

# Rituals as Environmental Skills: Inhabiting Place, Fabricating Meaning, Enhancing Morality

Do rituals have a place in our perceiving, thinking and acting within nature? Do they have in general a place in modern life, and, in particular, a place and function in environmentalism and environmental ethic? If so, might rituals offer unique social skills to »make-oneself-at-home« and to assist the just and sustainable flourishing of »Earth, our home« (www.earthcharter.org, 18 September 2006) in a world of constant homelessness and increasing anthropogenic dangerous environmental-and-climatic devastation? Is there any significance in rituals and processes of ritualisation for our perception of, thinking about and acting in, for and within the environment?

This chapter responds to these questions positively. Rituals are by no means regarded as ultimately pointless to be fenced in the ethnographical museum, but rather treated as essential for social life in general. In such a lens, rituals appear as specific skills and places where both meaning and belonging can emerge. As such it might be worth to mine them deeper with regard to their potential power for and within environmental ethics in an inter- and transcultural key.

In the following I will depart from the common understanding of rituals in the transdisciplinary field of ritual studies, and hereby especially emphasise the discussion of rituals in the context of environmentalism. The discussion though seems still limited in spite of its unexploited potentials, and I can therefore in the frame of this text only offer preliminary reflections on some selected subthemes: ritualised fabrication of meaning, ultimate sacred postulates, inhabiting a place, spiritual and environmental activism among the Mi<sup>2</sup>kmaq, machine fetishism, and rituals in urban space.

## 1 Rite, Ritual and Ritualisation—Meaning, Power, Wisdom and the Sacred

Resonating with the well-established discussions in ritual studies and ritual theory, rituals are regarded as sociocultural mediums that invoke the ordered relationships between human beings and non-immediate sources of power, authority and value. Rituals represent sociocultural mediums constructed of »tradition, exigency, and self-expression« (Bell 1997: xi). Following Catherine Bell, they are enabling people to embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things. »Ritualisations« should not be taken for rituals but are those actions that transform a practice into a ritual. »Rites«, in contrast, are ceremonial acts that take place mostly in explicitly religious contexts. They are further grouped in different categories of practices such as rites of passage, communal or individual rites, or also pilgrimages. One should also keep in mind that ritual scholars do not follow a clear consensus about definitions and even avoid pragmatically all too strict limitations of their central terms (cf. Grimes 2014: 189–90).

Social processes can thus be studied in the new light of the young field of ritual studies, mainly developed in the frame of cultural and religious studies. The lens of looking at social life as rites, rituals and ritualisations offers exciting possibilities to combine the analysis of actions and ideas. Looking at social life in the ritual lens also allows one to become more aware about the interconnection of perception, thinking and acting. Following Tim Ingold, thinking and acting are intimately interwoven but they are both rooted continuously in our perceptions of the environment (Ingold 2000: 166 ff.). Consequently, the impacts of rituals on thinking and acting should therefore be emphasised through their capacity to interact with our perception. Performing a ritual affects the understanding of oneself within a community and surrounding; it permeates the perception of the self and its embeddedness and opens new horizons that can persist also after its performance.

Such a multifaceted view can also enrich environmental ethics in a fruitful way. Sights, values, worldviews, moralities and practices appear in this perspective as closely interwoven, and they are not in the same way exposed to philosophical systems' well-known risk of fragmenting and separating practice from value, seeing from acting, and subject from object.

Rituals are not necessarily embedded in religion, even if religions substantially draw on ritual practices and rites in their unfolding. Rituals can fabricate meaning, but they can also appear meaningless. Not dependent on the ambivalence of ordinary life, rituals can—as basic social acts—offer a kind of safe language for performative effects. The marriage ritual's changing vows gets you for example married even if you are not in love at all with the other. Once a ritual has been performed under the right conditions it develops its own law and power.

Rituals are able to create and carry a community, and they produce what one might call specific ritual places that are able also to impact on a broader surrounding. Rituals are able to transform places into sacred places either for a short or a long time. My introductory phrase above about rituals as *skills and places* was formulated to express this place-shaping and place-transforming capacity.

The older assumption that religion—and rituals with them—would decline in the process of modernisation has, as we know, not come true. Not every ritual represents necessarily a confessional practice of faith, but religious practices can scarcely develop without ritual performances. In fact, religions can be analysed as ritualisations that depend on and reshape space. Whatever concept of religion one prefers, the foundational code of religious processes approaches reality as a given spatiality in connection with the acting spirits, gods, or God, and rituals are locating faith at place. The interaction of religion and ritual and its scholarly discussion though is all too complex for to be mapped in detail here (cf. Insoll 2011).

