

# ENERGY AS THE MEDIATOR BETWEEN NATURAL AND SUPERNATURAL REALMS

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## ABSTRACT

This article\* discusses contemporary vernacular theory about the elusive energies that emanate from the ground. These energies are reported to be the ultimate reason for different remarkable occurrences, both natural and supernatural. The hypothesis of special energies is expressed in local tourism, in ecological debates and healing practises, driving the curiosity of amateur science. In these expressions knowledge as a form of engagement with the supernatural plays an integrating role between the individual and the forces beyond.

Dowsing reveals the 'energetic' nature of reality, which will be discussed using three examples. Tuhala Nõiakaev (the Witch's Well) as a peculiar natural sight in the north of Estonia has drawn together many reports of energy columns that are linked to underground rivers and cultic stones. Another place under discussion is also famous for healing energy points: Kirna Manor works as a centre for spreading knowledge of the interdependence of physical health and the search for a spiritual path with the help of energies that the next example, the Society of Dowsers, attempts to discover using scientific methods. In these examples 'energy' designates the position of the individual, in which the participative relationship with the environment works as a form of folk epistemology within the limits of cultural understanding.

KEYWORDS: energy • folk beliefs • place-lore • dowsing • healing

## THE THEORY OF ENERGIES AS THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INDIVIDUAL AND ENVIRONMENT

Since 1992 when the first of a new type of monument – an energy pillar – was erected in the south Estonian town Otepää, the Estonian landscape has gained several such destinations. Invisible energy columns heal people at Kirna manor park; a natural fountain occurring during flood periods, Nõiakaev (the Witches' Well) in Tuhala, has revealed its special energy and therefore attracts people during the dry season; the limestone

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museum at Porkuni has an 'energy path' that stresses the invisible influence of limestone on human health and well-being. All these projects, contributing inevitably to local tourism, embody a variety of beliefs that centre around the invisible waves and radiations that affect the human physical as well as spiritual condition. In addition to the list above, people who share these ideas would add tens of examples, and even more, the concept of a uniting network of waves (Hartmann, Curry, etc.<sup>1</sup>) binding different places and different times, explaining facts on the global as well as individual level. Along with it, a huge amount of training courses are offered to educate people to detect and use the invisible energies in their homes and places of work. Specific interest in earth rays and "anomalous zones" has brought people together in clubs and societies (for example, Club Energo and the Estonian Geopathic Society in Tallinn; see Energo klubi; Influence of Geopathic Fields on Life and Environment) although they share their principles and methods with wider esoteric knowledge.

Doing fieldwork at the popular sites of 'energies' or among the dowisers and healers, often the question of my intention arises. What is a folklorist doing examining the very promising field of natural science, or examining the medicine that helps people? This surprise reflects the conflict in the understandings of belief and truth, and also the conflict within folkloristics, which is supposed to deal with stories of the past and 'folk poetry'. In a secular society that values scientific rationality, the social designations of belief and truth are in opposition. Despite this confrontation of understanding, which could be a topic for analysis by itself, in the subject of earth energies expressions of belief start from a certain modality which begins from the assumption that there is something beyond our conscious understanding and is sometimes elaborated as detailed visions and comprehensive theories of this 'realm beyond'.

In the following article I introduce my research material, which consists of different realisations of the idea of earth energies. Ideas that are shared in various contexts, by various viewpoints and authorities are difficult to analyse as a whole. In this problem I have found it fruitful to look at the material with an eye for vernacular dispute, whereas the 'energetic' explanation always offers an alternative view of reality. From this viewpoint, belief legends get an epistemological quality in the contest of worldviews. In this article, the theoretical discussion of these points is followed by the empirical material.

Leonard Primiano's (1995: 44) central statement for scholars of religion and belief is to look at their subject as "religion as it is lived". In this he does justice to lived tradition and belief, in order to start analysis from the emic point of view, to value vernacular expressions and not the dogmatic frameworks of scholarship or official religions. According to this view belief grounds every aspect of expression within tradition. Researching the mechanisms between expression and belief would justify this goal in its fullest sense. Expressing, verifying or negotiating beliefs in situations and practices unites these two sides to a new analytical unit when the result is neither a pure ideology nor a utilitarian knowledge of the world, but the process of believing, which has the impact of both.

An inductive approach does more than simply extrapolate general principles from particular data. It generates a theory of and method for the study of religion based on criteria of religious validity established by the inner experience and perception of the believer. Scholarship on lived religion is, however, never a purely objective position, but rather a subjective composite of various analytical vantage points. A

presentation of the beliefs of others occurs always through the filter of the empathetic perception and interpretation of the scholar. (Primiano 1995: 40)

A warning statement from one of my informants, a successful 'life-coach' and *feng shui* specialist stresses the very point of Primiano's thought:

I am often asked if I really BELIEVE in this [the existence of invisible energies]. I always answer, it does not make sense if I believe in it or not. All that matters is whether I decide to USE it or not. (FM Trainer)<sup>2</sup>

The appropriation of the terms 'religion' and 'believing' in secular society is a designation in itself. It is not something that can be associated with the critical thought and sober common sense. Even the existence of supernatural, definitive characteristics of the reality of belief would be problematic in the case of dowsing as vernacular science. Many aspects of the material collected for my study refer to it as a practice rather than a structured body of principles; it is similarly recognised by informants who avoid associating it with the realm of beliefs or religion. Even worse, the conclusions that the informants reach too often contradict each other. The precise detection of earth rays or the interpretation of the scales of a pendulum operate within certain limits of confusion; the appropriation of a positive or negative designation to trees or places is highly debatable among the interpreters themselves. Looking at the variety of expressions, in which the basic cosmological principle that there are invisible and imperceptible rays and waves emanating from the surface and that their influence defines the reality, could lead to total confusion. In a "religion as it is lived" analysis, focus should not only be on ways of expression but also on the motivation of the tellers.

