

---

## Book Review

---

Ive Brissman, Paul Linjamaa, and Tao Thykier Makeeff (eds.), *Handbook of Rituals in Contemporary Studies of Religion: Exploring Ritual Creativity in the Footsteps of Anne-Christine Hornborg* (Leiden: Brill, 2024), 308pp., \$172,99 (hardback), ISBN: 978-90-04-54292-1.

The handbook is a commendable and helpful collection of work exploring creativity of human rituals, paying homage to the central concerns of Professor Anne-Christine Hornborg's theoretical concerns with how ritual is constructed, created and performed, and the fields and localities that have interested Hornborg throughout her extensive career.

Hornborg's vast interests and expertise show a deep dedication to the effort of knowledge creation in the field of religion and ritual, furthering cross-pollination of various disciplines that touch on the creativity that shapes the human activity of rituals. Her career has contributed to important work stemming from engagement with communities in Nova Scotia, Peru and Tonga, among others. Connecting to similar topics, the authors here explore crucial issues of contemporary theoretical advancements on creativity in the study of religion and ritual, being invited to 'approach them in new, creative and curious ways' (p. 4), not only looking at the creation of ritual, but also what is created with rituals.

The book handles a complex array of central questions based on theoretical discussions or empirical findings from mostly theoretical, textual and ethnographic explorations. The texts will be of interest for readers from a wide range of disciplines but will be especially useful for novices of ritual and religious studies, as well as those interested in theories of embodiment and the paradoxes of Cartesian dualist thinking. Divided into seventeen chapters and separated into four parts tackling: Part One 'Ritual and indigenous religion', Part Two 'Ritual, Ecology and New Spiritualities', Part Three 'Ritual and Body: Bodies as Ritual', and Part Four 'Rituals in Regional Perspectives: African Christianity and Islam', representing authors from various disciplines. Some of the contributions read more like essays, like R. L Grimes' musings on what it means to live 'here' on land he owns that is also colonized lands. Some are seminal texts on ritual creativity, while other chapters muse on contemporary developments in the field of ritual studies.

Part One opens with foundational and new works on Indigenous beliefs and rituals that struggle with contentions, paradoxes, and problematics of the way ritual, spirituality, and religion creatively intersect, focusing on debates that still shape much of current popular discourse, like cultural appropriation. By showing paradoxes of 'borrowing' or of different narratives of events, the authors (Bron Taylor, Graham Harvey, Michael Jackson, Mikael Rothstein, Ronal L. Grimes)

engage with negotiations over authenticity, animism, colonialism, and syncretic development, often those that happens in meetings with 'the Other'. Part Two handles innovations in forms of spiritualism that are shaped often outside, in resistance to, or parallel of religious traditions, through, for example, financial astrology (Olav Hammer), and celebrating the Hindu Durga Festival in Sweden (Göran Ståhle). Johan Nilsson shows how the Western canon reduces dimensions of ritual practice, exemplified by Crowley's interpretation of the esoteric ritual of Yijing stock divination.

Some of the more striking contributions from the first two parts are Ive Brissman's analysis on rituals of silence, and Mikael Rothstein's chapter on subsumed and sombre rituals which speaks to creativity that does not perform as spectacle but rather encourage deeper connections to nature and relation, showing how rituals communicate and become something powerful and transformative beyond mere utterances and performance.

Part Three explores how ritual is embodied practice and creativity. The chapters explore questions of what is created with the body and what role the body has in ritual, like can the ritual exist without the body? For example, the authors engage with topics of embodiment of identity, meaning, initiation, movement, and sound. Olivia Cejvan argues for the importance of reiteration and learning in the post-liminal phase of Sodalitas Rosae Crucis initiation rituals in an interesting auto-ethnographic text, and Paul Linjamaa highlights antiquity's more complex thinking on parrhēsia, or body: mind dualism exemplified by Christian theologian Valentinus in which the human becomes fully embodied with movement in correlation with knowledge and speech. Drawing on the ideas of habitus and mirror neurons, Erica Appleros writes about the embodiment of dance where the body and mind create and become through subjectivity, and how these rituals are multidimensional involving all senses and reworks and negotiates lived worlds. Also, intriguingly, Tao Thykier Makeef shows how martial arts can be an embodied creation of the individual through ritualized practices that expand excellence and discipline in other aspects of life.

The final part of the book reflects on rituals in Christianity and Islam. Here, Jonas Otterbeck investigates the significance of group meaning-making through the Al- alāt daily prayers, and Hege Markussen considers divergence within groups in ways they approach ritual fields like festivals, such as those exemplified by the Alevis minority's festival in Turkey commemorating the thirteenth century Sufi saint Hacı Bektaş Veli. Captivatingly, Martina Björkander discusses tensions of ritual failure, negotiations, and authenticity in subversive creative practices in a mega-church in Nairobi called Mavuno that aim to speak to the younger people's lives by telling bible stories in new and relatable ways by 'borrowing' from youth cultures, and how, sometimes, these take breach social boundaries. Mika Vähäkangas's contribution is also a gripping text, showing how reinterpretation of myths, self-blame, anti-colonialism, and white supremacy are negotiated during rituals among the Congolese Kimbanguist church members in Stockholm.

Many of the authors discuss the influence of Hornborg on their thinking, and other established ritual theories, especially the work of religion by Émile Durkheim,

Victor Turner's work on ritual phases and liminality, the expansion of ritual to be understood as more than just based in religious belief systems by Ronald L. Grimes, and Pierre Bourdieu's ideas on embodiment and habitus.

There are some repetitions, and the arguments in some of the chapters could have been developed further to grasp the issue of creativity. Even if the overarching issue of creativity could have been fruitfully or more explicitly investigated in the introduction, for example, the contributions give a good overview of central concerns surrounding ritual creativity and speaks to the impact of Hornborg's works. It highlights the more central advancements she has made with her studies, sparking curiosity with the reader on the many interesting potentials of expanding on ritual studies that take both the ideas and experiences of ritual seriously as part of human creative and transformative activity, experience, and force.

*Mari Hanssen Korsbrekke  
Western Norway Research Institute  
mhk@vestforsk.no*