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Terhi Utraiainen 

ABSTRACT

In spite of the variety of often welcome everyday enchantments and empowerment that lived religion may bring to an individual in his/her personal life, it may become problematic in a person's social life due to provoking tensions with significant others who hold different worldviews. This controversy necessitates the adoption of tactics and practices for adjustment and regulation, should that individual wish to enhance the benefits of religious enchantment and, simultaneously, maintain his/her position in the shared social lifeworld. This article argues that ritual theory, particularly in combining the notions of ritual framing and the subjunctive mode of ritual, offers a promising approach to researching this dynamic. The ritual studies approach helps shed light on the sometimes quite subtle ways in which moving in and out of the ritual frame makes it possible to regulate the often delicate balance of enchantment and disenchantment. This article examines the case study of women engaging in angel spirituality in Finland and the way they are able to navigate different 'religious' and 'secular' worlds. It argues that the dynamic combination of ritual framing and the subjunctive mode of ritual works as important *possibility work* in everyday life in a society which is uneasy about very strong expressions of lived religion.

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Introduction

Kaisla (pseudonym) is a Finnish woman in her late thirties living in an old house in the countryside, outside the metropolitan area. She comes from a secular family; she is married to a Finnish man and she is the mother of two small children. Being trained in the natural sciences, she works for an organization which focuses on environmental issues. She is also a Reiki master who has recently become attuned to the 'energy' of angels. She uses these otherworldly energies in caring for herself and her family. Kaisla recounts several incidents and small ritual ways in which angels and other energies are invited and integrated into her life; in some instances, these energies feel very concrete and real to her, while at other times they are understood more vaguely and metaphorically. She also says that she uses these energies to enhance her performance at work. Although she finds her life strongly

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supported by her engagement in this kind of spirituality and considers scientific and spiritual worldviews to be compatible, she is acutely aware that her significant others, both at home and at work, are uneasy about her spiritual practices. This causes her constantly to monitor and reflect on her social surroundings and adjust her spiritual enchantments accordingly. After listening to Kaisla and many others who in some ways were like her and after lengthy participant observation in different gatherings of women interested in angels, I began to turn to ritual studies in order to find a way to understand the subtle ways in which the spiritual frame of life was activated, engaged, and managed by the people I met.

I discovered that the ritual studies approach can contribute to the study of contemporary everyday lived religion by shedding light on the often delicate dynamics of the 'religious' and 'secular' aspects of social life. The social lives of many people in Western societies, even if they are attracted by religion or spirituality, are largely secular in the sense that they are not regulated by religious teachings or institutions, nor do they have the ritual rhythm of a religious calendar or an institutional sacred space. Moreover, even the most tolerated expressions of religiosity in the cultural climate of a predominantly secular society tend not to subscribe to strong manifestations of the 'supernatural' or the magical, but are instead relatively this-worldly and metaphorical in nature. Most people in Finland, for instance, prefer 'moderate' forms and modes to very strong religiosity (or atheism), as shown in the survey by Kimmo Ketola et al. (2011). In this kind of cultural and social climate, engagement with emotional, supernatural, animistic or fringe forms of religion (such as angel spirituality in the context of present-day Finland) may become the source of some controversy and tension. This is especially likely if significant others in one's personal or professional life (or in the institutional religious sphere) do not have the same views or experiences, particularly when one still wishes to maintain a shared lifeworld with them. Moreover, both secular and Christian media frequently report on alternative forms of spirituality (such as angel spirituality) in a dismissive tone, with people involved in it often being acutely aware of this dismissal (Utriainen 2016a; Hulkkonen 2017; Ramstedt 2018). This indicates that society is uneasy about or provoked by some aspects of what it finds to be alternative modes of religion. As several scholars have noted, relations between followers of folk, vernacular, popular or lived religion and those with institutionally religious or secular sensitivities are potentially tense, so that practitioners need to find ways to negotiate, manage, and regulate boundaries in order to balance their religious and secular worlds (e.g. Ammerman 2007, 2016; Kapalo 2006, 17–45; McGuire 2008; Koski 2014; Orsi 2010, xxvii–xlii).