Seppo Knuuttila (2012: 370) has written about the epistemological qualities of different vernacular expressions. The problem he raises is that of the logic of the generalisations in folklore material. From which side should we read the generalisations from of our material in order that an understanding of the dynamics of vernacular belief would reveal itself in an accurate way? Are the stories examples of something? Seppo Knuuttila elaborates this viewpoint by scrutinising of the concept of supernatural.

The supernatural can, however, be understood in at least two different ways: usually it is considered to be an aspect of religion, whereas references to supernatural in the sense of the inexplicable can be interpreted as intellectual contemplation without the framework of belief. Naturally it is not necessary, or wise, to deny the mental category of belief as such, but it can be bracketed when the question asked is not if people in times past used to, for example, believe in guardian spirits. Belief stories can thus be used to exemplify the vernacular interest in knowledge and epistemology. (Ibid.: 371)

Knowledge that has both magical and intellectual power is well expressed in contemporary popular understanding of the term 'information'. The activities performed in esoteric circles consist of rituals as well as of group or private meditations, in which the expression and perception of the sacred is clearly marked with decorations, food, music, etc. But many of the social activities of people with the same interests focus around the getting and sharing, even the 'taking', of information. Self-help books, the wide business of life-training courses in human relations, *feng shui*, and balanced food show the intimate, even inseparable relation between intellectual and religious settings

in people's lives. Is the information about earth energies that is shared at the conferences of dowsers and radiesthesists, in the form of slides with technical data given in figures and scales, the same information that they detect during conference excursions as an information field at a particular place in cultural history? Probably yes and no. The desire to seek an explanation, a reason or a narrative above and beyond daily experience that would explain and order this experience, is the feature that keeps different ideas together and also sustains these ideas in practise. Information as an esoteric experience, though gained through intellectual mechanisms, is religious in the sense that it does not reach further than already established myth. Religious information can widen the central idea; it can attach the proper elements, keywords to it, or seek different manifestations or formulations. As characteristic to myth, information organises the worldview for those who adopt it, unifying and explaining the differences. In this sense information could be understood as myth. But actualisation of this myth at conferences and at formal and informal training events, associates the religious perception of information (as the vernacular category) with the current of gnosticism as known in the history of religion.

Gnosticism, or gnosis as a set of religious ideas of revealed knowledge, which Antoine Faivre (1987a: 158) has named the masculine part of esotericism (in partnership with feminine mysticism), focuses on the myth according to which ultimate divine wisdom is gained only through the human self, which is itself of divine origin. This myth, as a compilation of different sources, tells of the human self that has direct contact with divinity. Knowledge of the divine, which the self is able to reveal, has releasing power. To know is to be released (Hanegraaff 2006: 790–798). Estonian historian of religion, Jaan Lahe, has raised several definitions of Gnosticism, stressing the fact that it is difficult to analyse as a definite ideology because it has always been a part of religious and intellectual history from the multi-religious Roman Empire up to contemporary new spirituality (Lahe 2009: 44). According to Kurt Rudolph, a peculiarity of the gnostic tradition lies in the fact that it frequently draws its material from the most varied existing traditions, attaches itself to this material and at the same time sets it in a new frame by which it takes on a new character and a completely new significance. Since gnostic myths are built together out of other mythological material they give the impression of artificiality as compared with the old developed myths of primeval times. It is not at all the case of artificial and fundamentally unimportant compilation, but of illustration of existential situations of the gnostic view of the world. Since this view of the world attaches itself in the main to the older imagery almost as a parasite prospers on the body of a host, it can also be described as parasitic. (Rudolph 1998: 53–55) Gnostic ideas usually have polemical relations with the prevailing tradition because, to use Kurt Rudolph's words, they re-write the existing socially established philosophy. In this, gnosis in particular gives us a typical example of the close interweaving of ideology and sociology. (Ibid.: 58)

German theologian Friedrich Christoph Oetinger (1702–1782), who had been inspired by theosophical ideas, developed the view of *physica sacra* or physicotheology from his experiments with the electricity, which might be considered the chronological link between cosmosophical views of the Renaissance and the German *Naturphilosophie* of pre-Romanticism and Romanticism (Faivre 1987b: 333). He interprets the Genesis story of creation, the primeval light ("In the beginning God created heaven and earth including the waters.

Darkness was upon the deep and God created the light”) before the Sun as the creation of an electrical fire that spreads over chaos as a stimulating, warming and form-giving life-principle. This constitutes a new view of the relationship between life and matter of spirit, soul, and physical properties that differs most strongly from the traditional Aristotelian concept of matter. From the beginning of the world a living life element has been added to matter, which contains the cause of all future natural creation, an element that Oetinger calls “the electrical fire concealed in all things” (Benz 2009: 45–47). This idea emphasises that intelligences and souls do not emerge from the substance of God and are, therefore, not to be considered a direct emanation of the divine being, while, on the other hand they are placed in the immediate proximity of the divine being as emanations of His originative potentialities (ibid.: 53). Oetinger reflects the positional shift between human world and a sacrality that was introduced by the development of the natural sciences during the Enlightenment. In this way knowledge uses the principle of salvation to change the personality from inside by positioning the sacred near the mundane. Although this engages the method of rational reasoning it sheds light on illuminating knowledge, which itself provides access to divinity.

