

Impact case study (REF3)

Institution: The Open University		
Unit of Assessment: D31 Theology and Religious Studies		
Title of case study: New Animism: impact on creativity, culture and society		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2000-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Professor Graham Harvey	Professor of Religious Studies	2003-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2013-2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
1. Summary of the impact		
<p>Harvey's 'new animism' research is acknowledged as foundational for the creation and development of new animistic movements such as the UK Bear Tribe and the US Ancestral Medicine organization. It has influenced environmentalist Christians and the Finnish installation artist Elsa Salonen and her audiences. Collaborative partnerships between Harvey and the groups and individuals have involved recorded public conversations and talks which have fomented wider public discourses about animism and Indigenous relational ontologies and epistemologies. In turn, these have fed into Harvey's ongoing collaborative research about the impact of Indigenous knowledges (e.g. through performance events) on metropolitan and global communities.</p>		
2. Underpinning research		
<p>The key insight of Harvey's animism research is encapsulated in the phrase "<i>Animists are people who recognise that the world is full of persons, only some of whom are human, and that life is always lived in relationship with others</i>" [O1]. This is widely cited both by other scholars and by a growing number of self-identified animists inspired by Harvey's publications and knowledge exchanges.</p> <p>Harvey's animism research was initiated in encounters during a medical anthropology conference organised by Memorial University of Newfoundland in 1996 at which he presented his previous research among Pagans. The hosting of the conference at the Miawpukek First Nation reserve enabled conversations with local people about rituals involving eagles. Reflection on the salience of animism as theorised by the anthropologist Irving Hallowell (1960) in contrast to that of Edward Tylor (1871) propelled a transition in Harvey's research.</p> <p>Fieldwork since 2000 at Anishinaabe reservations in the USA (selected because Hallowell's work was among other Anishinaabeg), and among Maori and Aboriginal Australians, led to the publication of Harvey's <i>Animism: Respecting the Living World</i> (first edition 2005, second edition 2017) [O1]. The initially casual use of the phrase 'new animism' was taken up by international colleagues with similar interests in approaches, methods and relations, and generated further research and publications. Harvey's continuing knowledge exchange about Indigenous relational ontologies has provoked considerable interest among UK Pagans and interfaith groups. This has been aided and mediated by Harvey's 'Animist manifesto' [O2], first published in 2005, republished and translated into multiple languages. It experiments with a somewhat playful presentation form, successfully employed by Donna Haraway and Bruno Latour, to convey Harvey's insights in an accessible manner.</p> <p>Further fieldwork in Nigeria, New Zealand and Hawaii [G1] contributed to the second edition of <i>Animism</i> [O1] and to <i>Food, Sex and Strangers</i> [O3]. In these, additional analyses of material religion, taboo protocols and processes, and hospitality were brought into dialogue with animistic and other forms of lived religion. From 2011-18 Harvey's research at an annual Sámi-organised Indigenous cultural festival in arctic Norway [G2, G3] focused on performances rooted in "traditional" ritual repertoires and contributing to increasing democracy. Particular attention to animistic responses to climate change in such events has been crucial to Harvey's ongoing contributions to the study of Indigenous religions and performance cultures [O4].</p>		

Harvey's edited *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* [O5] spear-headed further scholarly debates and enabled **Harvey** to disseminate new perspectives on diverse epistemologies, ontologies, ritual performances and relationality to people seeking to enhance and share their animist knowledge and practice. Similarly, *Rethinking Personhood: Animism and Materiality* [O6] engaged such people with new understandings of the significance of narratives, embodiment and materiality expressive of Indigenous and other animisms. Interest in these and previous publications from artists, festival organisers and key influencers within animist movements has led **Harvey** to research the modes of dissemination of animism among members of groups, visitors to galleries, and wider audiences.