In this regard, I would like to stress a methodological issue. It is important to study the lived reality of religious ontologies and epistemologies in specially marked (more or less institutional) religious or

ritual frames and contexts. Amy Whitehead (2013), for instance, investigates what takes place between sacred statues and their devotees in sacred locations. However, my case study of everyday angel practices can complement (and complicate) this approach by paying attention to the skills, practices, and operations that people use to *relate* and adjust religious presence to other social realities in which they participate equally and which they cannot, or do not wish to, ignore completely. Only very few people would—or could—choose a religious life with the exclusion of a secular life; others must find ways of balancing both.

The ritual approach, which focuses on small everyday practices and even quite fluid forms of ritualization, may on the one hand facilitate analysis and understanding of how some forms of religion may bring enchantment and empowerment to everyday secular life, as it clearly does for Kaisla, for instance. On the other hand, this approach could also highlight the importance of being able to discern when people find it necessary to tune out the enchanted ritual mode in social settings in which the enchantment is not welcome. The notion of ritual and ritualization that emphasizes the flexibility and fluidity of ritual framing and de-framing offers a nuanced practice-theoretical micro-approach to studying lived religiosity in the interplay between both present-day secular society and institutional religion. From the perspective of the art of ritual framing, one can see the intimate, yet also sometimes tense relations of the lived ‘religious’ and the lived ‘secular’ (or ‘enchanted’ and ‘disenchanted’).¹

I conceive of ritual primarily as a framing device that enables people to enact and communicate important changes in their social and personal lives in terms of status, time, and place or in what can become possible in a given situation. For Kaisla, angelic energies bring elevated moments and potential for positive change. My approach combines theoretical insights from Jonathan Z. Smith’s (1987) now classic ritual theory and from Don Handelman (2008) and Adam Seligman (2010). My starting point is Smith’s argument that rituals are first and foremost *devices for directing attention* in order to establish desired differences (Smith 1987). In line with Handelman (2008), I further argue that ritual works as a more or less clearly bounded communicative frame in dynamic interplay with non-ritual life. Most importantly, ritual frames and the special subjunctive mode created in the process of ritually framing things offer potentially unforeseen vistas for practitioners. Seligman (2010) is one scholar who elaborates this last aspect most poignantly. However, as I hope to show, the subjunctive mode may also bring challenges when it encounters the sensitivities of a secular society or religious institution. I suggest that this ambiguity may be reconciled by learning the art of ritual framing.

Rituals and ritualizing with angels

I develop my argument in dialogue with the ethnographic case that provides its empirical source and context: Finnish women who engage in angel spirituality. My material includes both individual and focus group interviews as well as observation and participation, between 2010 and 2013, in several kinds of angel spirituality practices and gatherings. It is also supplemented by a survey (N=263) conducted, in 2011 during a visit to Helsinki, by Lorna Byrne, a popular Irish writer and angel healer. These data are complemented by various kinds of media material and collected artifacts.² The interviewees and other research participants were mostly women between 30 and 60 years of age, from many walks of life, for whom angels had become attractive and a form of emotional and spiritual support. The popularity of angel spirituality has been increasingly visible and has been studied for some time, not only in Finland but also in other countries, such as the US, the UK, Norway, and Estonia (e.g. Draper and Baker 2011; Gardella 2007; Gilhus 2012; Uibu 2013; Walter 2016). It has also recently piqued the interest of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, at least in Finland and Norway, and the media (Gilhus 2012; Utriainen 2013a; Kraft 2015).

Angel spirituality in Finland lies at the crossroads of Lutheran Christianity and esoteric or alternative spirituality, with many links to commercial popular culture as well as healing and therapeutic cultures. I approach this phenomenon as an example of present-day non-institutional, lived, everyday religion, which could be characterized in this context as a religion in which it is easy to participate and which is relatively democratic, often practical and tactical in its aims and techniques, intimately connected to some extraordinary or otherworldly presence, and practised in many quotidian situations (see Draper and Baker 2011, 626–627, 639–640). It is generally the case that this kind of lived everyday religion is particularly attractive to women; this is especially true here, with women comprising 94% of the respondents to the questionnaire. It is also worth noting that, although the women who participated in my research very seldom attended church services, the clear majority were members—at least nominally—of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, thus demonstrating a connection between angel spirituality and a powerful religious tradition.³ However, their understanding of angels considerably differed from the way the Lutheran tradition conceives of these otherworldly beings. The women I researched often asked angels to take part in any sphere of their lives as intimate companions, whereas the Church sees them as divine messengers; in modern liberal theology they tend to be conceived as merely metaphorical figures.

