

# Ritual as Technology:

*Meaning-Making and the Sacred  
in an Age of Immanence*

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"I'll never forget when I first learned this (the immanent) concept of God.  
My daddy was a fundamentalist preacher, and I came home for some holiday, and  
there was a ketchup bottle. I said, 'Dad, is God in that ketchup bottle?'  
And he says, 'Don't you come in this house and blaspheme, boy!'  
And I'm just like, 'I'm not blaspheming, it's a legitimate theological question: Is  
God in that ketchup bottle?'  
And he said, 'Of course God is not in that ketchup bottle.'  
So the follow-up question was: 'Are you meaning to tell me there's a ketchup bottle-  
shaped vacuum in the universe, where God does not exist?'  
He said, 'Of course that is not what I'm saying.'  
'Well, what are you saying then? Either God is in the ketchup bottle, or He is not.'  
And so finally, I got my dad to concede that God was, indeed, in the ketchup bottle."

*darkwaterbermit. (2023, April 10). Is God in the ketchup bottle?  
A conversation about the immanent sacred (Video). YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZA6xfPb--M>*

## Abstract

This dissertation explores ritual as technology: *a line of flight* into an immanent understanding of the sacred—one that is not bound by transcendence or dogma, but personally encountered in the visceral, relational fabric of life. With line of flight, I refer to the Deleuzian term describing a transformative escape from established systems, towards new possibilities, and indeed, this dissertation relies heavily on the work of Deleuze and Guattari.

Amid the ongoing *meaning crisis*—a popular term for the fragmentation of meaning in contemporary Western society, that we will later both address and critique—the return to spiritual inquiry reflects a deep, human desire for lived and felt meaning.

This dissertation argues that ritual offers a valid epistemic and ethical path toward Spinoza's *third kind of knowledge*: intuitive understanding the highest form of understanding, surpassing both imagination, and reason. Rather than framing ritual as mere reenactment, superstition, or empty repetition, this project reclaims it as a broadly and loosely defined participatory mode of knowing—a practice that bridges symbolic imagination, rational reflection, and embodied intuition.

Spinoza's oscillation (a term I introduce to describe his dynamic movement between imagination, reason, and intuition) is positioned as a central dynamic to the human condition. This movement is not static; it shifts as we attempt to navigate the complexities of understanding. Ritual, then, is proposed not as a solution to this instability, but as a means of navigating it with depth, coherence, and care.

This dissertation is not so much interested in what ritual is, but in what it does, and proposes six operations of ritual: (1) *embodied practice*, (2) *situated structure*, (3) *technē of attunement*, (4) *ontological contact*, (5) *pre-discursive affectivity*, and (6) *world-making practice*.

Through these operations, this dissertation contends that by reactivating ritual within an immanent cosmology, we open ourselves to a sacred that is not above or beyond, but present, here, now, and always becoming. In doing so, we cultivate an ethics not of escape and lack but of presence, desire, and joy—a renewed way of being in, with, and through the world.

The theoretical framework draws from esoteric and philosophical traditions—including Hermeticism and Neoplatonism's cosmic-human mediation, Spinoza's monism and intuitive ethics, Deleuze and Guattari's concepts of immanence and affect, and Braidotti's posthumanist ethics. These diverse perspectives are then brought together to inform several case studies of contemporary practices, which I interpret as ritual. In this framing, ritual itself emerges as a participatory

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### *Meaning-Making -*

In this dissertation, meaning-making is framed as an active engagement with the world, here approached through ritual, enabling access to a sense of purpose, value, and connection, particularly when viewed through an immanent cosmology.

### *Ritual -*

A repeated, structured practice or set of actions that connect individuals to meaning, the sacred, or the collective. In this dissertation, ritual is very broadly defined as any embodied, participatory practice that facilitates engagement with meaning and the sacred, particularly within an immanent framework. This broad definition allows for the recognition that individuals can engage in ritual or ritual-adjacent practices—whether consciously or unconsciously—without necessarily recognising them as ritual. Rather than being viewed as remnants of outdated traditions, rituals are understood as dynamic technologies of meaning-making that help negotiate existential anxieties and foster relationality.

### *Sacred -*

Something regarded as holy or revered. In this dissertation, the sacred is understood through immanence—not as distant or transcendent, but as an intensified force embedded within the material world, relational interactions, and embodied experience. The sacred, in this context, is not a static concept, but an active, dynamic presence that emerges in the here and now, woven into the fabric of life itself. This understanding of the sacred emphasises its *intensity*—an embodied force that vibrates through individuals, communities, and the world, constantly shaping and reshaping the conditions of meaning and existence.

### *Immanent -*

Immanence refers to the belief that the sacred and meaning are not located outside of or beyond the world but are present within it. An immanent cosmology views the divine or sacred as woven into the relational fabric of existence, experienced through the world, the body, and relational processes. This contrasts with transcendent models, where the sacred is often seen as separate or beyond the material world. Immanence suggests that the sacred is not a distant ideal but is actively involved in the unfolding of life, inherent in the material, the relational, and the lived experience itself. Given that immanence can have various detailed interpretations, this dissertation gently focuses on its role in fostering a deep, interconnected engagement with the world as sacred, where meaning and value emerge from within the very processes of existence.

### *Technē -*

A Greek term often translated as "art," "craft," or "skill." In this dissertation, technē refers to the applied knowledge or practice through which individuals engage with the world in a meaningful way. Unlike a theoretical understanding, technē involves practical, embodied actions that have the power to shape experience and foster transformation. Ritual, as technē of meaning-making, is viewed as a skillful, participatory practice that allows individuals to actively engage with the sacred and negotiate existential anxiety within an immanent cosmology.

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## Chapter 1:

# INTRODUCTION

“How might one live?”

The question lands like a sledgehammer.

It strikes so deeply because it exposes three unsettling truths: (1) the answer is unknown, (2) the answer may be unknowable, and (3) this lack of grounding destabilises every structure that is built upon it. As Paul Tillich observes, ontological questions represent our ultimate concern, because they reveal the abyss beneath our feet (Tillich, 1957). We can ask about ethics (*what is good?*), epistemology (*how do we know?*), or phenomenology (*how does it appear to us?*), but none of these inquiries can be fruitfully developed if we have not addressed the root question: what is being?

In the absence of a clear, definitive understanding of our nature and the world, humans have historically turned to myth, religion, and spiritual traditions to make sense of self, purpose, and reality—what Spinoza calls knowledge shaped by imagination, where meaning is structured through symbols, narratives, and affect. While ritual is often categorised as one of these foundational meaning-making practices, I argue that risks limiting its transformative potential.

These ontological debates are urgent; today we find ourselves at a turning point in history, which will be explored further in section 1.3 (Context and Background). As digital technologies, artificial intelligence, and data-driven frameworks saturate our lives, our concept of meaning itself risks becoming flattened.

What are we, besides measurements, productivity and data? Questions like these contribute to existential fatigue, but also to a spiritual hunger for reconnection, meaning, and the sacred. As Rosi Braidotti contends, the posthuman condition demands that we thoroughly rethink subjectivity and meaning beyond disembodied data streams, embracing instead relationality, embodiment, and affirmative ethical engagement as vital pathways towards a shared, human future (Braidotti, 2013).

As we will see in the case studies, there is a resurgence of secular meaning-making practices that still appear to grasp at something bigger— something sacred—much like how Romanticism once responded to the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment. Many of these contemporary practices are not inspired by transcendence, but orient themselves toward a more immanent and indirect perception of the sacred, as a generative space for creating meaning.

This Spinozan pendulum begins its journey at the first kind of knowledge: imagination (*imaginatio*), where inherited beliefs and impressions freely shape our world. When contradictions appear, the pendulum proceeds to reason (*ration*), in search of coherence, and veridicality. But reason alone can often feel sterile and insufficient, particularly when addressing more existential questions. This compels the swing towards the third kind of knowledge: intuition (*scientia intuitiva*)—a direct, lived, ‘sacred’ apprehension of truth that resists easy articulation and often requires symbolic interpretation, pulling us back once again towards the imagination. (Spinoza, 1677)

This dissertation follows this oscillation between imagination, reason, and intuition, anchored in the concept of immanence: the sacred not as distant or transcendent, but embedded within and among us. In this light, ritual emerges as a *line of flight*—a dynamic tool that transcends rationalisation, and disenchantment. Rather than being seen as superstition or cultural residue, ritual is redefined as a technology of embodied knowing, enabling us to engage deeply with the world and its transformative possibilities.

