



CENTRO STUDI
DI CIVILTÀ E SPIRITUALITÀ
COMPARATE
fondazione ONLUS
GIORGIO CINI



UNIVERSITY
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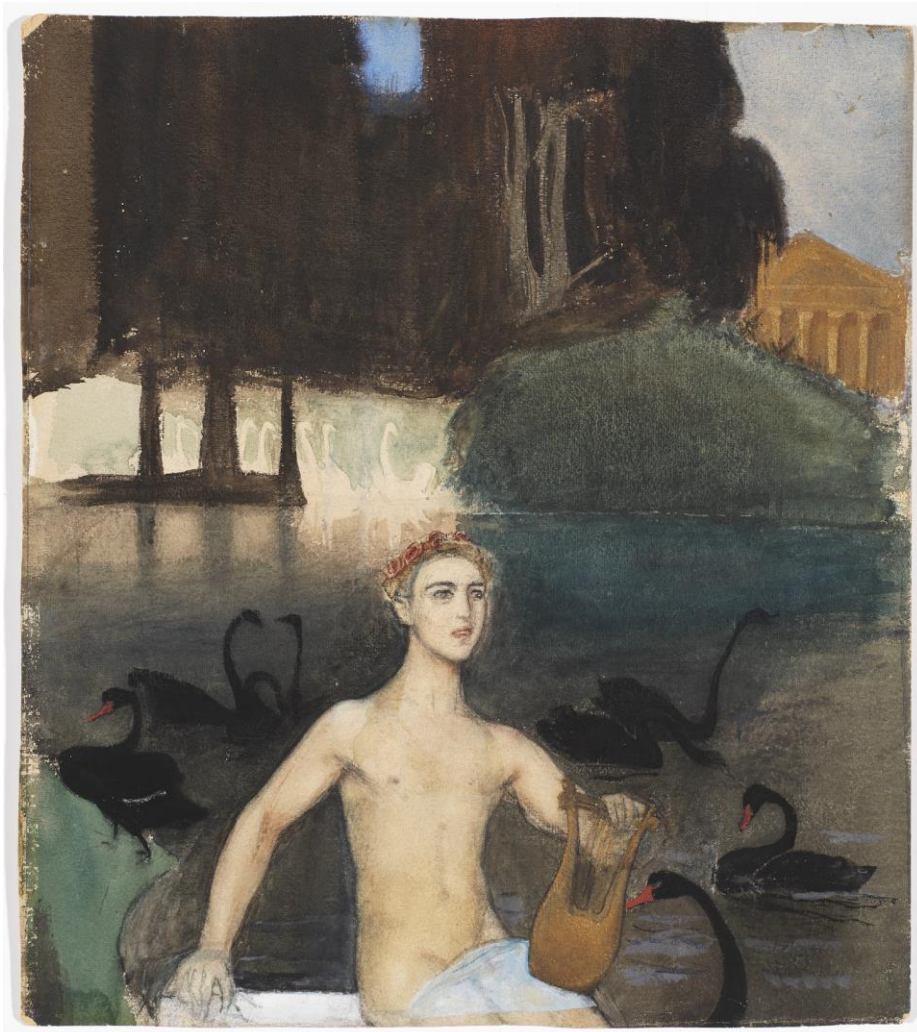


NordForsk



History of
Hermetic Philosophy
and related currents

OCCULTURAL TRANSFERS BETWEEN NORTH
AND SOUTH
Conference program



Fantasy, 1895 @Artwork Magnus Enckell

Fondazione Giorgio Cini, Venice, 1-2 November 2023

Wednesday, 1 November 2023

09:30 – 10:00 *Welcome greetings*

- ◇ **Francesco Piraino**, Director of the Centre for Comparative Studies of Civilisations and Spiritualities
- ◇ **Giuliano D'Amico**, University of Oslo
- ◇ **Marco Pasi**, University of Amsterdam

10:00 – 11:30 *Literary occulture in the 19th century*

- ◇ **Henrik Johnsson**, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway, “Catholicism in Scandinavian Esoteric Fiction at the fin-de-siècle”
- ◇ **Gísli Magnússon**, University of Iceland, “The Subcultural European Reception of Danish Mystic Johannes Anker Larsen – Occultural Literary Transfer in Different Phases”
- ◇ **Tim Rudbøg**, University of Copenhagen, “Anna Kingsford and The Painter of Venice”

