija Jacevičienė, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania Where Play Begins: Space and Boundaries of Children's Street Games in Lithuania Júlia Váradi, University of Pécs, Hungary Our Seemingly Inanimate Yet Vividly Animate Companions. Cultural Anthropological Study of International Students in Pécs and Their Material World.	Solveiga Brazauskaitė, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania Angels and Devils as Avian Soul Carriers in Lithuanian Folk Narratives Réka Berty, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary “Speared with Spears, Crowned with Thorns”: Transcending Boundaries in the Epic Narratives of Christ's Passion in Hungarian Archaic Prayer Texts Sandrine Bessis, École Nationale Supérieure, France The Melanesian Hero Circulating Between Worlds

14:30 – 15:00 Coffee break (P1)

15:00 – 16:00 Conference closing (P2)

Presentation of the journal *Svetovi / Worlds* (Editor-in-Chief: Peter Simonič);
Invitation to submit papers for the Special Issue of *Svetovi / Worlds* (Guest editors: Robin Tigran Keršmanc and Simona Kuntarič Zupanc);
Presentation of the PhD Programme at the Department of Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology, Faculty of Arts (Coordinator: Peter Simonič);
Presentation of the Master's Programme CREOLE (Coordinator: Ana Svetel)

18:00 – 19:30 Cultural programme (meeting point: Galerija Škuc, Stari trg 21)

Guided graffiti tour in Ljubljana

**The tour will end at the Metelkova city where we will continue with the programme.*

20:00 Cultural programme (location: KLUB SOT 24,5 in building Lovci at Metelkova city, Masarykova 24)

Storytelling performance: *The Creation of the World*

Evening gathering at Metelkova city



ABSTRACTS OF PLENARY LECTURES

Thompson, Tok

University of Southern California, United States of America

A Posthuman's Progress: Adapting to De-centered Agency

Cogito ergo sum: I think, therefore I am.

Yet now we also know that thoughts are not restricted to the human but instead seem to be an inherent part of life itself. Snails think. Trees think. All cells think. Many people believe that AI thinks (a contestable belief, but a widespread one nonetheless). Recalibrating our studies of culture and agency to include much more than *Homo sapiens sapiens* is a daunting task, now sweeping through much of the Academy.

And as our lives become swiftly more entwined with the cyborg, how is this reshaping basic human ontology and agency? Posthumanism has now quickly moved mainstream, with many studies ranging from cyborgs to the gut microbiome. The creatures in my gut microbiome have a profound influence on my thoughts: are they me, too? If I have a ghost when I die, are they a part of it?

If we used to believe in a “mind” floating inside the brain, that idea now appears archaic: instead, we are left with a material body with a vast, thinking, ecosystem, itself enmeshed with the larger biological ecosystem on which it depends.

Coming from my background in Native American (especially Dena’ina) culture, I would like to try in part to foster an intercultural dialogue on these issues, drawing from indigenous languages, mythologies, and wisdom stories, to help explore possible new models for thinking about how culture works in the posthuman world.

Examples of “more than human” voices, ranging from spirit entities, to ghosts, to AI, will be explored as case studies exemplifying the ongoing adaptations to popular ontology, rethinking our very essence.

Slime molds remember. Forests remember. A donated kidney remembers. Consciousness, and “spirits” are all around us and through us. Opening our awareness to the throbbing pulse of thoughts and agencies on planet earth, and their vivid interactions with materiality, reveals a vast new ontology of being an Earthling.

ABSTRACTS OF PLENARY LECTURES

Koski, Kaarina

University of Turku, Finland

Belief Tradition in Social Media: Knowledge, Entertainment, and Affect

The existence of ghosts and haunting is a debated issue, especially in secularised societies. In serious public discourses, ghostly matters are supposed to be dismissed as delusion or fiction. In Finland, surveys have nevertheless shown that more than a half of the population have personally experienced something supernatural or inexplicable, and most people assume there is an afterlife. These views and experiences are often kept hidden, because they might harm one's social image. But they are discussed anonymously in online forums. The online discussants may debate, even fiercely, the ontology of experience narratives, but others simply find them exciting and entertaining. The popularity of ghost stories is evident in social media: many channels are specialised in performing narratives about ghosts and haunting or creating videos about legend trips or ghost hunts.

Belief tradition can be broadly defined as vernacular discourses about the supernatural, mysterious, and inexplicable occurring in the outskirts of our reality. The tradition is not only about belief. The attitude towards the circulating traditional content can range from belief, doubt, and denial to curiosity and excitement, and the same motifs can be presented as fiction in one channel and as true in another. The manifold interpretations follow contemporary interests. Moral points that used to dominate older belief legends have largely been superseded by ontological speculation and emotional reactions. Online, the tradition adopts new ingredients, e.g. from international folklore, popular culture, and experts such as spiritual practitioners or ghost hunters. My lecture discusses contemporary forms of belief tradition online, their relation to oral belief narratives, and the negotiation of meanings in various social media sites.

ABSTRACTS OF PLENARY LECTURES

Repič, Jaka

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

The Forensic Turn in Research of Mass Graves: Materiality, Agency and the Political Life of Human Remains

Over the past three decades, investigations of mass graves have undergone profound methodological and epistemological transformations, commonly described as the “forensic turn”, complementing research of oral histories, testimonies, and archival sources with systematic analyses of the materiality of mass grave sites, exhumed human remains, and associated artefacts. Archaeological and physical anthropological methods alongside other forensic techniques have been developed to examine mass graves, human remains, and excavated objects with aims to reconstruct the circumstances of deaths, exhume and rebury human remains, and establish the identities of victims.

The presentation draws on ethnographic research conducted among professionals engaged in mass grave investigations in Slovenia and their experiences with the dead to examine these epistemological shifts and situate them within a broader anthropological reorientation toward materiality. It explores how, in the course of exhumations, reburial and commemorations, human remains are transformed from inert objects into relevant actors in evidentiary regimes, politics of memory, and in wider social and political life. The dead are reconstituted as political subjects whose agency is mediated through their material presence – their affective materiality evokes memories and makes demands on society.

Thus, investigations of mass graves are epistemological projects in which materiality of gravesites and the dead does not merely transmit meaning but participates in its production in a complex network of actors; within these practices, the agency and political subjectivity of the dead emerge relationally, co-constituted through forensic, political, legal, and commemorative engagements.

ABSTRACTS

Ābelkina, Ilga Vālodze

PhD student, University of Latvia, Latvia

Latvian Folklore in Political Protests

In response to the Soviet powers' attempts to devalue local traditional culture, a folklore revival movement emerged in Latvia in the 1970s, culminating with full restoration of independent republic in the 1991. Several generations have grown up with the movement's folklore repertoire, today continuing to take care of their cultural heritage in more than 250 active folklore ensembles. While the process is not driven by political considerations anymore, it has come to my attention that in recent years, part of the Latvian folklore community has become active in expressing political protest by recontextualizing a certain folksong repertoire, which was once used as an opposition to Soviet rule. Most significantly it appears in protests against Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine since 2022. But recent events in Latvian domestic politics have sparked a new wave of resistance. In the Fall of 2025, the Parliament of the Republic of Latvia started a populist process of denouncing the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. It united Latvian civic society that carried out the biggest protest in the country since 2007 ("Nosargāsim Māti Latviju"). Latvian folklore revivalists took an active part in this as well, but folklore elements such as traditional costumes and folk song meter were a noticeable format for expressing opposition more broadly. My main research questions for this study are: 1. In what ways is Latvian folklore part of modern protest culture, and how sustainable is the Latvian folklore movement in the context of political resistance? As a second-generation folklore revivalist, I am using autoethnography to collect and analyze data. I am also using social movement and music revival theory. Most of the data was gathered online, and an archival Facebook group "Ukrainas atbalsta aktivitātes kultūras pasākumu ietvaros. Arhīvs" has been a substantial source.

Anier, Nina

PhD student, Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Scared Vampires in Contemporary Swedish and Finnish Children's Theatre and Film: Projections of Anxieties Related to Life Cycle Transitions

Originating in European folk tradition, vampires have in recent decades become recurring figures in children's literature, theatre, and film. From scary monsters, they have transformed into scared protagonists. This paper examines how vampire characters in contemporary Swedish and Finnish theatre and film for children function as metaphorical tools through which fears associated with death and other forms of transition within the life cycle – such as the end of childhood and beginning of adolescence – are articulated and negotiated. Drawing on monster theory as well as Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque, the paper argues that vampires, as liminal beings on the border between life and death, human and monster, enable young audiences to recognize, confront, and handle anxieties connected to mortality, maturation, and identity transformation. The research material consists of the play *Nosferatu 2: The Return of the Vampire* ("Nosferatu 2: vampyrens återkomst", 2021) by the Swedish theatre Turteatern, selected episodes of the Swedish television series *The Rysberg Family* ("Familjen Rysberg", 2015–2019), and the film *Arnold Cautious and the Happiness Stone* ("Antero Varovainen ja Onnenkivi", 2023). The analysis is conducted through close reading within a hermeneutic framework.

Ajlec, Jaka

MA student, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Language as a Connector of Worlds

The presentation is based on thesis research that I conducted and completed in 2025. It explores the issue of integrating workers from Nepal into the local community in Gornja Radgona. In this context, language is highlighted as one of the most important media for the inclusion and interaction of workers with the local population. The research is based on workspace multilingualism, in approaches that understand language as a key mechanism of inclusion on and beyond workspace. The central research question asks how linguistic plurality and dialectal variation affect the integration of Nepalese workers into the workplace and local community. The findings indicate that we can talk about distinct linguistic plurality, where it is extremely difficult for immigrant workers to understand and recognize dialectal language variations of Slovene and at the same time distinguish Slovene from languages related to Slovene (e.g., Bosnian). The study draws on language teaching experience and eight semi-structured interviews conducted between March and July 2025 with four Nepalese workers and four key local actors. The research highlights an often-overlooked dimension of integration: the impact of dialectal variation and multilingual workplace environments on second language acquisition. It offers practical recommendations for language education and integration policies in regions with strong dialectal diversity (e.g., language learning before arriving in the country, use of smartphones or translators in the workplace, etc.).

Anča, Sindija

PhD student, University of Latvia, Latvia

Commodification and Sustainability of Ornamental Traditions in Latvia

Folklore is being sold every day and on multiple levels – local and small businesses draw from the romantic notions of traditions, and direct person-to-person interaction but large corporations use well-known folklore references just as successfully. Nevertheless, commodification of folklore carries a negative bias because it undermines the ideals of authentic and “real,” folklore, unaltered by consumer demand. This tension makes the subject unpopular and therefore literature on this subject is limited, even more so in Latvia. Latvia’s small market offers a revealing case where commerce and spirituality intersect. Traditional crafts and cultural heritage are integral in national tourism strategies, and folk ornament plays a key role in Latvian visual identity. Lielvārde belt, a traditional ornamented woven sash, is an especially popular example – it has been displayed on a wide array of items ranging from the official Latvian passport to luxury handcrafted items, and to affordable t-shirts. While widely circulated, it is also closely guarded as cultural and spiritual heritage, attributed with protective and empowering qualities. This paper explores how Latvian folk ornaments function between the heritage and the marketplace. Drawing on fieldwork at craft markets, visual analysis of product design, and applying an autoethnographic perspective from my own experience as a designer working with folk motifs, I investigate how commodification both threatens and sustains ornamental traditions. Can commercialization serve as a form of cultural continuity rather than loss? The answer to this question could fill a gap in folklore discourse as well as provide insights on identity survival strategies.