Today processes of so-called secularisation and re-sacralisation are flourishing at the same time, more or less interrelated, and they increase in the same common modern global space, though in different cultural forms, within the one common world system. Nevertheless, the overarching theories about secularisation and sacralisation seem to have lost their capacity as grand narratives to explain the overwhelming diversity and dynamic characterising »The Changing World Religion Map« (Brunn 2015), where one for example in the field of nature, ethics and the environment can clearly observe new modes of searching for the sacred (Buttimer 2015).

Processes of ritualisations have furthermore been identified and analysed in growing different social spheres. With regard to rituals, which earlier were regarded only as instruments within a cultural system, one can surprisingly see a development where ritual practices

themselves are regarded as objects for belief, rather than ideologies or images. This means that partaking in a ritual performance is believed to be more important than to rationally accept a set of doctrines about God, world and man/woman or to adore a specific object of divine representation. Rites, rituals and processes of ritualization are, as Roy R. Rappaport, Ronald Grimes and Catherine Bell have shown, at the daily heart of fabrications of meaning in social action.

Another interesting capacity of ritual lies in its normative power. Rappaport has in his famous ecology of religion shown how rituals work as »homoeostatic«, that is as aesthetically normative regulations of social interactions with nature (Rappaport 1968 and Rappaport 1999: 411). Due to ritual practices, humans preserve images and norms about how to interact with hunting, farming and modes of survival. Rituals can work as normative practices which regulate human ecology, in traditional communities as well as in modern societies.

In his later work, Rappaport regards ritualisations (the expression of belief and meaning in ritual practices) as the essential way of fabricating meaning. He analyses modern society by distinguishing between scientific and religious interpretations of reality. The ritual fabrication takes hereby place in contradiction with the scientific rational production of knowledge, or what he calls the »epistemologies of discovery.« In contrast to the boisterous rationalists, who call for a sharp separation of knowledge and belief, Rappaport pleads for a necessary synthesis of both (Rappaport 1999: 451 ff.). For him, the basic tension of human life lies between constructing meaning for our environment and the epistemologies of discovery that aim to explain the laws of the same environment.

Even if Rappaport and others in their ritual studies have shown how environmental regulations take place as efficient practices in the ritualization of a culture's agency with natural resources, it is controversial in scholars' internal discussion how this works and whether rituals *should* function as environmental regulators or in fact are *doing* it. If ritualization is regarded as a basic social act, it represents a »cosmo-topic« practice where the human cosmos is established performatively as a »cosmo-sized place«, a universe at a local place (Grimes 2003: 44).

Also, in climate change this tension between the rational observation of global and local environmental change and the fabrication of its meaning is detectable. But scientific explanation should in my

view not override the production of local knowledge and it should further include also ritually fabricated meaning, religious or otherwise spiritual meaning. Following Rappaport, both need to progress and interact. Such a synthesis can turn into the well-needed wisdom that, according to Nicholas Maxwell, is necessary to decide how to apply the products of rational knowledge. In his criticisms of the philosophy of knowledge, which does not take into account the living beings' self-interests and interplay and which only seeks simple rationalisations of selected phenomena, Maxwell argues that we should replace knowledge with wisdom inquiry (Maxwell 1984). A philosophy of wisdom is for him a truth-seeking discourse that strives to negotiate the criteria of why we should act or abstain. With Maxwell's help, where rationality and wisdom are not equal but placed over and under each other, we can thus sharpen Rappaport's plea for a synthesis and regard rationality as a presupposition for wisdom inquiry and ritual as an experimental method to explore its practice.

Applying Grimes' insight one can further trace a close entanglement of narratives about the change of climate and our common future and the ritualization of a climatically cosmo-sized place that is depicted in new colours, and ask if how such cosmo-sizing ritualization might contribute to the production of new environmental wisdom. How can one express the presence of the whole universe at one particular place in rituals?

## 2 Ultimate Sacred Postulates, Ultimate Concerns and Empowering Gods

Rappaport furthermore emphasises in his later work the significance of »ultimate sacred postulates« (Rappaport 1999: chapter 9), that is, the central, normative presumptions that determine the value of actions in light of what we can describe as ultimate concerns. No matter how much these are constructed, humans experience and regard them as real and sacrosanct. One can disregard them but not falsify them, as they exist beyond empirical verification. Also, technical and rational ideologies are in my view constantly hiding such ultimate sacred postulates. For example, technology, as well as social engineering, is fueled by the *belief* in total controllability and achievability, whereby one can control humans and natural processes through artefacts and machines. Inspired by Rappaport, one can here on the one

hand explore the sacred postulates and hidden driving forces within machine fetishism but at the same time also empirically investigate the social construction and significance of machine fetishism.

