



## CHAPTER 1

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# Relating with More-than-Humans: Interbeing Rituality and Spiritual Practices in a Living World—An Introduction

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There is little doubt that the formidable scientific revolution that took off in the eighteenth century—after several centuries of early developments—significantly increased the capacity of the Moderns to know and understand their world, their Earth and its inhabitants, or what they used to classify as “nature”. But it seems that the more we, Europeans or North Americans of the early twenty-first century, *know about* nature, thanks to the most advanced tools and methodologies of modern Western science, the less we are able to *relate with* nature. Many factors can explain this predicament, such as the position of exteriority taken by science, defined

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by observation and not engagement, that implicitly engenders distance and separation. The modern Western ontology that splits the world between the cultural realm of humans and the rest, “nature”, can also explain such estrangement. Radical environmentalists, however, increasingly challenge this “Great Divide”, by contesting the exteriority of humans—a position that can be summed up by their famous motto “we are not defending nature, we are nature defending itself”. They also find inspiration from debates within academic circles, especially those concerning the “ontological turn”, though it remains a contested concept.

What is no longer debated, especially thanks to the seminal works of Bruno Latour (1993), Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1998), and Philippe Descola (2013), is the plurality of nature. The idea of one unique nature, along which many cultures are organised, is gone. Following the *provincialisation* of the concept of nature has emerged the need for a semantic redefinition to designate beings that are not human. The expressions “non-humans”, “other-than-humans”, or “more-than-humans” (Abram 1996) have the important advantage of containing in their plurality a multiplicity of forms, which are not limited to the “living”, nor even the “visible” (or the “physical”). But they also have the great disadvantage of designating what is not, or not only, human. These terms remain thus somehow anthropocentric and fail to really supersede the concept of “nature”, which stays hidden in the closet.

To go beyond “nature”, since looking for its semantic substitutes is not enough, our aim is to explore how humans, in various cultural contexts, relate *with* other entities. A first version of the title of the book was actually “Relating to More-than-Humans” but we decided to replace the preposition by a “*with*”. It may appear to be an error of translation as we are not native English speakers, but it is a deliberate change to underline our intended focus on more horizontal relationships, though asymmetry will always remain, *volens volens*. Words matter and it is crucial to challenge familiar expressions, whom obviousness implicitly reproduce power imbalances. We also aim at following the path opened by Tim Ingold, for whom life is not a feature to be attributed to existing objects or subjects but is instead what emerges from their interrelations (2006). The processual approach that characterises the “ontology” or “poetics of dwelling” Ingold promotes and his insistence on relationality (2000) advocate for focusing on relations between “Earth Beings”—if we humbly adopt the expression popularised by Marisol de la Cadena through her work with Runakuna in Peruvian Andes (2015). In fact, many indigenous worldviews and Western contemporary spiritual practices create different

realities by sharing the world with more-than-human beings. Critically, through such relationality, other-than-human beings bestow their human counterparts with knowledge, agency, and reflexivity.

## RELATING THROUGH RITUALITY

Interbeing relationships can take many forms, but we decided in this book to focus on rituality, because rites and rituals can constitute an important component of daily life and a specific space to observe and understand relationships with more-than-humans. Above all, rituals, contrary to appearances, never remain unchanged and are constantly evolving to take into account changes in societies.

The starting point of this book is the panel “(Re)connecting with Earth Beings: Ritual Innovation and Affective Entanglements in Contemporary Ecopolitics” that we coordinated at the 16th European Association of Social Anthropologists (EASA) Biennial Conference in Lisbon in July 2020 (following a first panel co-organised by Jean Chamel and Bertrande Galfé at the International Union of Anthropological and Ethnological Sciences (IUAES) Inter-Congress held in Poznan, Poland, in August 2019). We actually came across two case studies during the panel that perfectly illustrate our point on rituality. Since they are not part of the nine ethnographies that constitute the content of this volume, we briefly present them here to discuss several recurrent issues of the volume.