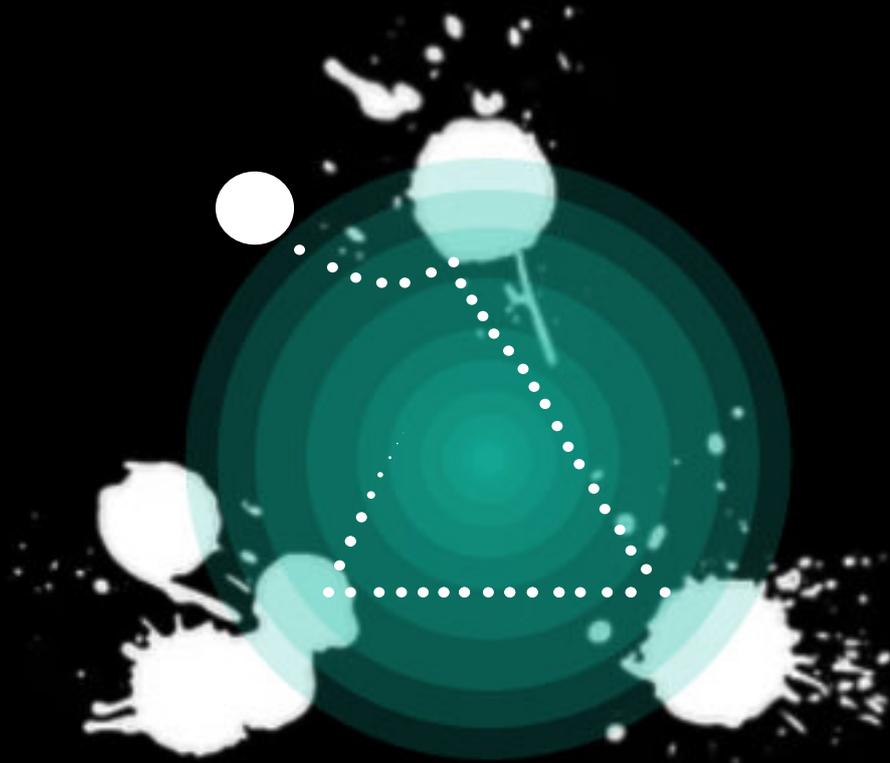
Building on a rich philosophical tradition—including Hermeticism, Neoplatonism, Spinoza’s monism, Deleuze and Guattari’s immanence, and Braidotti’s posthuman ethics—this dissertation explores contemporary ritual practices as dynamic intersections where these ideas of interconnectedness, immanence, and relational ethics come to life. These frameworks will be further unpacked in Part 2 (Ontology). What follows is a bold reimagining of ritual through six operations, as a grounded, affective and ethically engaged approach to contact with the immanent sacred. Ritual, in this light, becomes a powerful technology for meaning-making in contemporary Western Society, and likely beyond.

While the proposed model is speculative and exploratory, it aims to bring together a diverse range of philosophical traditions—immanence, posthumanism, and affect theory—into a cohesive framework for understanding ritual as a dynamic, embodied practice. While the complexity of these traditions and the ambiguity of terms like immanence and sacred means the model is still in development, it offers a new, urgent way of thinking about ritual in a time when meaning is fragmented and disconnected.

By reframing ritual as a *line of flight* in the Deleuzian tradition, this work repositions ritual as a vital force, crucial for addressing the existential and ethical crises of our time. This dissertation shows how ritual can offer fresh, transformative pathways toward meaning, connection, and a renewed experience of the sacred that is firmly grounded in the present.

**Knowledge by Imagination**

*"This is what I perceive or believe it to be—based on images, hearsay, or associations.  
But is it actually true?"*



**Knowledge by Intuition**

*"I grasp it wholly and directly—but it's so ineffable, I'm left wondering if I've simply imagined it."*

**Knowledge by Reason**

*"Now I can explain this clearly and logically—but why does it still feel partial or lifeless?"*

	<i>Name</i>	<i>Source</i>	<i>Mode</i>	<i>Strengths</i>	<i>Limitations</i>
<i>1<sup>st</sup> kind</i>	Imaginatio (Imagination)	Sense experience, memory, hearsay	Associative	Immediate, emotionally powerful, accessible	Subjective, often false, fragmented
<i>2<sup>nd</sup> kind</i>	Ratio (Reason)	Logical deduction, common notions	Analytical	Clear, consistent, communicable	Can feel abstract, emotionally flat
<i>3<sup>rd</sup> kind</i>	Scientia Intuitiva (Intuition)	Direct apprehension of essence	Holistic	Unified, revelatory, transformative	Hard to describe, easy to mistake for fantasy

*Fig. 1.1) A Visual Conceptualisation of the Spinozan Pendulum and the Three Kinds of Knowledge*

## 1.1

### CONTEXT AND BACKGROUND

As stated in the abstract, to set the stage for this dissertation, it is important to address the "meaning crisis" that many contemporary thinkers argue contemporary Western society is experiencing. This section serves three purposes. Firstly, to diagnose the crisis of meaning in contemporary life. Secondly, to introduce immanence as a philosophical response to this fragmentation. Thirdly it proposes that ritual, viewed through the lens of immanence, offers a grounded, participatory way of meaning-making in a secular world. Where the introduction presented a world in flux and a renewed desire for symbolic resonance and connection, this section builds on that worldview.

The contemporary meaning crisis, a term popularised by John Vervaeke, is argued to be driven by forces like secularisation, the decline of traditional institutions, the collapse of grand narratives, waning moral reference points, rising individualism, capitalism, neoliberalism, digitisation, and the advance of artificial intelligence. While these causes are complex and interwoven, they ultimately contribute to a fragmented sense of meaning across social, psychological, and ecological domains.

As Peter Berger (1967) notes, it appears there has been a rupture in the "sacred canopy," the shared symbolic order that once structured human experience. This rupture has real-world consequences. Byung-Chul Han (2015) links self-optimisation culture to burnout and existential fatigue, while Mark Fisher (2009) describes the ambient despair caused by neoliberalism. From another perspective, Jordan Peterson (2018) highlights the rise of nihilism in the absence of shared metaphysical frameworks. Charles Taylor (2007), in *A Secular Age*, reframes secularisation not as the disappearance of religion but as a transformation in the conditions of belief. Taylor argues that we now inhabit an "immanent frame," where transcendence is no longer assumed but becomes one of many possibilities, often sidelined in public life. In this context, meaning becomes a personal responsibility—something individuals must create and maintain.

The result is cultural disorientation. Thinkers like Sherry Turkle (2015), Jean Baudrillard (1994), and Robert Whitaker (2010) propose loneliness, disembodiment, and psychic distress as reflections of this malaise. These symptoms point to a deeper issue: the loss of symbolic cohesion, existential grounding, and shared rites of passage. Contemporary societies are not only disconnected from one another but also from the modes of knowing that once provided meaningful or sacred structures to human life.

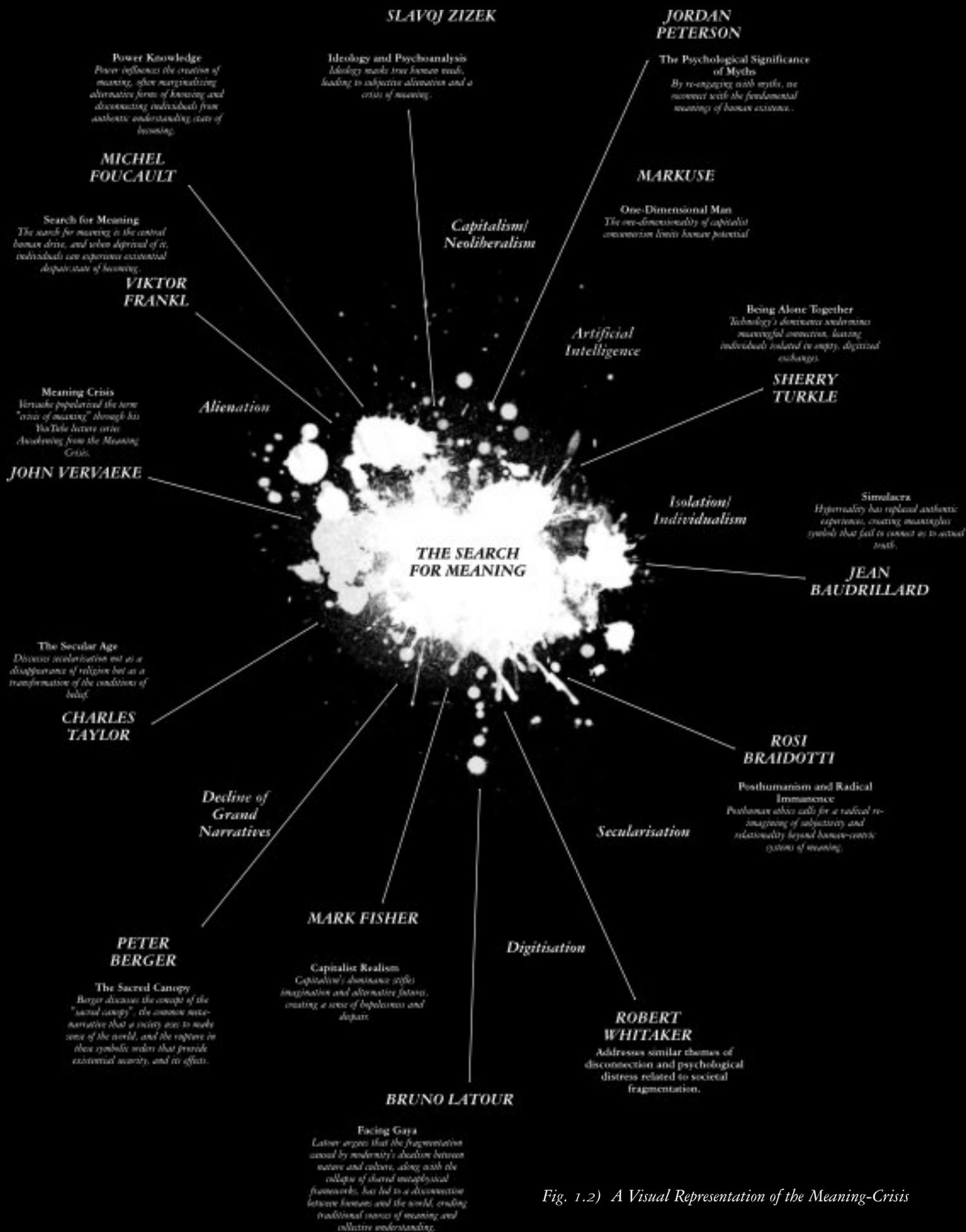


Fig. 1.2) A Visual Representation of the Meaning-Crisis

However, I align more with Rosi Braidotti's view that this is not a "crisis as such", but a site of cultural transformation, a non-linear shift in how meaning, morality, and connection are being redefined in contemporary Western society. The thinkers presented in the previous paragraphs identify some of the overlapping dynamics disrupting the symbolic, communal, and affective structures that once provided Western society with its existential coherence, as Taylor states, largely through an automatic acceptance of a transcendent sacred.