Another example can be found in the ultimate sacred postulate about money, and the belief in the final value that is placed on monetary accumulation and leads to the worldview and practice of applied mammonism. In our discourse on environmental ethics the awareness about such implicit ultimate sacred postulates in presumed rational arguments can help to discurtain problematic claims of validity.

How can one, for example, believe in the constructive power of geoengineering in general, which attempts to solve problems that have been produced by other forms of engineering, particularly fossil emission-based technology? Why should faith in machines save us from problems caused by machines? And how can processes of ritualization catalyse or resist such fabrication of meaning? What kind of a cultural system and process of ritualization do we need for example in the sphere of engineering if we want to enhance life at depth rather than to govern and rule it for particular interests of some of us? Can also scientists (and engineers) transform into more than simply »a family of innovative dwarfs that can be hired for everything« (Brecht 1939–55: Bild 14)? How can ritualisations assist such a transformation (for example in higher education institutions)?

Surprisingly enough, the insight from ritual studies about the normative power of ultimate sacred postulates converges with a central insight that has for a long time also been at the core for theologians in the Protestant tradition. In analogy to Rappaport's thinking, the influential philosopher of religion and theologian Paul Tillich coined his technical term of »ultimate concern« in the 1950s. On the one side, this concern characterised for him the essence of religious attitudes and demands that all other concerns are sacrificed. On the other hand, Tillich circumscribes Christian faith as ultimate concern, a belief that transcends rational and other expressions in an ecstatic passion for the ultimate (Tillich 1957: 8–9).

Ultimate concerns are not only at work among believers in explicitly religious confessions but they characterise a deeper existential skill to form some kind of a hierarchy of normative ideas in worldviews too. Tillich continues hereby to walk on a path that earlier had been ploughed by Martin Luther, who in his »Large Catechism« has circumscribed »god« as that »what you set your heart on and repose your trust in« (Luther: First part, First command). In Tillich's concept

god is »the name for that which concerns man ultimately« (Tillich 1951: Volume I, 211). Turning back to our discussions about rituals we can conclude that their normative power anchors in ultimate concerns, expressed in ultimate sacred postulates, as well as in the imagination of gods to whom we set our heart, trust and rely upon. In the context of discussing environmentally relevant rituals one can learn from all these three, Rappaport, Tillich and Luther, to become aware about the normative power of overarching, and often hierarchically structured, ideas and values that can unfold an immanent autonomous power to govern social and ritual life within nature.

From theologian John B. Cobb Jr. and environmental economist Herman Daly's classical work on the »Common Good« one can in the same plough of thinking learn to regard also theocentrism (not simply as a source of all premodern monistic top-down governing evil) but as a significant »check against idolatry« (Daly/Cobb 1994: 401). Efficiently belief in the power of one God makes it possible and even necessary to question and to relativise all demands for power from other gods and to refuse these if they aim at conquering the top of ultimate concerns and sacred postulates. The idea of the one God's universal power works in this sense as an idea of supernatural and superhuman power in order to limit and encapsulate human power claims and to keep these open and negotiable, as Cobb has convincingly argued (Daly/Cobb 1994: 401–404).

To whom do we set our trust? And in what kinds of rituals do we express our faith? Which gods are allowed to empower us and to whom/what are we setting our heart? How do we lend power to rituals so that these can unfold their own authority and power? What kind of beliefs and connected ritualisations are supporting or counter-valuing existing power constellations? Obviously both a spiritual and ritual perspective on questions like these can throw almost some light for unmasking hidden and implicit, life-enhancing as well as life-devastating, sociocultural driving forces.

### 3 Ritually Re-earthing and Inhabiting a Place

One of the few well thought-through texts on the theme of this chapter has been written by leading ritual scholar Ronald Grimes. He departs from the observation that few people on the one side would consider rites as effective means to save the environmentally threa-

tened planet but that one can follow on the other side an emergence of groups and individuals for whom it is obvious that rituals are offering one of several significant responses to the environmental conundrum (Grimes 2003: 31).

Grimes refers to different examples such as the emergence of the »Council of All Beings«—a communal ritual, founded in Australia in 1985, in which participants step aside from their human identity and speak on behalf of another life-form—with a series of »re-earthing« rituals and workshops where humans are trained in carrying animal masks and where participants' deepened connection with Earth and its creatures shall lead to a better morality and political commitment for the sake of the planet. Another example is found among Buddhist monks in Thailand who have created environmentally oriented rites and applied these in their struggle against clear-cutting land bulldozers driven by corporations' profit interests. Also, composers and artists from the 60s have developed ritualised musical performance rites onwards.

