



**Religion and Society Research Centre Symposium on
'Theorising Belief through Monsters and the Supernatural'
Western Sydney University, Bankstown Campus, Building 23, Room 23.G.41**

Tuesday 6 October, 10:00am – 5:00pm

Ghosts, witches, trolls, demons and other monsters exist in most cultural contexts, and local beliefs in these continue to shape social practice in a number of ways. Often these beliefs coexist with more officialised ideologies and engage with spiritualities, organised religions and faith in complex ways. These dynamics represents a number of theoretical challenges about how belief is constructed and performed socially, and provide ample opportunities for re-thinking the role of belief in social life. Indeed, despite its centrality in all discourses about religion and spirituality, the relationship between belief and social practice is rarely theorised from an empirical basis. In its simplest terms belief is often conceptualised as a particular mental process that occurs in reference to meaningful propositions that may be considered either true or false. While such a definition is adequate in epistemological terms, it ignores many of the aspects of belief that are of particular interest to social and cultural theorists. Not only are there a number of possible relationships between belief, knowledge, thought and social action, but these are also culturally and socially specific. Our contention is that such reflections become particularly immediate in the context of local engagements with the hyper-real or the super-natural. In this symposium we gather social and cultural theorists from various disciplines and seek to theorise belief based on ethnographic and theoretical data about monsters and the supernatural.

James L. Cox, University of Edinburgh and Western Sydney University
The Pragmatic Nature of Belief: The Shaman as Master of Spirits

Francesco Formosa, University of Melbourne
Altered States of Knowing: The Supernatural as 'Gnosis'

Tony Jinks, Western Sydney University
Rethinking the Measurement of Paranormal Belief: Informed Believers, Quasi-Believers, and the Limitations of Existing Questionnaires

Yasmine Musharbash, The University of Sydney
Pankarlangu come to Yuendumu

Helena Onnudottir, Western Sydney University
Locating the Spirits: Visualizing the Supernatural in City, Nature and Beyond

Thiago Oppermann, Australian National University
Sanguma, the Specter of Spectral Commodification

Adam Possamai, Western Sydney University
The Over-Policing and Branding of the Devil: A Sociology of Exorcism

Geir Henning Presterudstuen, Western Sydney University
The Seeing, Believing and Making of Ghosts and Demons in Fiji

Matt Tomlinson, Australian National University
Partial Beliefs, Appealing Monsters: Or, What I Learned from the Jersey Devil

This is an open and free event. For more information and registration, please go to
http://www.westernsydney.edu.au/religion_and_society/events/symposium_registration/ nocache