Importantly, this loss of transcendence does not equate to nihilism. Rather than suggesting the sacred does not exist, it points to a reconceptualisation of the sacred as immanent. As embedded in the relational processes that constitute existence. As Spinoza suggests, the sacred is not "above" but within the world, in bodies and relational processes of becoming.

This shift in the understanding of meaning and the sacred draws on deep philosophical traditions that challenge dualistic frameworks. Thinkers such as Spinoza, Deleuze and Guattari, and Rosi Braidotti offer a view of meaning not as something lost or transcendent but as something relational, embedded, and emergent. These philosophies of immanence provide the foundation for the dissertation's central claim: that ritual, understood through this lens, becomes a powerful tool for re-weaving meaning in a fragmented world.

## 1.2

### PROBLEM STATEMENT AND POSITIONALITY

As stated in the previous paragraph, contemporary society is seen to be experiencing several profound shifts in meaning. Traditional frameworks of spirituality, ethics, and transcendence are evolving, creating challenges in connecting with the sacred and existential grounding. As secularisation and rationalisation reshape cultural discourses, a growing desire for embodied meaning seems to emerge. One that seeks to re-engage us with the world and a felt sense of purpose.

Revisiting the concept of the meaning-crisis in 1.1, I view these shifts as a site of cultural transformation—an ongoing negotiation of meaning in a world where the sacred is no longer self-evident, or (perhaps thankfully) imposed. But this freedom is not without consequence.

As Tillich observes, “The threat of nonbeing produces anxiety... The basic anxiety... cannot be eliminated” (Tillich, 1952). This existential anxiety, inherent to our finitude and unverifiable place in the cosmos, simply demands our engagement. We must, as Haraway puts it, *stay with this trouble* and find new ways to exist in relation to our fundamental uncertainties (and, perhaps, our unrational, unverifiable certainties). I argue that ritual may be a tool to do that.

This dissertation frames ritual not as a static, traditional, delimited practice but as a vital, participatory technology, adaptable to diverse contexts, that may help us navigate uncertainty and re-establish connections with both the sacred and the tangible world around us. Ritual, framed within an immanent cosmology, allows us to engage directly with the various layers of reality, finding the sacred not above or beyond us, but embedded within the relations fabric of life itself.

Here, the terms ritual and immanence are intentionally expansive, resisting fixed definitions. Because of its potentially unlimited scope, this dissertation embraces Deleuzian conceptual fluidity and imprecision for creativity—acknowledging that terms such as 'ritual', 'meaning', or 'immanence', can and should evolve as new ways of relating to the world are explored.

Deleuze's approach avoids systematic, rigid, interpretations, engaging with philosophical concepts in a dynamic, open-ended manner instead; an approach also taken here. Rather than offering precise theological definitions, this dissertation offers ritual as a transformative process that adapts to our complex, ever-changing world (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).



Fig. 1.3) A Visual Representation of Immanence vs. Transcendence

### 1.3

## RESEARCH QUESTION AND THESIS STATEMENT

Meaning-Making Through Contact with the Sacred:  
Exploring the Role of Ritual in the Age of Immanence.

or

What might ritual become when reinterpreted through a lens of immanence rather than transcendence? How does it offer a unique mode of access to meaning, intuition, and the sacred in a post-secular world?

This dissertation explores how ritual, reframed through a Deleuzian ontology of becoming and Braidotti's affirmative ethics, presents a vital, transformative modality for meaning-making within an immanent framework. It examines ritual as a generative technology that enables direct engagement with the immanent sacred, understood not as distant or separate, but as an intrinsic presence embedded in the world. By doing so, this study investigates how ritual can catalyze processes of personal and collective transformation, offering a profound response to the disorientation and fragmentation characteristic of secular modernity.

### 1.4

## AIMS AND OBJECTIVES

1. To explore the shift from transcendent to immanent frameworks of the sacred, drawing on key thinkers such as Charles Taylor, Gilles Deleuze, and Rosi Braidotti, and to assess how this transformation reshapes contemporary meaning-making.
2. To reframe ritual as a dynamic, participatory practice of becoming and intuition, challenging traditional views that cast ritual as superstitious or symbolic, and positioning it as a transformative modality for engaging with the sacred in an immanent world.
3. To investigate how ritual facilitates personal and collective transformation by activating embodied and affective modes of knowing within the framework of immanence, offering a path for existential re-engagement.
4. To examine the ethical dimensions of ritual in a posthuman context, considering its potential for fostering relationality, solidarity, and responsibility beyond traditional transcendental ethics.
5. To develop a conceptual framework positioning ritual as a site of resistance and creativity, enabling the formation of alternative identities and collective action through embodied practices in a fragmented, secular world.

In pursuit of these objectives, this dissertation proposes to examine ritual through six interrelated operations that illuminate its epistemic, ethical, and ontological significance. 1) embodied practice, 2) situated structured, 3) technē of attunement, 4) ontological contact, 5) pre-discursive affectivity, and 6) world-marking practice. These operations will be revisited and developed throughout the dissertation in order to demonstrate how ritual can operate as a powerful mode of reconnecting with the sacred in a secular, posthuman, and data-driven age.

## 1.5

### SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

This dissertation draws on the ontologies of Hermeticism, Spinoza, Deleuze, Guattari, and Braidotti, to explore ritual as a transformative practice that enables processes of becoming meaning-making, and affirmative ethics. The dissertation treats ritual as a universal mode of engaging with the sacred, beyond any single religious tradition. While the theorists discussed represent only a fraction of the broader immanent tradition, the dissertation centers on authors who have influenced one another: Spinoza's work incorporates Hermetic influences, Deleuze and Guattari build on Spinoza, and Braidotti draws on all three in shaping her posthuman ethics.

This work's aim is not to claim any theological authority or reject transcendence outright, as even Deleuze alludes to a "transcendental field" within an immanent ontology, (even though, unlike classical notions of God, this field does not refer to an external divine being, but to the structural conditions that enable experience and becoming within immanence itself.) This dissertation does not seek to define ritual in immanence definitively but explores how it fosters connection, transformation, grounding, and resistance across domains such as therapy, communal life, and politics, with a focus on its functions rather than a comprehensive ethnographic account.

## 1.6

### METHODOLOGY

This dissertation employs a conceptual and theoretical methodology, integrating philosophy, ethics, and critical theory to explore ritual as a transformative technology. Drawing on the works of immanent philosophers—such as Spinoza, Deleuze, Braidotti, and Presocratic thinkers—this study focuses on ritual as a practice that creates conditions for encountering the sacred, framed not as transcendent but as immanent, an intensified presence disrupting habitual perception.

The primary method used is textual analysis, engaging with the writings of Deleuze and Guattari, Braidotti, Spinoza, and Taylor, as well as several works from the Hermetic tradition, to test and explore how concepts like immanence, becoming, and affect inform our understanding of ritual. Rather than seeking to reconcile or resolve the differences between these thinkers, the goal is to examine the potential that emerges when their ideas are brought into dialogue. This approach is applied to case studies, which provide practical grounding for philosophical discussions.

This dissertation does not include original empirical research, aside from my participation in several of the rituals explored in the case studies. Instead, it draws on existing literature from philosophy, religious studies, sociology, and psychology to show how a ritual, broadly defined, manifests in lived, contemporary, Western contexts, offering a framework for understanding its transformative potential.

This exploratory approach allows for a flexible, intuitive, and cross-disciplinary mode of investigation, guided by curiosity, experience, and conceptual relevance, rather than strict philosophical purity, aligning with the Deleuzian method.

## 1.7

### **SIGNIFICANCE**

This study offers a fresh perspective on ritual as a dynamic technology for engaging the sacred. By reframing ritual through the lenses of becoming, affect, and relational ethics, it reveals how ritual can rupture everyday perception, generate deep forms of attention, and facilitate personal and collective transformation and grounding. I argue that ritual is a tool deeply embedded in human engagement with experience, and that we need it more than ever to make sense of the world in a time of so many interconnecting, transforming societal frameworks.

The dissertation contributes to ongoing debates in philosophy, religious studies, and social theory about the role of spirituality in secular life, and suggests that ritual offers not only meaning-making but also resistance: a way of navigating the affective, ethical, and political complexities of contemporary existence.

## 1.8

### **STRUCTURE OVERVIEW**

This dissertation examines ritual as a transformative practice within an immanent cosmology, exploring how it functions as a dynamic technology for meaning-making. The first chapter introduces the research question, objectives, and the shift from transcendent to immanent frameworks of meaning, arguing that ritual is a living technology capable of disrupting habitual perception and facilitating change.

Chapter two reviews key philosophical frameworks, focusing on Deleuze, Braidotti, and Taylor, and explores the ethical dimensions of ritual within an immanent understanding of the sacred. The third chapter reframes ritual as a transformative technology, emphasising its role in shifting affective and cognitive states to create space for connection and reflection.