While environmentalists are, as we have learned recently in the sociology of religion and environmentalism, approaching nature in a neo-animist or pan-spiritist way, where living creatures and systems are regarded as spiritually animated (Harvey 2006: 212), Grimes states aptly that ritual responding to environmental problems is »not typical of the religious mainstream of the Euroamerican West« (Grimes 2003: 33). Looking at the more recent developments in the Christian ecumenical movement as well as in local churches, it is obvious that not only rational (eco-)theological and ethical argumentation is at the core but that also other modes of mobilising believers inside and contribution to public debates outside are intensified. Liturgical renewal and aesthetical expressions such as music, drama, visual arts, architecture and design play herein central roles. Rational and ethical argumentation takes place side by side with ritual and aesthetical creativity, with the same intensity that one also can observe in constantly growing social environmental-and-justice-related movements, for example in the annual »World Social Forum.« Exciting countervailing power is produced in approaches such as the »Dark Mountain Project« where stories that prevent us from seeing ecological, social and cultural unravelling are contrasted to other stories of help and hope (Dark Mountain).

To the question if rituals might be good for the environment Grimes responds positively:



For attitudes to become definitive they must be cultivated by practice. And the name for sustained, value-laden attitude practice is ritual. In ritualizing, human beings discover, then embody and cultivate their worldviews, attitudes, and ethics. Rites are not only about confirming views that people already hold but also about divining ways to behave (Grimes 2003: 33 f.).

Grimes regards rituals as both cultural and natural. According to him all social behaviour is »not only ritualized but necessarily ritualized«. Ritualization rather represents an essential function of our brain and nervous system, and therefore both a function of our biological and our cultural constitution (Grimes 2003: 36). Convincingly Grimes both acknowledges and criticises biogenetic structuralists who focus mainly on the biological anchorage of rituals and he defends also the need for an ethical critique of ritualistic means. What I herein deeply appreciate is that one in such a perspective can interconnect ritual and ethics in a differentiated reciprocally critical way, which in my view seems inevitable for not to fall into simplistic gaps.

In a detailed discussion with Rappaport's earlier dominant and influential approach Grimes acknowledges the ecological anthropologist's view that ritual is the basic social act but criticises fittingly his inability to do justice to rituals' creativity by focussing all too much on their function to preserve the existing order (2003: 40). Ritual for Rappaport, in Grimes' eyes, mainly creates social and ecologic order and its most essential function is to preserve this order for the sake of the planet. Provokingly Grimes sums it up:

For Rappaport, ritual is essential to planetary survival not because God created it but because it created God. (Grimes 2003: 41).

Rappaport takes his approach even further, into some kind of a mystical transfiguration (my term) by regarding humanity itself as that part of the world that can think about itself, so that ritual performance becomes not merely a means for humans to express their relation to the environment but ritualising becomes »the way the world itself tries to ensure its own persistence« (Grimes 2003: 43). While rituals for Rappaport are mainly conservative and preserving the world's persistence, Grimes is able to perceive and analyse rituals in a more differentiated way. Rituals can in that sense offer creative social skills for to »enhance adaptability and thus the longevity of the human species on the planet earth«, and they can also in deep ritualised life render »participants one-dimensional, stereotyped, and inflexible—in short, maladaptive.« (Grimes 2003: 43)

Following Grimes in his conclusion, this ambiguity should in my view rather be regarded as a source of creativity for socio-environmental transformation than a hindrance. Rituals allow, as Grimes so aptly formulates, »to discover ways of inhabiting a place« (Grimes 2003: 44). Rituals help people to figure out, divine and even construct a cosmos. In order to make ourselves at home on Earth, we do need to interrelate the local and the cosmic, at every place anew, and rituals are nurturing this process. A cosmos is not merely an empty everywhere, as Grimes makes us aware about, but it has to be loaded and filled with meaning. Rituals contribute in such a lens to establish cosmosized places and they allow to both act for the preservation, protection and transformation of environmentally threatened life.

Till now, I am talking mostly in general about what rituals might and maybe also ought to do, but I almost hope to have awakened the reader's curiosity about the potential of rituals in their own means for the best of environmental commitment before we shortly will take step closer to their practice. Rituals can make us dance, sing, paint, taste, play—all activities to explore and discover new and old ways of inhabiting a place. Especially environmentally threatened places and spaces can—by the means of ritual performance—appear in new colours, sounds and shapes; rituals do not solve problems but they allow to perceive them deeper and to respond differentiated, no more or less. Ethics therewith becomes able to turn into what I have called »aesth/ethics« (Bergmann 2006, 2010, 2014), that is the embodied perception about what is morally demanding at depth. The slash was once inspired by Wolfgang Welsch's invented term »Ästhe/tik« (Welsch 1996: 108) that however depicts only those parts of aesthetics which of one own's accord include ethical moments, while »aesth/ethics« in my sense makes us aware about the aesthetical foundation of ethics in general. Ecorituals are in such a perspective not only driven by or applying values, moralities and ideologies, but they are also able to deepen and widen perceptions, to provoke, and to critically question and transform common views and methods. How such a reciprocally critical interconnection between ethic and ritual can take place in practice and what it can teach us, seems still to be a wide-open and all too less investigated field of research. Nevertheless, I would like to offer some selected insights into the field of such exciting interaction.