11:30 – 11:45 Coffee break

11:45 – 13:15 *Arts & Crafts in an occultural context*

- ◇ **Simon Halink**, Frisian Academy, “‘We are Gangleris and so are all men’. Norse mythology as a means of occultural transfer in Icelandic Theosophy”
- ◇ **Hanna Elisabeth Åberg**, University of Bologna, “Landscape of remembrance: ideas and ideals behind occult grave monuments in Swedish recreational space”
- ◇ **Elisa Palomino Perez**, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History, “From the Fish Demi-Gods of Ancient Mesopotamia to the Sacred Fish skins robes of Arctic Coastal Societies”

13:15 – 14:45 Lunch

15:00 – 16:00 *Theoretical approaches to occulture*

- ◇ **Giuliano D'Amico**, University of Oslo, “Occulture as (literary) theory”
- ◇ **Francesco Piraino**, Harvard University, “Occulture as a field: a Bourdieusian-Latourian approach to spirituality and art”

20:00 Dinner

Thursday, 2 November 2023

10:00 – 11:00 Tour of the Cini Foundation

11:00 – 12:30 *Literary occulture in the 20th century*

- ◇ **Gerd Karin Omdal**, Norwegian University of Science and Technology (NTNU) in Trondheim, “Sigurd Mathiesen’s imagination of a re-enchanted North in ‘Abigael’” (1908)”
- ◇ **Charles Marshal Stang**, Harvard University, “North and South in the Novels of Philip Pullman”
- ◇ **Agnès Parmentier**, UVSQ University Paris-Saclay, “Maurice Maeterlinck Reconciling Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and August Strindberg: A North-South-North Occultural Case Study”

12:30 – 14:00 Lunch

14:00 – 15:30 *Art and occulture*

- ◇ **Alessandra Molinari**, Carlo Bo University of Urbino, **Alessandro Gasparini**, University of Oslo, **Hege Kristin Ringnes**, Oslo Metropolitan University, “The hidden connection between Oneiric drawing and Hilma af Klint’s artworks: a designerly perspective”
- ◇ **Pehr Englén**, Albert-Ludwig University of Freiburg, “Ludic Magic: The Occultural Transfers within the Situationist International”
- ◇ **Pekka Pitkälä**, University of Turku, “A Synthesis of Northern and Southern Ideals in Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa’s (1870–1946) Works”

15:30 – 16:00 Coffee break

16:00 – 17:00 *Occultural performance arts*

- ◇ **Eveliern Jonckheere**, University of Antwerp, “Measuring faces and bellies on stage: predictive physiognomy in popular performance in fin-de-siècle Belgium
- ◇ **Matteo Polato**, Manchester Metropolitan University, “Operations of Spirit Communication: radiophonic resonances between Sweden and Italy’s occultural practices and the sonic arts”

17:00 – 17:30 *Concluding remarks*

18:00 – 19:00 *Concert mdi ensemble*

Introduction by **Gianmario Borio**, director of the Institute of Music, Giorgio Cini Foundation

Jean Sibelius, *Malinconia per violoncello e pianoforte op. 20* (12')

Kaja Saariaho, *Cendres per flauto, violoncello e pianoforte* (10')

Franco Oppo, *Trio III per flauto, violino e pianoforte* (13')

Kaja Saariaho, *Light and matter per violino, violoncello e pianoforte* (18')

mdi ensemble

Sonia Formenti, flauto

Corinna Canzian, violino

Giorgio Casati, violoncello

Luca Ieracitano, pianoforte

This event is financed by the Giorgio Cini Foundation, the University of Oslo (Norden and NordForsk through ReNEW), and by the Centre for History of Hermetic Philosophy and Related Currents (HHP) of the University of Amsterdam.

Abstracts

“Landscape of remembrance: ideas and ideals behind occult grave monuments in Swedish recreational space”, Hanna Elisabet Åberg, University of Bologna