Illuminated gnostic knowledge itself involves many types of perception, as well as many operations to make the acquired information intelligible. The sources of truths as well as the methods of gaining it are both socially determined (for example, academic science versus New Age science). In vernacular practices the methods, channels and skills of adopting knowledge are not rigidly imposed, although they reflect those values that form the authority. Many scholars of Renaissance magic, esotericism and contemporary spirituality see magic and belief as being intensively in dialogue with rationality, with empirical and causal reasoning (Tambiah 1990; Luhrmann 1991; Hammer 2007). Those scholars see magic as a highly adaptive form of involvement in the world. In this, rather than content, purpose and instruments of certain magical practise, the type of ordering of the cosmos in relation to the subject is under scrutiny.

Since the Enlightenment the legitimate method of gaining knowledge about the world has favoured empirical proof and logical reasoning of facts. However the separation of science from magic has reordered the view of a person’s participation in the process of gaining an active relationship between the human self and the outer world in the terms of knowledge. Since the 18th century the main complaint against people who dowse has been that their methods contain no sufficient scientific proof. Thus the moral aspect has replaced what was formerly sinful, i.e. the relationship with demons and the devil. For example, Martin Luther, in his book of sermons *Decem praecepta Vuittembergensi predicata populo*, printed in 1518, mentioned dowsing as being against the first commandment. (Barrett, Bestermann 1926: 17)

Here we can see conflict between the different moralities and ideologies built upon different categories of human thought. The categories of *participation* and *causality* designate the different cognitive orientations in the process of analysis. The first of them, the “law of participation”, as phrased by its author Lucien Lévy-Bruhl, is the association between people and things in primitive thought to the point of identity and substantiality. (Tambiah 1990: 86) Lévy-Bruhl contested the evolutionary view of culture by setting the participative sense at the very centre of human perception; this can be met not only in traditional mentalities but is rather a question of two types of knowledge in any society that touches upon the levels of thought and experience (Hanegraaff 2003: 373). The principle of participation, based on existential immediacy, contact and

a relationship of contiguity (Tambiah 1990: 107) takes on an even more literary sense in the current theme, which has the central idea that humankind is related to the environment through waves and elusive energies that are now the subject of 'advanced perception' (only people with special abilities can properly perceive these charges) but will be one of the future sciences. The first indications of reciprocity in the participatory relationship between humans and the environment are seen in quantum theory. Thus, the desire to be aware of the laws of nature, and not just to be aware but to be an active and conscious participant in these forces, is what drives the dowser. This goal to overcome the existential separation that the natural laws inherently involve is part of the religious desire to be in a *participative* relationship with reality.

If people define reality by the special energies that fluctuate between cosmos and earth, then all natural (for example the shapes of trees) and supernatural occurrences (for example, areas of high UFO activity, folkloric references to ghosts and to legends about buried treasure the location of which is revealed with flashing lights) are explained by this energy, and the position of a person telling these stories is expressed as a reaction to existing knowledge. But the detection of earth rays or veins of water as part of finding a solution to various illnesses, tiredness or bad dreams, shows the possibility of overcoming these troubles. Even more, going into the countryside to perceive the harmonising energy of nature, the healing energies of trees, or just to entertain yourself with a tickle of the supernatural coming from sensations at the energy column is an expression of the direct relationship with the meta-rules of nature.

Although the principle of logical or causal reasoning that has established itself as a socially dominant ideology in Western thought could also be seen as complementary to the participative orientation towards reality. "Like participation, it is a spontaneous tendency of the human mind: the tendency to suspect things that happen in the world to be the result of material causation, and to explain events in this manner" (Hanegraaff 2003: 375).

The appeal of quantum theory to 'spiritual science' is in that existential unity of human perception that it seems to support, and which academic science does not seem to take into account. The use of scientific terms in the context of belief is supported by those developments within natural sciences that produce the knowledge of the world in a literally esoteric sense. Both perception and understanding is hard to achieve in terms of up-to-date scientific knowledge. Physicist Jaak Kikas has drawn attention to metaphoric usage of the concept of physical field.

Developments of physics where the exposition of static and magnetic fields as carriers of interactions between charges and currents have reached to descriptions of quantum and non-linear effects may viewed as "dematerialization" of electromagnetic fields in sense that more and more subtle and distant from our everyday experience effects have been taken under consideration. The physical concepts of fields, however, always assume rigorous mathematical models, no matter how weak the field may be. Quite a different usage of the same word is given by the examples like "biofields", "morphic fields" etc., where the elusiveness of field seems to be its basic characteristic in order to make it responsible for effects (real or imaginary) otherwise unexplainable. A noteworthy historical example is that with the term of "animal magnetism", which lost its popularity when rigorous physical theory of magnetism was developed. (Kikas 2000: 19)

The idea of uniting energies that help to overcome the existential separation has two functions within the frame of rational epistemology. At first, energy itself is that medium through which the participative relationship with the environment or other people is possible. At the same time, its explanations in physical terms allows the possibility of crediting it to the scientific worldview. And secondly, at the level of thinking the goal of gaining the active position towards the 'forces beyond' involves the associative, direct and face-to-face relationship, which at the same time is connected with the conscious and analytical will. Thus both causality and participation are in principle inescapable ways of making sense of natural environment involving both the religious as well as rational epistemology.