3. References to the research

- O1. Harvey, G.** (2017) *Animism: Respecting the Living World*. Second, revised UK edition: London: Hurst. 294pp. ISBN: 978-1-84904-840-8. First edition: 2005: London: Hurst.; New York: Columbia University Press; Adelaide: Wakefield Press. 251 pages. UK ISBN 9781850657583.
- O2. Harvey, G.** (2005) "An animist manifesto", *Strange Attractor 2*: 24-31. ISBN: 9780954805418. Reprinted on diverse websites, some in translation. Reprinted in the peer reviewed journal *PAN: Philosophy Activism Nature* 9 (2012): 2-4. ISSN: 1443-6124.
- O3. Harvey, G.** (2013) *Food, Sex and Strangers: Understanding Religion as Everyday Life*. New York: Routledge. 244 pages. ISBN: 978-1-84465-693-6
- O4. Harvey, G.** (2017) "Performing indigeneity and performing guesthood" in Christopher Hartney and Daniel J. Tower (eds) *Religious Categories and the Construction of the Indigenous*. Leiden: E.J. Brill. pp. 74-91. ISBN 9789004328983.
https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004328983_006
- O5. Harvey, G.** (ed.) (2013) *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism*. New York: Routledge. 581pages. ISBN: 978-1-84465-711-7.
- O6. Harvey, G.** (2018) "Adjusted Styles of Communication (ASCs) in the Post-Cartesian World" in Harvey, G. and Astor-Aguilera, M. (eds). 2018. *Rethinking Relations and Animism: Personhood and Materiality*. New York: Routledge. pp. 35-52. ISBN: 978-1-138-56234-9.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203709887>

Funding

- G1.** (2010-11) 'Food, sex and strangers: redefining religion' for fieldwork in Nigeria, New Zealand and Hawaii (British Academy/Leverhulme small research grant) GBP6,123.
- G2.** (2013-17) "Ritualising diaspora and re-occupying Kårfjord" subproject of "Reassembling Democracy: Ritual as Cultural Resource" (REDO) (Norwegian Research Council SAMKUL programme) GBP34,504.
- G3.** (2011) Feasibility study for research at Riddu Riđđu indigenous cultural festival, Sápmi (University of Oslo Travel grant) GBP600.

4. Details of the impact

Harvey's phrase 'new animism' and related ideas have been adopted by some Pagans and practitioners of 'Green Spirituality' including members of the Forest Church and related Christian movements. **Harvey's** work has impacted on the self-understanding and practices of religious networks (the Bear Tribe animist group (UK), the Forest Church movement (UK) and The Ancestral Medicine Alliance (USA)) and the Finnish artist Elsa Salonen. **Harvey's** animist manifesto [O2] has been translated into many languages and one group, the Institute for Earthbound People, has adopted it as their mission statement. Through the specific people and groups identified here, **Harvey's** work has impacted on wider networks, e.g. of Pagans, Indigenous religious practitioners, and international art and culture institutions.

Impact on religious and spiritual movements

Bear Tribe is a growing Pagan network founded by a Pagan couple. **Harvey's Animism** [O1] and a talk he gave at a Druid camp influenced their ecological and religious thinking and the

inception and direction of the Bear Tribe. A key theme resonated with them: the value of rituals in which gratitude is offered and requests made to those beings who might become food. Using **Harvey's** insights, they developed an annual midwinter feast complex to experiment with making animism more than an ideology. This was first held in 2007 but the work continues to inform the annual Bear Feast [C1]. Each year, over a long weekend, a gathering of around 60 people (many returning annually, building a community of over 400 people, many of whom have influential roles in the wider Pagan movement) focus on human relations with the larger-than-human community, evocatively led by a bear (the pinnacle of food chains of some Indigenous hunter-gatherer communities and a significant character in cosmological myths and rites).

The Bear Feast movement has spread internationally, as founder Corwen Broch explains: “We never wanted BF [Bear Feast] to belong exclusively to us, so all these materials, song recordings etc as well as a compete manual in how to hold a Bear Feast have been freely available online and have been downloaded many hundreds of times” and Bear Feasts have also been held in the Pyrenees, Sussex, Dorset, Yorkshire and Orkney. The Bear Feast Facebook group has 150 active members and a Facebook page with 743 followers. There are plans for an online Bear Feast via Zoom during the coronavirus pandemic. “Bear Feast came to international attention in 2016 when the 92nd Street Y, a large New York based Jewish cultural organisation ran a competition to design a new religion. There were many entrants and tens of thousands of votes cast. Bear Feast came in 2nd place winning a USD2,000 prize” [C1].