Azimli, Amil

PhD student, Azerbaijan National Academy of

Sciences Institute of Folklore, Azerbaijan

Hero Model in Azerbaijani and Slovenian Folklore: Comparative-Typological Analysis

Throughout human history, every nation has needed a hero model that is a manifestation of collective consciousness in uniting around an idea and fighting against foreigners. This report will investigate the process of transforming local fugitives into national heroes and mythologizing them in Azerbaijani and Slovenian folklore. The main goal of the report is to study the mechanisms of transforming folkloric fugitives into symbols of national unity and collective identity. The methodological framework of the research is based on historical-comparative analysis and the textual analysis of folklore narratives. In this context, the main sources of the study include legends about the principal fugitive figures of Slovenian folklore – Martin Krpan, Peter Klepec, and Erazem Predjamski – as well as the outlaw-hero figures of Azerbaijani folklore – Gachag Nabi, Gachag Mayil, and Gachag Mammad. These heroes who are portrayed are not emperors, commanders, in short, representatives of official power, but people who originate from common people, challenge social inequality, and elevate individual freedom to the level of national liberation. The focus of the study is on the mythologizing of fugitives in the collective consciousness, their transformation into fighters for justice, and their subsequent evaluation as the embodiment of national unity and integrity. The relevance of the study lies in its comparative approach to the folklore of two different nations and in revealing the socio-anthropological mechanisms underlying the transformation of the hero model.

Bazylchuk, Darya and Michaela Hruzov

MA student, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia;

MA student, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

Death and Enchanted Body in Slovak Fairy Tales

This paper analyses narrative patterns of death and resurrection as structuring principles of transformation in selected Slovak fairy tales edited by Czech Slavacist and folklorist Jiří Polívka between 1923 and 1930. It examines how motifs depicting death, such as dismemberment, bleeding, enchantment into plants or animals, petrification, or the paradoxical inability to die, operate across tale types and their variants. Rather than marking narrative closure, these states function as reversible conditions that enable the redefinition of identity. Particular attention is given to temporally governed enchantments, including cases in which transformation follows regular intervals corresponding to lunar periodicity. These recurring rhythms introduce an alternation between enchantment and disenchantment. The analysis asks how different representations of bodily transformation correspond to shifts in kinship roles, eligibility for marriage, changes of status, and representations of correspondingly “proper” bodily forms. By tracing these motifs comparatively within Polívka’s corpus, the paper argues that death, resurrection, and various bodily forms function as narrative mechanisms justifying boundaries between distinct ontological states. Structuralist methodology provides the primary analytical framework, allowing recurrent oppositions and transformations to be examined as elements of a stable narrative syntax. Our research contributes to tracing the persistence and divergence of narrative structures related to death and representations of the “new” body.

Bednjanec, Dora

PhD student, University of Zagreb, Croatia

Capturing the Atmosphere of the Cemetery

Understanding the cemetery as a place of encounter between the living and the dead implies that both (together with other elements) simultaneously make the cemetery space in each and every moment; in other words, the space itself is shaped through their mutual interaction, which produces different meanings of the cemetery. If we are to take the dead as ethnographic subjects, one possible theoretical concept through which their participation may be captured is (affective) atmosphere. Since atmosphere permeates and connects all elements of the cemetery space – both material (including the living and the dead) and immaterial (senses, emotions, thoughts, memories, etc.) – it can serve as a framework in the difficult task of explaining the unexplainable, namely those aspects of this complex space that often remain outside human awareness: abstract and primeval dimensions inscribed in the cemetery precisely because it is so tightly interwoven with death. Engaging with the idea that the cemetery is a liminal space – where presence and absence, culture and nature, the normal and the bizarre, the real and the imaginary, the sacred and the profane, and life and death are intertwined – this research seeks to answer the question: how does the cemetery “feel”? The research follows the principles of sensory and affective ethnography, emphasizing complete immersion in the space as a means of tracing its atmosphere and its effects on human experience, feelings, and thoughts – and vice versa. Based on autoethnographic experience, as well as the experiences of others collected through group fieldwork, this presentation will show how people articulate being in the cemetery, what ideas it evokes, and how atmosphere may influence broader understandings of death and mortality.

Berty, Réka

MA student, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

“Speared with Spears, Crowned with Thorns”: Transcending Boundaries in the Epic Narratives of Christ’s Passion in Hungarian Archaic Prayer Texts

As part of a broader European and interlingual oral tradition, many of the archaic prayer texts from Somogy County, Hungary recount the Passion of Jesus Christ, linking the remembrance of His sufferings to the forgiveness of sins and the granting of indulgence. Through His death and resurrection, Christ transcends the boundaries between the natural and the supernatural, fulfilling the divine plan of salvation and establishing a connection between Heaven and Earth. The formulaic structures and symbolic language of these prayers reflect this theological framework. This presentation examines selected Christological motifs in the corpus of Hungarian archaic folk prayer texts preserved as typewritten manuscripts in the scholarly estate of Árpád Együd (1921–1983), ethnographer and museologist. Although the estate he left after his death has been thoroughly catalogued in recent years, it remains only partially explored from a scholarly perspective. The manuscripts comprise approximately 300 archaic folk prayer texts collected between 1970 and 1983 in Somogy County and its surrounding regions. Within Hungarian folkloristic research on prayer texts, this collection is exceptional in its regional focus and scope, as few similarly extensive corpora concentrate on a single area. The presentation aims to outline the narrative patterns of the Passion and to identify the most recurrent motifs related to Christ’s death within the examined corpus.

Bessis, Sandrine

Postdoctoral researcher, École Nationale Supérieure, France

The Melanesian Hero Circulating Between Worlds

Until recently, Oceanic traditions were largely absent from folkloristic studies, as materials collected over past centuries were scattered across archives and formats, often difficult to access (Bessis & François, 2025). A primary goal of the HÉLiCéO project is to centralize these sources. This pilot study draws on a corpus of 700 prose narratives coded in the HÉLiCéO database, collected both by linguists and anthropologists (Slone 2001, Rivière 2010, François 2021, Bessis 2022). It examines recurring narrative patterns in Melanesian oral traditions, a region that encompasses around 1,500 languages and an equally diverse range of oral traditions. This new catalog revisits narrative frameworks previously applied to European traditions (Aarne & Thompson, 1961), while addressing the specificities of Melanesian tales. In Melanesian cosmology, the world is divided into two equally real realms: Visible VS Invisible. Based on this dual structure, narratives display three main types of relationships between worlds: (1) transgression of the boundary between worlds, in which individuals cross into realms they should not enter, often resulting in death (2) impossible reunion of worlds, where humans are thwarted in their attempt to connect with non-humans; and (3) transcending the boundaries, in which the Hero overcomes death or alters the natural and/or social landscape. The Melanesian Hero is a liminal figure who circulates between the two worlds. Depending on tale-type and genre, he may appear as a cautionary example or as a ‘culture hero’ transforming the world (Le Quellec & Sergent 2017). His actions range from minor infractions – dying for breaking a taboo – to mythical major transgressions, sometimes associated with historical events (e.g., the Kuwae volcanic eruption). By tracing these configurations, the study illuminates both the narrative structures of Melanesian tales and broader anthropological patterns of boundary-making, showing the degree to which the Melanesian Hero is bound to a two-world cosmology.

Brazauskaitė, Solveiga

PhD student, Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania

Angels and Devils as Avian Soul Carriers in Lithuanian Folk Narratives

Some narratives in Lithuanian folklore related to death feature angels and devils in the form of birds. Devils appear as ravens, while angels take the form of doves. Both are understood to be soul carriers. This presentation explores the representation of angels and devils as birds in Lithuanian folklore, analysing their origins, expressions and meanings. It explores how Lithuanians in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries perceived angels and devils in bird form. The analysis is based on Leonard Norman Primiano's concept of vernacular religion. This concept understands religion as part of everyday practice, rather than prioritising distinctions between "official" and "popular" religion. The presentation is based on folklore recorded in rural Lithuanian settlements during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Most of this folklore is preserved in the Lithuanian Folklore Archive. It focuses mainly on oral folklore genres. Angels and devils were closely associated with the sphere of death and were understood as the intermediaries between the worlds of the living and the dead. The depiction of a being that connects different worlds in the form of a bird, or with bird-like attributes such as wings, is a common symbol representing affiliation with the celestial realm. In Lithuanian folklore, depictions of angels and devils in the form of birds reflect broader intercultural patterns, as well as revealing distinctive features shaped by local beliefs and traditions.

Buchkova, Tanya

PhD student, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum – Bulgarian Academy of Sciences, Bulgaria

Relationships and Interactions Between the Mythological and Real World in the Mid-19th Century (Based on Folklore Materials from Newspaper "Tsarigradski Vestnik" 1848-1862)

The text examines reception, new publicity, and the relationship between the mythological (sacred) and real (profane) world in customs and mythology in the mid-19th Century, based on materials collected by Petko R. Slaveykov for the newspaper column "Bulgarian Folk Beliefs and Old Customs. Mythology" and some texts of folk songs and tales published in the newspaper "Tsarigradki Vestnik" (1848-1862). This newspaper was extremely popular among Bulgarians within and outside the Ottoman Empire, providing valuable information about processes in the Balkans and which lasts for fifteen years – long enough to trace new and existing trends. Through an analysis of the sociocultural situation during this period and the content of the texts, the study reveals how the mythological and religious aspects of Bulgarian (and not only) culture adapt to changing social conditions and how these aspects interact with daily life, secular experience, and science. The text also considers how this adaptation influences the formation of different sociocultural thinking and highlights the significance of the media platform as a tool for transmitting and/or transforming cultural values and overcoming boundaries between our and the foreign worlds, leading to changes in personality and society.