“Death has inspired great art and architecture” (Curl, J.S, 2002): as death is our only certainty, graves play a central role in understanding ideals and cultural exchanges over time. This article explores the ideas and ideals that manifest through the design of decorative grave tombs in Swedish parks. In busy public parks, often mainly used for recreational purpose today, occult grave monuments are at times hidden in plain sight by the park’s everyday users. The design of these monuments and surrounding landscape of remembrance often manifest Nordic paganism (e.g., cairns and rune stones) and romantic ideals. Yet, the memory and esotericism that by design has given emphasise to mysticism are perhaps lost. By exploring five Swedish tomb monuments set in parks, this paper draws connections between Swedish park ideals and cultural influences at the time of constructions of the graves and put in relation to today’s usage. The five monuments are located around Sweden and were built between 1630-1930. They were all initially located in private parks which on the surface may seem like they were built only as a materialisation of family history. With two exceptions these monuments functioned as burial sites. Yet, they were built as token landscapes and sites for contemplation, even ephemerality of life, rather than solely as family graves. The five monuments refer to occult mysteries of holy groves of pre-historic times deriving from a Nordic tradition of the spiritual nature. These are interweaved with ideals based on an idea, a transfer and interpretation of a Southern culture, e.g., a message in Hebrew or cave like elements inspired by illustrations of Roman graves. These monuments express an occult understanding, manifesting a transfer and reinterpretation of geographic contexts, knowledge, and belief systems. The five monuments explored through this article are all landscapes of memory, imprinted by time, and once again reused by the present.

“Ludic Magic: The Occultural Transfers within the Situationist International”, Pehr Englén, Albert-Ludwig University of Freiburg

The Situationist International (SI) was an amalgamation of artist groups from Northern and Southern Europe, and beyond: at its 1958-9 peak, it connected groups in Scandinavia and West Germany, the Benelux and France, Italy and Algeria, as well as including associated chapters in Montreal and Tel Aviv. While the Situationists are today mostly famous for Guy Debord and his *Society of the Spectacle* (1967), the International was a trans-national network, which, among other things, also published a journal, *The Situationist Times*, running pieces by Eranos-presenters and exploring the secret crosscultural histories of labyrinths, spirals and rings. In my paper, I propose to focus on the implicit esotericist underpinnings of the early SI years, when the different artistic groups initially united around a vaguely defined project to construct a ludic situation. They did so to ensure the coherence of the international and the historical significance of its project (Englén, 2019). As such, their ludic situation drew on what Johan Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* had cast as the two affordances of games. According to Huizinga, “the magic circle” of the game, whose spiritually esoteric anchor has recently been demonstrated (Aupers, 2015), has an inherent propensity to stimulate group formations. In addition, civilizations, Huizinga noted, “aris[e] in and as games”. Rooted in sacred practices, play harboured the potential to create new lifeworlds. To the Situationists, it seemed to offer the prospect of establishing, what Partridge (2013) would call, an alternative plausibility structure, one not defined by the kind of calculating rationality and productivist logic all situationists rejected. But due to the elusive nature of their project, the situationists interpreted such possibilities differently. To understand why, I am going to look at two transfers involving the SI's two founders, one going from North (Dutch Huizinga) to South (Huizinga's reception among pre-situationists in Paris, especially Debord), the other from the South (the originally French project to construct a situation) to the North (the Danish painter and thinker Asger Jorn's exploration of what it meant to create a new ludic lifeworld). I will show how the spiritual aspects of Huizinga's argument were downplayed in the first transfer, where it was integrated into an oppositional bohemian stance to a stratified society, but returned in the second, when it was rather used to set artistic experimentation against larger, technobureaucratic developments. By casting ludic art as an epistemic practice seeking a realm beyond what is known, Jorn, I will suggest, thus opened the way for the esoteric interests on display in *The Situationist Times*.

“We are Gangleri and so are all men’. Norse mythology as a means of occultural transfer in Icelandic Theosophy”, Simon Halink, Fryske Akademy

As an esoteric school of thought based to a large extent on Oriental philosophies, Theosophy paved the way for Westerners to internalize non-Christian belief systems, both exotic and pre-Christian, in innovative ways. Up until the very end of the nineteenth century, Old Norse mythology – as preserved in the Eddas – could be celebrated as national heritage, or presented as ‘disguised history’ and even as ‘disguised science’, but not as a fully-fledged system of religious thought, or a ‘national Old Testament’, equal to the Hebrew Bible. But around the turn of the twentieth century, things had changed; new artistic and literary currents such as Symbolism had kindled a lively interest in the symbolic language of myth, and closer contacts with non-Christian cultures increased the West’s fascination with the primordial nature of its own spiritual heritage.

In 1912, Icelandic Theosophists founded the first Icelandic branch, and an Icelandic periodical dedicated to the promotion of Theosophy has been published from 1926 onwards. Icelandic Theosophists were inspired by Blavatsky’s interpretation of their pre-Christian heritage, and actively indigenized her world-view through association with the Eddas, with which all Icelanders were familiar. They named their periodical *Gangleri*, or ‘Wanderer’, which is a reference to the Swedish king Gylfi, who – according to ancient myth – receives teachings directly from Odin himself.