Regarding this view, rationalising different sensations as well as existential positioning does not cause a separation between practical or metaphysical issues, but rather is the way to create a coherent narrative upon the different facts. Despite this, the participative or otherwise direct position of the human to natural laws is what makes the science of radiesthesia and the art of dowsing an 'alternative' to the dominant ideology of scientific rationality.

#### THE COLUMNS OF ENERGY IN TUHALA

The 'energetic' layer of place-lore is first and foremost concentrated around the concept of certain places that embody an unexplainable power that has strong impact on human mental and physical wellness, and on the growth of plants and trees. Energy columns are reported to be situated at geological breaks (meaning they occur due to peculiarities of the earth's surface) or in churches and other sacred places (meaning they have impact on people's sense of the sacred). Energy as an elusive vernacular concept can be attributed to many different natural formations. Thus, some stones, sandstone walls or trees can in fact work similarly to energy columns. The forces that can be detected around the columns are often related to magnetism, electricity or just 'fields'.

A story of energy columns near Tuhala Nöiakaev (the Witch's Well) is told by the owner of the well, Ants Talioja. Below I refer an interview with him (recorded in September 2011) and also his letters, in which he explains the energetic methods of gaining knowledge about local history.

In 2001 a geobiologist Rein Hanstein re-discovered the energy columns here. At first one and later four. The energy columns were measured in ångströms<sup>3</sup> by a Swedish researcher using a pendulum. The Finns are working similarly; recently a group of them was here, researchers of energy columns. Four columns are of 18,000 ångströms and one is 19,000; the Otepää one is 14 and those of Kirna manor are not more than 14. (FM Tuhala 1)

Tuhala well is famous by its ability to 'boil': during early spring and with the heavy rain, water gushes out of the well. In old photos, the place is a lake with a small spurt of water in the middle. A wooden construction hold the spring and temporary lake in the form of a well. This makes the well, with its erupting water, a strange spectacle during the flood period. The phenomenon of the well is connected with the karst topography of the region where the acidic water from the bog erodes parts of the mineral ground



*Photo 1. Tuhala Nõiakaev is a spectacular sight during the early spring. The sign guides the drivers by the well and the “strongest energy-column of Estonia”. Photo by Kristel Kivari.*

creating a sensitive ecosystem for all kinds of interventions. Tuhala has come to have meaning not only as an interesting sight, but also as an anchor of identity for the local family and the region. Nõiakaev as a well-known sight is relatively ‘young’. It was introduced as an interesting phenomenon by journalist Ülo Tootsen through a popular TV program titled *Kodukandi lood* (Homestead Stories) at the beginning of the 1980s. Some years before, in 1976, a project started to study, protect and popularise the karst landscape of the area in the fear of extensive amelioration. As Ants recounts in his letter, the name Nõiakaev “was revealed” in about 1980. These were the years of discovering archaeological remains, marking and bringing them under protection, erecting memorial stones for the local intellectuals and founding the Tuhala Nature Centre (see Tuhala Maastikukaitseala). Paradoxically, the source of the fear was a state farm (sovkhoz)<sup>4</sup> whose aid was kindly provided to fund activities that supported the popularisation of local culture and history. Since that time the story and fame of Nõiakaev has increased with the help of the mass media, and the fight against the excavation of peat and limestone form the background to local activism.

One reason is why I have come to promote those [columns] is that people usually do not want to talk about it, because they are looked at awry. I purposely do not care about it.

I built a new house. I did not know anything about the water veins. And for twenty years I crawled out of bed in terrible pain and did not know what was the

reason. In 2001, when the energy column was discovered, Rein Hanstein said that he also detects the location of water veins inside buildings. I invited him to check my house as well. It occurred to me that a huge water vein was flowing diagonally under the house. Although I made a strong basement full of iron and ironstones, nothing helped, still the crack is there. The sleeping places of all my family had to be removed from above the water veins and me, I was sleeping at the dead point! And what is this? The dead point is the place of still water, a column of negative energy, invisible geomagnetic radiation, there could not be a place of more negative influence. I was told to move my bed half a meter, the head to the north, the foot to the south, and my backpain has been gone now for ten years. Therefore I tell this on purpose. (FM Tuhala 1)

Despite the fact that Ants says he perceives the energy columns with his body as “frying me on the pan”, he often mentions the existential turn of getting to know about invisible energies.

The region of Tuhala is rich in archaeological monuments. Archaeologists have detected 11 ancient settlement places, 30 cup-marked stones and 3 stone graves, and there are many toponyms related to the name sacred grove (Hiiekadakas, Hiieotsa talu) (Kink 2011: 9). Ants himself, being an enthusiast of local history, has been a contact person between the workers of the local sovkhos and the state authorities who were in charge of taking the archaeological monuments under protection. Thus he often mentions his exclusive local identity together with the long history of the Tuhala region. The cultural particularity got a new meaning at the beginning of the new millennium when Ants was introduced with the ‘energetic’ nature of his environment. In addition to his acquaintanceship with Rein Hanstein, who detected the strongest energy columns at his front garden, Ants passed the pendulum course held by Rein Weber, who imported the idea from France. The impact of Rein Weber’s activity on Estonian dowisers and esoteric circles has been enormous: his followers have created a professional movement of geobiologists, as well as Club Energo.