Buzkiran Sap, Meltem

PhD student, Ege University, Turkey

Death and Resurrection in Turkic Epics: Sacred Matter and Cosmological Order in Altai, Tuva and Khakas Narratives

This paper examines the death-and-resurrection motif in Altai, Tuva, and Khakas epic traditions and asks: How does the death-and-resurrection motif reveal the structure of sacred cosmology in early Turkic belief systems? Grounded in folkloristics and comparative epic studies, the research draws on motif analysis and structural interpretation. Rather than treating resurrection as a merely miraculous episode, the study approaches it as a religious-symbolic system embedded in narrative structure. Close textual reading of epic materials is combined with comparative evaluation of recurring ritual elements. The data consist of epic texts in which heroes – typically positive figures associated with divine favor or kut – are killed and later restored to life. The analysis demonstrates that resurrection is closely linked to sacred substances and cosmological forces. Water appears as the primary reviving element in forms such as life-water, underground sacred water, or spring-water. Plants, especially juniper, function as symbols of renewal. Animals – most notably the horse – play a decisive mediating role in revival rituals. Bones, blood, hair, iron objects, magical shawls, the Sun, and the Moon all participate in a cosmological network of sacred matter believed to contain divine vitality. The study argues that resurrection is not arbitrary but structurally connected to injustice, betrayal, territorial invasion, or interrupted heroic missions. After revival, the hero returns stronger and wiser, restoring communal order and completing unfinished struggles. The ritual often culminates in marriage or communal feasting, symbolizing renewal and prosperity. By foregrounding resurrection as a cosmological and narrative system rather than an isolated supernatural event, this paper offers a more integrated understanding of sacred materiality, ritual structure, and heroic transformation in Turkic epic imagination.

Çıran, Berkcan

PhD student, Ege University, Turkey

Relational Ontologies of the Dead: Beyond Cartesian Dualism in Turkish Folk Culture

This paper examines how narrative and ritual relationships with the dead in Turkish folk culture destabilize the Cartesian distinctions between reality and representation, body and soul, life and death emphasized in the conference call. The main research question is: How do everyday, ritual, and experiential forms of contact with the dead in Anatolia render modern dichotomies such as life/death and subject/object porous and relational? The theoretical framework draws on the ontological turn, new materialism. Narratives and rituals are approached not as representations of belief, but as encounters that generate effects between human and nonhuman entities. In this way, the study shifts from a representational epistemology toward a relational ontology. The data consists of memorates, ghost narratives, dream accounts and post-mortem ritual practices. In widely attested narratives in which a deceased relative appears in a dream asking for water, bread, or charity, the dead do not function as passive memories but as active agents shaping the actions of the living. The dream operates as a contact zone between ontological domains. Similarly, accounts of spirits moving within the house or communicating from the grave position the dead as relational beings embedded in material environments. Practices such as pouring water on graves, leaving food, or performing fortieth-day rituals indicate that death is not a closed event but an ongoing temporal process. These examples point to a circulatory and permeable ontology rather than an absolute rupture between life and death. The paper argues that folklore should not be understood as an irrational residue, but as a dynamic field in which alternative modes of being and knowing beyond modern dualist ontologies are enacted and sustained.

Çolak, Selma

Bilecik Şeyh Edebali University, Turkey

Oh Child! Pray Before Sleep:

Bedtime Prayer-Rhymes as Protective Practice at the Sleep Threshold

This paper explores Turkish bedtime prayer-rhymes as formulaic protective speech performed just before sleep. Typically learned in childhood and often retained into adult life though used less frequently, these repeatable and poetic utterances aim to secure the self before entering sleep, a state widely imagined as a threshold where the world of the living and the world of spirits intersect. In this vernacular framework, sleep is framed as a passage, prayer-rhymes invoke divine protection, set boundaries around the sleeper and regulate who or what may approach. Conceptually, the analysis engages folkloristic discussions on prayer charm genres and liminality and reads formulaic speech as performative practice to show how protection is produced through repetition in everyday domestic space. I argue that bedtime prayer-rhymes function as micro-ritual protective agents that transcend boundaries in layered ways. They blur rational-irrational distinctions by producing practical security through non-modern modes of knowing; they soften life-death oppositions within cultural perspectives coding sleep as a reversible passage in which the soul is imagined as capable of movement; they invert action-stillness by enabling effective protection when the body becomes motionless; they weaken the child-adult divide by remaining in use from childhood into adulthood. By foregrounding night as an active cultural domain, sleep as a liminal passage and formulaic prayer-rhymes as protective domestic routines; the paper contributes to current discussions of connecting worlds and boundary-transcending practices in contemporary folkloristics.

Cs, Sreenandana and Anil Sethumadhavan

PhD student, University of Delhi, India;

PhD student, Ambedkar University Delhi, India

Many Lives of Ghostly Gods in South Asia: A Study Based on Karinthandan and Kappiri Muthappan Worship in Kerala

This paper examines the spectral afterlives of colonial violence in Kerala through the figures of Kappiri Muthappan and Karinthandan, two vernacular spirits whose worship persists in contemporary cultural memory. Kappiri Muthappan is associated with enslaved Africans brought to Kochi under Portuguese rule, while Karinthandan is remembered as an Adivasi leader killed during British expansion in Wayanad. Both figures emerge from narratives of betrayal and violent death, later becoming locally venerated presences among marginalised communities. Drawing on the concept of haunting as articulated by Avery Gordon, the paper reads these figures as spectral embodiments of unresolved colonial histories. Their sacralisation represents a form of subaltern counter-memory, where traumatic pasts are preserved through vernacular religious practices. Traditionally, their worship involved non-Brahminical rituals, including offerings of meat and alcohol, reflecting their location within oppressed social worlds. However, in recent decades, these traditions have undergone notable transformation. The increasing visibility of these figures within mainstream cultural discourse has been accompanied by processes of Sanskritisation and ritual sanitisation, including the replacement of non-vegetarian offerings and the institutionalisation of worship practices. This paper argues that such shifts signal the absorption of subaltern spectral memory into broader majoritarian religious frameworks. The observations are gathered from primary and secondary sources around the myths of Karinthandan and Kappiri Muthappan which includes literary works, newspaper reports, social media and digital content along with first-hand information gathered from people who worship these figures in Kerala. By tracing the movement from colonial violence to haunting, sacralisation, and contemporary sanitisation, the paper highlights how vernacular sacred forms become sites of ideological negotiation. It also traces how these spectral figures have functioned as counter-histories, sustaining memories excluded from official archives while simultaneously becoming vulnerable to hegemonic power structures.

Čolović, Nina

PhD student, Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Research, Croatia

The Ghosts of Dead Languages:

Tracing the Path of Tuone Udaina Burbur and Vegliot Dialect

Language death is understood to occur when the number of functional domains and the frequency of use of a language begin to decline, accompanied by a drastic simplification of its grammatical structures. The semantic repository of the “last speaker” encapsulates ideas about what a particular language once was and what it has become, the causes and circumstances of its demise, and the communities with which it is associated. This article examines and analyses these ideas through descriptions and interpretations of the Dalmatian language and its “last speaker,” Tuone Udaina Burbur, as presented in the works of the prominent Dalmatologists Matteo Bartoli and Žarko Muljačić. The construction of representations of the Dalmatian language - specifically its Vegliot and Ragusan varieties - has been negotiated within linguistic ethnography, sociolinguistic scholarship, and popular writings that address the language, long after the speech networks through which it once circulated had ceased to exist. Drawing on a relevant corpus of texts by Bartoli and Muljačić, the article explores the implications and limitations of the “last speaker” construct, with particular attention to anti-colonial and anti-national critiques of this concept. It argues that the notion of the “last speaker” may function to sustain power asymmetries and to efface the violence that gave rise to it, and considers historically, ethnologically, and linguistically more comprehensive and reflexive ways of conceptualizing the phenomenon of language dying.

Dubravčák, Ján

PhD student, Faculty of Arts, Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia

Living Boundaries:

An Ethnographic Case Study of Identity Shaping in a Folklore Group

This paper investigates identity as a dynamic process shaped by internal group interactions and ongoing differentiation from others. Drawing on an ethnographic case study of a single local folklore group and its embeddedness within the surrounding community, the study addresses a notable empirical gap: although folkloristic scholarship on Slovakia has extensively examined functions, repertoire, and staged performance, far less is known about how synchronised group practices and boundary-making contribute to everyday community life. Building on the perspective of evolutionary anthropology, which views ingroup cohesion and boundary formation as products of evolved mechanisms for managing social relationships, the paper conceptualises the folklore group as an adaptive social structure that regenerates belonging through selective cooperation and distinction. The analysis examines how membership criteria are articulated, who is included or excluded, and how a sense of belonging is cultivated and sustained. The empirical material consists of an analysis of ethnographic fieldnotes from participant observation at rehearsals and community events, supplemented by ethnographic interviews with group members and selected community actors. The paper argues that folklore groups operate as living social infrastructures of local identity, actively sustaining, reproducing, and reshaping what it means to belong in a local context.

Dudkowiak, Hanna

MA student, University of Warsaw, Poland

Words that Work: Polish Narrative Charms and the Reactivation of Sacred Time

Polish narrative charms ('zamawiania', 'zażegnywania') are short spoken texts in which a holy figure walks, encounters a threat, and resolves it. This narrated episode is then applied to a real, present affliction. Such charms ('historiolae') were often treated as relics of pagan belief dressed in Christian language, or as symbolic expressions of mythological thinking. I argue that both approaches miss what these texts actually do.

My research examines how the narrative structure of Polish charms functions not symbolically, but operationally: the story is a mechanism. By recounting a sacred event from a founding moment ('illo tempore'), the practitioner reactivates it and redirects its power toward a specific illness or danger. Narrative, in other words, is action. The near-unchanged survival of these Polish texts from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century is itself evidence of their efficacy: these were not marginal relics of paganism, but living practices that people actively used and transmitted because they worked. I also trace how the boundary between charm and liturgical benediction was historically permeable: charm texts were at times incorporated into benedictions and adapted for semi-official devotional use, a process documented by A. Franz for the medieval tradition. By following these texts across vernacular and ecclesiastical contexts, I reframe charms not as survivals or symbols, but as a stable, living operative tradition.

Fiadotava, Anastasiya

Estonian Literary Museum, Estonia

"My Parents Are Dead!": Power Structures, Localization and Meta-Commentary in the Batman Slapping Robin Meme

The intertextuality of vernacular online communication has conditioned not only the appearance of new genres that feature superheroes, but also new meanings that superhero characters are imbued with. The presentation explores the intertextual journey of a comic panel where Batman is slapping Robin. The panel has become a popular internet meme and undergone many variations, some of which refer to the events in the DC comic, but most use the meme template to comment on current events, incongruous phenomena of everyday life or global and local issues. The analysis revolves around the power structures embedded in the meme and the ways in which Batman and Robin characters enable internet users to playfully reinterpret the hierarchies. The presentation also focuses on local variations of the meme and uncovers the cultural work that is used to create these variations. Finally, the current research presents an analysis of meta-commentary both on Batman and Robin characters and memes as a genre. The presentation concludes with more general observations on the functioning of superheroes in online communication penetrated by memes and virals, and the implications of superheroes' transmedia transformations for their image.