Among the possible rituals for invoking angels and engaging with them, my interlocutors referred to practices such as healing, meditation, ‘angel

card' reading, channeling messages from angels, angel visitations, angel-related art, angel magic (involving the use of talismans), and the interpretation of omens and dreams (Utriainen 2016a, 2016b, 2017). Some of these practices are bounded rituals with set instructions and clear ritual framing, of which angel healing and meditation serve as examples. Others, however, are more like momentary and fleeting micro-rituals, or "tending rituals" (Bell 2008, 541), deeply embedded in everyday, mundane, and non-ritual life; it is in relation to this life that such tactics and practices aim to make a difference, mainly in the form of small desired changes in perspective, for example, or even a miraculous turn of events.

In long, open-ended interviews, the women and I talked about angels and other extraordinary or otherworldly matters and also about mundane everyday concerns around health and subsistence or their personal and their family's well-being. Among the most frequent themes emerging in the interviews and conversations, as well as in the survey, were challenges related to emotions, distress, life crises (with illness, divorce, and unemployment the most frequently mentioned), and the diverse difficult choices needing to be made in life. The therapeutic value of a variety of angel-related practices was often highlighted. Such topics as dreams, the importance of beauty in one's life, and wishes for the future were also frequently discussed. Another specific issue that arose in the interviews was the range of controversies caused in the women's social worlds due to their engagement with angel rituals and practices, a reminder that even personal and private religiosity is seldom only a matter for the individual but affects his/her wider social life. This issue also featured in Kaisla's account.

Directing attention through ritual framing

Framing things ritually is one of the most important ways in which things are valued and differentiated, both in institutional and lived religion. According to Smith, ritual is, above all, a "mode of paying attention" and "a process for marking interest" (Smith 1987, 103). His theory emphasizes ritual as an actively engaged, highly motivated and involved orientation device. His key example of directing attention is sacred space. The Greek word for 'temple', *temenos*, derives from *temnō* ('to cut'), to set apart from the usual and everyday course of affairs. Thus, anything that is placed or made to take place inside sacred space, however ordinary a thing or action it may be in another social context, by the very operation of being set apart, gains special attention and becomes something out of the ordinary. Furthermore, when ritual valorizes a thing or action as special—as sacred, for example—the thing or action becomes an object of value and strong interest for participants (Smith 1987, 104).

Smith does not explicitly elaborate the notion of ritual framing in his chapter “To Take Place: Toward Theory in Ritual”, although it is evident that his example—the temple as a “focusing lens” (Smith 1987, 104)—is a spatial frame that marks and institutes ritual difference. He emphasizes ritual space in active and verbal terms as *emplacement*, which may be spatial in a merely metaphorical sense. He points out that “anything, any place, can potentially become the object of attention” (Smith 1987, 114). The ritual frame is often understood as a more or less concrete spatial setting for organizing ritual, such as the marking of space by drawing a circle, building an altar or setting the table for a ritual meal. A ritual frame could also be a temporal boundary, marked, for instance, by the act of lighting a candle, which serves as the opening of the ritual called ‘angel visitation’, in which angels are invited to visit one’s home for a few days.

In Smith’s words, frames become *focusing lenses* that communicate the *kind* of reality and knowledge that is dealt with in the ritual setting. Desired effects, such as healing or empowerment or the appearance of some otherworldly presence and power, are made possible and plausible, being enacted and communicated during the ritual by and through framing.⁴ During the angel visitation, a table is transformed into an altar by the lit candle and other material arrangements, which signal that one is ready for the visit of the angels.

Just as there are many different forms of ritual action, there is great variation in degree: the range from clearly bounded and well-defined rituals to less bounded micro-rituals as well as more vague or open-ended ritual practices and ritualizations (Bell 1997, 81–83). On the more open-ended end of the spectrum are found relatively routine, simple, and quite low-key and fluid rituals, a category which Catherine Bell (2008, 540–541) calls “tending rituals” (rituals that help people to resolve recurrent concerns in their lives). Domestic rituals often fall into this sub-category (for traditional domestic tending rituals, see e.g. Keinänen 2010). The ritual frame in such cases does not necessarily mark a clear boundary and may be a more imperceptible and delicate operation, a difference-inducing ritual deed, closely interlaced with non-ritual reality.