The thing is that some people can apprehend those energies. For example, a man was here who said that he has seen a map in 1980 that was brought from Novosibirsk where all the strongest energy columns of the Soviet Union were located in addition to ours. We didn’t know a thing about it, meaning only certain people knew about it. We at our home didn’t know. But something drew us there, we wanted to play at this hole, me and my brother and sister. [The energy columns is situate by the edge of a hole in the ground.] How we wanted to play with that mud, but we were playing between the strongest energy columns! We just didn’t know. (FM Tuhala 1)

The revealing knowledge that illuminates the distant as well as immediate past is just beyond the reach of a sensitive person’s<sup>5</sup> hand. Through this illumination the knowledge of the energies of the region is like a story that finds the expressions in certain values. The aspects of health and peaceful sleep already mentioned above in connection with skilful building techniques concern the most intimate sphere of everyday concerns. From the communal side, the mythic or sacral past that this method detects not only sacralises the environment but through references of national history makes them a powerful argument in local debates. For an explanation of this we must remembered



*Photo 2. Oak pillar at Tuhala Nõiakaev marks the location of energy column. Photo by Kristel Kivari.*

the continuous struggles that have preceded the activities of Ants and his supporters. He speaks in the name of 'us', not 'me' and does not hide his teachers, guides and their discoveries. It is quite a different position from that of the authority that I have encountered during my fieldwork among dowsers and other energy-enthusiasts who rarely speak with the words of someone else. In addition, the literature of dowsing and other esoteric techniques seldom mentions any references, except to the general body of scientists. In the case of Tuhala, the line between 'us' and 'them' is overtly drawn for the sake of preserving local nature as well as cultural history. In my field visit to Nõiakaev Ants kindly offered to be a guide on the Tuhala hiking trail that passes several natural sights as well as sites of cultural interest. The discussion about our common interest in the unseen level of reality and about the question of energies continued in correspondence. As his letters were written to support my research, which he saw as also contributing to his interests, I quote some thoughts from them concerning matters that were touched in the earlier interview.

It is such a disadvantage that scientists usually do not want to cooperate with sensitive people. Sensitive people are skilful people who can indicate something that scientists could research further.

Formerly the threat for sacred groves was from the amelioration, while today these places are damaged by clear-cutting.

Recently a person with sensitive abilities discovered an ancient sacred grove. He detected a presence of strong energy there. It was a place for village feasts dur-

ing past times. At this moment he did not know the presence of strong energy columns there like those beside Tuhala Nõiakaev. Four big birches grow at the place of one energy column under which we found a cultic stone from the first millennium before our era. Of course this sacred grove is not thoroughly researched yet.

I tried to introduce this sacred place to the two archaeologists who were staying nearby at this time. First I asked what they thought of sensitive people. The answer was: they are sorcerers. Thus there was no reason to bring them to the sacred grove. The next day we discovered the cultic stone there. (FM Tuhala 2)

The layer of energetic explanation in Tuhala region offers an intimate relationship with powers that are behind the natural and historical formations. The relationship is gained with the help of a psychic who introduced the achievable living presence of some aspects of the past, such as feasts and cults. The myth of the energies binds together bodily health, history and community in front of the economic and ecological threat. At the same time it is an act of symbolic construction of a particular environment relying on the hardly achievable grounds of the distant past as well as that of physics. Relating cultic stones at the fields of Tuhala with the natural peculiarities of the surface is a creation of local narrative. This is an active process that is mainly done by Ants Talioja with the help of the mass media, the groups of tourists, the schoolchildren, and the Tuhala Nature Centre. Richard Bauman has noted that the traditional begins with the personal and the immediate here, not with some objective quality of pastness that inheres in a cultural object but with the active construction of connections that link the present with a meaningful past. When examined, this process of traditionalisation in text manifests itself as a species of contextualisation. (Bauman 2004: 26–27) The stories of the Tuhala energy columns are related, as previously noted, with the wider tradition of energetic explanations, while they are also part of an intensive place-making process that highlights the local peculiarities and uses them in local debates.

#### THE ENERGIES OF KIRNA MANOR

In central Estonia Kirna manor works as a healing and spiritual centre that holds courses and meetings, hosts excursions, and provides healing services through forces and energies of special kinds. Beams that were saved from a broken roof are put on the places of energy columns that heal different parts of the body. These benches work to improve heart problems, problems with fertility, cancer, different pains, etc. Patients are guided to move from bench to bench and sit for some time at each depending on their problems. Parts of the garden are associated with angels, parts with UFOs. The imaginary realm of visions is loosely connected with the organisation of the benches. The mistress of the manor, Helle Anniko, found the manor accidentally and saw in a vision the great potential of this place for spiritual work due to the special energy field that she perceived. She finds support for her arguments in the fact that Kirna is situated on the border of the karst area where gaps between limestone layers exhale special forces. In addition, characters of the traditional place-lore, monks from the monastery that preceded the present location of the manor house, play an important role in her experiences and spiritual work.



*Photo 3. People recuperate by sitting and meditating on the bench. Photo by Kristel Kivari.*

I conducted fieldwork in Kirna manor during the summer 2010. Apart from friendly contact with mistress Helle and her colleague Henn Hunt I was introduced to several 'loyal customers' of the manor who had overcome their illnesses with the help of Helle and Kirna's energies. Below I refer to interviews with two people who say that they were cured of cancer, and thus for them the manor park has become a regular destination for spiritual as well as physical self-care.