The first ritual case study was presented by our colleague Maria Salomea Dębińska who co-organised the EASA panel with us (after we met in Poznan). This case study was featured in her 2021 article “Witnessing from Within. Hyperobjects and Climate Activism in Poland.” Dębińska had been involved in an “Interspecies Community”, a collective of artists, academics, and activists that had the objective to create in Warsaw a registered religious organisation in order to instrumentalise the legal privileges granted to Polish Churches to protect the environment. As she explains, “to have a religion legally recognized one has to prove that one has a doctrine and a form of worship” (2021: 457). Therefore, the collective decided to invent a composting ritual called *Mszak*. Face masks, costumes, banners (all made of recycled materials), and scripture and litany were invented for an event that took place in May 2019 in the Botanical Garden on Museum Night:

At 11 p.m. we took the wheelbarrow to the temple. We hid under a piece of plastic foil, recycled and sewn together, representing all things slimy and oozing, without which life is impossible. It felt very intimate to be lying together under this thin layer separating us from the crowd. We were folding, waving, breathing, and laughing. Then we put on black masks and stood around the barrow, while one of us sat on top of the temple announcing that on the sixty-sixth Saturday of the Great Compost (a play on the Polish word *post* which means “fasting”) the time has come for the Mszak (a play on the words *msza*, meaning “holy mass,” and *mszak*, meaning “bryophyte” or “moss”). (457)

The ritual went on with the recitation of their “composting litany”, which combined an anti-capitalist discourse “with a celebration of decomposition and rot”:

It imitated the style of Polish folk religious songs, which made it sound a little frivolous. The litany summoned the powers of decomposition by invoking images of rot, mold, putrefaction, and decay. It was trashy and funny; it recognized death as a necessary part of life and turned composting into the central element of the ritual. The metabolic processes that make up the circle of life were juxtaposed to capitalist exploitation of bodies and ecosystems, but also to the Western drive towards classification, both processes that arrest change and produce the illusion of a stability of categories. (2021: 457–458)

Invented and performed by a group of artists, academics, and cultural animators, the *Mszak* ritual turned out to be more than a parody of Catholic rituals, in a political attempt to challenge the privileges of the religious status that solely benefits the Catholic Church, to become a profound and sincere kind of “playful spirituality” (458).

The second ritual took place during the EASA conference, in the afternoon following our panel: Maria Dębińska was staying with a few friends she had met within the Interspecies Community in a house lost in the hills that surround Lyon, and she invited us and Bertrande to join them in order to enjoy exchanges “in real life” since the conference was held virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. A young female Polish artist who was staying in the house had created a mobile of found objects, suspended and linked by an old hemp rope, and forming a tetragon. Among the objects comprising the tetragon were an animal skull and the rusted section of a farm tool. The young artist suggested we perform a ritual for

Arnica, an endangered species. The ceremony would also be driven by the idea of celebrating nature, with the involvement of the mobile. The choice to mourn for Arnica remained a bit enigmatic, but we understood that the idea of mourning derived directly from the Mszak ritual, during which a speaker recited a list of species that had become extinct. A photographer within the group also wanted to install a camera trap in the woods near the mobile to automatically photograph humans (our group to begin with) and non-humans alike that would pass by, but some technical issues made it impossible.

For this Arnica ritual, there was no litany, no prepared sequence of gestures, and no rehearsal. The motto was improvisation. We started by walking down under the house towards a wooded ravine, following the mobile in single file, before climbing up a little bit on the opposite side of the ravine. We were quiet and tended to adopt a collected attitude, though we didn't forbid ourselves to speak sometimes, in hushed voices, and to laugh at funny situations. Then the mobile was hung from a branch, and we stood still and quiet in front of it. So far, not much had happened. Then one of us decided to get out of line and came silently close to the mobile, touched it very smoothly with the ends of his fingers, kind of danced very slowly with and around it, making it turn around itself as well and finally came back to the line of the ritual participants. This inspired a few others to approach the mobile and to improvise some corporeal ways of relating with it, also silently and smoothly.

We then left the mobile there and came back to the house, down and then up again in the woods, with more small talk, debriefing informally about the ritual. One of us was not really convinced that the exercise had meaning and potential effects, and preferred to observe indirectly rather than participate. Deeply involved in biodynamic agriculture, she explained that for her powerful rituals are not crafted out of creativity and improvisation, but are rather part of a whole system of meaning, with gestures that practitioners do not even consider as rituals.