Angel practices include both clearly framed rituals (healings and meditations, for instance, or the above-mentioned angel visitation) and more fluid everyday ritualization. An example of the latter is someone stopping for a moment in the quotidian flow of life to consider a sudden pleasant physical sensation as the ‘touch of an angel’ or to take a quick look at an angel card before beginning a new task that demands concentration. Smaller devices for directing attention are often learned in more elaborate ritual settings, such as meditation and collective ‘angel evenings’, or angel healing courses, forming a semiotic and pragmatic continuum between more and less clearly bounded rituals.

Handelman's anthropological perspective suggests a way of thinking about the ritual frame that facilitates acknowledgment of less clearly-bounded rituals and ritualization which are often ambiguous and fleeting acts embedded in surrounding non-ritual life. In the case of less clear framing, Handelman (2008, 578–580) approaches the relationship between the 'outside' and the 'inside' of the ritual. The 'outside' and 'inside' are like the two sides of a Moebius strip in that they turn into one another, often quite imperceptibly and without clear boundary marks. The Moebius strip is a surface that has only one side, although by turning around on itself it can appear to be two-sided. In such instances of framing, a ritual may become like a wave or pulse of ritualizing that comes and goes in the midst of one's everyday chores, bringing about subtle—and often also significant—changes.

Moebius-like framing frequently features in angel-related practices in the context of daily events. For example, remarking the appearance of a certain color several times a day one might note that color as different from others and take this difference to signify an angelic message; this type of awareness was taught in the angel-healing course in which I participated. Course participants thus learned that even an ordinary thing, like a feather, may be taken as something special, perhaps as an angelic presence, when rightly framed. They were told to pay attention to feathers or certain colors in any place and situation, which could, with patient and repeated practice, develop into having a new perspective on things. When leaving one of the angel evenings, the woman who accompanied me pointed at feathers outside the front door and asked if I thought that they might be angel feathers.

Given the potential interlacing of ritual and non-ritual life, one should perhaps talk about ritual *framings* rather than frames. The plural—ritual framings—emphasizes situational change, interplay, and permeability between the 'inside' and 'outside' of ritual rather than between two temporally and spatially separate, distinct spheres or states of ritual and non-ritual. The dynamism between the 'inside' and 'outside' of a ritual frame may enable different proximal communicative realities (e.g. the religious and non-religious, the transcendent and the immanent or the enchanted and the disenchanting) nearly to merge with one another.

According to some of my interviewees, the reality in which angels are mere metaphors and the reality in which they become active spiritual beings can quickly alternate. I suggest that the process of shifting and interplay may offer a flexible and enriching *complexity of perspectives* to people when they navigate complex social situations and communicative contexts. In one frame, a feather may signal an angelic presence, but in another (and perhaps even overlapping frame), it is *just* a feather. For example, one of my interviewees signaled quotation marks with her fingers when she said

the word ‘angel’, while simultaneously talking about the very concrete presence of angels and the effects she felt they had.

Framing can be learned as a *portable device* to be used in everyday life.⁵ Learning to frame ritually within everyday religion brings the agency of ritual (what ritual does to a person) as well as ritual agency (what one can do by means of rituals) into the quotidian, in the sense that it makes things seem, to some degree and often at least momentarily, more ordered and ordained (‘guided’ or ‘given’ are two emic expressions often used in this context) than they would otherwise appear outside the ritual frame. An example of this transformation in terms of degrees of orderliness is the way in which one of my interviewees found it possible, with the help of an angel-related ritual, to introduce a ‘sacred timetable’ in the otherwise often chaotic and fractured everyday flow of time in her large family. The ritual frame can also be used to highlight specific things by paying attention to their aesthetics, thus making them stand out from the ordinariness and banality of daily life. Many women mentioned angels in relation to their extraordinary beauty; some had filled their homes and handbags with angel imagery and artifacts (including home altars), thus using ritual objects to give their quotidian life an elevated aesthetic quality and/or a surplus of divine or cosmic energy.

Framing guides attention and makes things stand out and appear more desirable—and, in some way, often more potent—than surrounding more ordinary things. One of my interviewees recounted that, when her family was in the process of looking for a new home, her husband noticed the photo of a house in an estate agent’s advertisement that caught a peculiar reflection of the light. They interpreted this light as an angelic orb, which indicated a particularly desirable, or blessed, potential future home. This leads me to discuss the notion of the subjunctive mode as an important aspect of the power of ritual.