The fourth chapter applies these theoretical foundations to real-world case studies, illustrating ritual's role in contemporary society as a tool for meaning-making and social transformation. The final chapter explores the ethical dimensions of ritual in a posthuman context, suggesting its potential to foster solidarity and address global challenges. In conclusion, the dissertation synthesises its findings, proposing ritual as a new approach to meaning-making and highlighting future research directions in ritual, ethics, and posthumanism.

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## Chapter 2:

# THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

### 2.1 Ontology and the Sacred: Transcendence versus Immanence

In section 1.1, I gave a brief overview of the current meaning-crisis, as diagnosed by thinkers such as Vervaeke, Peterson, Taylor, and Berger—who provides the metaphor of a rupturing, sacred canopy. This crisis of meaning is often attributed to the erosion of the transcendent frameworks that once made up our world, and grounded our sense of ethics, purpose, and belonging. Kierkegaard, in his *Sickness unto Death* (1849), finds it impossible to imagine meaning-making without a transcendent entity that the *'relationship relating to itself'* can in turn relate to.

However, as I concluded earlier, I argue that this loss of transcendence does not necessarily lead to nihilism. Drawing on thinkers such as Spinoza and Braidotti, I argue that if meaning can no longer be anchored outside the world, it must be found within it. This shift reframes the sacred, not as an external commandment or metaphysical rupture, but as a quality of intensified relational presence—what Barad (2007) terms **intra-action**—moments where bodies, affects, and matter co-constitute reality in ethically charged ways.

Rather than viewing Taylor's *Secularity III* and *Immanent Frame* as signs of lost meaning, I interpret them through immanent philosophy, where meaning, agency, and the sacred are reconstituted within the world itself. Taylor (2007) describes the "immanent frame" as a social imaginary in which transcendence is no longer the default backdrop for meaning, and meaning is instead located within a self-contained natural order. This marks the "Age of Authenticity," where meaning and value are drawn from personal experience and self-expression. While this shift can be liberating, it often results in fragmentation and groundlessness—issues that ritual, as an embodied practice of attention, can address.

Therefore, I view ritual as a technology of authenticity, allowing individuals to construct embodied meaning without relying on transcendent sources. This reframing challenges secular epistemologies that often marginalize affective, intuitive, or somatic modes of knowing. Modernity, as Taylor (2007), Asad (2003), and Barad (2007) argue, is not epistemologically neutral but metaphysically saturated.

Even though the sacred might appear far removed from modernity, its longings persist in moments of awe, deep belonging, or ethical clarity that transcends rationality. This is not the sacred as doctrine, but as an immanent event—an intensification of the here and now, positioned in an immanence so vast it eludes our understanding: there is no outside, only a world dynamically charged with meaning (Spinoza, *Ethics*, Part I; Deleuze & Guattari, 1994).

Contrarily, most classical theories locate the sacred in collective projection (Durkheim, 1912) or transcendent rupture (Eliade, 1957), both relying on a sacred/profane binary that this dissertation seeks to dissolve. Durkheim views the sacred as a social boundary, while Eliade situates it as an ontological rupture revealing a higher cosmic order. My dissertation suggests that an immanent perspective integrates these insights, viewing contact with the sacred, for example through ritual, as both a site of social bonding and a vector of cosmological participation, without requiring a transcendent absolute.

This view is rooted in Spinoza's *Deus sive Natura*, where God is Nature, and Nature is the only substance expressing itself through infinite modes. Braidotti (2013) extends this vision with her posthuman ethics, framing sacredness as an affective force rooted in our entanglement with both human and non-human others. Sacredness, then, is not a metaphysical substance, but a charged ontological event, where relational meaning becomes undeniable.

As stated at the beginning of this chapter, this conception of the sacred—emergent, embodied, and ethically charged—finds its roots in a long philosophical tradition that grounds meaning not in transcendence but in the relational weave of life itself.

In this context, the sacred may no longer be defined by transcendence, but remains deeply relevant. As Taylor (2007) notes, modernity seeks meaning within lived experience, not beyond it.

Sacredness persists as affect—manifesting in communal protest (Butler, 2015), the grief of climate vigils (Latour, 2017), or the meditative attention of mourning rituals mediated through digital networks (Chun, 2021). These examples challenge Durkheim's sociological reduction and Eliade's metaphysical verticality, exemplifying what Braidotti (2013) calls an "affective infrastructure"—a sacredness emerging from immanent entanglement.

Even Simone Weil's concept of "pure attention" (1947) can be understood as a form of secular ritual. In *Gravity and Grace*, Weil writes: "Attention, taken to its highest degree, is the same thing as prayer. It presupposes faith and love" (Weil, 2002, p. 117). Ritual practices, by cultivating deep, sustained attention, mirror this structure of prayer. They orient participants toward an intensified, receptive, and transformative relationship with the world. This aligns with my broader argument that ritual is not merely symbolic enactment, but an epistemic technology—a disciplined cultivation of attention that yields profound modes of knowing.

In that sense, I find inspiration in the work of Tara Isabella Burton (2020), who examines contemporary subcultures, such as Harry Potter fandoms or SoulCycle classes, as ritualised spaces for collective longing, belonging, and meaning. Though often dismissed as trivial or commodified, these phenomena point to new configurations of the sacred—manifesting as affective intensifications, not theological affirmations. Fundamentally, Burton argues that the sacred has not disappeared, but has been dislocated, and refound in surprising locations by the religiously unaffiliated. Latour's Gaia theory (2017) offers an ecological perspective to this 'secular society', suggesting that "we have never been modern" and that our secularism has always been partial, always haunted by affective ties to the more-than-human. In this framework, the sacred is not lost but displaced—into intersubjectivity, material networks, and ecological vulnerability.

As I stated before, I argue that immanence, by these mechanics, raises the stakes of ethical life instead of trivialising them. Without external command, responsibility becomes radical: if meaning arises from within the entangled relations of life, our ethics must attune to what sustains those relations. One objection to the immanent sacred is that it risks relativism: without a transcendent moral authority, how can ethics be grounded? This assumes ethics must come from above. In contrast, Spinoza's *conatus* (Ethics, Part III)—the striving of each being to persist in its mode of existence—roots ethics in joyful, life-sustaining relations. Braidotti (2013) extends this into a posthuman ethics, grounded not in rules, but in shared vulnerability and planetary interdependence.

Ethics emerges from connection, response, and co-becoming. It is not about rule-following, but resonance; not about salvation, but solidarity. In a disenchanted world, reclaiming the sacred within immanence becomes not just a philosophical gesture, but an ethical imperative—especially in the face of climate crisis, political fragmentation, and ontological homelessness. This sacred moment—described by Spivak (1988) as "pre-discursive tremors"—intensifies responsibility, anchoring it in the fragile, felt fabric of entangled life.

The immanent sacred—vibrational, participatory, and ethically charged—did not emerge in a vacuum. Its contemporary expressions resonate with a deeper intellectual lineage that has long sought to ground meaning in the dynamics of life itself. What follows is not a unified school of thought but a genealogical constellation: thinkers and traditions that, across time, have challenged metaphysical dualisms and articulated the sacred as relational, embodied, and immanent.

## 2.2

### HERMETIC AND NEOPLATONIC COSMOLOGIES

Hermeticism offers a perceptual toolkit for re-enchanting a disenchanted modernity by resisting the objectification and fragmentation of nature. As Hanegraaff (2012) notes, esoteric traditions view nature as a field of correspondences, inviting a participatory and ethical stance grounded in metaphysical kinship rather than abstract moralism. Although often dismissed as mystical, Hermetic thought resonates with ancient philosophical intuitions.

The Pre-Socratics, especially Heraclitus, described a cosmos in flux—*panta rhei* (“*everything flows*”)—where change, relation, and unity formed the core of reality. Similarly, Plato’s *Timaeus* presents the universe as a living whole, albeit shaped by a divine, transcendent, artisan. These early sources prefigure the Hermetic vision of a world that is both intelligible and sacred, animated by relational structure and metaphysical vitality.

Later, Plotinus deepens this cosmology into a fully immanent metaphysics. In the *Enneads*, he describes a universe where all levels of being emanate from the One—not in exclusion but in a seamless overflow of presence. The divine is intimately present within the world, and human beings participate in this divinity through contemplation and attunement. Plotinus’s influence on Hermetic texts is well-documented (Hanegraaff, 2012; Faivre, 1994), especially in the shared emphasis on unity, correspondence, and the sacredness of all life.

The Hermetic tradition thus offers one of the earliest articulations of an **immanent sacred**. Central to this worldview is the principle articulated in *The Kybalion*, which asserts, “All is in The All. It is equally true that The All is in all” (Three Initiates, 1908, p. 49). This paradox encapsulates the idea that divinity is not transcendent, but immanently present within the cosmos. “The All” functions as both source and substance, unified in its oneness yet thoroughly embodied in the multiplicity of existence.