#### 4 Ritual Power in Spiritual and Environmental Activism

A move to the Americas and the land of the Mi'kmaq Indians, living at Cape Breton Island, Nova Scotia in the North East of Canada, takes us closer to the field of ritual power in the context of environmentalism.

Anne-Christine Hornborg, a scholar of religion, has in her ritual studies (Hornborg 2001) carefully investigated the field of environmental protests among the Mi'kmaqs, where rituals are used to prevent exploitation of places and natural resources. Knowledge from science, that is mainly environmental science about the impacts of mining, has in this case been combined with expressions of religion and spirituality. In a synthesis of what Hornborg depicts as »integrative science« rational knowledge, religion and environmentalism have been compressed in meaning conveying practices and rituals. What the Mi'kmaqs regard and respect as their sacred mountains was violated brutally by mining companies' and national bodies' profit-driven and energy hungry interests. Hornborg's extensive studies explore excitingly the power of ritual performance in this context. Traditional rites as well as creatively invented new rituals offered an excitingly creative social process, where also modes of thinking in established environmental ethics were combined with findings in environmental science. While Grimes' and Rappaport's discussions still approach ecorituals as a marginal and potential force, Hornborg's study offers evidence for the emergence of a new kind of what scholars depict as »spiritual activism.« It furthermore clearly shows the difference and collision between bureaucratic language and ritual performance in the struggle, where a ceremony successfully could resist verbal argumentation. Spiritual activism can specifically also turn into spiritual eco-activism, in the land of the Mi'kmaq as well as in other spheres, which we recently discussed in a specific international conference on »Faith Communities and Environmental Activism« in Edinburgh in May 2017 (Faith activism conference).

Also, in other contexts, and even in not explicitly religious contexts, one can observe the growth of such activism, for example in how a healthy life style increases its value and leads to an increasing demand for ecologic food. Food practices are not only longer just ordinary but driven by such activist values where many avoid animal food because of ideological and ecological reasons, where animal care is debated and where animals in general change their significance for

humans. Eating has in such a sense become rather an existential issue and for some also a somehow magic performance. What we do allow to go into our body also impacts our identity in an animated surrounding and universe. An increasing ritualization of food producing and sharing practices can consequently be observed. After her Mi'kmaq studies Hornborg (2005, 2009) continued to critically analyse the process of ritualization and explored the health industry and individuals with regard to »health rituals« (Hornborg 2009). Such an approach establishes undoubtedly an ambitious new field of relevance also for environmental ethics, a field where the marketing and selling of nature and health take place in parallel with each other.

The meaning of place, that Grimes had emphasised so aptly, was at focus also in the Mi'kmaq's resistance against the companies' and national economic interests, in this case around and at the Kluskap's Mountain on Cape Breton, and its cave. Already the Canadian name of the mountain expressed in the indigenous view an oppression, as it was the non-native smuggler and moonshiner Keller, who lived on this mountain, who also gave the official name, Kelly's mountain, to the place. As a part of their struggle, embedded in a long history of centuries of colonisation and oppression, the Native Americans renamed the place as Kluskap Mountain, asserted this as the home of their culture hero Kluskap and the place where he was expected to return to his people.

During the 1990s, the Mi'kmaq fought a successful battle to prevent the establishment of a super-quarry on this mountain, and employed constantly rituals in their protests, a process that appeared to be a successful way of resistance, within their own groups as well as within the public discourse that accompanied the events. Referring to inviolable values like tradition and sacred places, practiced in rituals in combination with ethical and scientific perspectives, and also in conscious and careful integration with Catholic celebrations, feasts, saints and liturgies, where one could gather native and non-native believers, produced effective results. Also, Catholicism turned in this context into a common ritual practice of resistance that Hornborg analyses in the tension between »power play« and »reconciliary hegemony« (Hornborg 2005: 103ff.). »Today it does not seem that the plans for a quarry will be realized«, Hornborg reports (Hornborg 2008: 8), even if many will play down the significance of the spiritual activism for the sake of profitability and stronger technological demands from the

state. The mountain thereby remains to be a sacred place protected by, among other, also rituals.