In this paper, I will examine the artwork of the Icelandic sculptor Einar Jónsson, who linked his visual interpretation of eddic mythemes to the national discourse of his age and the esoteric assumptions of contemporary Theosophy. Both Jónsson and the other protagonist of this paper, the Theosophist Sigurður Kristófer Pétursson, took the metaphysical approach to the myths further than anyone ever before, and applied their symbolic language as a means of occultural transfer, with the aim of de-exoticizing and indigenizing foreign, exotic concepts such as karma and reincarnation.

“Catholicism in Scandinavian Esoteric Fiction at the *fin-de-siècle*”, Henrik Johnsson, UiT – The Arctic University of Norway

This paper examines the role played by Catholicism in esoteric discourse informing the works of Scandinavian authors during the 1890s. During this decade, significant literary trends emerged which were united by a polemical attitude toward the realism, atheism, and political radicalism associated with the literature of the Modern Breakthrough. One such trend was a turn toward esotericism. Among the Scandinavian authors of the time who integrated esotericism into their writing, August Strindberg stands out the most. Although Strindberg's esoteric fiction has been subjected to critical analysis, one aspect of his engagement with esotericism remains understudied: his preoccupation with Catholicism as a potential remedy for what he conceived of as the ills of modernity. This interest, filtered through the lens of Strindberg's Swedenborgian thought, contributed to the reinvigoration of his literary career. Taking as my point of departure Strindberg's fascination with, but ultimately rejection of, Catholicism as a remedy to disenchantment and loss of faith, I will explore the different attitudes exhibited toward Catholicism by Scandinavian authors of the period. My other case studies will include the Norwegian author Arne Garborg, whose novel *Weary Men* (1891) engages with esoteric thought and established religion in its depiction of *fin-de-siècle* ennui, and Johannes Jørgensen, whose introduction of literary Symbolism to Denmark led him on a path toward converting to Catholicism. A comparative analysis of these case studies will highlight the various reactions exhibited by authors who, having been raised in Protestant environments, were both intrigued by, but also sceptical toward, the Catholic faith and the historical associations adhering to the Catholic church. The paper thereby contributes to our understanding of Catholicism as an occultural bridge between Northern and Southern Europe at the turn of the twentieth century.

“Measuring faces and bellies on stage: predictive physiognomy in popular performance in *fin-de-siècle* Belgium”, Evelien Jonckheere, University of Antwerp

Fin-de-siècle predictive physiognomy theories were popular at fin-de-siècle theatre stages. In the 1893 revue 'Bruxelles-Electrique', a scene was staged at the Brussels Alcazar Théâtre in which a female doctor observed a white male in the centre of the stage. The doctor concluded that the man must be a criminal, even though he is

wearing a uniform. Why? Well... his belly has the same dimensions as the notorious murderer Pranzini! The doctor standing on the far right takes a picture of the poor man and notes that this observation needs to be reported to the congress of criminal anthropology! This scene was a direct reference to the third international criminology conference in Brussels earlier that year. Despite the fact that leading Belgian criminologists were rather centred around the 'French school' of Alexandre Lacassagne and his sociological approach of criminology since 1889, the biological determination of the 'Italian school' around Cesare Lombroso was still present in Belgian popular performances such as fairground attractions, the satirical journal and performances of the Brussels artistic cabaret *le Diable-au-Corps* and in performances of indigenous people and so-called 'freaks' at the Brussels Musée Castan which served simultaneously as a gathering place for Brussels criminal-anthropologists. By demonstrating the network of collaborators at these popular performance venues, as well as their artwork, a close connection to symbolist art circles will be unveiled, directed by enigmatic characters such as Raymond Nyst, Jules Du Jardin and Jean Delville in Brussel. Located at a geographic and linguistic intersection of the Latin (with the French in Wallonia) and Germanic (with the Dutch in Flanders) spheres of influence, Brussels symbolist circles opened up to both Anglo-Saxon theosophy and different kinds of occult predictive practices such as astrology, chiromancy, graphology, anthropometry and physiognomy. Through an analysis of correspondence and journals such as *La Ligue Artistique* and *Le Mouvement Littéraire*, this paper will investigate how predictive physiognomy, despite the resistance from leading Belgian scientists, remained a popular topic of discussion in popular performances in Brussels in the last decade of the nineteenth century.