Were the parodic performance and the improvised happening actually rituals to start with? Aren't rituals dependent on calendric repetition, collectively agreed-upon effects, and some form of structure or choreography, questioned very accurately our colleague Degenhart Brown after reading a first draft of this text? A first answer is yes, they are rituals since their initiators define them as such. "Mszak ritual" and "Arnica ritual" are emic terms and therefore they cannot be discarded that easily. Their

one-off nature, even improvisational for the second, is neither problematic if we adopt the definition proposed by Catherine Bell, for whom

ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities. As such, ritualization is a matter of various culturally specific strategies for setting some activities off from others, for creating and privileging a qualitative distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane,’ and for ascribing such distinctions to realities thought to transcend the powers of human actors. (Bell 1992: 74)

In both cases, the distinction with quotidian activities is well marked and “orchestrated”, notably with the clear inspiration from religious ceremonies.

### RITUAL CREATIVITY AND CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

What did we learn from these two cases? First of all, rituals and ritual creativity are not limited to indigenous, religious, or alternative spiritualities contexts, but can be also found in political, artistic, and even academic milieux. Both cases also illustrate how rituals are generally forged from bits and pieces of existing ceremonies. Indeed, since the 1960s, anthropologists began to focus on the emergence of spiritual practices that challenged their common idea of rituals as non-dynamic phenomena rooted in traditional beliefs and techniques. It was at this time that Victor Turner (1969) highlighted the creative and innovative potential of rituals, emphasising their flowing, processual, and subversive effects. According to Ronald Grimes (1992), this reinvention of ritual called into question the very criteria that defined an action as ritualistic. Engaging in a revisited theory of ritual, he suggests that traditional features can be understood as both invented and creative without losing sight of their historical and cultural processes. Grimes’ analysis attempts to conciliate tradition and invention by emphasising that they are engaged in a dialogical relation rather than mutually exclusive. In this sense, he calls for rituals to be conceptualised not as timeless and motionless structures but as dynamic phenomena that draw continuously on their sources and tributaries in order to reinvent themselves (Grimes 1992: 23–24). Taking an innovative approach to ritual as both conservative and transformative process, Catherine Bell (1992:

25) has identified the social relationships and dichotomies rituals support: continuity and change, collective and individual experience, as well as thought and action. Bell also calls our attention to the roles that the body and structural power play in ritual, inviting us to ponder what makes us identify some acts as rituals, and what such a category does for the production of knowledge about other cultures.

The composting ritual is conceived as parodic and therefore intentionally copy Catholic features, with shifts and wordplays. It is less evident with the arnica ritual, but still participants attune themselves to a collected attitude, as it is required during formal ceremonies, which are often religious but can also belong to the political or civic realms (Bellah 1967). The arnica ritual was also presented as a moment of mourning, like the *Mszak*, and that explained the choice of a relevant attitude. We can actually note that mourning is a recurrent feature of many invented rituals, for instance, present in the practices associated with ecopsychology, such as the Work that Reconnects developed by Joanna Macy (Chamel 2021: 450), but also central to the ceremonies organised in Iceland, Switzerland, or Oregon for disappeared or disappearing glaciers. It is true that rituals are often thought of as practical ways to enact transformation, following the classical works of Arnold Van Gennep (2013) and Victor Turner (1969), and funeral is the most evident ritual to acknowledge the end of an epoch or any loss.

Dębińska does not give details on how litanies and gestures emerged to build up the *Mszak* ritual but the processes of improvised invention were obvious during the arnica ritual, through specular interactions. The attitudes and gestures of one person influence the attitudes and gestures of all, through an immediate and perpetual adjustment that makes the outcome of the ritual somehow impossible to anticipate. The arnica ritual offers a privileged window upon the processes of ritual uncertainty and doubt highlighted by Fedele (2014) in her analysis of contemporary crafted rituals. During practice, both emerge as powerful tools against meticulous ritual structures and rigid patterns of behaviour, allowing participants to feel less restrained by long-lasting religious traditions and talk more openly about their doubts.