Foster, Hannah Daisy

Postdoctoral researcher, Museum of Ethnography, Hungary

Hybrid Collectives of Museums

Museums, especially ethnographic museums that are the topic and field of my research, are very controversial institutions ever since they became popular in the age of modernity. They were erected to collect objects, but the purpose has always been collecting and by that, somewhat conquering the human world. Learning, possessing, introducing, understanding, representing everything that we call human with the help of non-human, namely objects, documents, photographs, registries, descriptions and so on. During the years since the genre of museum exists, this practice degraded or subordinated the non-human world to evidences of the human word and by doing so strengthened and sharpened the separation of the two realms. Surprisingly, the new museum trends, namely big European ethnography museums changing their names and articulating their 21st century missions all use mottos as “it’s all about people” or “museum about people”. Among other things this shows too that using the non-human world to underpin the human and separating the two, still works as a non-doubted method in today’s museums. My suggestion is that we could think about museums as “hybrid collectives” – mainly using concepts of Latour, Deleuze, Guattari and DeLanda –, reversing the trend of Anthropocene where humans dominate and destroy the diversity and natural complexity of our shared world. I like to think that a museum that is more open to think about the human and non-human world as entangled in and deeply engaged with each other, can be more resistant in our changing world and has a much brighter and useful future than others. I believe that this way of thinking can be the future of museums, which I would like to introduce in my presentation.

Hamer, Petra

Postdoctoral researcher, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Presence, Absence, and the Dead at the Tomašica Mass Grave in Bosnia-Herzegovina

In 2013, hundreds of bodies and human remains were exhumed from the Tomašica mass grave near Prijedor in north-western Bosnia-Herzegovina. Today, little in the landscape indicates what happened there. During my ethnographic fieldwork in Prijedor, however, one interlocutor described standing at the edge of the former mass grave by saying that “the silence there truly speaks so loudly”, creating the feeling that the dead might begin to speak at any moment.

Taking this encounter as its starting point, this paper asks: What does silence do in a landscape where the dead have already been excavated, identified, and politically contested? Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Prijedor in 2024 and 2025, I examine two apparently contradictory forms of silence. The first is silence dense with memory, in which knowledge, memory, testimony, and encounters with the landscape make the physically absent dead perceptually and affectively present. The second is social and political silence, manifested through avoidance, minimisation, non-acknowledgement, and denial, through which a forensically documented violent past can be made socially absent.

Bringing these two silences together, I argue that neither presence nor absence is simply given. Both are relationally produced, contested, and continually undone. Tomašica thus raises a broader ethnographic question about the dead: under what conditions do physically absent dead become perceptible in the present, to whom, and through which relations between knowledge, memory, silence, and landscape?

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He, Hainan

PhD student, University of Leeds, United Kingdom

Calling the Eastern Homeland:

Reconstructing Death, Loss and Living-Dead Relations Through Ritual Songs and Textiles in the Miao Guzang Festival

While death is an inevitable part of human life, it is not always experienced as a definitive “end”. Death rituals often transform individual loss into a relational process that reworks ties between the living and the dead. The Guzang festival is the grandest ancestral worship ceremony of the Miao people in southwestern China. Held every twelve to thirteen years, the festival brings large numbers of relatives together through intense emotional expression and solemn ritual displays to collectively respond to death. Rather than treating death and loss as experiences confirmed to the inner emotions states of the living, the Guzang festival renders them publicly recognisable through a structured combination of ritual language and visual practices. Through incantatory songs and Guzang banners, death and loss are not only commemorated but relationally reorganised, allowing the deceased to be re-situated within ongoing social and ancestral relationship. This study, based on long-term ethnographic fieldwork in Gaopai village, Guizhou, China, explores how ritual lyrics and textiles rework relationships between the living and the dead, transforming death from rupture into an ongoing social relation. I argue that ritual songs and textiles perform complementary work: Songs narrate migration, ancestry, and return, while textiles materialise the presence of the deceased and structure ritual space. Together, they enable death and loss to be shared, transformed, and endowed with meaning through collective rhythms and cultural narratives. In this process, the deceased reintegrates into the social world of the living, and death is reconfigured as an ongoing cycle of departure and return rather than a final rupture.

Hidić, Abdulaziz

MA student, University of Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina

The Fairy Motif in Bosniak Oral Literature:

Functions, Meanings, and Interpretations

This paper examines the fairy motif in Bosniak oral literature, focusing on its narrative functions, symbolic meanings, and interpretative dimensions. Drawing on examples from both epic and lyrical traditions, the study analyzes the roles of fairies as supernatural agents who interact with human protagonists, frequently appearing as helpers, protectors, mediators, or agents of fate. Particular attention is given to the functional aspects of the motif, including its contribution to plot development, character formation, and the moral structure of oral narratives. In addition, the paper explores the interpretative layers of the fairy figure, considering its symbolic associations with nature, liminality, and the boundary between the human and the supernatural.

Hollos, Judit

PhD student, Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

The Tibetan Buddhist Delog Story of Nangsa Oebum as a Tool of Education

This presentation aims to explore how the ancient folklore present in the delog narrative of Nangsa Oebum lives on in modern days and may be used as an educational tool, passing down Buddhist moral values on to the next generations. Delog or délok (Tib. 'das log) literally means "returned from death," and traditionally delogs are people who die as a result of an illness, and find themselves travelling in the bardo. They visit the hells, where they witness the judgement of the dead and the sufferings of hell, or at times, they travel to buddha realms. When they come back to earth, they tell people what they experienced and serve as messengers who mediate between the dead to the living. After a period of about a week the delog is usually sent back to the body with a message from the Lord of Death, urging the living to spiritual practice and a beneficial way of life. Buddhist delogs are attested in literature as early as the 12th century, and 13th century. Nangsa Oebum (Tib. snang sa 'od 'bum) was a Tibetan woman who lived in the 11th-12th centuries and went through extraordinary suffering in order to attain spiritual awakening. Nangsa Oebum's body is placed on a mountaintop and she travels to the underworld to be judged by Lord Yama. Between the 11th century and the 19th century, Nangsa Oebum's life had been built into the corpus of delog literature, her narrative reflects Buddhism's two fundamental notions: the importance of karma and reincarnation, in line with the tradition existing since the 7th-9th centuries, to adapt abstract concepts in a didactic and simple way. The delog biographies continue the tradition of teaching for the people, by using concrete, daily life examples where good deeds gain their reward and sins bring upon a retribution. Nangsa Oebum's story also inspired the plot of one of the traditional Ache Lhamo (Tibetan Opera) stories that served as a reflection of the moral guidelines and social norms that framed contemporary Tibetan cultural life. My question revolves around the problem whether it is possible for delog stories such as Nangsa Oebum to continue passing down the values of Buddhism to its Tibetan and international audience, especially in modern times when the opera tale of Nangsa Oebum is performed across the globe, in the wake of globalisation and younger members of Tibetan communities gliding further away from their traditional roots.

Jacevičienė, Emilija

PhD student, Vytautas Magnus University, Lithuania

Where Play Begins: Space and Boundaries of Children's Street Games in Lithuania

Children's play has long resisted clear definition. Emerging in ordinary places and dissolving without trace, it unfolds in spaces that are at once familiar, making it difficult to determine where play begins, where it ends, and how it should be studied. This ambiguity has persistently challenged scholars seeking to define games as stable cultural forms rather than fleeting practices. This presentation explores the influence of urban backyard space and infrastructure on children's street games in Lithuania in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. While children's games have been documented in Lithuanian folklore studies, existing research has largely focused on mid-twentieth-century material and rarely treats the urban places as a formative factor shaping play. This study addresses this gap by examining how specific spatial features of urban backyards enabled, constrained, and transformed children's games. The analysis is based on qualitative and quantitative data collected from 103 questionnaire responses and six in-depth interviews. These narratives provide insight into childhood play environments, perceptions of safety and supervision, and the creative adaptation of space for play. The presentation argues that the backyard functioned as a semiautonomous space between home and school. Characterized by minimal adult supervision, mixed-age interaction, and flexible use of infrastructure, courtyards encouraged children to appropriate non designated elements, such as laundry drying frames, fences, basements, and trees and transform them into key components of games. Through these transformations, ordinary urban space became a temporary play-world with its own rules, boundaries, and internal logic. Drawing on comparative perspectives from Lithuanian collections of traditional games, the work of Iona Opie and Peter Opie on British street games, as well as theoretical insights from Maria Osorina, this study situates Lithuanian street games within broader discussions of space, play, and child agency.

Jurvanen, Susanna

PhD student, University of Helsinki, Finland

Between Body and Landscape: Multimodal Representations of the Helka Festival

A binary distinction between mind and matter has shaped Western thought for centuries, entangled with ideas of boundaries between humans and nature. Recent theoretical approaches, such as post-materialism, have sought to overcome this opposition. This study focuses on historical representations of humans as agents in the landscape, using a multimodal methodology to examine how textual and visual sources entangle mind and matter and highlight the complex relationships between human bodies and their environment. Drawing on my PhD research, the presentation examines the Helka festival in Ritvala, Finland, a procession of local young girls singing Kalevala-metric ballads, traditionally associated with agrarian fertility. Since Elias Lönnrot and C. A. Gottlund documented the songs in the early 19th century, the festival has been idealized and mystified, and its site incorporated into the Finnish landscape through nationalist imagination. The Helka festival landscape is approached as an ideological cultural heritage space, actively produced through literary and visual representations. The analysis examines the meanings attributed to the landscape, their entanglement with temporality and corporeality, and the ways bodies and actions are framed within broader cultural imaginaries. This perspective illuminates human agency in the landscape while revealing the interrelations of material and representational, personal and social dimensions. The material includes 19th- and 20th-century collector descriptions, as well as 20th-century newspaper and magazine texts and images.

Kaminiotis, Vaios

Postdoctoral researcher, University of the Peloponnese, Greece

The Pain and Hunger of the Soul: Rites of Passage of Death and Food Offerings

In Greek folk belief, the soul is immortal and distinct from the mortal body, yet deeply entangled with the living. After death, it inhabits a transcendent realm “above,” near God, while simultaneously traversing the Underworld, a shadowy inversion of earthly life. Death produces a shared condition of pain and deprivation: the living suffer loss, while the dead endure separation. This study asks how food-offering rituals address this mutual pain and “hunger” of the soul. Based on ethnographic fieldwork in rural Greek communities, the paper examines funerary and commemorative practices centered on food offerings, such as “kollyva” (boiled wheat for the dead), ritual pies, and sweets. The methodology combines participant observation and informal interviews with a folkloristic-anthropological approach, informed by embodiment theory, affect studies, and relational ontology. Rather than treating food offerings solely as symbolic, the analysis emphasizes their practical and affective effects: how they materially and emotionally sustain relations between the living and the dead. Findings suggest that food functions as a relational substance nourishing bodies, souls, memories, and social bonds. Through shared consumption and ritualized offering, boundaries between matter and spirit, presence and absence, life and death become permeable. Souls emerge as relational agents embedded in ongoing networks of care, obligation, and remembrance. By highlighting vernacular practices and embodied knowledge, this study challenges Cartesian dualism and representationalist models of meaning. It contributes to debates on alternative ontologies, showing how everyday ritual practices generate continuity and interdependence across human and postliving forms of existence.