“The Subcultural European Reception of Danish Mystic Johannes Anker Larsen – Occultural Literary Transfer in Different Phases”, Gísli Magnússon, University of Iceland

One of the most enigmatic figures of Danish occulture and neomysticism is J. Anker Larsen (1874-1957). Unlike the other great Danish esotericist author of the 20th century, Martinus Thomsen (1890-1981) who preferred to write lengthy esoteric treatises to convey his thoughts, Anker Larsen choose literature as his medium of communication. Anker Larsen had his breakthrough as a writer in 1923, when he won Gyldendal's novel prize of DKK 70,000, which at the time was equivalent to more than half a Nobel Prize. Subsequently, the novel was translated into several

languages: German, English, Dutch, Czech, Swedish, Hungarian, and Spanish. Anker Larsen's popularity as a public author who was lively debated in the leading newspapers followed primarily in the wake of the prestigious literature prize from Gyldendal. After that, public interest waned. What happened, however, was that Anker Larsen gained a readership as a guru-like figure with insight into the mysteries of life. He gained a kind of esoteric underground fame that has lasted to this day. In scholarship, Nordic occulture – with the exception of Swedenborg – has not received much scholarly attention. Danish occulture and esotericism is no exception. The monography on J. Anker Larsen: *Mystiker og digter – Anker Larsens liv og forfatterskab* (Syddansk Universitetsforlag 2011) by Knud Wentzel deals very competently with the life and works of the Danish esotericist and neomystic, but he only briefly touches upon the European reception of Anker Larsen. In my lecture, I wish to shed light on the European reception of J. Anker Larsen's works: What role did the Northern origin of Anker Larsen play in this reception?

“The hidden connection between Oneiric drawing and Hilma af Klint's artworks: a designerly perspective”, Alessandra Molinari, Carlo Bo University of Urbino, Alessandro Gasparini, University of Oslo, and Hege Kristin Ringnes, Oslo Metropolitan University

More than a hundred years after Hilma af Klint's prophetic insights, a trio composed of two psychoanalysts and a Surrealistic painter developed in Buenos Aires the practice of oneiric drawing, which is inspired to André Breton's thought and combines the main tenets of Surrealism with Jung's archetype theory and Moreno's psychodrama. However, some automatic drawing techniques being employed within oneiric drawing in Argentina and Italy seem to be closer to Hilma af Klint's experiments than to the surrealists' practice - these analogies are on the level of the technique but also of the transformative power of symbols. How can we explore these links between the Buenos Aires trio and Hilma af Klint? We will first try to answer this question on the level of symbol theory: to do this, we will be taking into account both Hilma af Klint's own ideas emerging in her Notebooks on the role of symbols, and present-day definitions of the symbol. As a second step, we will try to respond to this question from a designerly perspective. The artworks of Hilma af Klint can be studied as objects created through a design process which in current design research is called Research through Design (RtD). The main goal of RtD is to use the result of the design process as a way to create and explore new knowledge.

The three pillars of RtD are: the creative process done by the designer/artist, often a reflective act; the process of gathering new understanding and knowledge of what lies behind the theories used to create the artifact; how the artifact offers and creates a new and critical understanding in society. Therefore, an RtD perspective can offer a novel understanding of Hilma af Klint artworks where the “knowledge produced, functions as a proposal” to create a wider discussion of her work.

“Sigurd Mathiesen’s imagination of a re-enchanted North in ‘Abigael’ (1908)”, Gerd Karin Omdal, Norwegian University of Science and Technology

From 1903 to 1914, the Norwegian author Sigurd Mathiesen (1871–1958) published several shorter stories and a play (*Satan som seirer*, [Satan Triumphant] 1910), dealing with occult phenomena. The stories occurred in his debut-collection, *Unge sjæle* [Young Souls] (1903), and in the collections *Hjemlig jord* [Homely Soil] (1908) and *Det urolige hus* [The Haunted House] (1914). Some of the stories also conceptualize or imagine geographical spaces, and the short novel or novella “Abigael” from *Hjemlig jord* is an example of this. It is set in a northern country, and the imagination of nature and landscape is intertwined with the occurrence of occult phenomena. The male protagonist, exhausted and hypersensitive after spending his summer in a southern tropical climate, returns to the North, where he meets a woman called Abigael. She is of Dutch and Sami descent. Her Sami heritage is prominent, and she is closely connected to the northern nature and natural forces (as the Northern Lights); she also claims to be skilled in shamanism. Abigael’s occult knowledge reaches further though, to spiritualism, telepathy and even voodoo. Mathiesen probably came across tales of Haitian voodoo during a stay with his aunt in Brooklyn from 1900 to 1901. (Gordon (2012: 768) writes about the popularity of tales about voodoo in the “white” press from the end of the nineteenth century.) Consequently, the story is a prominent example of how Mathiesen’s occulture was influenced by sources originating both in the North and in the South. The aim of the paper is to investigate how the representation of the complex character Abigael and her occult powers contributes to an imagination of a re-enchanted North.