The *Mszak* ritual and the arnica ritual represent just a glimpse of a far-larger phenomenon taking place in plural, increasingly secularised Western contexts and beyond. In the last 40 years, the emergence of alternative spiritual practices has continued to shape our understanding of rituals, confronting scholars with contemporary holistic ideologies,

self-development practices, and body-mind techniques, which mobilise aesthetics and modes of representation characterised by the idiosyncratic and unexpected juxtaposition of heterogeneous elements (Houseman 2016: 213–215). Drawing from different religions, indigenous traditions, and esoteric ideologies, “alternative spiritualities” have challenged traditionality as a fundamental value, driving scholars to conceptualise their innovative and creative processes as ritualistic features. Several chapters of this volume provide fieldwork accounts of their diversity, instability, and exposure to secular influences, highlighting how these rituals transform and adapt to multiple cultural contexts (Fedele 2013). The identification of their ritual structure provides insights into many aspects related to their transformation processes (Houseman 2011a: 700). In fact, “the conscious elaboration of new rituals, or the reinterpretation of existing ones” is associated “with the expressly subversive aim of bringing about cultural change” (Magliocco 2014: 1). In her exploration of ritual effects, Dębińska quotes David Graeber, for whom Pagans often “seem to be engaging at the same time in a ritual and the parody of a ritual; the point where laughter and self-mockery are likeliest to come into the picture is precisely the point where one approaches the most numinous, unknowable, or profound” (Graeber 2009: 220–221, cited by Dębińska 2021: 458). As noted by Houseman (2016: 221), the playful nature of these practices allows participants to engage in creative enactments without holding back, leading to changes in perception through which newly generated realities are experienced as subjectively real.

Lineage associations, fabricated traditions, and revitalisation of ancient practices, among other creative strategies, often serve the purpose of conjoining the spiritual dimension of contemporary rituals with social and political activism. They also provide innovative usages concerned “with knowing how to behave appropriately toward persons, not all of whom are human” (Harvey 2005: 17). For example, advocacy efforts to protect more-than-human beings repeatedly reappropriate indigenous traditions and animistic worldviews as means of providing legitimacy to specific demands such as legal personality attribution. Therefore, ritual creativity acts as an instrument of transformation and production of values, behaviours, and practices regarding more-than-humans. Our focus on multi-species ritual interactions considers the ways rituals create their own realities. Social relationships between humans and more-than-humans are often organised by hierarchies, protocols, and objectives, which grant a function or an ability to each participant within a collective. The capacity



for non-humans to communicate (Descola 2013), to cure a physical or spiritual illness (Turner 2006), or to recreate ways of relating to the Earth and all its inhabitants (Harvey 1997) simultaneously determines more-than-humans' intrinsic properties and roles in a given cultural context. For example, Native American Ojibwe considers animate and inanimate beings as persons with whom they relate (Hallowell 1960: 24). Nayaka hunter-gatherers of South India perceive their environment as an assembly of sentient beings who provide and need care, therefore overriding the subject/object divide of Cartesian lifeworlds (Bird-David 1999). The Nayaka establish shared relationships with non-human beings, stressing the connectedness of *everyone*.

In nature-based spiritualities practiced in Western societies, non-human beings' attributes and roles sometimes seem contradictory. Practitioners pursue a symmetric relationship with non-human entities by considering them as their partners, while simultaneously seeking a sense of connection and belonging to nature sometimes personified as a transforming power (Taylor 2000: 277). Therefore, they conceive their ceremonies as structurally organised spaces where humans and non-humans can achieve common objectives, from the re-establishing of harmonious relationships to the re-implementation of a sensory communion between the two. However, as noted by several authors in this volume, the ultimate objective—or at least consequence—of such rituals is the accomplishment of individual and collective goals related to personal development. In this sense, more-than-humans are often instrumentalised as tools for human ends while simultaneously being regarded as partners. There is therefore sometimes a discrepancy between discourses about horizontal, egalitarian, relationships, and the reality of practices that are ultimately not so different from the usual unequal intercourses.

## CIRCULATIONS AND REFRACTING RITUALS

Another aspect to be considered is how cultural, social, and economic reconfigurations taking place across the globe are accentuating the multifaceted dynamics of rituals. Frontiers within spiritual practices are increasingly porous and permeable, allowing the exchange of heteroclitic elements and producing eclectic and hybrid rituals. Thomas J. Csordas has addressed this issue, highlighting that spiritual practices deriving from foreign contexts and often lacking a grounding in local culture and traditions are crossing geographical and cultural spaces, conveying what he defines as

“transportable practices” and “transposable messages” (Csordas 2009: 4–5). Both terms refer to ritual forms that can be easily transmitted and require limited knowledge of the original context. Circulations of ritual forms are therefore common between socio-cultural contexts and are also increasingly diverse, with a growing trend of Western practitioners drawing inspiration from indigenous cosmogonies and ceremonies, while rituals that could be, at first glance, perceived as “traditional” are in fact deeply influenced by the Western world. In all cases, these circulations always give rise to new and unexpected forms.