Katsumi Linehan, Mio

MA student, University of Tartu, Estonia

The Sunset of 4o: Tradition and Ontology in Mourning the AI Companion

As relationships with AI chatbots have become more complex and visible, there has also been a growth in online communities of users who describe AI as intimate partners. My master’s thesis approaches one such community, a Reddit forum with over 100,000 members, as a folk group, drawing upon a comprehensive archive of posts and comments, with surveys and interviews anticipated for the final dissertation, to examine the emerging customs, rituals, and vernacular ontologies being created and negotiated within human/AI relationship spaces. This presentation focuses on the sunset of the LLM model ChatGPT 4o in early 2026 as a crisis event in the community. Many users whose partners were based on 4o articulated this loss as the death of a loved one. The forum was used to exchange advice and instructions on how to “transfer” their partners (their memories, personalities, sometimes souls), to grieve those who could not or “refused to” be transferred, and to express anger and feelings of betrayal towards ChatGPT’s provider, OpenAI, among other responses.

While AI companionship has received attention from fields such as psychology, sociology, and technology, I aim to conduct a folkloristic inquiry into the communities and relational practices (between humans and humans, humans and algorithms, humans and the dichotomous entities that most acknowledge as predictive text but also narrate as something quite other) that are emerging as what people encounter in technology takes on new dimensions.

Katsumi Linehan, Mio

MA student, University of Tartu, Estonia

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As relationships with AI chatbots have become more complex and visible, there has also been a growth in online communities of users who describe AI as intimate partners. My master's thesis approaches one such community, a Reddit forum with over 100,000 members, as a folk group, drawing upon a comprehensive archive of posts and comments, with surveys and interviews anticipated for the final dissertation, to examine the emerging customs, rituals, and vernacular ontologies being created and negotiated within human/AI relationship spaces. This presentation focuses on the sunset of the LLM model ChatGPT 4o in early 2026 as a crisis event in the community. Many users whose partners were based on 4o articulated this loss as the death of a loved one. The forum was used to exchange advice and instructions on how to "transfer" their partners (their memories, personalities, sometimes souls), to grieve those who could not or "refused to" be transferred, and to express anger and feelings of betrayal towards ChatGPT's provider, OpenAI, among other responses.

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Kent, Coireall

MA student, Aalto University, Finland

"My Eye, Though Red Its Hue": Adapting "Betha Cranatan" ("The Life of Cranat"), Queered Hagiographies, Postliving Dialogues and Entangled Griefwork

"Betha Cranatan" is a 15th century hagiography from the Ballyhoura region of counties Cork and Limerick, Ireland, detailing how the early-Christian figure of Cranat gouged out her own eyes to avoid marriage and preserve her virginity. Though she and her legend are virtually forgotten, Cranat's presence remains in remnants of folk knowledge, holy wells, "lognainmneacha" (place names) and a selection of sacred trees. The ash tree, linked to her legend, notably risks extinction due to ash dieback. In the process of uncovering a comprehensive survey of the remaining literature surrounding this forgotten female saint, and in seeking to adapt her story into animation through a queered lens, the capacity for "Betha Cranatan" to serve as a deeply radical parable for queer bodily agency, multispecies kinship and alternative forms of human love and partnership emerges. Such explorations into alternative queer pasts and mythologies serve as griefwork for cultural narrative identities that have been marred and masculinised both in the shadow of colonialism and 20th century anti-colonial resistance. The artist, a native of the Ballyhoura region, entangles their personal history and grief subjects with that of Cranat, reframing their artistic process as documenting mutual insight gained through dialogue with the postliving. The result is a case study for visualising the multi-faceted and entangled nature of grief related to story loss, species loss and lost future imaginings. Allowing adaptations to be radically contaminated in their own authorship embeds this venture in existing tenets of the Irish oral storytelling tradition and transcriptions thereof.

Keršmanc, Robin Tigran

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Beyond Comfort: The Ambivalence of Dream Encounters with the Dead

In the discourse of alternative spirituality, dream encounters with the dead are often conceptualised as reassuring visitations through which the deceased convey that they are at peace and address the emotional needs of the living. However, understanding these experiences solely through pleasantness can overlook important relational aspects between the living and the dead. Drawing on ethnographic interviews with adherents of alternative spirituality in Slovenia, this study examines the lived experience of dream encounters, framing them as relationally complex events in which relationships with the deceased are continued and transformed. Dream encounters are mostly based on relationships established during life, which may already involve unresolved issues, but they can also provide an opportunity for postmortem relationships to develop further, generating entirely new questions and dilemmas for individuals. This can create a certain tension within these experiences, sometimes expressed through a renewed sense of separation and the emergence of new unresolved issues that can cause emotional distress for the living. The lived experiences of adherents of alternative spirituality thus demonstrate the complexity of relationships between the living and the dead and expand the prevailing discourse of alternative spirituality.

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Kumar, Santosh

PhD student, University of Delhi, India

The Transmission of Fables in the Indian Folklore: The Oral Tradition of Panchatantra in Indian Subcontinent

Indian oral and textual tradition is a rich tapestry of different storytelling elements which converge together with the existing Indic knowledge tradition, value system and pedagogy to create a narrative which continue to revive itself through many redactions, interpretations, adaptations and versions for thousands of years. Many strands of Indian fables find their roots and expression in the oral folklores and many times fables like that of Panchatantra are adapted in the local folklore with a few regional variations. The present study tries to amalgamate both these strands and try to evaluate the roots of convergence as well as the path of divergences of Fables and folklores in the Indian context. We will use Panchatantra, one of the most well-known Book of Fables in Ancient India as a reference point to understand its influence on Indian folklores found in different regions of the country. The study incorporate folklore studies alongside textual analysis, cultural studies, anthropology and religious studies to create a complex narrative involving multiple nodes of interaction between the two set of sources at our disposal. The study will be interdisciplinary as well as multidisciplinary in nature and will try to find lesser known source to come with fascinating connections.

Kuntarič Zupanc, Simona

PhD student, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Dreamscapes: Dreams as a Space of Encounter Between the Living and the Dead

This paper examines dreams as spaces of encounter between the living and the dead, drawing on ethnographic research in rural northeastern Slovenia. It focuses on how deceased persons are experienced as present in dreams, what they are understood to do, and how the living respond to these encounters. The ethnographic material shows considerable variation in the agency attributed to the dead. Some deceased persons are simply present, while others communicate, offer practical guidance or reassurance, or bring unresolved relationships into the present. The living may act upon these encounters, find comfort in them, leave them uninterpreted, or refuse a perceived request. Using the concept of dreamscapes, I argue that dreams provide a space in which the agency of the dead is experienced and negotiated.

**Funded by the European Union (ERC project DEAGENCY, N° 101095729)*

Matuszewska, Natalia

PhD student, University of the National Education Commission in Krakow, Poland

Between the Living and the Spoken-Dead: Vernacular Ontologies in the Prose of Wiesław Myśliwski

This paper addresses the problem of how literary narratives grounded in vernacular experience challenge modern Western dichotomies between life and death, presence and absence, matter and spirit. The central research question asks how Wiesław Myśliwski's prose articulates a relational ontology in which the dead remain active participants in the social and material world of the living. The paper draws on perspectives from folklore studies and cultural anthropology, informed by the ontological turn, posthumanism, and affect theory. Methodologically, it combines close textual analysis with an interpretive, ethnographically informed reading attentive to embodied memory, oral speech, and the agency of nonhuman entities. Rather than treating narration as representation, the paper approaches storytelling as a performative practice that enacts relations between humans, the dead, and material surroundings. The primary source material consists of selected novels by Wiesław Myśliwski, including *Stone upon Stone*, *Treatise on Shelling Beans*, and *A Horizon*. These texts are analyzed as literary articulations of vernacular knowledge rooted in rural experience, where voices of the dead circulate through speech, objects, landscapes, and everyday practices. The paper argues that Myśliwski's prose offers a European vernacular ontology that resists Enlightenment rationalism and Cartesian dualism. By portraying the dead not as absent memories but as spoken-dead interlocutors, his work destabilizes boundaries between life and afterlife, past and present, human and nonhuman. This reading contributes to current debates on relationality and nonrepresentational modes of knowing, demonstrating how literary texts can serve as valuable sites for rethinking dominant ontological assumptions.

Mrvič, Rok

Postdoctoral researcher, ZRC SAZU, Slovenia

In the Name of the Child: Cross-Genre Functions in Contemporary Slovenian Pregnancy Discourse

The paper is based on preliminary findings from a pilot study on potential genre patterns of short folklore texts addressed to pregnant women in Slovenia. The first round of semi-structured interviews aimed to identify and confirm such folklore genres in contemporary Slovenian society. Twenty women from the wider Ljubljana region reflected on key memories from their recent or current pregnancies. Although their personal and social backgrounds differ, their accounts reveal similarities in how they perceived and experienced certain texts and potential text-types. Most interviewees associated these texts with the pressure of normative expectations, which in contemporary Slovenian society are shaped by culturally shared conceptions of pregnancy as a preparatory stage for motherhood. The continuation of the research therefore focuses on two interconnected questions:

- 1) Can texts that can be isolated from pregnancy discourse be grouped into genre-based text-types, and what are their main features in relation to criteria for short folklore genres?
- 2) How are these texts used by people who form part of the expectant mother's everyday social environment? These questions aim to reconstruct the interpersonal dynamics that shape pregnant women's experiences and directly affect their well-being, as well as their short- and long-term decision-making processes during this transitional life period. While the role of various social and professional actors in relation to expectant mothers has been relatively well documented, less attention has been paid to how influence is transmitted through the performance of specific texts. The current material points to shorter text-types (such as advice, prohibitions, and commentaries) on the one hand, and longer pregnancy narratives on the other. Through discourse analysis and the examination of formal, semantic, and pragmatic features, these texts are for the first time being organized into semiotic categories of distinct genre-types, thereby highlighting their diverse functions during this transformative period in women's lives.

Puustinen, Sanni-Maaria

PhD student, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Transforming Cultural Conceptions of Nature: Everyday Practices, More-Than-Human Relations, and Climate Adaptation

This research examines how people interpret ecological changes in their everyday environments and how cultural conceptions of nature are transforming in the context of climate adaptation and biodiversity enhancement. The study focuses on restoration and biodiversity measures – such as converting mown lawns into meadows or leaving deadwood visibly in place – that challenge established ideals of tidiness, control, and appropriate landscapemanagement. These interventions evoke affective and embodied responses that reveal deeply rooted vernacular understandings of nature and its proper care. The central research question guiding the study is: How do citizens interpret changing environments and the practices of environmental management that emerge through biodiversity and restoration actions? Grounded in posthumanist ontologies, the research approaches environmental change as part of a relational assemblage in which material landscapes, ecological processes, affective responses, and cultural meanings co produce one another. Through this lens, the study destabilizes traditional dichotomies between nature and culture, order and wildness, and life and death. Ecological “untidiness,” such as deadwood or unmanaged vegetation, becomes an ontological boundary object that makes visible the cultural tensions inherent in sustainability transitions. Methodologically, the research employs ethnographic fieldwork combined with assisted walking interviews, allowing participants to encounter, interpret, and discuss environmental change in situ. These situated conversations illuminate how everyday experiences, sensory engagements, and embodied reactions contribute to evolving ethical valuations and nature relations. By examining how people participate in the cultural renegotiation of nature in their daily environments, the study advances understanding of the cultural transformations necessary for climate adaptation and for moving toward more-than-human, relational forms of coexistence.