I have understood that in fact there is nothing new, because the old Estonians also believed, they practised the tree religion. If we are moving around, we lose energy, and if we get the right energy from below it puts our organs to work in a proper way. For example at the kidney seat, those organs get new energy. There is a circle of Michael, up in the garden, with a very strong effect. It is so: if you sit there at the edge of the bench of Eternal Peace, you will see something like a vortex going up into the sky. It seems like an electric bulb is down there and its light shines up, and looking through it, all seems misty. It is such a strong column of energy. And always if we finish, we take this energy with our hands you feel how the warmth comes, the hands start to tingle. You physically feel that something comes inside you, we take this energy with us. It gives us good strength. (FM Kirna 1)

The physical interdependence of the individual with the place shows the possibility for religious immediacy with the powers of support and strength. The context of communication are marked with natural forms, such as old and tall trees that grow

in close circles, the open view down the hill from the Angel's Stone, the feminine form of trees which is called Department of Women. Although the garden at Kirna manor is not ordinary nature because of the authority of healer Helle and her activities, its ways of symbolising natural forms illustrate the ideas of *Naturphilosophie* in New Age thought (Hanegraaff 1996: 64). As Antoine Faivre has formulated,

[*Naturphilosophie*] is a continuation of Paracelsianism and pansophy, but it benefits from the acquisition of the experimental sciences and places emphasis on the figurative systems [...]. Nature is a text to be deciphered with the aid of correspondences and symbolic implications; as a consequence, rigorous experimental science is never more than an obligatory point of departure in the movement toward a gnostic apprehension of invisible processes. (Faivre 1987b: 334)



Photo 4. A bench that relieves curses. Photo by Kristel Kivari.

Kirna manor park is marked by benches located at the special points of energy. Benches from ships are reported in healing stories as places of ultimate visions and sensations. The ship designates spiritual creatures, in the form of aliens, in Helle's healing visions.

Look, at this bench from a ship, there have strange things happened. All is concentrated there. It is like a meditation. I really can say that I saw how my veins were cleaned. No there weren't any people, but I saw my pulsing veins and how they were cleared. I sat there and said to M. [his wife]: "Jesus Christ! Look what is happening! [You saw yourself aside?] Yes, yes." The eyes were closed like this and first time I did not feel anything. The next time... It does not always happen. You have to sit for as long as it takes for some kind of pain or problem that you have to disappear. It is so that you have to believe, you have to concentrate on it. If you sit there, ho-hoo, this is nonsense, nothing happens to you. (FM Kirna 2)

Visions are like the translators of the bodily impulses into culturally accepted figures. Look into your own anatomy from outside is not possible without education on human physiology. The stressed power of concentration as a final and reliable tool for recovery supports the idea of spiritual supremacy over physical reality. At the same time, 'cosmic operations', as such visions are called among Kirna's patients, are the culminations of initiation and the religious turns from crisis to illuminated life. The empirical proof in the form of health and spiritual self-consciousness that are translated into the concept of energy binds together the inner and outer realm. In this process the bodily impulses hold the value of intimacy, genuineness, proof and ultimate knowledge. A mythical

participative relationship with sacred that brings religious coherence into lived reality could be achieved in different bodily attributions, through the places, roles or institutions. In Western secular society that which carries the values of individuality, bodily fitness, mental health as well as spiritual consciousness are closely intertwined (Shilling 2003: 101). The tingling of hands and feet or dizzy feelings are conditions that are determined by physiology but are filled with the power of evidence and proof. At the same time, cultural norms and values play themselves out in these expressions: the divisions between group and individual, or organisation of space in terms of secular and sacral, frame representations of bodily impulses. Leonard Primiano has noted that the process of religious belief refers to the complex linkage of acquisition and formation of beliefs, which is always accomplished by the conscious and unconscious negotiations of and between believers. This process acknowledges the presence of bidirectional influences of environments upon individuals and of individuals upon environments in the process of believing. (Primiano 1995: 44) The bodily basis of the experiences in Kirna in terms of illnesses and different impulses receive a unifying explanation that not only pays attention to certain sentiments, but connects those sentiments with the wider existential story of recovery and spiritual development.

#### THE DOWSERS' ASSOCIATION AND THE SCIENTIFIC STUDY OF EARTH FIELDS

The societies of dowsers are the active social grounds for the interpretations of bodily impulses in contact with the environment. The method, which I have referred to here as detecting the invisible elusive forces that would influence or reveal the nature of phenomena, stands on the idea of organisation of the universe in accordance with undescribed energies.

Societies use such concepts as geobiology, radiesthesia or geopathic stress to describe their work. Geobiology as a vernacular term differs from the academic meaning of the research field, which investigates the relationships between the biosphere and the lithosphere. Vernacular enquiry is driven by the intention to gain knowledge that it is possible to use on the unseen level of reality for the benefit of every aspect of life. Geobiology involves a more practical outcome of knowledge of the field: specialists and their knowledge are mainly concerned with successful building techniques and the arrangement of plants in gardens. The term radiesthesia covers a wider idea of this field, proposing that all bodies and substances give off certain waves that can be detected by those with paranormal abilities.

The term geopathy relates through the syllable *pathos* (feeling, suffering) to the hypothesis of geopathic stress, by which it designates nature-forming force. However, geopathic stress is just a different naming of the concept that grounds the Tuhala columns as well as the Kirna vortices, referring to the academic aspect of society. An international delegate from the Earth's Fields and Their Influence on Organisms conference, held in June 2012, explained his position when I asked about his engagement with his local dowsers' association: "They are esotericists. I teach them because what I do is a pure science and is nothing to do with esotericism."

