

FALL 2014 COLLOQUIA SERIES

Date: Monday, October 20

Time: 3:30PM – 5:00PM

Location: Social Sciences 1, room 261

Dr. Rune Flikke

Materializing the Invisible: Wind and Weather in Zulu Zionist Experience

In this paper I will discuss the theoretical potential of air, winds and atmospheric phenomena as they place flux, transience, and motion at the center of the human predicament. I will introduce ethnographic cases from my fieldworks among urban Zulu Zionists to show that the winds blowing across the landscape of KwaZulu-Natal also blew through bodies, in the process restructuring subjectivities.

Through a general discussion of the phenomenal aspects of air and why it seems such an apt carrier of the spiritual, I will depart from recent phenomenological approaches to the atmosphere as a universal human affordance. Instead, I argue that we need to approach our sensory relations to weather and atmosphere through a diachronic focus on changing local body worlds, infused with power relations in order to account for the multiple practical ontologies that ground human beings in the world. This, I argue, is an imaginary leap needed in order to challenge the material and visual that implicitly underpin much social theory, a theoretical move we need in order to properly address weather-worlds.

Rune Flikke is an associate professor at the department of social anthropology, University of Oslo and the former chair of the Norwegian Anthropological Association. Through a long-standing engagement with South Africa Flikke has primarily published on healing rituals in the African Independent Churches. From earlier semiotic approaches to healing, he has the past ten years analyzed the movements, not in terms of creation of meaning, but as a practical response to alleviate suffering. This has led to publications and a book manuscript where he traces the religious dynamic as evolving alongside the history of epidemic and the ensuing Colonial and Apartheid public health responses.

Flikke has also recently finished a research project sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council on mother-child health and the utilization of vaccination in Malawi.

He is currently about to wrap up another research project also sponsored by the Norwegian Research Council, called *Cultural Understandings of Biodiversity*. Here his primary focus has been on the changing South African landscape ecology, eucalyptus and its sensory effects on local social life. In today's presentation Flikke will try to marry this new interest with his long-term study of health and rituals.