“Maurice Maeterlinck Reconciling Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson and August Strindberg: A North-South-North Occultural Case Study”, Agnès Parmentier

At the beginning of 1884 in Paris, as he had just finished to write *Over Ævne I* [*Beyond Human Power I*, 1883], Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson (1832-1910) famously met August Strindberg (1849-1912) in person for the first time. They had an intense friendship for a few months together with Jonas Lie, during which it is assumed Bjørnson brought to Strindberg's attention the works of Charcot and Richer he had just been working on. They violently broke up later on that year for a variety of reasons, among which the paternalistic attitude of Bjørnson which Strindberg couldn't stand. They never reconciled even though they kept on playing a role in each other's life. This paper intends to show that Maurice Maeterlinck (1862-1949) has been a literary and occult bridge between these two authors after the breakup. In 1890, as Maeterlinck was still delved into the process of inventing his new theatrical aesthetics, he read *Over Ævne I*, *Leonarda* (1879) and *En Hanske* (1883) in a German translation. He was then fascinated by heredity, death and the unconscious, and later wrote in *Le Double Jardin* (1904) how much he had appreciated reading Bjørnson. In 1894, upon his return to Paris and the start of his occult period, Strindberg didn't pay any particular attention to Maeterlinck's plays. *Au-delà des forces* had been staged for the first time in France that same year, but it was a few months prior to his arrival. However, a few years after the Inferno crisis and his return to Sweden, Strindberg started recognizing Maeterlinck as a key figure. In 1901, in order to give them a hint of his new theatrical vision, he recommended to Harriet Bosse as well as his set designer to read the pre-*Monna Vanna* (1902) plays as well as *Le Trésor des humbles* (1896), which he even partly translated into Swedish. Interestingly enough, he admired Maeterlinck both as a dramatist and an occultist: “Péladan et Maeterlinck se rattachent à un même tronc: l'occultisme parisien [...]”. The aim of this paper is to highlight the importance of North-South and occultural exchanges in the evolution of modern drama at the end of the 19th century. Far from being a mere meeting point where Lugné-Poe gave *avant-garde* Scandinavian and Francophone playwrights a voice on an equal footing, Paris was a place where people came and went, and where some authors were more than others instigators. Besides the historical complexity of human relationships, literary/occult readings and travels, it also points to the importance of spiritual crises in artistic turning points, sometimes bringing writers closer in spite of their many differences.

“From the Fish Demi-Gods of Ancient Mesopotamia to the Sacred Fish skins robes of Arctic Coastal Societies”, Elisa Palomino Perez, Smithsonian National Museum of Natural History

Fish as a source of animal protein has been consumed by humans since Palaeolithic times and has appeared as a symbol in prehistoric mankind's religions. Man has thus deified fish by endowing them with supernatural powers while fish, as man's first ancestor exerted a profound influence on civilization. This paper looks at fish skin artistic traditions and the divine powers held by fish in both Ancient Mesopotamia and early modern Arctic societies. Both cultures believed that humans, fish and nature shared spiritual qualities, just as fish skins provided soul protection. The research analyses the origins of the fish-gods-men, tracing back to the Sumerians. A comparison with the fish skin customs of Indigenous Arctic Peoples and their sacred meaning follows. Early Sumerian religion believed in fish divine powers. Enki, the Sumerian god of the 'water ocean' was the donor of water and fertility and performed healing rituals. He created the seven demi-gods or Apkallu. Oannes was one of them with the body of a fish, but underneath his fish head was a man's head, and human feet emerged from beneath his fish tail. For ceremonial purposes, Oannes wore a cloak made from a species of giant carp that lived in the Tigris River. These figures clad in fishshaped capes are found in the clay tablets inscribed in the cuneiform script of ancient Mesopotamia. Small fish-man figurines were buried underground in groups of seven to protect a household. Oannes possessed the healing powers of Enki, and the fish skin wore on his back, was placed on the bed of patients during healing rituals. There is no archaeological evidence of actual fish garments being made in ancient Mesopotamia or of the use of fish skins in prehistoric Europe, but their depiction may have had some real basis of inspiration for fish-skin clothing, or these mythological depictions may have been inspired by earlier garments. There are many similarities between Mesopotamian fish deities and the myths about fish among Arctic Peoples where salmon abounds. Inuit, Ainu, Saami, Hezhe and Nivkh Peoples shared many cultural traits including subsistence patterns based on fishing; the use of fish skin as raw material to manufacture garments and accessories; animism and shamanism practices. These Arctic groups personified all natural resources, establishing that all creatures have a spiritual meaning, worshiping natural forces, plants and animals. Wearing fish skin clothing created a connection with the animal and a tribute to it. Through careful processing, and sewing, seamstresses could pass an animal's 'soul' into a garment made from its skin, renewing the cyclical