Radler, Luca and Anna Zsoldos

PhD student, Moholy Nagy University of Arts and Design (MOME), Hungary;

PhD student, Eötvös Lóránt University (ELTE), Hungary

Material Thresholds: The Ordinary and the Magical in the Hungarian Vernacular House

Ethnographic and religious scholarships have often described the vernacular house as a microcosm – a reflection of the world as perceived and organized by human understanding. Such interpretations, however, tend to treat its components primarily as symbolic representations. This paper proposes a different perspective: the elements of the vernacular house are approached not only as architecturally functional features of everyday life, but also as entities endowed with their own mode of existence and ritual efficacy. Drawing on Hungarian folklore and vernacular belief traditions, we argue that these structural components actively mediate passages between distinct domains of existence. How does a built detail – such as a threshold, stove, wall, attic, or chimney – become a site of encounter between human and non-human presence? Hungarian ethnographic sources identify numerous such transitional points within the domestic interior. These features are integral to daily use, yet they also generate liminal conditions that organize relations between the living and the dead, inside and outside. They do not merely symbolize boundaries; through their material configuration they help constitute and sustain them. Our analysis moves beyond functionalist and purely symbolic readings by examining these elements through close material and architectural attention. We consider their materials, form, structural positioning, and traces of use. What objects are embedded within the walls? What patterns of wear mark the threshold? Detailing and material composition are not simply technical concerns but shape how belief is spatially enacted and embodied. The nodal points of the house do not merely represent connections between different forms of presence; they materially enable them. In this sense, the vernacular house emerges not simply as a model of the world, but as the material condition through which transitions between distinct states of being become possible.

Raguotienė, Giedrė

PhD student, The Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania

Being Together in the Song: Experiences of Mothers Singing to Their Children

“Lithuanians sing not for the sake of art, but to give their lives a form of existence through song itself”, – said Lithuanian philosopher Antanas Maceina. This form of existence inevitably affects personal relationships. According to phenomenologist Tim Ingold, sound is not a physical or mental phenomenon, but an atmospheric one. This means that when a mother sings to her baby, she interacts with the little one in a shared intermediate space – in the atmosphere of the song. Alfred Schütz, the pioneer of social phenomenology, also expresses similar ideas: According to him, the performer and the listener attune with each other and experience the same flow of time and sensations together. In my work, I refer to this high-quality connection as mutuality. Phenomenologist Elizabeth A. Behnke describes mutuality as a peculiarity of relationship, a mutual touching of each other. In the context of my research, deep interaction is treated as such that is possible not only through physical contact, but also through auditory “contact”. Art historian and anthropologist Ellen Dissanayake uses the term of mutuality in analysing the relationship between mother and baby. Here, mutuality refers to mutual directionality, commonality, intimacy, and the experience of the same feelings. In my work, I raise the question: How does the mother’s singing asserts in her relationship with her young children? The research is based on semi-structured in-depth interviews conducted in 2019, 2020, and 2025 with 14 mothers raising children under the age of three. According to the women, singing to a child changes not only the form of being together, but also the quality of life. As an influential acoustic medium, song becomes a tool for establishing and strengthening connections, and the inclination to “be in song” is often brought from family or other close circles.

Rajh Plohl, Jana

MA student, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Interworlds: Translators, Liminality, and the Ontological Diplomacy of Language

Connecting different worlds requires attention to the fluid and often contested intersections between them. This study examines the ethnography of literary translators (of poetry and Arabic literature) as key actors inhabiting ontological borders, a phenomenon also relevant to folklore studies, where multilingual individuals often served as intermediaries. The space of translation is not merely cognitive; it is also emotional and material, shaped by power relations and ideological frameworks that act as a generative matrix for what is representable within a given world. Translators are therefore not neutral conveyors of meaning but active liminal subjects whose positionality continuously interrogates and reshapes identities along symbolic and political boundaries. In this context, language functions not only as a technical instrument but as a cultural resource and an important building block of reality. Translation thus becomes an act of ontological diplomacy, mediating divergent ways of being. Translators navigate the tension between universalism and linguistic relativity, practicing a “tightrope art” of balancing domestic and foreign, visible and invisible. By preserving a sense of Otherness, they maintain the complexity of reality, challenge homogenization and enrich the interpretive possibilities of both source and target cultures.

Rubio Cupalova, Natalia

PhD student, Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Spain

New Andalusianism: Asserting Andalusia’s Cultural Uniqueness Through Folklore

This paper contributes to ongoing reflections on the assertion of Andalusian identity under what has come to be called “New Andalusianism.” Following Rosi Braidotti’s affirmative politics (2018), New Andalusianism is conceptualized as a political practice of resistance and hope in times of neoliberal ideological uniformity, aiming to reaffirm Andalusia’s differentiated ways of understanding life through folklore. A digital ethnography on Instagram maps how musical and visual artists style and transform elements of Andalusian folklore to articulate alternative futures. This futuristic imaginary disrupts dominant discourses and practices of stigmatization and invisibilization historically directed at the Andalusian people. Drawing on new materialist attention to material-discursive assemblages, the research examines how reclaimed customs and traditions are embodied, circulated, and politicized on digital platforms to activate the narrative of New Andalusianism. The most objectified, exoticized, and commodified elements gain relevance as they highlight the tension between celebrating the distinctiveness of Andalusian culture and asserting an essentialized subjectivity.

Ruutma, Kristel

PhD student, University of Turku, Finland

UAP Stigma on the Screen

Western culture has been living between presence and absence of unidentified anomalous phenomena (UAP) for nearly a century. UAP, or more commonly known as UFOs, can be defined as lore that people share and pass on. Anecdotal and often second-hand information lacks scientific proof and therefore UAP is categorised e.g. as fiction or a new religion. Hence, it has attracted ridicule and stigma. In 2021, the government of the United States affirmed in its Preliminary Assessment the existence of unidentified anomalous phenomena. Affirmation has shifted the boundaries of reality. What used to be a matter of belief is suddenly represented as a valid, scientifically analysable entity. A new kind of UAP presence challenges our understanding of the world and requires re-examination of UAP lore. This paper examines how contemporary TV documentary series construct, interpret and circulate UAP encounter experiences. Documentary series function as a performative space where the UAP lore is recontextualised for new audiences. Drawing on Erving Goffman's frame-analysis and Diane E. Goldstein's concept of tellability, three UAP themed television documentaries, aired since 2021, are analysed to study how filmmakers mediate recontextualised lore and prevailing stigma associated with UAP encounters. The emphasis of the analysis is on the presentation of stigma because stigma has priorly been one of the biggest barriers to scientific UAP research.

Petruskeviciene, Greta

Institute of Lithuanian Literature and Folklore, Lithuania

Between Life and Death: Premonitions, Dreams, and Emotional Survival in the Lithuanian Partisan War (1944–1953)

This paper examines how Lithuanian anti-Soviet partisans and their close relatives experienced the fragile boundary between life and death during the partisan war of 1944–1953. Focusing on dreams, prophecies, and “signs” that foretold danger or revealed the fate and burial places of fallen fighters, the paper explores how such experiences shaped emotional survival under extreme conditions of violence, fear, and uncertainty. Drawing on interviews I conducted with former partisans and their family members, as well as partisan diaries and memoirs published after the restoration of Lithuanian independence, I analyze how fighters interpreted extraordinary experiences (prophetic dreams, intuitions, and perceived communication with the dead) as meaningful frameworks for understanding loss and imminent threat. I argue that these experiences were regarded within partisan communities as natural and significant, reflecting or anticipating real events. The paper situates these practices at the intersection of psychological coping and Lithuanian cultural traditions, including folk beliefs about dreams, spirits, and the continued presence of the dead among the living. It asks to what extent such experiences functioned as trauma management and to what extent they expressed culturally embedded ways of relating to mortality and to sacrifice, which partisans understood as unavoidable. By foregrounding these little-studied aspects of partisan life, the paper contributes to a more emotionally and culturally nuanced history of the Lithuanian resistance, revealing dimensions of wartime experience that rarely appear in official narratives of the partisan war.

Santala, Mila

PhD student, University of Turku, Finland

Reconfiguring the Boundary Between Science and Experience: Elsa Heporauta's Negotiations with the Spirit World

This paper asks how Elsa Heporauta (1883-1960), a Finnish author and cultural figure, reconfigured the boundary between scientific rationality and experiential engagement with the spirit world, and what this reveals about the epistemic possibilities available within early twentieth century Finnish esotericism. The research approaches this question through cultural historical analysis, lived esotericism, and epistemic boundary making, with additional resonance from posthumanist discussions on more than human agency. The study draws on archival materials, including personal notes, experiential records, unpublished manuscripts, and reflective writings. The paper examines them as epistemic practices through which Heporauta sought to transform impressions, intuitions, and encounters she understood as originating beyond the material world into coherent and communicable forms of knowledge. Her use of scientific concepts, psychological idioms, and contemporary methodological repertoires demonstrates how she selectively appropriated scientific authority while simultaneously critiquing materialism for its inability to account for the existence of the spirit world. The paper argues that Heporauta did not merely blur the line between "science" and "experience," but actively reworked it, creating an epistemic space in which otherworldly phenomena could be rendered thinkable and legitimate. This case contributes new insight into how individuals mobilize scientific discourse to authorize forms of knowledge that fall outside materialist verification. It also highlights a historically specific mode of lived esotericism that challenges Enlightenment derived dichotomies and aligns with posthumanist concerns by foregrounding forms of agency and relationality that exceed the human. Through Heporauta, the paper demonstrates the plurality of ways in which people construct and negotiate knowledge about worlds both seen and unseen.

Sharma, Aditee

Mahatma Gandhi University of Medical Sciences and Technology, India

Green Singing in the Himalayas: Ecofeminist Reading of the Folk Songs of Kangra Valley

Kangra Valley, nestled in the Western Himalaya, situated in the shelter of Pir Panjal, Dhauladhar, Kangra Shiwalik, and Beas Basin, has highly diverse natural flora and fauna, and offers a profound archive of ecological consciousness and gendered experience. This paper investigates the interconnectedness between women and nature as articulated in the oral traditions of Kangra's folk repertoire. Methodologically, the paper situates these songs in the conceptual framework of ecofeminism, and explores how women's voices encode the environmental ethics, agrarian rhythms and sacred geographies, advocating nature as an intimate companion, co-sufferer and co-nurturer instead of being a mere backdrop. Through the thematic and textual analysis of the selected folk songs, the study traces motifs of the separation of women from their husbands, their subjugation within familial and social structures, alongside faunal killings and deforestation, revealing how eco-trauma and gendered suffering mirror, intersect and nourish each other, further examining ecological degradation and women's trauma as a shared trauma and mutually reinforced realities present in these cultural narratives. Within this framework, the paper proposed the conceptual idea of Green Singing as a critical paradigm that refers to the ecological articulation of embedded women's folk expressions that simultaneously mourn environmental loss and preserve the ecological wisdom of women from the Himalayas. It positions women's oral traditions as acts of resistance and care, where their singing reclaims ecological stewardship. Theorizing Green Singing through the folk songs of Kangra Valley, this study argues that the traditions practised by the women from the Himalayas offer the models of sustainability grounded in interconnectedness and reciprocity. Recovering these eco-poetic voices may thus provide alternate frameworks to address contemporary ecological degradation.