While Rappaport, in Hornberg's view, departed from the liturgical rite as the raw model of rituals in general, the new spiritual activism operates with a different understanding and relation to place. While older rites and also for example the Mi'kmaq in their struggle could apply rituals for to protect, to defend and to preserve the traditional power of place, new rituals »must attract a more or less placeless, detraditionalised modern human, and this makes the prerequisite for the ritual performance different than for the traditional liturgical rite« (Hornborg 2009: 111). Health, for example, can in such new activism turn into a commodity to be traded and economised.

Another difference lies in the distinction between community and individual. While older traditional, also environmentally relevant, rites were mainly community-based, new rituals are individually cantered; they are further prepared for constant change according to the needs of the participating persons. New ritualised practices are according to Hornborg also developing new relations to specific places which they discover and even produce, such as health centres, fitness centres, and alleged green nature zones (for bodily and spiritual well-being and comfort). Many of these pretended new rituals have their roots in Eastern Asian traditions and practices which they transfer, fragmentise and transcontextualise to the west inconsiderate of their original context and function. The individual body is hereby ritualised and treated as a central object. Critically, Hornborg discusses how rites can turn into commodities that serve exclusive financial interests. Ritualisations can insofar not only serve as contributors to save our common »Earth as our home« but also serve as money-makers for some of us. Cultural traditions are exploited in that way and the old colonial cycle can continue in new forms. Ritualisations can in this sense function as instruments of neocolonialization where ritual raw material from one original context is commoditised, transported and sold back to new actors for a cheap price, or better for nothing that can benefit the cultural practice's original inventors and guardians of rituals that once might have served their practitioners and others' life.

Learning from Hornborg's studies in the Mi'kmaq land, the health industry and the ecofood sphere, one cannot uncritically set one's trust only to the power of rituals themselves for to save the planet but need to be cautiously and critically aware about the rituals' cultural context, driving interests and power constellations. Critical

ethical questioning is therefore more than needed also in the context of ritual performance and its background warrants.

Furthermore, one can learn that obviously a well-working deep synthesis of rational, ethical, aesthetical and ritual dimensions seems to be stronger than only rational or ethical argumentation if one wants to catalyse environmentally life-enhancing social processes. Also, rituals are, as we have seen, deeply in the need of self-critical awareness. Rituals can without doubt serve as new cultural resources but they are by no means ethically non-ambivalent. Discovering new modes of inhabiting places and developing forms of co-existence in environmental spaces demand ritual, conscious, spiritual and aesth/ethical awareness in a well- functioning synthesis.

Rituals can, as we see, serve as significant and unique cultural skills to respond to crises. However, they cannot be taken as the only skills but seem to function best in cooperation with other skills such as rationality, ethical consciousness, bodily awareness and aesthetic creativity with regard to the suffering of one's neighbours both in human and in non-human spheres of life, both nearby and far away. Without doubt, rituals can hereby contribute with unique skills to respond to an increasing amount of suffering in climate-related processes of change, and to the social and cultural re-ordering of sustainable and just human life on Earth. I have difficulties to imagine how the urgently needed mobilisations for the »Great Transformation« ahead of us (Schneidewind 2018) can take place without the power of traditional and creative new ritual performance, but I have also my doubts, with Grimes and Hornborg, about relying solely on the power of rituals, as these seem to stay, in analogy to many other human skills, in a constant danger of misuse and commodification.

## 5 Machine Fetishism and Rituals of *Verblendung*

Another way of exploring our theme about the interconnection of ritual and environmental ethics takes us to the discourse about technology and what engineering and machines, and the almost religious adoration of technical systems, do to us, to our co-creatures and to the environment. Following my earlier work on machine fetishism, environmental animism and the potential of a reconstruction of beliefs in the Spirit, including Christian faith in the Holy Spirit as a Giver of (sustainable) Life (Bergmann 2012, 2015), I would here shortly like to

emphasise anthropologist and human ecologist Alf Hornborg's critique of our contemporary technocratic system in the lens of ritual.

According to Hornborg, modern technology can undoubtedly, together with global turbocapitalism in unequal and unjust social systems, be held responsible for most of the accelerating dangerous climatic-and-environmental devastation. It is supposed to work as some kind of magic. What is the difference between the efficacy of magic and the efficacy of the machine? Hornborg explores this analogy thought provokingly (Hornborg 2014) and relates it to the question of how pre-modern sacred and ritual power could be transformed into modern economic and technological power.

Industrial technology as well as theocratic rituals, for example in ancient Peru, follow according to the anthropologist the same cultural dynamic. While symbolic objects such as spiritually powerful shells in Peru could offer evidence for the successful function of ritual communication with the empire's divine father, the Sun, and thereby guarantee agricultural fertility, also modern society is dependent on such similar »pivotal exchange rates« as for example oil prices. The transformation of imports into work has in modernity been locally objectified into technology, and machines are in themselves manifestations of global exchange rates.