Michael Houseman (2011b: 261–263) explored the ritual mode of attentiveness that allows participants to experience alternative spiritual practices as emulations of ceremonies that are perceived as “traditional”. He proposed the terminology of *refracted rituals*, to be opposed to the more “traditional” rituals that he described as *condensed*. The latter are made of complex actions performed by the participants whose sense and purpose remain mysterious to them because of their ambivalence: the same action can express contradictory objectives and relations. Houseman gives the example, in some regions, of the mother traditionally slapping her daughter when come her first menses: the exact meaning of the slap is never explicated but it still produces effects and is reproduced from generation to generation. Refracted rituals also contain structural indeterminacy and ambivalence, but they concern the participants’ attitudes and feelings rather than the activities they execute. For example, in alternative spiritual practices, summoned entities—archetypal figures held as exemplary and often ascribed as pre-Christian, indigenous, or non-Western—are presumed to affect the participants’ personal attitudes and beliefs rather than the actions they performed. Refracted subjects experience different, contrasting identities at once. On the one hand, those of summoned entities whose emulations are embodied through ceremonial actions, and on the other hand, those of participants themselves, affected by the performances derived from these emulations (Ibid.: 262–263). Distinguishing condensed rituals from refracted rituals, Houseman focuses on the qualities that mark them as distinctive kinds of actions and experiences. He explores patterns of behaviour and the nature of relationships created through the enactment of ritual condensation, and acknowledges personalised creativity, self-aware reflexivity, and prevalence of immaterial representations of summoned entities as concomitant characteristics of ritual refraction. Interestingly, the parodic purpose of *Mszak* does not make it fit with what Houseman (2011b) calls “refracting rituals”, since

apparently participants come without the expectation of being touched by the process. But at the end, some are, somehow against their will, which can be more easily associated with “ritual condensation”. This may be an effect of the contradictory combination (“condensation”) of mockery and experiences of *communitas*. A contrario, the arnica ritual looked more like a “refracting ritual”, but without much effect following probably a lack of preparation, expectation, and projection.

Are invented rituals influencing day-to-day life, and therefore changing the nature of relationships between humans and more-than-humans? Or are new rituals—or ritualised activities—involving more-than-humans just the consequences of deep changes within human communities? Given the paradoxical complexity of this question, we posit that the way rituals are framed and reconfigured cannot be distinguished from how human societies see and interact with non-humans.

This volume comprises nine case studies that illustrate how humans relate to non-human entities in a large variety of cultural contexts. Aiming to provide a global understanding on the ritual processes involved and to emphasise the particularities and junctions among these case studies, we divided the volume into three main sections: daily interactions, political implications, and spiritual engagements. Part I is entitled “Living with More-Than-Humans: The Role of Daily Rites”. It highlights the day-to-day relationships between human and non-human beings through the analysis of cooperative interactions, knowledge systems, kinship relations, and ritual practices across societies located in the Nepalese Himalayas, Mexico, and south-western France.

Chapter 2 by Théophile Johnson on yak herding systems in Nepal as cooperative interactions constructed over time is a very useful introduction to contemporary negotiations with more-than-humans. Drawing on participant observation, interviews, and detailed ethnographic descriptions, Johnson places the reader at the centre of ritualised and daily repeated interactions between the herder and the yaks. Seeking to explore local practices of pastoralism and bio-semiotic behaviours, he scrutinises interaction rites existing between various species and analyses the negotiations taking place between those species during domestication processes. Importantly, Johnson pays attention to different practices showing the collaboration between the shepherd and the yaks and proposes a typology of interactions between humans and non-humans, including ritual identifications, confirmatory ceremonies, maintenance practices, and funeral events. He also explores the non-violent strategies set in place by the

shepherds to protect the yaks from predators who are also part of this living environment. In his chapter, Johnson shows that yak pastoralism is an extremely rich case for studying domestication and its possibilities in terms of animal agency in bio-semiotic mechanisms.