A Bear Feast participant says, having read [O1], that “Finding this spiritual path as good as saved me, as I was very lost in my teens and twenties and having unhealthy relationships with myself, people and drugs”. This participant started attending Bear Feast in 2014 and found that “The whole experience is full of gratitude for all the animals and plants who have given their lives to keep us alive throughout the year. It feels as though we as a community have come together to truly honour those whom we share our lives with on this planet” [C1].

The Forest Church movement was established in 2012 to reimagine Christian practice in an ecologically aware context. The founders had been influenced by **Harvey's** work and invited him to speak at a conference in 2014. Steve Hollinghurst (Evangelism Enabler, Environmental Focus, Diocese of Lichfield), one of the founders of the Forest Church movement, says **Harvey's** contribution was significant in giving credibility to new forms of Christian practice: “Thinking of non-humans as people we share life with is a powerful idea and something that for several of us including myself led to an exploration of whether such an idea could form part of a Christian faith tradition. This was an unusual approach as most Christian engagement with animism viewed [it] as part of pagan religions that people gave up when they became Christians in foreign mission contexts, and often therefore viewed animism negatively” [C2]. The Forest Church movement, heavily influenced by **Harvey's** insights, has since grown to an estimated 50-100 groups in the UK with similar groups in the US, Australia and elsewhere in Europe [C2]. Hollinghurst continues to use **Harvey's** insights in his teaching in theological colleges (and on associated reading lists), in speaking “widely across the church both in the UK and abroad about Contemporary Paganism and concepts like Christian animism which have been informed by Graham's work”, and in his own published writing [C2].

Noel Moules is another exponent of Christian Animism, a loose movement that is gradually maturing thanks to **Harvey's** insights. In the current context of ecological awareness Moules has come to the conclusion that “Christianity had not only been a major conceptual and cultural cause of creating and sustaining the ecological crisis, but that this reality was also incapable of reversing it” [C2]. He argues that in order to address the ecological crisis, we need to understand the relationships between all things, a new and transformative way of thinking presented in **Harvey's** work: “That opening statement in Graham's book 'Animism' is re-quoted everywhere! It has effectively become the defining definition of animism for so many people [...]. Only thanks to Graham's quote, and everything that is found within it and lies behind it, am I able to set up repeated learning experiences so beautifully and powerfully” [C2]. In 2014 Moules realised that there was enough interest in Christian Animism to justify a website as a focal point for his **Harvey**-informed thinking, “However, the website was just the beginning of what I call my

'Christian Animism Project' which now includes a Facebook group ("508 very active members"), Zoom gatherings set up in autumn 2020 (2 meetings so far, approximately 50 attendees per meeting) and a YouTube channel. In 2020 Moules drew on **Harvey's** thinking in an interview for the Nomad podcast (14,000 downloads in the first 6 months) [C2].

Impact on spiritual and religious practice

The US Ancestral Medicine Alliance is a network promoting indigenous and particularly African understandings and practices focused on relationships with ancestors. Because the themes and language of 'new animism' resonated with founder Dr Daniel Foor's practices, Foor invited **Harvey** to record an interview discussing animism, published as an eight-part series of videos on its Voices of the Earth YouTube channel (8.1k subscribers). These videos were uploaded in 2012 but have continued to attract an audience in the current assessment period having been viewed 18,000 times as of December 2020 [C3].

Foor's online course *Practical Animism: Rituals for Earth Reconnection* has run four times since 2018, reaching 2,000 participants in total. Foor says, "*In this course upfront I very explicitly credit Dr. **Harvey** with my way of framing 'animism' and include a few excerpts from his book in the opening lessons [...]. We've received a ton of good feedback and will continue to refine it gradually over time*". **Harvey's** work is also "*my go-to in terms of an intellectual/ontological frame and working language*", underpinning Foor's book *Ancestral Medicine: Rituals for Personal and Family Healing* (2017) which sold around 10,000 copies in the first two years and has been translated from the original English into Chinese, Croatian, Dutch, and Polish and his development of a network of 67 ancestral healing practitioners all using animism at the centre of their practice [C4].