The associations of dowsers', which can be found in most Western countries, usually hold the authority to regulate and accredit, within certain limits, the professional activities of geobiologists. The client-supplier relationship encourages some kind of officiality in the relationship of trust, thus many dowsers have a certificate that is issued either by the association or the distinguished trainer.

A dowser Roy Riggs explains the professional challenges and character of the geobiologist:

A Geo-biologist (also referred to as a building biologist) is a researcher, architect, engineer, and doctor, all in one. He or she offers a preventive and healing medicine and a creative and unifying influence. A geobiologist is a worker in the global effort to solve the problems that come from modern ways of building and settlement planning – ways that disregard nature and human culture. To work for a better and more beautiful world in any respect or form is a necessary and satisfying job. The goal of geobiology is to regain order and harmony in our surroundings: to restore the balance between nature, our buildings and ourselves and to help build bridges for the realisation of a world that is ecologically oriented. This goal calls for dynamic, idealistic, and creative people. It calls for people who appreciate deeper meanings and hold higher aspirations in life. (Riggs n.d.)

This formulation points to the essential characteristic of the dowser: it is a personal as well as professional challenge with an idealistic and humanistic goal. Criticism of profit-oriented contemporary culture relates these traits, and many others, to ideas of a romantic anti-positivistic way of thinking that also seeks unifying knowledge of different episodes of perception. The ecological orientation, which indeed has political, economic, and rhetorical weight, brings forth this goal for an individual intimate relationship with the environment.

The Estonian Geopathic Society, officially a sub-organisation of the Baltic Dowsers' Association, unites people with different opinions as well as different opinions about the "weak earth fields and their influence on organisms" (the formulation of the phenomena in the Association's charter). Meeting once in a month the Society offers the possibility to share and discuss issues connected with contact between the natural and the supernatural. According to Internet material the activities appear to be relatively similar to those taken up by sympathisers in other countries, involving enthusiastic curiosity towards the explanation of the supernatural in mundane terms. By following this line of enquiry the societies operate at the fringe of esoteric activities with some connections to academic research. The Estonian Society, once initiated by a group of scholars, has organisationally moved towards independence by being part of the Institute of Geology and a sub-section of the Estonian Naturalists' Society. In addition to monthly meetings the Society organises a series of conferences titled *Earth's Fields and Their Influence on Organisms*. Collections of abstracts and articles from these conferences comprise a body of elaborated statements, discussions and examples of the 'geopathic' view on the issue.

The rationalising arguments in the conference proceedings of the Dowsers' Association come mainly from the field of natural sciences. In the forewords of the volumes academic Anto Raukas warns readers not to overestimate the results of experiments with

earth energies, because there is still too little reliable evidence from physics, although his note is also an encouraging call for future work.

The conference articles, as the title tells, discuss different aspects of reactions in the human body towards the environment. In following example the bodily reaction is given the name "information".

There are electromagnetic means elaborated in the human body in the wake of evolution that are capable to percept weak electromagnetic signals from the environment. The human body is not only accommodated itself to these fields but it is also making use of them as a source of information. There is an electromagnetic homeostasis in [the] human body, i.e. the aggregate of adaption reactions developed to eliminate or restrict maximally the action of various external or internal factors striving to derange the dynamic stability of the internal structure of the body. The animate nature of Earth is subjected to the influence of various external factors [such] as gravitation and electromagnetic fields, temperature, barometrical pressure, air humidity, light etc. Each factor plays a peculiar role in the human body and it has developed a set of defence reactions against each one. (Krishbergs, Ulmanis 2006: 114)

The information is a reaction that a skilled dowser is able to perceive.

An experienced dowser has developed the response on specific weak natural signals. It is significant to note that the external field does not serve as source of energy or force that moves the rod but it serves as source of information causing the response of the dowser's body. (Ibid.: 117)

Despite the signal being unclear in terms of physics, its intensity compared to dowsers' body is the indication of reciprocal interaction:

When the signal energy is less than that of response then the exchange of information between the body and environment takes place. When this energy is comparable to that in the energetic process of the body then the energetic or force interaction between the body and environment takes place. (Ibid.: 118)

Information that the body is able to perceive is a linking concept, a metaphor that is uniting the spheres of the natural sciences (information as a signal) and vernacular explanations (information as knowledge). Enthusiasts with different educations and professional backgrounds meet mostly at the level of examples and explanations. Intrigue between the supernatural and natural is attributed to bodily signals which open the opportunity to discuss supernatural experiences as well as peculiar natural formations.

Another author from the collection of articles has applied the historical-geographical method to reports of the supernatural. He has marked on a map the UFO and poltergeist reports, visions of St. Mary and birth places of famous Lithuanians. The density of the entries on the map is higher at the banks of two rivers in the Central Lithuania. He concludes:

I have collected these statistical data [over] the course of 20 years, but only recently I have noticed the correlation between four groups of phenomena. The statistics [are] not comprehensive and a lot of phenomena we didn't know about and not all active places were noticed. We know that Earth's radiation activizes people.

These conclusions were reached already by our ancestors when they gave the name “Šventoji” (Holy) to two rivers in Lithuania. The Earth’s radiation carries information. This interaction can interact in the [r]esonator lithosphere-ionosphere and build an informatic field of humanity. (Gikys 1996: 11)

Discussions about supernatural experiences in the context of science carries a deconstructive purpose – poltergeists, diseases, and peculiar natural phenomena receive mundane meaning in the literal sense. At the same time the supernatural is integrated into everyday reality. Through the supernatural, visions and hallucinations are given legitimate explanations and the causes of illnesses can be eliminated after its detection.