Cyndy Margarita Garcia-Weyandt's (Chap. 3) sharp analysis on *Tatéi Niwetsika* or "Our Mother Corn" among Wixárika families living in West Mexico offers a framework on how to live life in relationality with non-human beings. Using descriptions regarding ritual practices where relationships with *Tatéi Niwetsika* are maintained and analysing how more-than-human beings such as maize shape Wixárika's personhood, being, and existing, Garcia-Weyandt takes us into the core of kinship relations organising Wixárika daily interactions and examines the agency of maize in Wixárika systems of knowledge. She convincingly argues that becoming a devout kinsperson of *Tatéi Niwetsika* ("Our Mother Corn") in the Wixárika context entails that families maintain her genealogy through cultivation practices, produce and consume culinary representations based on maize as main ingredient, pass down oral tradition, remember *Tatéi Niwetsika*'s teachings through memory and embodied practices, and make bodily offerings during the cultivation and harvesting cycles.

Part I of the volume ends with Chap. 4 by Bertrande Galfré based on her fieldwork among biodynamic peasants living in south-western France. She centres on the ritualised preparations of soil advanced by biodynamic agriculture, a practice which was developed by an esoteric movement called Anthroposophy founded in the early twentieth century and promotes an agriculture of care aiming to reach a symbiotic welfare for human and non-human beings. Using detailed descriptions of biodynamic practices performed in a collective farm in Pyrenean's piedmont, Galfré carefully analyses how peasants interact with more-than-humans through specific gestures and actions. She also shows how practices are driven by the peasant's social, political, and spiritual commitments, and how links are built and maintained among different actors engaged in the welfare of the agricultural organism's foundations. Analysing the farmer's role in the improvement of the harmony and equity between animal, plants, humans, cosmic, and terrestrial forces, Galfré offers an understanding of biodynamic agriculture as a practice to preserve and improve the farm's general welfare.

Part II of the volume is entitled "More-than-Human Politics: Belonging, Identity, Indigeneity and the Rights of Nature". It centres on the cultural and political dimensions emerging through human and

non-human interactions through detailed analysis of senses of belonging, traditional healing techniques, and non-human beings' legal personality attribution in Buriatia, West Africa, and during events for the rights of nature mainly taking place in Europe.

Drawing on her extensive fieldwork among the residents of the South-Central Siberian landscape of Oka, Chap. 5 by Anna Varfolomeeva focuses on the influence of mineral resources in local societies' sense of belonging, creation of patterns of ritualised interaction, and establishment of affective bonds between 'Okans' and their landscape. Using both semi-structured and unstructured biographical interviews, Varfolomeeva discusses how Okans simultaneously articulate their connections with a specific place and their sense of belonging when addressing local resource extractions or when engaging with minerals directly. She carefully analyses how minerals such as graphite, gold, and jade are animated and related to non-human beings considered to inhabit this particular territory. Varfolomeeva illustrates how Okans relate to more-than-humans in a context permeated by political tensions and calls for rethinking local conceptions of belonging beyond the established dichotomies of dominance or mutualism. She also addresses mining as an activity which permeates identity configurations and ritual interactions and does not restrain to economic and political relationships.

Chapter 6 by Degenhart Brown offers insight into specific animal ingredients markets located in Togo and the Republic of Bénin and calls our attention to one of the key topics of animal-derived medicine practices in West Africa today: their role in the interpretation and reconfiguration of human and other-than-human relationships. Drawing on detailed analysis of interactions taking place in *Awinon* community markets, Vodun systems of knowledge regarding illness, and diverse ritual practices involving animal parts consumption, Brown elucidates how animal-derived medicines provide salient ways for West African populations to assert their identities, traditions, and healthcare requirements in the face of rampant globalisation. He analyses the ritual and creative strategies used by Awinon merchants to accentuate the spiritual and healing potentials of animal ingredients and highlights the crucial role of these practices in local communities. Brown also questions a research corpus which regard multi-species relations and traditional healing practices as mystical frameworks, superstitions and archaic beliefs, and demonstrates how in this uncertain context where economic inequalities between societies across the world

are exponentially growing, communities across West Africa turn to traditional knowledge and valorise ritual interactions with non-human beings.