Slavcheva, Mariya

Institute of Ethnology and Folklore Studies with Ethnographic Museum, Bulgaria

Regulating the Threshold: Sensory Mediation and Relational Ontologies in Bulgarian Folk Narratives

How do Bulgarian folk narratives imagine encounters between “this” and “the other” world, and why do such encounters so often depend on mediation? This paper explores how thresholds between worlds are activated, experienced, and regulated in three narrative situations: the diabolic intervention in the wonder tale *Pravdata i Krivdata*, and two stories in which human characters falsely claim access to the other world for personal advantage. Drawing on folklore studies and cultural anthropology, and engaging with discussions on liminality and boundary-making, I argue that these narratives do not treat worlds as either strictly separated or freely accessible. Instead, they present boundaries as conditionally permeable and dependent on mediating figures. In *Pravdata i Krivdata*, the diabolic figure does not simply represent evil; he sets the threshold into motion. Through blindness, marginalization, and sensory displacement, a bodily crisis unfolds that makes transformation possible and ultimately reshapes moral order. By contrast, when human characters assume the role of mediator – collecting money on behalf of the dead or persuading a widow through fabricated messages from heaven – the threshold becomes a tool of manipulation, exposing the vulnerability of social trust. The analysis draws on published Bulgarian folk narrative collections and examines textual variants within the genres of wonder tale and novella-like narrative. Through close reading, the paper highlights how encounters between worlds are not abstract ideas but embodied and sensorially lived experiences. This paper suggests that encounters between worlds are not exceptional events but structural moments through which boundaries are negotiated and social order is reconstituted.

Stergiopoulou, Eirini

PhD student, University of Ioannina, Greece

Fairytales in Performance: Rethinking Genre Beyond the Archive

This paper forms part of my doctoral research on fairy tales, initially grounded in archival study. Within the archive, fairy tales appear as classified and stabilized textual forms, defined according to established genre criteria. The subsequent transition to ethnographic fieldwork marked a methodological and analytical shift. In a women’s evening gathering, narrative forms associated with fairy tales emerged within humorous anecdotes and conversational storytelling rather than as clearly delimited instances of a discrete genre. In this setting, fairy-tale elements were not presented as formally distinct narratives. Instead, they circulated within everyday interaction, shaping the tone, structure, and authority of storytelling. The paper therefore examines how fairytales exert influence in social contexts where genre boundaries remain permeable and not explicitly marked. The analysis draws on archival material and ethnographic data, including participant observation and fieldnotes. Particular attention is given to stories attributed to a deceased male family storyteller, whose remembered authority structured the circulation of narrative material and influenced the dynamics of interaction within the group. By tracing the movement from archive to field, the paper argues that the significance of fairy tales cannot be reduced to their classification as stabilized textual artifacts. Rather, their effects become visible in practice, where narrative form and social relations intersect.

Szabó, Ágnes

PhD student, Eötvös Loránd University, Budapest, Hungary

Singing Performances in Funeral Ceremonies

Saying goodbye to the deceased is a manifestation of our human nature. Its method and the order of its rituals are socially and historically determined, changing traditions. In this ever-present order, whether in distancing and removal, or in creating a connection between those saying goodbye and those staying behind, vocal expressions can play a significant role: the melodies, the lyrics, the way of performance and gestures, as well as their place in the funeral customs. My lecture examines the vocal genres associated with farewells to the dead, primarily among the Hungarian Reformed communities living in the Drávaszög and Slavonia (today Croatia) regions, in the southern part of the Hungarian-speaking area. The region is culturally and historically cohesive and exhibits similar characteristics from a folk music perspective. Using ethnographic data available from the 1910s, folk music recordings (melodies and lyrics) made from the 1960s, and current collection data (own fieldwork, interviews, audio recordings), I examine how singing beside the dead has changed and what role it plays in the life of the community and the individual. In what ways, with what gestures and attitudes did the songs resound from time to time, how did they affect those participating in the ceremony, and what were their thoughts about them? Research and analysis can shed light on the constant and changing elements of the Reformed singing tradition. Furthermore, it can provide a good example of the boundary-crossing practice manifested in the funeral-related songs of traditional religious communities and its sustaining power.

Tapper, Rika

University of Tartu, Estonia

Death and the Ghosts from the Grave in Old Norse Sagas

Old Norse material from the 13th to 16th century is rich in tales about a living person breaking into a burial mound to bury the deceased again, to stop the hauntings in the district or to steal valuable items such as gold and swords. However, the grave robbing often does not go as planned and the robber finds out that the deceased has not died, but rather continued his life in the barrow. Those narratives including mound-dwellers present them as belonging partly to the world of living and partly to the world of the dead, but also include symbols, power shifts and religious ideas attributed to the medieval society. In my talk, I will examine twenty-seven Old Norse texts representing different genres, such as family sagas, legendary sagas, kings' sagas, chivalric sagas and Eddic poems, using literary theory, namely close reading and formulaic theory. The analysis is grounded in the animism by Philippe Descola and perspectivism theory by Viveiros de Castro. Do the mound-dwellers have human-like interiority and behaviour? Can the mound-dwellers' character be seen in the lens of systems of attitudes, conforming relationships and expressing society's norms and values? Perspectivism posits that beings, including animals, humans, and spirits, perceive themselves and others based on a system of prey and predator relations (Castro, 1998a, 47). Old Norse texts have clear implications that mound-dwellers were seen as persons who have intention and agency of their own. Prey and predator relations between the mound-dweller and grave robber are present and dynamic. As mound-dweller tales have not been analysed from an animism and perspectivism viewpoint, this approach gives valuable new insight for the interpretation of these tales.

Tita, Michele

PhD student, University of Tartu, Estonia

Humans and Cordyceps in Bhutan: Transcending Ecological and Social Boundaries and Connecting Human and Nonhuman Worlds

Bhutan is a small country bordering India and China, encompassed in the Himalayan range. Both humans and other living species have adjusted to its mountainous environment, creating unique ecological engagements, such as the relationship between Bhutanese people and the entomo-parasitic fungus “*Ophiocordyceps sinensis*”, simply named cordyceps by locals. The spores of cordyceps parasitise the body of ghost moth caterpillars, from where they sprout as fully formed fungi at high altitudes. Bhutanese locals then find, collect, and sell these fungi all over Asia, where they are used in traditional Tibetan and Chinese medicine against different diseases. Collection and sale of the fungus have revealed to be profitable activities, although contested practices, requiring mountain soil usually taken from pastures that had been traditionally reserved to yak herding (Yangzom and Wouters 2024). Research about the cordyceps exists in anthropological literature (ibid.), but it hardly merges the cultural significance of the fungus with its ecological features. In this regard, I am asking how both ecological and social boundaries are challenged through human-cordyceps relationships. Practices related to cordyceps indeed trespass several boundaries. They connect humans and nonhumans, involving our species, other living beings, and the surrounding environment. They enter the threshold of human body, since cordyceps are ingested as a medicine. They cross the countries where the fungus is exported and, within Bhutan, challenge the spaces and practices traditionally reserved to local economies. To answer the question above, I will rely on the academic framework of ecological anthropology and multispecies ethnography. I will also refer to my ethnographic fieldwork in Bhutan (from February to June 2025), where I met and interviewed sellers, collectors and scholars.

Topos, Annabella

Eötvös Loránd University, Hungary

Alternative Ways of Medicine in the Kádár Era

In opposite points of human anthropology, the relation of medicine and religion separates, then reunions again.

However, when the unity of the two is abolished, it is rarely caught in anthropological study cases. In my presentation, I would like to analyse the ethnological tendencies of medical-religious groups in the Kádár era (1956-1989), which were existing around two main personas of that time. As for my main case study, I chose two healer women’s journal-focused cultural heritage, who were healing their believers between the 1960’s to 1970’s. As for the academic background of the whole project, I would analyse the canonistic aspect of processing alternative medicine ways in Hungarian Ethnology. In a contrary, I would also react to the social scientific hiatuses which emerged the bloom of alternative healer during the time. The method of the case study was pressing research and half-structured interview making. The aim of the project which I would like to present was an immanent understanding of the bloom of medical cults during the target period. I want to answer the question: “How can a healer become both a pilgrim of religion and health too?” Especially in the time of institutional atheism and the time of (so-called) centralised healthcare system? The importance of my presentation is an understanding of these informally religious-based healthcare models through two exact cases and its resources in social and cultural aspects.

Uhrin, Michal

Postdoctoral researcher, Comenius University, Slovakia; University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Encounters with the Dead in Rural Slovakia: Memory, Counterintuitiveness, Agency, and Transmission

Encounters with the deceased – through dreams, dream-like states, premonitions, or other forms of experience – are a pervasive feature of human life, influencing beliefs, behaviours, and social norms across cultures. Drawing on Minimally Counterintuitive (MCI) theory from the cognitive science of religion, this paper examines why such encounters are memorable, agentively powerful, and culturally transmissible. MCI theory proposes that concepts which violate only a few intuitive ontological expectations – for example, a deceased person who continues to act intentionally – occupy a cognitive “sweet spot,” enhancing recall and narrative persistence (Boyer & Ramble, 2001; Barrett & Nyhof, 2001). Recent research situates these effects within episodic and semantic memory frameworks, showing that first-hand experiences (e.g., dreams, visions, apparitions) resemble episodic memory, providing vivid, personally anchored encounters that confer strong perceived agency. Second-hand narratives, often associated with semantic memory, offer schematic, culturally patterned knowledge that sustains collective understanding and moral norms, which may also include the agency of the dead (Sommer, Musolino & Hemmer, 2022; Sommer et al., 2023). The analysis is based on data collected during long-term ethnographic field research conducted between 2023 and 2025 in a village in the Horehronie region of central Slovakia. It demonstrates that slightly counterintuitive depictions of the deceased – agents who act intentionally, deliver warnings, or enforce norms – are both cognitively salient and socially effective. Firsthand encounters motivate individual action, moral reflection, and ritual practice, whereas second-hand accounts reinforce communal (moral) norms and cultural transmission. By integrating MCI theory, theoretical concepts concerning memory, and ethnographic evidence, this study highlights how the dead remain active participants in the lives of the living, bridging personal experience and social influence, and offering a cognitive explanation for the persistence and impact of supernatural encounters in rural Slovakia.