The ritual subjunctive

According to Smith (1987, 109), rituals connect things *as they are* to things *as they should be*, thus closing the distance between the desired ideal model of life and everyday reality. He stresses that ritual does not erase the incomplete and fragile circumstances of life but rather juxtaposes or brings them into contact with an ideal and more potent image of what life could be like at its best.⁶ I draw on Seligman in proposing that the desirability and potency that ritual framing enables and creates can be understood through the distinctive mode of the subjunctive. The subjunctive is a category of modality (mode or mood, as both words are used) that communicates a degree of certainty and realness. (Different languages express the subjunctive in different linguistic operations.)

Whereas the indicative mode presents things as they are and the conditional mode presents things as they might be if some conditions were met, the subjunctive is a more open and future-oriented mode of potentiality. The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) defines the subjunctive as

Designating or relating to a verbal mood that refers to an action or state as conceived (rather than as a fact) and is therefore used chiefly to express a wish, command, exhortation, or a contingent, hypothetical, or prospective event. (*Oxford English Dictionary*)

People live not only in the indicative mode of things and state of affairs that are unquestionably and demonstrably present in or absent from their knowledge, but also in modes of wish, intuition, hope, and the possibility of things to come. For the young couple mentioned earlier, the dream home signaled by the angel orb was such a potential thing to come.

According to Seligman (2010), Victor Turner (1987), and Ronald Grimes (2011, 83), the subjunctive mood is strongly linked to ritual and its productive power. Turner (1987, 41–42, 101–102) writes that ritual expresses and performs the culture's subjunctive mood, in contrast to the otherwise prevailing indicative mood, and that its subjunctive power is most powerfully enacted and experienced in the liminal stage during which major transformations are generated. Seligman (2010; Seligman et al. 2008) writes at greater length on the subjunctive. He posits that ritual poses and assumes a subjunctive '*as if mode*' (Seligman 2010, 10) and is thus very much about potentialities, possibilities, and creative illusion. The ritually framed and enacted subjunctive illusion, which is close to play, imagination, hypothesis, and creativity, facilitates a shift in perspective that can help one to integrate and deal with the inevitable complexities and fragilities of human life and to open up possibilities that are otherwise often unnoticed.⁷ The real home inhabited by the couple who saw an angel orb in the image may not turn out to be a dream home; for a moment, however, there exists an imaginary possibility for this.

Seligman (2010) describes the ritual subjunctive as an important creative mode that allows for a shared life in a plural society by displaying shared possibilities that could not be easily articulated or agreed upon discursively. (One could, perhaps, say that it is not easy to argue with art or ritual in the same discursive way as with verbal statements.) I suggest that the subjunctive is as much in use, and equally useful, in individual and private life situations and interactions. However, this also implies that it not only unites people but may also separate them and that people do not always share the same potentialities, even with their significant others: this was clearly visible in the social world of angel enchantments. I will first consider what the subjunctive enabled and then the potential challenges it raised.⁸

Participatory and enchanted agency

Ritual framing can transform what seems to be in both the background and the foreground of quotidian life. Something that passes unnoticed in the ordinary course of the day, such as a fleeting sensation or intense perceptions of light or color, can, when framed ritually, be given extraordinary attention and significance, which in turn may lead to the further development of its dormant potentiality and possibility. In extreme cases, it may seem that ritualized daily life is conceived as a continuous, more or less enchanted process of making differences that feel significant. One woman summarized her account of the variety of her ritualized angel enchantments in this way: “At the end of the day, I do everything with the angels.”

The extent to which these framings connect with non-ritual actions undertaken to change social and economic circumstances and other harsh realities in life—or, alternatively, unwanted personal habits and routines—varied greatly in the interview narratives and ethnographic conversations. In one long account, I was told that, after the social security office had rejected the income support application of the interlocutor’s family at a point in their lives when they were finding it very hard to make ends meet, she decided to cope with the situation by relying on her otherworldly supporters and own spiritual practices. This woman gave me an account of how, in hindsight, it was clear that it had been this enchanted agency—acting together with angels—that had opened a way out of the situation. It seems that, at least at the narrative level, she (successfully) turned to a kind of ritualized agency when social agency failed her.