One participant in Ancestral Medicine's training said: "*Graham **Harvey's** book, *Animism: Respecting the Living World*, was the turning point for me [...] Currently I'm studying with @danielfoor in his online course "*Practical Animism*". If you are looking for an amazing platform to learn about Animism, complete with the most amazing resources, I can't imagine a better place for it*" [C5].

Another participant, Wild Ana Crow, says "*Graham's book offered me closure to all those spiritual questions I had back then [...] I enrolled in the online course 'Practical Animism' by Daniel Foor, which has references to Graham's work and has allowed me to deepen my knowledge on how to deepen my relationships with others, both human and other-than-human, on a more practical level. I also felt compelled to delve deeper into my own traditional culture and dig up all the practises that still exist and have a very animistic core (e.g. 'caretos' in Portugal). The result of all these small steps is that [...] once we relate with the land on a deeper level, we also are more willing to fight for her protection*" [C4]. Wild Ana Crow has incorporated these insights in her work as a hide tanner, crafter and visual storyteller, hoping to inspire others to delve into a more intimate relationship with their other-than-human kin and ancestors.

Impact on artistic practice

Harvey's ideas influenced the work of the artist Elsa Salonen, as cited in the catalogues of several exhibitions of her work, including in Columbia and in that of her 2019 Berlin exhibition, 'Stories Told by Stones' [C6]. 'Stories Told by Stones' explored the idea that stones ground into pigments and used by artists remain 'animate persons'. **Harvey** was invited to present on the theme of transformation within animism at the catalogue launch event in Berlin, hosted by the Finnish Institute in Germany on 17th March, 2019 [C7]. The Institute also asked **Harvey** to provide a comment for the cover of the catalogue.

The curator Dr Christine Nippe said "*One of the most important contexts behind her [Salonen's] work is the idea of animism, which is based on the assumption that everything in nature has a soul or that a spiritual consciousness resides inside it. Salonen makes reference to the interpretation of the British religious scholar, Graham **Harvey**, who researches our relationship with our neighbours, such as "animals, plants, rocks and kettles" and demands that we show them respect. All of them are relevant for us because, according to **Harvey**, the notion of*

“person” encompasses more than the usual understanding of the word, in which humans stand alone at the centre of creation. This concept opens up a new interpretation and presents nature as valuable as people [...] Salonen uses her artistic practice to operate within precisely this field of opportunities” [C6].

Elsa Salonen says **Harvey’s** work “re-invented the discourse of animism” [C8] and “has left a mark both on my working processes as well as on a wider audience through exhibitions, public talks, and screenings that I’ve organised or co-organised during the last years [...]. I was invited to give a lecture at the University of Fine Arts in Poznan, Poland. I entitled my talk ‘How to Enlarge Your Bubble?’ to underline the importance of being aware of the limits of your thoughts and trying to enlarge your mind space whenever possible; in order to have more ground for creativity, but especially to understand each other better. One of my examples of ‘mind-opening’ theories was new animism” [C9].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- C1. Testimonials. December 2020. Corwen Broch, Bear Feast Organiser. Bear Feast Participant.
- C2. Testimonials. November 2020. Stephen Hollinghurst, Evangelism Enabler, Diocese of Litchfield. Noel Moules, Author.
- C3. Weblinks. EMA Voices of the Earth YouTube channel.
<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL77311891373E297B>
- C4. Testimonials. December 2020. Daniel Foor, Founder and Director, Ancestral Medicine Alliance. November 2020 Wild Ana Crow, Artisan Tanner.
- C5. Instagram post. @WildAnaCrow, 27 May 2019.
- C6. Exhibition Catalogue. ‘Elsa Salonen, Stories Told By Stones’, ed. Christine Nippe (2019)
- C7. Programme. ‘Stories Told By Stones’, conversation, Christine Nippe, Elsa Salonen, Graham **Harvey**. 17 March 2019. <https://finnland-institut.de/events/artist-talk-elsa-salonen-graham-harvey-christine-nippe/>
- C8. Interview. *Artfridge*, ‘Interview: Elsa Salonen’, Anna-Lena Werner, 2 August 2019.
<http://www.artfridge.de/2019/08/interview-elsa-salonen.html>
- C9. Testimonial, December 2020, Elsa Salonen, Artist.