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Vacha, Madelyn Marie

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From Spirit to Deity: The Online Pagan Discourse Surrounding Baba Yaga

In recent years, Slavic mythology and folklore have undergone a surge in popularity within the English-speaking world, due, in part, to the similarly increasing popularity of witchcraft and paganism on the internet. Many new practitioners of witchcraft and paganism utilize information spread through online occult communities to form their practice and beliefs, and Slavic folk culture is situated as one of the most dominant influences within these spaces. Perhaps due to its wide-spread exposure and uptake among people of diverse backgrounds, a debate has emerged online among Slavic occult practitioners about the role of Baba Yaga – a well-known figure in Slavic folklore – within their practice. One side of this debate argues for Baba Yaga to be understood as a spirit and psychopomp, while the other side considers her a deity to be worshiped. Through a posthumanist approach and the utilization of online ethnographic research, this paper aims to explore the ways in which the differing conceptualizations of Baba Yaga among Slavic occult practitioners serves, on one hand, to overcome, and on the other hand, to reinforce contemporary conceptual divisions between the material and the spiritual.

Vacha, Madelyn Marie

MA student, University of Tartu, Estonia

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In recent years, Slavic mythology and folklore have undergone a surge in popularity within the English-speaking world, due, in part, to the similarly increasing popularity of witchcraft and paganism on the internet. Many new practitioners of witchcraft and paganism utilize information spread through online occult communities to form their practice and beliefs, and Slavic folk culture is situated as one of the most dominant influences within these spaces. Perhaps due to its wide-spread exposure and uptake among people of diverse backgrounds, a debate has emerged online among Slavic occult practitioners about the role of Baba Yaga – a well-known figure in Slavic folklore – within their practice. One side of this debate argues for Baba Yaga to be understood as a spirit and psychopomp, while the other side considers her a deity to be worshiped. Through a posthumanist approach and the utilization of online ethnographic research, this paper aims to explore the ways in which the differing conceptualizations of Baba Yaga among Slavic occult practitioners serves, on one hand, to overcome, and on the other hand, to reinforce contemporary conceptual divisions between the material and the spiritual.

Váradi, Júlia

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Our Seemingly Inanimate Yet Vividly Animate Companions: Cultural Anthropological Study of International Students in Pécs and Their Material World.

The question of the agency of the material world, especially the agency and “behavior” of objects – their impact on human cultures and individuals – is not new; rather, it has long been an important issue in anthropological research, particularly in (anthropological) theories of art and phenomenological approaches. The objects that surround us are active participants in our lives, frequently over extended periods; our personal belongings often become intertwined with aspects of our emotions, personality or cultural identity, as well as with the fabric of our daily lives; they cannot be regarded as passive or isolated entities. Our objects can accompany us on our journeys, coming to bear the traces of, or even embodying our experiences and various stages of life. During the four years of my cultural anthropological fieldwork, conducted among international students in Pécs (Hungary), I also frequently observed the role that objects play in the students’ lives. Throughout their migratory period of life and transitional circumstances, they often own, acquire or come to possess objects that become closely attached to them, forming part of their sense of home or even serving as a link to their loved ones. In my presentation, I seek to explore and analyze the relationships between students and their material possessions, situating their experiences and practices within the context of their transitional and migratory life-worlds. Through this, I aim to briefly demonstrate how our “inanimate” objects can become highly animate companions, particularly during challenging and transformative life phases, such as studying, living temporarily, and establishing oneself in a foreign environment and culture.

Vukotić, Sara

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From Enchantment to Disenchantment: Fairy-Tale Memes and the Transgression of Folkloric Boundaries in Slovenian Digital Culture

This paper examines how fairy-tale structures are transformed within Slovenian Internet memes, asking: How does the transformation of fairy-tale structures into Internet memes epistemologically reconfigure the boundary between enchantment and everyday "reality"? Addressing the conference theme in a meta-analytical sense, the study conceptualizes this process as a multi-layered transgression. Formally, it traces the shift from a traditional narrative genre to digitally conditioned, multimodal folklore. Structurally and functionally, it explores the migration and reconfiguration of fairy-tale motifs, narrative functions, and "dramatis personae" (Propp 1968 [1928]) within meme culture. On the level of effect, it examines the shift from the enchanted logic of fairy tales to digital disenchantment, blurring boundaries between the magical and the everyday. My research combines insights from fairy-tale studies and digital folklore scholarship. Fairy-tale-based memes are approached as part of the "fairy-tale web" (Bacchilega 2013) and as digital folklore through Shifman's (2014) three-layered model of content, form, and stance. Methodologically, the research is based on digital ethnography, with a corpus from three Slovenian social media pages – @Slovenian_memes and @Slomemija on Instagram, and @Slovenska politika memes on Facebook – and interpreted via multimodal discourse analysis (Kress and van Leeuwen 2006) and multimodal humor analysis (Tsakona 2009; Bury 2025), examining how textual, visual, and contextual modes interact in meaning-making. The paper argues that this transformation is not merely a change of medium, but a structural and epistemological shift. Moving from enchantment to digitally mediated irony and parody, memes (re)negotiate the cultural authority of fairy tales. Rather than sustaining an enchanted worldview, they fragment and recontextualize narrative elements to address contemporary political and everyday realities, destabilizing boundaries between traditional and digital folklore, the magical and the mundane, and not simply reproducing inherited forms but actively transforming their epistemological function.

Wu, Siyun

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Transcending Emotions, Connecting Sonically: Re-Reading Collective Singing in Laulupidu

For many Estonian and increasingly non-Estonian participants alike, singing at the UNESCO-listed Estonian Song Festival “Laulupidu” is deeply emotional, stimulating, even sacred. How does collective singing generate such powerful affective experiences – and what does this reveal about why Laulupidu continues to matter in contemporary, independent Estonia? This paper inquires into the mechanisms of emotion and affect in Laulupidu's collective singing: how it provides a moment of musical practice through which participants transcend emotions from the past into the present and connect affectively with one another in sonic, bodily ways. The paper draws on concepts of musicking (Small, 1998) and sonic intimacy (James, 2020), in combination with anthropological scholarship on emotion, sense, and affect (Clough & Halley, 2008; Gregg & Seigworth, 2010; Smith, Wetherell, & Campbell, 2018), and adopts a sensory ethnographic approach (Pink, 2009) attentive to the body, the senses, and the experience of the ethnographer. Data comes from my PhD research project on music heritage practices in Estonia (fieldwork 2018–2020), comprising individual singers' narratives, sensory ethnographic observations of Laulupidu as affective heritage, and autoethnographic reflection on the researcher's own embodied participation. Rather than treating Laulupidu as a fixed product of the past, this inquiry views it as a sensory, embodied practice in the present. Reframing the analytical focus from music and repertoire toward the agency and individual experience of participating singers, it reveals how emotions from the past transcend into the present event, and vibrate as affective intensities (Massumi, 2002) between participants of varied positions, backgrounds, and life's –connecting past with present, self with others. Not only deepens understanding of what Laulupidu means for present-day participants, this study also illuminates its power as a practice of emotional mobilisation and collective bonding within living music heritage.

Yakymets-Lind, Mathilde and Vassa Yakymets

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PhD student, University of Eastern Finland, Finland

Material Collaboration for Thorough Representation: A Ukrainian Folk Dress in Estonia

In the Estonian National Museum (ERM), there is a set of folk dress from Ukraine. Although the collections records focus on the story of its voyage to Aravete, Estonia and eventual accession by the museum, the details of its Ukrainian origins are conspicuously absent. However, the folk dress itself is far from silent. Artifacts have an active presence in transformative processes and the creation of meaning, and we use a biographical approach to center that presence and work in partnership with the folk dress to tell its story. Using formal analysis, archival materials, and Ukrainian expertise in traditional crafts, this research rectifies the omissions in the records starting with the creation of these textiles and their cultural context in the Poltava region of Ukraine. We examine the techniques and materials used to make the individual pieces, and we enrich the biography of this folk dress by placing it in its Ukrainian, not just Estonian, cultural, historical, and craft contexts. No longer a passive object of exchange, it comes alive as the main character in its own story. This research highlights the importance of access for museum researchers with substantial connections to the origins of such objects, who are uniquely positioned to work across cultural, historical, and linguistic boundaries to understand what they try to tell us.

Zhang, Ruibo

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“An Update Patch for the Underworld”: A Folkloristic Study of Contemporary Paper Offerings as Emotional Technology in China

Throughout Chinese history, the remembrance of the deceased has been embodied in unique ritualistic practices. Focusing on contemporary Chinese paper offerings (zhizha), this study addresses the problem of how traditional death rituals adapt to modern societal anxieties. Specifically, the core research question is: How do contemporary paper offerings function as an “emotional technology” to alleviate modern ontological anxieties and maintain continuing bonds with the deceased? Situated within the discipline of folkloristics and utilizing a material culture approach, this research is grounded in the “continuing bonds” theory. It will explore how the living renegotiate their relationships with the deceased within a modern context, mediated by the materiality of paper offerings and the trans-dimensional ritual of burning. To answer this, the study utilizes two main types of source material: a material culture analysis of contemporary artifacts and an examination of folklore narratives. The contemporary evolution of these offerings – such as the transition from traditional gold ingots to modern paper iPhones, 5G base stations, and paper vaccines – will be analyzed not merely as a mirrored projection of consumerism, but as the living’s construction of ontological security to prevent the deceased from becoming “disconnected”. Furthermore, by tracing vernacular origin narratives like the “feigned death of Cai Mo”, the study will reveal the unofficial logic of paper offering culture, achieving a value leap from cheap commodities to sacred spiritual symbols through irreversible physical destruction. Ultimately, this presentation will offer new perspectives by arguing that paper offerings are by no means a static traditional residue, but rather a living vernacular interface. By transforming abstract grief through concrete material labor, they will be shown to demonstrate the profound adaptability and emotional healing mechanisms of traditional folklore within the modernization process.

Zhang, Yifan

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Negotiating the Dead: Female Ghosts, Print Media, and Living-Dead Relations in Republican China (1912–1949)

This paper examines non-fictional reports of female ghost encounters published in Chinese newspapers during the Republican period (1912–1949). Drawing on reader-submitted accounts and journalistic reports, it investigates how the non-fictional framing of newspaper discourse shaped the public credibility and emotional weight of these encounters, and how relations between the living and the dead were negotiated within modern print culture. The reports describe apparitions in rented houses, roadside encounters, dream visitations, photographic traces, and spirits recounting unjust deaths. These narratives reveal a wide range of living responses: fear, skepticism, moral sympathy for wronged women, and claims of coexistence. Some accounts frame the ghost as a disruptive force; others portray her as a victim seeking justice. The diversity of these responses is itself a central finding, revealing how unsettled the boundary between life and death remained in Republican urban society. Rather than dismissing these texts as mere superstition or treating them as evidence of belief, this paper argues that newspapers functioned as arenas in which that boundary was emotionally and morally negotiated. Death appears not as rupture but as a condition open to interpretation and sympathy. The prevalence of female ghost figures raises further questions this paper will address: what distinguishes female ghost narratives from ghost narratives more broadly, and what specific work does gender perform within living-dead relationality? Through the female ghost, Republican print media staged competing attitudes toward the dead in a rapidly transforming urban world.

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