*Presence of comparable ideas in different immanent world-views. Not  
(yet) an actual comparative analysis*



*Hermetic*  
- *The All is All*  
- *Desire as the Creative Energy*  
- *Gnosis*  
- *As Above, So Below*  
- *The Universe is Mental*



*Spinozist*  
- *God or Nature*  
- *Conatus*  
- *Third Kind of Knowledge*  
- *Paralleism, Common Notions*  
- *Thought a one of God's Attributes*



*Deleuzian*  
- *Plane of Immanence*  
- *Desire as Production*  
- *Becoming-Intense-Intuition*  
- *Assemblages, Rhizomes*  
- *Noology, Immanence of Thought*



*Braidottian*  
- *Immanence*  
- *New Vitalism*  
- *Nomadic Epistemology*  
- *Posthuman Assemblages*  
- *Nomadic Thought*

Revisiting Hermeticism, then, is not a nostalgic retreat but a recovery of resources for understanding the sacred as radically immanent—woven into the dynamic, material, and affective fabric of life. This prepares the ground for the later exploration of Spinoza’s *scientia intuitiva*, which offers a philosophically rigorous elaboration of immanence with ethical implications, discussed in Section 2.3.

Hermeticism’s non-dual ontology sharply contrasts with dominant Western metaphysical dualisms—spirit and matter, mind and body, sacred and profane. Where classical mechanistic cosmologies render the universe inert, Hermeticism insists on its vitality. The cosmos is not dead matter but ensouled, alive, and responsive—a dynamic field saturated with meaning. This vision foreshadows ecological and process philosophies that reject the fragmentation typical of modern secular thought. By collapsing the divide between sacred and profane, Hermeticism invites a participatory engagement in which the world itself is encountered as divine (Hanegraaff, 2012)

One of Hermeticism’s axioms, “As above, so below; as below, so above” (Three Initiates, 1908, p. 19), encapsulates its relational cosmology: it suggests a structural resonance between the macrocosm and microcosm, between the celestial and terrestrial realms. As the opening line of William Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence* read: “*To see the world in a grain of sand, and heaven in a wild flower. Hold infinity in the palm of your hand, and eternity in an hour*” In such a universe, knowledge does not arise from detached analysis, or a transcendent entity, but from situated participation—via symbols, intuition, and, indeed, ritual. While esoteric in nature, I argue that these are not merely primitive superstitions, but legitimate alternative epistemologies attuned to a world imbued with significance.

Historically, Hermeticism’s influence extends far beyond late antiquity. During the Renaissance, thinkers like Giordano Bruno drew heavily on Hermetic cosmology to challenge mechanistic metaphysics and envision an infinite, living universe (Yates, 1964). Its enduring legacy can be felt in contemporary ecological, esoteric, and post-secular thought, where the cosmos is once again viewed not as a neutral backdrop, but as a **living whole**—knowable through imagination, embodiment, and participatory relation.

Antoine Faivre (1994), a key scholar of Western esotericism, identifies several core features of Hermetic thought that remain relevant today: the principle of correspondences, the belief in a living nature, the epistemological value of imagination, and the transformative potential of knowledge. Faivre approaches Hermeticism not as a set of doctrinal beliefs but a “style of thought”—a mode of being that renders the world intelligible through symbolic resonance rather than reductive abstraction.

## 2.3

### SPINOZA'S MONISM AND INTUITIVE ETHICS

Baruch Spinoza offers a rigorous metaphysical vision of immanence, collapsing the binary between divine transcendence and worldly immanence through his concept of *Deus sive Natura*—God or Nature. In *Ethics*, he asserts, “Besides God no substance can be granted or conceived” (Spinoza, 2000, Part I, Prop. 14, p. 91). This substance monism affirms that all of reality is one infinite, self-caused substance. Crucially, this “God” is not a personal deity apart from the world but the world itself—immanent, expressive, and alive.

This radical monism synthesises ancient metaphysical traditions, drawing from Stoicism, Neo-Platonism, and Jewish Kabbalistic thought. Spinoza reframes divinity as the internal logic of existence, as opposed to an external lawgiver, and identifies freedom not with dominion over nature but with understanding one’s embeddedness within it. This resonates with the ecological philosophies discussed earlier, such as Latour’s (2017) Gaia theory, which explicitly draws on Spinoza’s framework to reimagine politics and ontology through relational vitality.

This emergence in the world means that Spinoza’s ethics are deeply embedded in this metaphysics. All beings—whether thoughts, bodies, emotions, or events—are modes of this singular substance, expressions of God’s infinite attributes (Garrett, 1996; Curley, 1988).

One of Spinoza’s key ideas is *parallelism*, which holds that “the order and connection of ideas is the same as the order and connection of things” (Spinoza, 2000, Part II, Prop. 7, p. 92), reminiscent of the Hermetic axiom previously discussed. Instead of restoring dualism, this line affirms non-reductive monism, where mind and body, thought and matter, are two attributes of the same reality: a deeply non-Cartesian, holistic understanding of being, reinforcing the idea of interconnectedness previously explored.

Spinoza’s concept of *causa sui*—self-caused—argues that all things follow necessarily from God’s nature. Yet, this necessity does not imply deterministic fatalism. Freedom, as Nadler (2006) explains, arises from understanding and cooperating with the unfolding logic of nature, emphasizing *active freedom*: a freedom in which ethics emerge from joyful participation in reality’s ongoing expression. It follows that the sacred, in this understanding, is not imposed from above but emerges from the relational matrix of existence itself.

At the heart of Spinoza's epistemology is *scientia intuitiva*—intuitive knowledge, the highest form of knowing. This is an embodied, affective grasp of our place within Nature's whole (Spinoza, 2000, Part V, Prop. 24, p. 256; Gatens, 2009). Deleuze (1988) calls this a joyful knowledge, culminating in *amor Dei intellectualis*—the intellectual love of God as Nature. This love is not directed toward an absent transcendence, but toward our shared substance with all that is, rearticulating the sacred as immanent and participatory, as we discussed in the previous section.

Spinoza offers not only a metaphysics of immanence but also an ethics of participation—an invitation to understand the sacred as already here: diffused through life, relation, and joy. His framework provides a profound precursor to posthumanist ethics and ecological thought, where humans are not separate from nature but co-embedded with all life. Braidotti (2013) extends this into a posthuman ethics grounded in ontological continuity with non-human others, while Bennett (2010) uses Spinoza to illustrate how vitality circulates throughout material systems—not just within human actors. Thus, Spinoza's work lays the foundation for an ethics of participation that is still relevant today.

## 2.4

### DELEUZE AND GUATTARI: THE PLANE OF IMMANENCE

Building on Spinoza's metaphysical foundation, Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari propose a dynamic and processual theory of immanence—reframing reality not as fixed substance taking various shapes, but as continuous becoming. In their collaborative work *A Thousand Plateaus*, they reject both transcendental origin and essentialist framework in favor of what they call the plane of immanence: a conceptual field where all things arise not by design but through relation, interaction, and emergence (Deleuze & Guattari, 2009, p. 163).

This notion has ancient resonance. Deleuze's metaphysics channels Stoicism's idea of immanent logos, and draws deeply on Nietzsche's will to power—a force not of domination, but of creative differentiation. Where Platonism sought truth in fixed forms, Deleuze seeks it in flows, intensities, and ruptures. His debt to Spinoza is profound, but he radicalizes Spinoza's monism into a non-hierarchical ontology of multiplicity.

The plane of immanence is ontologically flat: there is no transcendent authority or vertical scale of being. Ideas, bodies, affects, institutions—these are all assemblages, produced through immanent conjunctions. “Immanence is not in something, to something; it does not depend on an object or belong to a subject,” Deleuze writes, emphasizing its radical non-dualism (Deleuze, 2001, p. 25). This field is not abstract, but lived and affective—a site of real spiritual and political transformation (Connolly, 2011).

A key innovation is their reconception of desire: not as lack (as in Freud), but as production. Desire creates, assembles, connects. As Smith (2012) explains, Deleuze’s ethics emerges from desire’s generativity—not obedience to law, but the composition of life-affirming relations. Ritual, then, is not symbolic reenactment but an intensive practice—a way of attuning to the shifting affects and thresholds of becoming (Massumi, 1992; Protevi, 2009).

Through their concept of becoming—becoming-animal, becoming-woman, becoming-imperceptible—Deleuze and Guattari name ontological processes in which fixed subjectivities are dissolved and reconfigured. These becomings are often sacred moments, not because they invoke a transcendence, but because they intensify immanence. Braidotti (2013) echoes this, describing such moments as affective ruptures that open new ethical and ontological possibilities.

In his essay *Immanence: A Life* (2001), Deleuze names the sacred not in dogma but in “a life”—an ordinary yet infinite becoming. Here, spirituality emerges not from belief, but from the capacity to stay with the unpredictable flows of the real.

Deleuze’s influence stretches into ecological theory, vital materialism, and political affect. Thinkers like Jane Bennett (2010) and William Connolly (2011) draw on Deleuze to articulate an ethics of attention to the vibrancy of both human and non-human life. Meanwhile, scholars such as Ramey (2012) explore how Deleuze’s thinking aligns with Hermetic and esoteric traditions, where symbolic resonance and energetic life suffuse materiality. Ultimately, the plane of immanence becomes a space for experimental ethics, spiritual materialism, and re-enchanted secularity—a way of composing the sacred not above, but among, within, and continuously unfolding.

## 2.5

### BRAIDOTTI: RADICAL IMMANENCE AND POSTHUMANISM

Building on the immanent philosophy of Spinoza and Deleuze, Rosi Braidotti extends these ideas into posthumanist ethics. She connects concepts like becoming and the plane of immanence with feminist materialism, ecological thought, and critical posthumanism, rearticulating immanence as both a metaphysical and ethical commitment for an interconnected world.