No less than ritual, machines mystify us by pretending to be productive independently of exchange rates. In modern capitalism, however, the mystified exchanges have become even more opaque, and the magic agency of fetishized objects has become compelling in completely new ways (Hornborg 2013: 256).

Modern power relations are developed in analogy to premodern ritually negotiated power, where social elites are able to extract symbolically controlled obedience and labour energy from all the many human beings who provide them with the means of asserting these demands.

Rituals have, as we have learnt aptly from Rappaport, even a deep conservative and power preserving potential function. In our own times also the promises of continued economic and technological growth, and even of global sustainable development, are dependent on such ritualised and spiritually fabricated meaning. With regard to the propagandistic myth of eternal growth, at present fruitfully resisted by the post-growth movement, they are underpinned by more or less reliable quasi-scientific explanations such as neo-liberal reduc-

tionist economy models and other de-contextualised anthropocentric science such as the theory of ecosystem services (as if all nature only would exist for the sake of serving man). In my view such an unholy alliance of ritual, quasi-scientific and culturally normative symbolic values, offers a gigantic process of ›blending-off‹ (German *Verblendung*) that environmental ethics, gladly in cooperation with ritual studies, needs to unmask and practically deconstruct.

In the same way as the Mi'kmaq mentioned above, other environmentally committed groups are searching new modes of inhabiting and transforming occupied places with the help of rituals, also the processes of common *Verblendung* and technocratic seduction demand their own rituals such as selling one's own ritualised healthy body, identifying oneself rhetorically and practically as a confessing motorised ›car believer‹ or handing over one's autonomy to the contingent games of fortune play, gambling or dreaming of a profit on the stock market. A manifold of contemporary social processes can thereby be analysed in the lens of ritualization. Rituals serve different interests, and they need to be constantly critically investigated with regard to their normative implications for others.

## 6 Rituals in Urban Space, Spatial Justice, Movement, and Aesth/ethics

Finally, I would like to turn to another highly exciting field: how rituals work in urban spaces. Environmental humanities and sciences have increasingly emphasised the ambivalent significance of a rapidly growing settlement of human beings in urban spaces, and the question of how spatial and environmental justice can be nurtured in the global ›postmetropolis‹ (Soja 2000) has consequently moved to the top of the environmental agenda. For environmental ethics, the turn to the spatial is crucial. As a majority of the planet's population lives in an urban environment, we are facing a significant need to reflect deeper about the spatiality of environmental ethics. Issues of energy use, housing, water ethos, urban planning, mobility, life style, and consumerism need to be thought through anew by also regarding the impact of built environments. My short section here can only offer glimpses but hopefully encourage further research in the field of environmentally based third space studies, that is to develop stu-



dies of physical *and* symbolic space as »lived space« (cf. Soja 1996 and Bergmann 2014, 49–70).

Also, in urban space one can observe how rituals contribute to the fabrication of meaning alongside the rational and scientific approaching of reality. Rituals regulate spatial behaviour and imagination in a normative way. How is this true in late modern urban space today?

Even if our understanding of a democratic society persuades us that all places are open for everyone, reality does not offer evidence. In a similar way, as temples in premodern times have had a hierarchy of spheres which were more or less open to all or strictly limited to religious elites, also the late modern city offers what I would call *maps of avoidance*. Some areas will be avoided or only accessed with very specific purposes, such as banks, embassies, or business buildings. Others are only approached with purposes such as schools, hospitals, shops, and theatres. Only few buildings are truly open public places such as squares, botanic gardens, museums and railway stations. An exciting example of a strongly ritualised space is the modern airport, where rites of passages take place several times and where a strict regime of surveillance and control is surveying all movements in the sharply drawn map's territory. With regard to environmental ethics, usually green spaces in cities, such as parks, cemeteries, alleys, squares, solitary trees, and playgrounds, offer a rich panorama of environmental conflicts. But also, styles of architecture, maps of mobility, and the planning of social housing offer a dynamic field for collisions between different understandings of dwelling and what characterises a city worth to live.