The charter of the Estonian Geopathic Society focuses on scientific and technical inquiry towards the dowsing phenomenon. Its central purposes are

[T]o foster co-ordinated resolutions of the problems arising in the area of study of weak Earth fields, to share research of the Earth’s radiation fields by means, to study their influence on organisms, application of dowser methods in geology, ecology, architecture and medicine, development of mathematical and physical models of dowser’s response and working out new methods and equipment for the study of geophysical anomalies and peculiarities of psychophysical structure of humans and animals. (Charter of the Dowsters’ Association of the Baltic States)

No belief position is mentioned in the charter of the Estonian society, however the application of the hypothesis of earth rays itself involves seeking a unified theory that would surpass the different worldviews of religion and science. This position was already clearly formulated in the objectives of the Theosophical Society in 1875. Apart from working towards universal humanity their aim was “to encourage the study of Comparative Religion, Philosophy and Science” and “to investigate unexplained laws of Nature and powers latent in man” (The Theosophical Society). In these goals belief is expressed in the form of revealing knowledge that would explain different supernatural episodes and thus provide the possibility to participate in them and receive some benefit in issues of trouble, health, good sleep, and problems with technology. This position is illustrated by Rein Koha, chairman of the Society at this time, in the foreword to the seminar’s article collection in 2006:

As far as I know, the seminars have not touched upon the so-called different reality: this, however, is what we come across on a daily basis, but unfortunately seldom become aware of. We should make this as clear to ourselves as possible, I hope that the seminar will create a lively discussion on this subject. (Koha 2006: 4)

## CONCLUSION

The scholarly concept of belief is expressed in the vernacular through various communicative contexts. In this article I have introduced a contemporary master-plot by which reality is shaped by the elusive energies expressed in three ways that represent the different applications of the idea of reality. The desire to bridge the natural and supernatural spheres of life is an empowering tool for the local activist against ecological threat (and in gaining certain symbolic power). A healer uses the well-known concept

of natural energies in awaking other supernatural arguments and visions (and applies them together in her work). A group of enthusiasts and specialists in dowsing mix the methods of magic and science in order to find proper and legitimate knowledge of the supernatural in life (and use their position as the last word about the supernatural). In the flow of the described ideas the position of the teller reflects that of a participant, a person who is in contact with those energies. At the same time, energies provide access to the source of the supernatural. Thus knowledge of it can make the art of magic into a science.

Leonard Primiano's objective for the study of "religion as it is lived" includes a two-sided call. Firstly it draws attention to the immediate level of any expression. However, any expression, especially within the non-normative frameworks of secular society that were introduced here, will not describe all the functions of vernacular belief. The specific theory and method of lived religion that Primiano was highlighting must set the research question so that the dynamics of content and context are noticed. That is why it is important to look at the communicative aspects of the teller, his or her aims for reflecting his or her experiences or positions. I have favoured Seppo Knuutila's view of expressions of belief as "stories for something". He makes his view clear with an example:

When philosophers conduct various experiments with thought and reasoning with the help of a 'myth' or 'science fiction', they usually aim to illustrate an abstruse or controversial theory or to point out the weaknesses of competing views. The aim of this text has been to show that it is also productive to examine the myths, fairy tales and legends inherent in folklore from an epistemological viewpoint. In folkloristics, on the other hand, the stories under scrutiny have been interpreted as parts of the worldview they portray and construct. Whenever this has been the explicit aim, the worldview has not been identified with the stories of which the study material consists. (Knuutila 2012: 379–380)

Getting and sharing knowledge sets the natural and supernatural beside each other. Both sides of this position have functions that are finalised somewhere else: in promotion of local culture and nature, in spiritual self-help and healing or in social expressions of curiosity. The content of belief in such situations is shaped by the communicative contexts and rhetoric. But a view of the sustaining framework of these motives, to the continuous struggle of different viewpoints, can add an extra understanding of religion as it is lived.

## NOTES

1 Hartmann grid: ground concept for dowsers, first described by German physician Ernest Hartmann (1915–1992). According to this theory, naturally charged lines form a grid around the earth causing different occurrences such as illnesses or dead vegetation along the lines. The worst place to be for a long time is at the crossing of two lines. A similar concept with lines at different angles is named for its describer, Manfred Curry (1899–1953).

2 All citations without references have been taken from transcriptions of interviews with people introduced in the text (see Sources). Translations from Estonian to English are by the author.

3 Ångström is a unit of length equal to  $10^{-10}$  metre (0,1 nm). It is named after Swedish researcher in spectroscopy Anders Jonas Ångström (1814–1874). Although internationally recognised, the ångström is not formally a part of the International System of Units, the closest unit being the nanometre.

4 Soviet agriculture was managed on the basis of two similar types of economical units: state farms, sovkhozes, and collective farms, kolkhozes, which were both operating within the framework of planned industry but had some economic independence depending on their success of production.

5 The Estonian term *sensitiiv* refers to a person with increased sensuous abilities. It could also be translated into English as psychic or clairvoyant.

## SOURCES

FM Kirna 1 – Interview with female informant on 20th of September 2010.

FM Kirna 2 – Interview with male informant on 8th of October 2010.

FM Trainer – Interview with spiritual trainer on 26th of September 2011.

FM Tuhala 1 – Interview with Ants Talioja on 24th of September 2011.

FM Tuhala 2 – Letter from Ants Talioja.

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