Braidotti inherits Spinoza's notion of a single expressive substance and Deleuze's affirmation of difference, inflecting these with feminist and Indigenous perspectives. She argues for a recognition of all life (zoe) as ethically significant, emphasizing relations over individuals as the unit of moral responsibility. Her nomadic theory is informed by, and deeply aligns with, Indigenous cosmologies that treat land as a living, agentic entity (TallBear, 2019; Whyte, 2018). Like Spinoza, Braidotti challenges dualisms (body/mind, nature/culture, human/machine/animal) while also questioning the hierarchical subject/object divisions at the heart of colonial and anthropocentric frameworks.

For Braidotti, immanence becomes an ethics of **situated relationality** and **affective belonging**, moving beyond moral duty and transcendence. She proposes **zoe-egalitarianism**, an ethics based on the ontological continuity of all beings, rejecting human exceptionalism (Braidotti, 2013). In very simple terms: ethics emerge from the rather strict rules of materials existence on our planet, and should we wish to survive, we have to comply with natural law.

Braidotti's affirmative ethics are grounded in the care of **becoming**, sustaining difference, and acknowledging subjectivity's embeddedness in planetary networks. Her project critiques the classical humanism, that appears to apply in direct relation to how much the objects of this humanism resembles the Vetruvian man: white, male, able-bodied, and young. Instead Braidotti positions us in an age of posthumanism, while actively, and joyfully, imagining new forms of solidarity and agency.

Central to her vision is transversal subjectivity: a selfhood that is porous, situated, and relational. Rather than viewing difference as a problem, she frames it as a resource for ethical learning and transformation (Braidotti, 2013).

Braidotti also reclaims spirituality from transcendental metaphysics, proposing a nomadic spirituality: an affirmation of life, difference, and shared vulnerability. This spirituality is grounded in immanent forces—matter, affect, and collective resistance (Braidotti, 2017). It resonates with Spinoza's amor Dei intellectualis, reimagined for a multispecies, ecologically precarious age.

Braidotti's work holds both ethical and political urgency, evident in movements like Extinction Rebellion which, for her, embody posthuman spirituality through rituals of grief, hope, and collective care. These are not empty symbols but lived practices reembedding the sacred in our interwoven, vulnerable world (Braidotti, 2019).

In sum, Braidotti extends immanence into a spiritual-political ethic that affirms difference, sustains life, and cultivates care across species and systems. She proposes an immanent sacred rooted in generative, shared rhythms—one that challenges divine command and calls for transformation within the fragile interconnectedness of life.

## 2.6 INTERIM SYNTHESIS: A FRAMEWORK FOR RITUAL IN AN IMMANENT AGE

These threads illustrate a profound shift: the sacred no longer serves as an external guarantor of meaning but as an emergent force from the very conditions of life. Hermetic correspondences, Spinozist monism, Deleuzian vitalism, and Braidottian posthuman ethics converge on a refusal of transcendental hierarchy, proposing instead a sacred woven through relations, intensities, and becoming. This vision calls for a **radical, participatory mode of care**, emphasizing solidarity with the dynamic, fragile world we inhabit. It does not negate reason or agency but places them within an ethics of **embeddedness** and **affective accountability**. Thus, the sacred becomes an ongoing practice—attuned, responsible, and alive to the world's precarious vitality.

Reframed by these traditions, the sacred emerges as a participatory event rather than a fixed doctrine, woven through relational, affective, and material flows. The sacred is not a transcendental intrusion but an intensification of the world's dynamic vitality. Yet, as this sacred is embedded within the textures of becoming, a further question arises: How does this cosmos organize itself? If transcendence no longer provides fixed laws, what principles structure immanent reality—and how might ritual engage these principles? These questions will guide the next section, exploring how cosmic principles such as desire, rhythm, correspondence, and vibration shape the conditions of sacred participation.

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## Chapter 3:

# EPISTEMOLOGY AND ETHICS IN AN IMMANENT COSMOS

### 3.1 PARTICIPATORY EPISTEMOLOGIES

As the preceding sections have shown, the philosophical traditions of Hermeticism, Spinoza's monism, Deleuze and Guattari's plane of immanence, and Braidotti's posthuman ethics converge on a decisive shift: a rejection of transcendental frameworks in favor of an immanent sacred. Having explored their genealogies, this section now turns to ask: if the sacred is immanent, how does such a cosmos actually work? What principles, patterns, or perceptual logics structure reality when transcendence is no longer the frame?

The traditions discussed do not imagine reality as a rigid architecture governed by divine decrees or mechanical laws, but as a vibrant, self-organizing field of tendencies, forces, and relational patterns. Rather than metaphysical commands imposed from above, these principles emerge from the very dynamics of matter and relation itself. As Deleuze (1990) suggests, these are expressions of a living ontology: consistent enough to guide experience, yet fluid enough to allow for transformation. In this sense, they function more like rhythms than laws — structuring reality in ways that are stable without being hierarchical.

Far from being abstract philosophical constructs, these principles make the sacred perceptible. They are how immanence shows up in practice, much like a cloud that takes endlessly shifting forms while still remaining a pattern of water particles. These patterns can be seen as ontological in their consistency, epistemological in their interpretability, and ethical in their implications. They shape not only what the world is, but how we know it, and how we might live within it. Reality, from this perspective, is not a passive stage on which human actors perform, but a vibrating, self-organising weave of forces through which life unfolds and consciousness emerges.

### 3.2 INTUITION, AFFECT, AND EMBODIED KNOWLEDGE

Among these immanent logics, desire and vital force stand out. Drawing on Spinoza, Braidotti (2013, p.56) describes the universe as a “monistic” field where matter is expressive, driven by an ontological desire for self-articulation and transformation.

This monism refuses to divide mind from body, nature from culture, or subject from object. Instead, matter itself is seen as desiring, capable of self-expression and creative differentiation. Such a vision extends seamlessly into Braidotti's vital materialism, which roots posthuman ethics in the dynamism of a world that is alive with potentiality.

Similarly, desire, in Deleuze and Guattari's framework, is not the lack of something absent — as classical psychoanalysis claimed — but a positive, productive force that assembles, connects, and generates new becomings (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987). Desire is a motor of emergence, an ontological principle running across humans, animals, ecologies, and systems. It is this constitutive energy, rather than a transcendent creator, that keeps the cosmos in motion.

The Hermetic principle of correspondence — “as above, so below” — adds another layer. According to this view, reality is organised through symbolic echoes between the macrocosm and the microcosm. Patterns found on one level of existence mirror those on another. A spiral in a fern, a pattern in a galaxy, or the growth of a shell all reflect an underlying unity across scales (Copenhaver, 1992). This principle frames the sacred as a hidden coherence that can be intuited through symbol, analogy, or resonance.

Deleuze, however, disrupts this symbolic reading by proposing instead a univocal ontology in which all beings express Being equally. As he writes, “It is being which is Difference... we and our individuality remain equivocal in and for a univocal Being” (Deleuze, 1994, p.39). There is no transcendent realm reflected in the material world, but a single field where difference itself is the mode of existence. This reframing dissolves symbolic verticality and replaces it with a flat, immanent fabric of becoming. For Deleuze, the sacred is not encoded in hidden correspondences but revealed through the differential unfolding of reality itself (Deleuze, 1990).

Another Hermetic axiom, the principle of vibration, declares that “nothing rests; everything moves and vibrates” (Three Initiates, 1908, p.19). Here, reality is seen as kinetic: movement is the fundamental condition of existence. Deleuze's concept of intensity resonates with this principle. Intensity is not mere quantity but the differential force that gives rise to perception, sensation, and affect (Deleuze, 1994, p.222). Brian Massumi (2002, p.23) extends this to describe affect as a pre-cognitive, embodied threshold: a way of knowing the world before thought has even arrived. In such a cosmos, experience is always vibrational, emerging through resonant encounters rather than fixed categories.

Crucially, these principles — desire, vibration, correspondence, rhythm — do not work in isolation. They form a co-emergent matrix in which each conditions and transforms the others. Desire animates becoming; rhythm organizes that becoming over time; correspondence encodes relational meaning across scales; vibration sustains their energetic unfolding. Taken together, these principles outline a reality that is not constructed from the top down, but self-organizes from within. This is a cosmos defined by relational attunement, rather than rule, hierarchy, or distant supervision.

### 3.3 ETHICAL IMPLICATIONS: RELATIONALITY, BECOMING, AND CARE

As discussed in Sections 2.1 and 2.2, these immanent frameworks decisively reject a sacred that is “elsewhere” or “above.” Instead, they reveal a sacred woven through the interdependent forces of ordinary life. In Hermetic gnosis, knowledge emerges by attuning to resonant correspondences. In Spinoza’s conatus, each being strives to persist and flourish. In Deleuze’s plane of immanence, difference itself becomes the ground of expression. In Braidotti’s posthuman ethics, subjectivity is continually shaped by multispecies entanglement. All of these share a commitment to locating the sacred in *relation* rather than transcendence.

Even **perception itself** becomes a site for encountering this sacred. Deleuze’s notion of the signal–sign system helps us see how meaning does not come from decoding a message from above, but from the resonance that happens when multiple layers of experience connect, producing a flash of awareness (Deleuze, 1994, p.222). Here, knowledge is no longer about discovering an external truth but about attuning to the intensities of a world already alive and expressive. Massumi’s idea of affective thresholds reinforces this, showing that the body feels its way into knowing before language can intervene. Ritual, in this context, is no longer a mere symbolic act but an epistemic practice: a way of participating in the world’s vibratory, affective logic.