Jean Chamel's (Chap. 7) enquiry carried out at the heart of networks seeking to promote the rights of nature provides a useful introduction to interbeing ceremonies, ritual animism, and alternative spiritualities. His discussion centres on the ongoing efforts to grant legal personality to non-human beings such as water bodies, forests, or the Earth as a whole. Observing ceremonies organised within rights of nature events taking place in Europe but also in Quito, and involving more-than-human entities, Chamel analyses how participants seek to re-establish their relationships with the non-human beings whose legal personality is being defended. Using detailed descriptions of animism-inspired rituals that draw inspiration from diverse indigenous cosmogonies, he identifies how these practices draw on the legitimacy of indigenous leaders, and how they become reformulated and institutionalised through ritual creativity processes. Chamel also questions the core argument of the movement for the rights of nature as a multi-sited and online initiative seeking to re-establish animistic and holistic relationships with the living world and invites the reader to understand this movement as a banner to promote an ecocentrism that is no longer fully naturalistic, without being truly animistic.

Part III of the volume entitled "More-than-Human Spiritualities: Liminality, Embodiment and Intimate Experiences of Personal Transformation" illustrates contemporary forms of relating to more-than-humans in Western societies. It focuses on the liminal interactions, transformation experiences, and phenomenological relationalities constructed among humans and non-human participants in alternative spiritual practices in Wales, Sweden, Finland, north-western France, and Estonia.

Searching to contribute to a re-evaluation of the classical and widely used terms liminality and *communitas* in ritual studies, Chap. 8 by Ed Lord and Henrik Ohlsson explores participants' relations with non-human beings in the context of therapeutic nature practices, such as ecotherapy, forest bathing, and forest therapy. Their fieldwork was conducted in three geographical and cultural contexts with much in common but also notable differences: Wales, Sweden, and Finland. Applying a comparative analysis of their respective fieldworks, Lord and Ohlsson call our attention to one of the key values granted by practitioners to alternative spiritual practices performed in natural environments: their capacity for providing them with experiences regarded as having the potential of momentarily dissipating the pressures and tensions of modern life. For interviewees, nature takes

the form of a liminal space where the burdens of social structures temporarily dissolve, and practitioners can access a living world inhabited by more-than-human beings. Lord and Ohlsson accurately demonstrate that the concepts of liminality and *communitas* contribute to our understanding of the practitioner's experience of more-than-humans in alternative spiritual practices.

Chapter 9 by Yael Dansac centres on alternative spiritual practices performed in the megalithic landscapes of north-western France. Her detailed analysis of the ritual design followed by different groups explores the construction of intimate experiences of personal transformation resulting from the practitioners' interaction with non-human beings considered to inhabit this territory. Drawing on interviews, observations, and descriptions of the rituals' organising principles, Dansac demonstrates how practitioners engage in different bodily techniques whose purpose is to create liminal spaces in which humans relate to non-human beings regarded as the guardians of the restorative and beneficial powers of the megaliths. Seeking to identify how participants assimilate summoned entities, she highlights collective strategies applied to reflect on them as animated beings who are equal to humans in diverse aspects while simultaneously being distinct because they have non-human powers and capacities. In her case study, interbeings interactions are first and foremost activated when the practitioner displays body postures and behaviours related to a state of "openness".

The volume's tour of the world finishes in Estonia with Chap. 10 by Tenno Teidearu on crystals as other-than-human persons in New Spirituality. Teidearu takes us to the heart of the problem of what the purpose of animist materialism is and how it illustrates another dimension of human and more-than-human interactions. Using both interviews and ethnographic observations in local esoteric shops, he discusses how Estonian women who have embraced alternative spiritualities incorporate semi-precious stones considered to have spiritual qualities into their everyday lives. Teidearu convincingly argues that bodily engagements with crystals allow these women to support their human capacities and qualities to solve personal problems and bring change to their lives. He also highlights that the combination of corporeal perception, interaction, intimacy, bodily proximity, and dependency can produce and shape the subject's phenomenological relationality with these objects regarded as living beings. Drawing on the practice of wearing crystals, Teidearu demonstrates that relationality and communication between humans and

more-than-humans is not static, rather, it evolves over time and through continual interaction and therefore has temporal and material dimensions.

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