nature of life. Wearing the skin of a fish could protect during dangerous activities like hunting. The paper studies the ritualistic relationship with the spirit forces associated with the fish, the capability of fish to assume human form, as the humans took animal form in the wearing of their skins. Through rituals, broken links between humans, spirits, and animals could be re-established, and afflictions were healed.

“A Synthesis of Northern and Southern Ideals in Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa’s (1870–1946) Works”, Pekka Pitkälä, University of Turku

The paper concerns the esoteric ideas of the Finnish artist and writer Sigurd Wettenhovi-Aspa (Georg Sigurd Asp / Wetterhoff-Asp, 1870–1946). Wettenhovi-Aspa claimed that most languages had their origins in Finnish. He was also the father of so-called ‘Fenno-Egyptology’. In this theory he claimed that the ancient Egyptian language and culture were of Finnish origin. Wettenhovi-Aspa studied painting and sculpture in Paris in the 1890s, where Swedenborg’s ideas, theosophical ideas of the unity of divinities and mythological texts and the interests in Oriental and ancient Egyptian and Assyrian culture converged. On the other hand, the culture of the Nordic countries was seen as pure and uncorrupted, and inspirational by both local artists and, for example, Swedish and Finnish artists as well. Wettenhovi-Aspa was also influenced by such contemporary writers as August Strindberg and Joséphin Péladan. From the 1910s onwards Wettenhovi-Aspa combined these elements in his literary works concerning languages and history, which were also very close to Theosophy in some aspects.

Wettenhovi-Aspa wasn’t a committed theosophist himself, but he emphasized the nature of the Finnish language and the *Kalevala* as the source of a secret wisdom, which had been preserved in the Finnish forests. Wettenhovi-Aspa was a representative of a larger cultural movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This cultural movement was characterised by an interest both in Oriental and Nordic cultures, which manifested both in arts and religious and intellectual movements such as Theosophy. It was also a counter-cultural movement against contemporary utilitarian rationalism and positivistic aspirations. At the same time, especially in small countries like Finland and Sweden, an interest in building nationality by investigating and inventing ancient national myth emerged. These interests were combined in Wettenhovi-Aspa’s texts. In my paper

I will examine the interaction of the idealized northern and southern cultures in Wettenhovi-Aspa's artistic and literary works.

***“Operations Of Spirit Communication: radiophonic resonances between Sweden and Italy’s occultural practices and the sonic arts”*, Matteo Polato, Manchester Metropolitan University**

The present paper adopts a sound studies approach to trace the occultural transfers between Sweden and Italy relatively to the use of radio technologies in spirit communication, as well as their influence on the two countries’ contemporary sonic arts. The experiments carried out in the late fifties by Swedish filmmaker Friedrich Jürgenson and Latvian psychologist Konstantin Raudive (professor at Uppsala University) are widely recognised as pioneering for the development of the use of radio in Spiritualist séances, those diverse set of practices commonly termed Electronic Voice Phenomena (EVP). While numerous academic researches exist on the relationships between the two researchers and UK – most notably Raymond Cass – or the United States – the experiments of Von Salazay, Meek and Sumption – a substantial gap exists on the connections between the Swedish tradition of EVP and the long-lasting history of radio-aided spirit communication in Italy. In fact, the experiments conducted by Father Ernetti, Marcello Bacci and the Ce.M.M group among others – some in direct contact with Jürgenson, while others operating autonomously – display discursive and technical specificities that make them a rich field for comparative analysis with the Swedish case.