As many theorists point out, ritual agency is not exclusively reducible to the religious or social structure that provides and supports rituals or to the ritualizing individual subject: it is a much more complex and highly relational phenomenon. William Sax (2008, 477–478), for instance, argues that ritual agency should always be approached as a *relational and mediated* network of action, which becomes possible only in its cultural context. I propose that a significant possibility that becomes visible in the context of ritualized angel practices is the emphasis on the idea and sense of participatory agency. This kind of agency is an enchanting and potent possibility. It is not reducible to the self alone but is diverse and dynamic; sometimes it may even be opaque and mystical in the sense of not being entirely transparent to the ritualist, let alone controllable by her (see also Rappaport 1999, 24).

The interview accounts refer to angels being told to support individual women, for instance, when they are alone in having to make emotionally difficult life decisions, such as leaving a painful relationship. Angel healers (those who have learned to heal others as well as themselves by channeling

the energies of angels) are understood to cooperate and work together with angels. Indeed, one woman told the others in a meditation session held during an angel evening that she had received a message from her own angel, who had promised to become her business partner.⁹

The sense and creation of a possible shared capacity to act is what I call participatory and enchanted agency. In the present case, it represents a strong source of healing as well as other ritual transformations (Utriainen 2013b, 2017). Kaisla connects with angels and angelic agency in several spheres of life: in her account, the angels have lent a helping hand and supportive shoulder on many occasions, both personal and work-related: they helped her to relieve her husband's prolonged anxiety and to come up with solutions for organizing an international conference.

From framing in to framing out the enchantment

Even if the enchantments (including enchanted agency) generated through the subjunctive power of ritual framing are welcome and very much sought after, to the point that, for the women I met, they may have become an instance of “coping religion” (Stringer 2008, 83), it may be quite important, at the right time, for the feather to cease signaling the presence of an angel and to return to being an ordinary, disenchanting avian feather or a mere metaphor. The ability *not to guide attention* (or even to guide attention away) is particularly important, should the person need and wish to maintain her foothold and relations in the shared secular world—an issue which, as seen at the beginning of the article, Kaisla is confronted with. The enchantments created by the ritual frame are not always shared with significant others: this issue was frequently raised by the interviewees, the ‘others’ in question being family members, colleagues or fellow parishioners of the church and congregation. Bringing the presence and power of angels and enchanted agency into the discussion can give rise to severe tensions and even open conflict in various social networks, be they secular or religious. Framing-in and framing-out skills are required to avoid or resolve tensions and conflicts; it is thus a question of not only enchantment but also disenchantment.

What calls for framing out can sometimes be the maintenance of one's own mental stability. This was discussed by some of my interlocutors. More often, however, it is the fact that the external social world does not necessarily support or tolerate the invited enchantments; for instance, both secular and Christian media often refer to angel spirituality in a clearly dismissive and even stigmatizing way, as being infantile and naïve, signaling that angels should only be understood as metaphors of various good things and not as spirits.¹⁰ I was also told about partners and husbands who could only tolerate a limited amount of talk about angels and

that the women had learned to respect this. One of my interviewees recounted that angels were a topic she was not able to discuss with her strongly Lutheran mother, who found the way in which her daughter approached angels (through the reading of cards, for instance) to be unorthodox from a Christian point of view. I heard several accounts of the way women had sought Christian pastoral care but had received very little understanding when they had been open about their intense contact with the spirit world. Thus, enchantments experienced as an important source of support in one's life can also bring about serious conflict in the social and shared lifeworld.

Women apply various tactics to avoid or resolve such conflicts. Some said that, when they were among strangers, they would very carefully mention the word 'angel' as a test, to see whether there was any interest, but they would otherwise avoid the topic or refrain from using the spiritual frame. One woman told me that, when she saw 'a certain look' in the eyes of her strongly secular husband, she would change the topic of the conversation. Kaisla also reported that she needed to be careful at first when approaching her husband about spiritual matters; however, he slowly developed some interest in her spiritual world and eventually allowed her to perform healing rituals on him.

I was shown homes and handbags filled with angel artifacts. Homes and handbags are personal spaces which may be either opened or closed to others. They can further be framed as intimate ritual spaces with ritual objects (which happens in an angel visitation) or as private secular spaces with aesthetic angel decorations. Angels were also used as gifts with spiritual or mundane significance.