These perspectives collectively push us to rethink knowledge, ethics, and spirituality not as separate realms but as interwoven practices. In such a cosmos, ethics is no longer about obedience to external commands, but about cultivating attentiveness and responsiveness to the world’s communicative patterns. As Braidotti (2019, p.36) argues, posthuman ethics asks us to listen to the signals of animals, technologies, and ecosystems — to expand the sphere of care beyond the human. These entities do not speak in language but in affective, vibrational codes that demand participation.

In this way, the sacred is no longer dependent on belief or doctrinal truth. It emerges through engagement — in rhythms, in movements, in gestures of care, in ecological entanglements. Knowledge, ethics, and spirituality become different registers of the same attuned participation in an immanent field of becoming. To live ethically in such a cosmos is to listen: to sense where the world vibrates, and to move with it.

### 3.4 RITUAL AS AN EPISTEMIC PRACTICE

Having articulated the ontological principles of an immanent cosmos, it is necessary to explore how knowing and ethical living unfold within this same frame. In traditions ranging from Hermetic mentalism to Spinoza's substance monism, knowledge is not a detached observation but a mode of participation, co-created through the dynamic interplay of mind, body, and world.

The Hermetic principle of Mentalism states “The All is Mind” (Three Initiates, 1908, p. 4), suggesting that perception and reality are entangled in a co-creative process. In this view, knowledge arises through resonance — a mental, affective, and energetic alignment with the rhythms of existence. Likewise, the Hermetic principle of Correspondence (“as above, so below”) frames knowledge as an ethical harmonization of the self with wider cosmic patterns, enacted through rituals that synchronize the body to those patterns.

Spinoza's theory of *scientia intuitiva* (Ethics, Part II, Prop. 40, Schol. 2) complements this. For Spinoza, the highest form of knowledge is intuitive, grasping our place within nature as a unified field. This is a knowledge that does not abstract, but embodies; it does not stand apart, but participates. It leads to freedom and joy through the recognition of our shared substance with all beings.

Deleuze builds on this idea by describing knowledge as an immanent force of becoming. On his “plane of consistency” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, pp. 3–25), thought is not a mirror of a stable reality, but an affective, material practice of world-making. Here, cognition emerges through intensities, differences, and affective flows rather than abstract representation. Brian Massumi (2002, pp. 25–35) extends this by describing “infra-empirical” knowing — pre-linguistic, bodily felt intensities that precede rational classification.

In this paradigm, ritual becomes a crucial epistemological method. As Victor Turner (1969) and Roy Rappaport (1999) suggest, ritual does not merely symbolize belief but actively reshapes experience, suspending ordinary categories to enable new states of knowing and relation. Drumming, chanting, dance, and breathwork align the human body with the vibratory field of the cosmos, operationalizing an intuition that is not passive reception but active resonance.

Epistemology, then, cannot be separated from ethics. If knowing is participatory, then so is ethical action. Deleuze's notion of increasing one's capacity to act (1988, pp. 50–72) and Spinoza's call to cultivate joy (*Ethics*, Part IV, Prop. 45) illustrate an ethics grounded in immanent engagement. To know well is to live well, and to live well is to be attuned to the relational flows that sustain life.

Rosi Braidotti (2013) expands this into an affirmative ethics of posthumanism. Ethics, in her terms, is not obedience to rules but the enhancement of life through sustainable, situated relations. Ecological rituals — water blessings, planting ceremonies, mourning practices — materialize this ethics by translating care into embodied responsibility. Through such practices, ethical living becomes an extension of participatory knowing.

In sum, within an immanent cosmos, epistemology and ethics emerge together as modes of embodied attunement. They cannot be separated: knowledge is already situated, affective, and ethical. Ritual, intuition, and everyday practices are not mere supplements to reason, but essential ways of knowing and caring in a world understood as vibratory, relational, and alive.

In the next chapter, we move from these philosophical foundations into their lived articulation: how rituals serve as technologies of attunement, creating contact with the sacred not through transcendence but through embodied, relational practice.

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## Chapter 4:

# RITUAL AS A TECHNOLOGY OF MEANING-MAKING

### 4.1 DEFINING RITUAL: FROM SUPERSITION TO PRACTICE

Building on Chapter 2's exploration of immanence, this chapter repositions ritual not as a mere practice of symbolism or dogma but as a technē of attunement—a dynamic, embodied practice that tunes the individual to the immanent forces of an evolving cosmos. Ritual, in this model, is understood as a participatory technology of meaning-making, one that attunes bodies, minds, and collectives to the relational flows of existence. Instead of viewing ritual as an external activity directed toward a transcendent reality, this chapter situates it as a deeply immanent engagement with the world's becoming, where the sacred is not external but emerges through embodied relationality.

Before I attempt to position ritual as a technē of attunement, it is essential to acknowledge that it may be difficult to fully operationalise this framework in practice. Firstly because the integration of Hermeticism, Spinoza, Deleuze, and Braidotti into ritual studies is, in itself, an ambitious and largely untested endeavor. Secondly, the theoretical richness of these concepts, while valuable, may be seen as an intellectual abstraction, not readily applicable to rituals as they function in diverse social and cultural contexts. This dissertation does not seek to resolve these tensions but offers a starting point for further exploration. In contrast to traditional approaches in ritual studies—often focused on static interpretations of ritual as symbolic acts or cultural residues (e.g., Turner, 1969; Bell, 1992)—this dissertation's approach highlights the transformative capacity of ritual, and provides a framework for exploring ritual's operations.

It asks not what ritual is, but what it does. How it activates, attunes, and transforms both individuals and collectives. The Foucauldian notion of technologies of the self (1988) serves as a critical anchor here, where ritual is seen as a disciplinary practice that shapes the embodied subject, fostering new ways of inhabiting, knowing, and responding to the world.

**MERLEAU-PONTY**

**Posthuman Assemblages**  
*A network of human and non-human actors coexisting in a dynamic and interdependent system of relations.*

**Lived Experience**  
*Understanding arises through engagement with the world in the body.*

**Embodiment**  
*Knowledge is rooted in bodily experience and perception.*

**Third Kind of Knowledge**  
*intuitive knowledge, the highest form of understanding, where knowledge arises from direct experience and embodied intuition.*

**BRAIDOTTI**

**Nomadic Subjectivity**  
*Identity is fluid, non-fixed, and ever-evolving.*

**Posthuman Ethics**  
*Emphasis on relational and interconnected existence beyond human-centered frameworks.*

**Ethics of Becoming**  
*Continuous transformation and becoming through relationality.*

**Perception**  
*The body is the primary site of knowing.*

**Vitalism**  
*The world is intrinsically vital*

**SPINOZA**

**Intuitive Knowledge**  
*Understanding emerges through direct, embodied experience.*

**Monism**  
*Everything is one substance, interconnected.*

**Deus sive Natura**  
*God is Nature, and Nature is God.*

**Conatus**  
*The striving or effort of every being to persist in its own mode of existence.*

**Desire**  
*Not as a lack, but as a productive force*

**Immanence**  
*Reality emerges from relational flows and connections, not hierarchies.*

**Parallelism**  
*the order of ideas corresponds directly to the order of things in nature.*

**DELEUZE & GUATTARI**

**Becoming**  
*Identity is never fixed; it is always in a state of becoming.*

**Affect**  
*Emotional responses that precede language and cognition.*

**Actor-Network Theory**  
*Reality is co-created by both human and non-human actors.*

**RITUAL AS TECHNOLOGY**

**MASSUMI**

**Intensity**  
*The powerful, pre-discursive feeling or energy that shapes experiences.*

**LATOUR**

**Gaia Theory**  
*The Earth is a living, interconnected ecological network.*

**Intra-action**  
*Matter and meaning are co-constituted through relational entanglement.*

**Vibrant Matter**  
*Matter itself has agency and is active in shaping meaning and reality.*

**IMMANENCE**  
*The sacred as part of the world, not as 'above it'.*

**Gnosis**  
*A term that refers to esoteric knowledge or deep, embodied wisdom that arises through direct experience or spiritual revelation.*

**BARAD**

**Relational Ontology:**  
*Understanding reality as entangled, not separate.*

**FOUCAULT**

**As Above, So Below**  
*The macrocosm and microcosms are interconnected and mirror one another.*

**Self-creation**  
*The active process of creating the self through ritualized practices.*

**HERMETICISM**

**Technologies of the Self**  
*Practices that shape subjectivity and personal transformation.*

**The All is All**  
*Divinity or cosmic intelligence is not separate from the material world*

**Attention and Grace**  
*Attention allows for spiritual engagement and meaning-making, aligning human consciousness with the divine.*

**WEIL**

## 4.2 RITUAL AS TECHNE OF ATTUNEMENT

As I have demonstrated, this reconceptualisation of ritual is grounded in Hermetic, Spinozan, Deleuzian, and Braidottian frameworks, all of which affirm immanence, relationality and the transformative power of these sacred experiences. In these systems, ritual is seen as a mode of active participation in the sacred—one that transforms not only individual subjects but the world itself, turning ritual into a creative, world-making process that constructs new realities.

To understand ritual as a *technē* of attunement, we must consider its role as both generative and participatory. Ritual is not simply a performance or a symbolic act that conveys pre-given meaning. It is, instead, a creative act of world-making, where meaning is generated through action—embodied action that attunes the practitioner to the immanent vibrations of reality. This move aligns with Deleuze's (1990) flux ontology, where meaning emerges dynamically from relational forces rather than from an external, authoritative source. Ritual thus operates as a site of ontological engagement, where the practitioner's relationship with the world is co-created through the rhythms, gestures, and affects involved in the practice.