The present paper explores the connections between the Swedish and the Italian approaches, analysing their use of technology and the meaning given to the recorded paranormal ‘voices’. The first part of the paper highlights the processes by which the sensation of paranormal communication emerges from the ecologies of listening involved in such experiments, with particular attention to the affective-discursive relationalities that sound and radio waves mediate between human bodies, material technologies and paranormal disembodied agencies. The second part of the paper focuses on the influence of these occultural methods on recent sonic art practices, investigating how sound artists remediate the aforementioned techniques for artistic purposes. Here, another resonance between North and South will be traced: the work of Swedish sound artist Carl Michael Von Hausswolff – openly influenced by Jürgenson’s research – will be analysed alongside the electromagnetic field recording practice of Italian duo L’Impero della Luce, as well as the use of EVP radio techniques in composer Mauro Lanza’s recent cycle *Æther is a haunted place*, for string quartet and electronics.

“Anna Kingsford and The Painter of Venice”, Tim Rudbøg, University of Copenhagen

Anna Kingsford (1846-1888) is undoubtedly one of the major characters in modern esotericism. She is well known as an independent woman and a leading member of the early Theosophical Society who also inspired members of the Golden Dawn when she founded the Hermetic Society in 1884. She wrote about matters ranging from esoteric Christianity to anti-vivisection, but she also wrote fiction, which has been given very little attention. In 1875 the collection *Rosamunda The Princess, An Historical Romance of the Sixth Century; and other tales* was published. This collection contains the interesting tale *The Painter of Venice*, which is set in the 15th century. This paper in particular argues that Kingsford's early fiction foreshadowed her later hermetic interest and her ideas about esoteric Christianity. By studying her early fictional work, it for example becomes clear that Kingsford had a passion for Italy, historical knowledge about the time when Marsilio Ficino translated the *Corpus Hermeticum* and that allegorical methods of interpretation cultivated in Southern Europe was something she valued. Kingsford was born in Northern Europe, Stratford England, but she travel to Italy and converted to Catholicism even though she was married to an Anglican priest. In addition to this, *The Painter of Venice* clearly reveals the use of familiar cultural stereotypes about the differences between the English, Northern European and the Southern European, Italian that equally filtered into Kingsford's fascination with Italy and esotericism. She for example wrote about the English as 'unspeculative' and 'cold-blooded' and the Italian or Southern as more 'poetic', 'tempered', 'philosophic' and 'artistic'. The aim of this paper is therefore based on the above to connect Kingsford's fiction with her esotericism in order to demonstrate how European transfers connected with the binary of North and South play a role in both.

“North and South in the Novels of Philip Pullman”, Charles Marshal Stang, Harvard University

NB: This paper follows on the heels of another paper I gave at a conference at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in November, 2022, on “The Eranos Experience: Spirituality and the Arts from a Comparative Perspective.” My earlier paper, “Henry Corbin’s Mystical Geography in the Novels of Philip Pullman,” argued for the influence of Corbin’s account of the mystical “North” in Pullman’s first, and most

celebrated, trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, especially in the trilogy's first novel, *Northern Lights* (released in the US as *The Golden Compass*).

Much of the drama of Philip Pullman's first trilogy, *His Dark Materials*, centers on a mystical North in a world that is revealed to be adjacent to our own, familiar and yet fantastical: a North populated by war-like armored polar bears, clans of competing witches, Scandinavian spies and scholars, and an *aurora borealis* that proves to be a gateway to new worlds, including our own and others. Pullman's unfinished second trilogy, *The Book of Dust*, looks to be taking an "orientalist" turn, as the action shifts to the Levant and further east. This paper will attempt to surface and interpret the southern axis of Pullman's "occultural" fiction. How does the southern Mediterranean, and north Africa, figure in both trilogies, and interact with the mystical and mythical North? Topics to be explored include: the "Gyptians," a people who are figured as Gypsies of a sort, but perhaps with Egyptian roots; the (Mediterranean) city of Citàgazze, whose guild of philosophers invented the "subtle knife" that allowed them to create fateful portals between worlds; and, finally, in a mythical South displaced to the West, the figure of Lee Scoresby, an aeronaut from the Republic of Texas, on the southern border of New Denmark (roughly equivalent to the United States of America in our world). How can we make sense of "cultural transfers" in the various imaginal Norths and Souths of Pullman's novelistic world(s)?