I also witnessed the process by means of which different tactics of guiding attention away were learned in the peer group meetings, as the women shared tips about negotiating their angel knowledge and rituals in delicate or critical situations. For instance, the teacher in charge of a certain angel evening said to a woman that she might do well to tell her child not to talk about angels at school or practise small rituals that he used to practise at home together with his mother.

These women were aware (some more than others) that their ritual subjunctive may disrupt shared social lives if it is not kept in communicative control. Thus, some of them explicitly stated the need to moderate the framing and attention-guiding mechanism: only then could the ritual subjunctive enrich everyday life rather than put it at risk. Keeping their feet on the ground and being cautious about practising excessively when alone, so as not to lose contact with the shared social realities, were some of the ways in which they expressed this awareness. The use of such tactics implies that the ritual subjunctive creates the possibility for new perspectives but also constitutes a potential threat to

social life and the shared lifeworld. Given the delicate boundary between the ‘religious’ and ‘secular’ social terrains, which calls for context sensitivity and nuanced communicative skills, one could slightly complicate Seligman’s argument by suggesting that skillfully enacted ritual framing and the ritual subjunctive could allow both enchantment and everyday reality to coexist.

This ties in with the earlier issue of the relationship between the ‘interior’ and ‘exterior’ of the frame as well as with the art and subtle dynamics of framing in and out. According to Handelman (2008, 572),

Framing draws immediate attention to three major issues in studying ritual: the structuring of the ritual frame, the organization of ritual within the frame, and the relationships between the interior and exterior of the frame.

Following my interlocutors, I have largely focused on the third aspect (the dynamic relationship between the ritual frame and non-ritual life). I have been particularly interested in the question of how and in what conditions the ritual frame, as engaged by my research participants, interacts with the promise of enchantment as well as the critical sensitivities of a relatively secular society.

Conclusion: possibility work in everyday life

I have explored the potential of the ritual approach—and particularly the notions of ritual framing and the ritual subjunctive—in analyzing and trying to understand the dynamics and situationality of one kind of present-day lived religion. My interlocutors and research participants—Kaisla and women like her—provided enthusiastic accounts about the many possibilities that became available for them when they learned how to contact angels and otherworldly powers. They practised what was often for them novel ritual means of learning to pay attention in different ways and to change their perspectives in challenging life situations. They felt (and I was able to observe), for instance, that angel enchantments were also useful in situations outside strictly ritual contexts and that these enchantments were transferrable to many areas of life, including work. In some interview accounts (as well as in other material, such as observations of angel practices), angel rituals were presented as an ongoing practice in the daily course of life. The active ritual framing of possibilities and potentialities might be called subjunctive possibility work in the everyday.

Present-day lived religion can, however, be very controversial in terms of how well it fits into the communicative situations of the surrounding, predominantly secular society. The social environment of the women who engaged with angels did not always tolerate religious expressions and this

led the women to seek ways in which to monitor and regulate their otherworldly enchantments.

I employed ritual theory, particularly the notions of ritual framing and the subjunctive mode, to analyze such instances of ritualization, which were often subtle, fluid, and permeable regarding non-ritual life. In the context of the presented ethnography, framing ritually was conceived as an art that can be learned and regulated so that it enables the practitioner to enjoy the benefits and potential of her otherworldly enchantments without seriously threatening her belonging to and participation in a more secular social world.

Given the dynamic relationship between religious and non-religious realities, it is clear why framing skills include knowing not only how to *frame in* the ritual subjunctive but also how to *frame out* the subjunctive. Knowing how and when to frame out enchantment—and not to guide attention—may be a necessary skill to help the person maintain the possibility of a shared social world which does not always welcome or tolerate intense religious expression, however important this may be to the individual. Thus, *ritual possibility work* is two-directional: it may be directed toward both the inside and the outside of the frame. This complexity is a salient aspect of modern Western lived religiosity and may also be evident in other social worlds and contexts.

I argue that this kind of ritual approach could provide one trajectory for depicting and pinning down significant and often complex social and communicative aspects of present-day religious and social life, in which mundane and extraordinary things may be welcome, on the one hand, but disturbingly entangled, on the other hand. Even if there are at times fruitful dynamics between enchantment and everyday reality, at other times, the two are forced to coexist in a much more troubled relationship.