An exciting example for how an artistic process can break out of the segregated urban map is found in the Swedish city of Malmö a dark autumn week. The short-term construction of a place for open ritualization can exemplify what in recent years has been tried out also in many other cities. One week after Halloween the cultural association *Rárika* arranged in 2006 a successful *Festival of the Dead* in order to counteract the asymmetry of life and death in modern culture. A couple of events in the darkening Nordic autumn took place and encouraged inhabitants to share their practical expressions of the sacred, or better: of what one regarded as sacred. Among other places especially *The altar of the dead* touched me, with many others, deeply. Some kind of an open cave was designed in the city's central park, and it was installed without any signs referring to a specific religious

confession. Frequently many inhabitants used it for to light candles, to contemplate, and to experiment with different forms of ritualization. Also, artefacts in this context attained a new distinction as »things as links between person and place« (Peterson 2009). The event in Malmö offered in this way a vibrant contribution to rethink what »ars moriendi« (the art of dying) means within environmental ethics in a technocratic society where death is allegedly eliminated and the dying are pushed to the margins (cf. Altner 1981).

Another interesting observation is about movement. Bodily movement as well as emotional motion seems to be crucial in every ritual practice. Rituals of birth and death accompany the new-born and the dead neighbour. While the first moves into existence, the other moves out this world into another one, and rituals are mirroring both these movements. Movement in itself is central in for example rites of passage or pilgrimages, while other rituals connect to the rhythm and circle of natural seasons. A ritual turns space into symbolic space and time into symbolic time. Movements according to specific spiritual references sacralise space and time. While some initiated are allowed to move into specific spatial spheres, others have to stay outside or in limited spheres. While some places are open for all, others have to be avoided in order to keep the order alive. The ritual that connects the community to the invisible powers achieves spatial order. Such a relation is central for social harmony, spatial order and the meaningfulness of a community. Also, in modern and late modern times ritual practice as movement works in this way. How is ritual linked to the mobility of urban space? Could we regard »the ethics of mobilities« (Bergmann and Sager 2008) as some kind of a ritualising practice, where ritualised movement regulates urban mobility? How are modes of moving ritualised in walking, biking, sailing or in motorised high-emission transport?

Reflecting over rituals of the sacred in the modern city one would need to follow a double direction of impacts. How does urban space affect ritualization, and what do rituals mean for lived space? It seems obvious that the choice of place is essential for the development of a ritual. Actions create some kind of what I have called a »ritual place« (Bergmann 2012a/2014) and decisions about the choice of place are part of a broader negotiation. A procession, for example, moves from one (sacred) place to the other, or it carries the charisma of the sacred from the inner to the outer. A procession also changes the surroundings where it moves along. As long as the ritual endures, a

place can no longer be used for transport or trading; also, the remembrance of a ritual affects the character and atmosphere of a place, even if the ritual is not executed any longer. The relationship of ritual and place seems to be intimate, complex, and somehow reciprocal. Place and ritual affect each other reciprocally. The specific attributes of place and context offer necessary conditions for ritualization, and the ritual practice includes and transforms the atmosphere and identity of a place where it takes place.

Rituals are, as we see, regulating human movements, and as urban space offers complex potential for many kinds of movements that are interlinked in a sublime way, an analysis of ritual practices and their ability to regulate movements in urban space would generate a lot of new insights. Rituals represent a form of social practice that takes place in the city both as visible and as invisible religion.

We can, for example, compare the spiritual pilgrimage, which in its present practices often is connected to and motivated by environmental values, with modern sport, even if sporting events are both similar to and different from rituals. The pilgrim places his or her walk over the movement as transport. Pilgrims experience their walking as a tool for contemplation, for mental and bodily regeneration and for a more intimate integration with nature, which we could easily compare to the modern city marathons. Even if the runner wants to reach the goal, it is the process of running together with many others that gives meaning to the run and the whole modern marathon. Most of the participants are not professional athletes but ordinary people who have spent a lot of time preparing and training. They are sweating, they are limping, they are faltering, but the experience of partaking in a common exertion makes their pain meaningful and even sensual. The marathon appears as a deeply ritualised form of common movement in urban space. There is no doubt that it changes the city itself, and that it transforms the economy of the modern urban space for trading, transport, and symbolic encounters into something else. Like a carnival, a religious festival, or a course for celebrating the winning football team, the urban lived space radically changes its atmosphere when the mass just runs.

## 7 Rituals in Transit to the Eocene?

Whereto might ritual power, as reflected and circumscribed in this chapter, take us in the future? The author would be happy if the reader could leastwise foreshadow the potentials of a further exploration of the interaction of rituals and aesth/ethics.

Might rituals assist us in offering new modes of executing power-with rather than power-over others? Might they be able to create new places for conversion, creativity and socio-ecologic transformation? How can rituals fabricate meaning in their own sense as well as in a critical and constructive reciprocity with rational explanation? How can rituals, globally and locally, contribute to the urgently needed great transformation into a just, deep-sustainable common future and Earth? Might rituals in synergy with environmental aesth/ethics assist in moving towards a future beyond the Anthropocene, a truly life-enhancing »Eocene« (Bergmann 2020: Chapter 8)?

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