Notes

1. Secularization could be described as a gradual multi-layered process of disenchantment in the (Western) world, following the Weberian narrative, but in the words of Bruno Latour (1992), it could also be said that we moderns have merely tried to hide our sources of enchantment (see Ingmann et al. 2016, 10–15). However, the present-day world (once again) displays a multitude of means for and sources of enchantment with which one may effect something unexpected and become spellbound (see Bennett 2001, 4–5).
2. The interview material is kept in the Folklore Archive at Åbo Akademi in Turku, Finland. The other materials are in the possession of the researcher/author.
3. Currently, about 70% of Finns are members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church of Finland, even if membership is steadily declining. On the changing religious landscape in Finland, see e.g. Ketola, Martikainen, and Salomäki (2014) and Nynäs, Illman, and Martikainen (2015).

4. Anne-Christine Hornborg (2016, 30) refers to ritual as “certain circumstances” in which otherwise ordinary things gain special powers. With her emphasis on the performative, material, and embodied power of ritual over animate objects, Hornborg’s discussion of the dynamics of Ojibwa ritual resembles my own approach to ritual.
5. Besides the Moebius strip and Gestalt image shifts that are also often mentioned in the context of this kind of complexity of perception (Seligman et al. 2008, 43–44), another heuristic model for such a rapidly changing perspective is the *lenticular image*. This is an optic device that is often used in popular religious materials, including prayer cards and the depiction of apparitions. The lenticular image changes its content with a slight flip. This happens in prayer cards, for instance, when the statue of the Virgin Mary changes into an apparition of Mary. The feather appearing as if from nowhere can act precisely like this (it can momentarily change from a bird’s feather into an angel’s feather in the frame of ritual imagination).
6. Cf. Orsi (2010, xxxviii): “Religion is always religion-in-action, religion-in-relationships between people, between the way the world is and the way people imagine or want it to be.”
7. See also Bruce McConachie’s (2011) article, in which he argues for an evolutionary theory of play and performance (and religious ritual as a sub-category) that places strong emphasis on the subjunctive function of the human mind. He suggests that the subjunctive is made possible by mental “double-scope blending”, which constructs new concepts. This could be considered an alternative approach to what I describe as the dynamics of framing, with its complexity of perspectives.
8. The subjunctive has recently attracted some attention and application in the study of ritual, although, to my knowledge, the notion itself has not been thoroughly examined in this field. Bronislaw Szerszynski (2002), for instance, developed a five-aspect ritual approach to analyzing protests about the environment. One of them draws on the idea of the subjunctive as proposed by Clifford Geertz (1973), who does not seem to use the word, and Turner. Geertz suggests that, “In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world” (Geertz 1973, 112). According to Szerszynski, in Geertz’s model, “rituals work by *closing* the gap between the indicative and the subjunctive” (Szerszynski 2002, 56, emphasis in original). However, even if, in Geertz’s opinion, a symbolic system closes the gap between the imagined and the real world, Szerszynski proposes a more open and ambiguous idea, reflecting Smith’s notion, albeit without direct reference to him: “First, I will argue, ritual is used to set up particular relationships between what is and what could (or ought to) be the case” (Szerszynski 2002, 55). Ruth Toulson (2012) analyzes funerary rituals for suicide victims in Singapore, focusing on the way ritualists play with the harsh reality of a particularly unwanted and culturally polluting death, on the one hand, and the ‘as if’ of a better, more desired reality in terms of what could and should have been, on the other hand. Danielle Wozniak and Karen Neuman Allen (2012) combine Turner’s model of rites of passage with the notion of transformative and future-oriented subjunctive narratives of self in a healing ritual therapy for women who have been victims of domestic violence. At the end of his short article on ritual materiality, Grimes merely notes that “*all* ritual is performed in the subjunctive” (Grimes 2011, 83, emphasis original).
9. See also Katriina Hulkkonen (2017) who studies New Age channelers working as entrepreneurs in Finland. Their understanding is that they work together with the

channeled spirits and energies and that the spirits have agreed a division of labor between themselves and the channeler.

10. Hulkkonen's (2017) interviewees talk about the social prejudice and stigmatization that their profession as New Age entrepreneurs provokes, not only regarding themselves but also their family members. See also Tony Walter and Helen Waterhouse (2001) who report that many of their interviewees (British people believing in reincarnation) chose to keep their beliefs to themselves in order to escape criticism.

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