In proposing ritual as a *technē* of attunement, I draw upon Hermeticism's concept of sympathy—the idea that all things in the cosmos are in dynamic resonance with each other. This idea is echoed in Spinoza's monistic vision of a single substance (*Deus sive Natura*), where all beings, objects, and forces are expressions of the same immanent reality. Ritual, in this framework, is a means of attuning to the vibrational intensity of these forces, aligning oneself with the relational flows of life.

In line with Braidotti's (2013) posthuman ethics, ritual attunement also includes an ethical dimension, where the practitioner learns to relate not only to other humans but also to the non-human and more-than-human world. Ritual thus becomes a method of ethical attunement, allowing individuals to engage deeply with the ecological and affective fabric of existence, fostering solidarity and collective transformation.

Ritual should not be seen as merely reflective or mimetic. It is a generative process—one that creates new ways of relating to the world and each other. This generative power aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of becoming, where subjectivity is not static but is constantly in the process of transformation. Ritual is thus a space of ontological flux, a field where new relational formations are produced through embodied interaction.

### 4.3 THE SIX OPERATIONS OF RITUAL

Building on the active, generative model of ritual, I propose a six-operation framework for understanding how this reimagining of ritual could be seen to attune and transform. These operations are interdependent and overlap in complex, non-linear ways, creating a dynamic field of ontological and affective engagement. They represent the core modalities through which ritual creates meaning and transformation. These operations do not form a checklist or a universal typology. Rather, they act as overlapping vectors — partial, co-implicated tendencies — through which ritual exerts its transformative force. These six are:

- Embodied Practice
- Situated Structure
- Technē of Attunement
- Ontological Contact
- Pre-Discursive Affectivity
- World-Making Practice

Taken together, these operations outline a *grammar of ritual's technicity*: they are the conditions of possibility through which ritual resonates, acts, and composes. As with language, these operations do not dictate content; they sustain a communicative and relational flow between body, world, and meaning. Alternatively, they might be likened to the *physics of music*: setting the resonant field through which specific melodies of sense, relation, and transformation can arise.

The six operations presented here are meant to provide a framework for understanding how ritual operates as a dynamic, generative process. However, these operations are not intended to serve as a universal typology. They function as interrelated vectors that overlap in various rituals but are by no means exhaustive.

Ritual's variability, depending on context, tradition, and the specific subjectivity of participants, means that these six operations cannot account for every form of ritual. Moreover, the risk of over-theorising these operations may obscure the embodied, lived experiences that ritual represents in everyday practice. Future research will likely need to address this risk through fieldwork, ethnographic studies, and interviews with practitioners.”

#### 4.3.1. Embodied Practice

The first operation, embodied practice, is rooted in Merleau-Ponty's (1945) phenomenology, where the body is seen as the primary medium of experience. Ritual intensifies this relationship, grounding knowing in sensory experience and perceptual attunement. As Spinoza's concept of *scientia intuitiva* suggests, knowledge is embodied and intuitive, arising not from abstract reasoning but from direct, lived experience. This is exemplified in practices like Sufi whirling, where the body becomes the primary vehicle for attuning to the divine. The movement, rhythm, and embodied flow in such rituals bypass intellectual abstraction and foster a direct, visceral encounter with the sacred.

#### 4.3.2. Situated Structure

The second operation, situated structure, draws from Braidotti's (2013) notion of nomadic subjectivity, where the self is emergent and shaped by shifting conditions. Ritual structures are not rigid but adaptive and responsive to the context in which they occur. This is aligned with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of order without hierarchy, where ritual's form is contingent on its context and emergent conditions. Protest rituals, for instance, transform public spaces into sites of social experimentation, breaking open possibilities for new relational configurations that challenge entrenched power structures.

#### 4.3.3. Technē of Attunement

Ritual as a *technē* of attunement refers to the craft of aligning the body, mind, and affect with the forces of the world. Drawing on Deleuze's (1990) theory of intensity and Braidotti's (2013) posthuman ethics, attunement is not a passive process but a skilled engagement with the relational forces that animate the world. Ritual practices like land-based ceremonies facilitate this attunement, allowing participants to feel deeply connected to the affective presence of the earth. These practices underscore the affective relationality of the world, enabling participants to engage with their environments in a reciprocal, ethically charged way.

RITUAL OPERATION	THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK	DESCRIPTION	EXAMPLE
Embodied Practice	Merleau-Ponty (phenomenology of embodiment) Spinoza (scientia intuitiva)	Rituals that ground knowledge in bodily experience, where the body serves as a primary site of knowing, connecting directly to the immanent sacred.	Sufi whirling as a method of embodying the connection to the divine, or nature immersion practices to intuitively feel the interconnection with nature.
Situated Structure	Braidotti (nomadic subjectivity, posthuman ethics)	Ritual structures that are emergent, fluid, and responsive to shifting contexts, enabling the creation of new relational and subject positions in response to changing environments.	Protest rituals that reframe spaces as sites of social transformation, or nomadic practices that adapt to political and ecological shifts.
Techne of Attunement	Braidotti (posthuman ethics), Deleuze (affect theory)	Attuning to relational and affective forces that connect bodies and the world, fostering a sense of interconnectedness.	Land-based ceremonies that attune participants to the affective presence of the earth, or ecological rituals that connect bodies with the environment.
Ontological Contact	Spinoza (monism, Deus sive Natura) Deleuze & Guattari (plane of immanence)	Rituals that create direct encounters with the sacred through the embodiment of interconnection, recognizing the sacred within the immanent world.	Compost ceremonies, where the process of returning to the earth embodies the recognition that life and death are immanently connected in an ongoing cycle.
Pre-discursive Affectivity	Massumi (affect theory), Deleuze (intensity)	Rituals that engage with affective intensities before they are conceptualized or named, fostering a direct connection with emotions and sensations.	Climate vigils that foster collective grief through non-verbal expressions like silence and shared emotional experiences.
World-making Practice	Deleuze (becoming), Braidotti (posthuman ethics)	Rituals that create new realities, actively engaging with becoming, where individuals and collectives co-create new social, ethical, and ontological formations.	Queer nightlife, as a space for performance and world-building, where norms are actively reimagined and new forms of relationality are enacted.

*Figure 4.1: The Six Operations of Ritual in an Immanent Cosmology*

#### **4.4.4. Ontological Contact**

Ritual offers ontological contact—a direct, embodied encounter with the sacred, grounded in Spinoza’s monism and Deleuze and Guattari’s (1994) plane of immanence. Ritual does not represent the sacred but facilitates a direct encounter with it. This is exemplified in practices like compost ceremonies, where participants return to the earth, embodying the sacredness of life and death. These practices highlight the interconnectedness of all things, where ritual is not a means of escaping the world but of deeply engaging with its materiality and vibrational forces.

#### **4.4.5. Pre-discursive Affectivity**

In pre-discursive affectivity, ritual engages with the affective intensities that precede symbolization or conceptualization. This operation recognizes that ritual has the power to evoke powerful emotions and sensations before they are even conceptualized. Climate vigils, for example, activate collective grief and mourning through non-verbal expressions like silence, ritualized gestures, and shared emotional experiences. These rituals bypass the cognitive and instead engage the pre-linguistic affective realm, attuning participants to the ecological crisis on a visceral, embodied level.

#### **4.4.6. World-Making Practice**

Finally, ritual is a world-making practice, where new realities are generated through the performance of the ritual itself. Drawing from Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) philosophy of becoming, rituals are seen not as representations of pre-existing meaning but as creators of new forms of subjectivity, social interaction, and ethical engagement. In spaces like queer nightlife, rituals perform new worlds, reimagining social norms, gender roles, and forms of relationality. These world-making rituals are powerful sites of cultural transformation, offering new ways to imagine and engage with the social order.

#### 4.4 SUMMARY: RITUAL AS A LINE OF FLIGHT

In advancing this model of the six operations, I argue that ritual is not a static performance but a dynamic, participatory technology of meaning-making. Ritual functions as a radical operative philosophy, where meaning, ethics, and ontology are co-created through embodied, affective practices. Through the embodied enactment of ritual, individuals and collectives actively participate in the world's becoming, reshaping the conditions of meaning in a fragmented world.

Ritual, in this light, becomes a technological practice for reattuning individuals to the world's relational, affective vibrations, thereby reintroducing the sacred as not something above but deeply embedded in the world's materiality and relationality.

As I stated, there are still important limitations to this model, and this dissertation's emphasis on ritual's creative capacity should not obscure the social, cultural, and political functions rituals often serve in community life. This important limitation underscores the preliminary nature of the model, and though grounded in immanent philosophy, this model remains open for further development, encouraging new ways of thinking about the role of ritual in meaning-making within the immanent frame.

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## Chapter 5:

# CASE STUDIES

### 5.1 INTRODUCTON TO CASE STUDIES

As I have demonstrated in the previous chapter, to speak of ritual is to speak of a paradox: a structured form that dissolves structure, a repetition that invents, a performance that unmakes the performer. The case studies in this chapter are not merely examples—they are *ruptures*, openings into a world where the sacred is not above but within, not beyond but between. If ritual has traditionally been understood as a vessel for transcendent meaning, this dissertation argues instead that it is a *technology of immanent attunement*—a way of touching the world’s aliveness, of feeling the pulse of what Jane Bennett (2010) calls *vibrant matter*.

Tara Isabella Burton (2020) observes that modern secular rituals—from CrossFit to skincare routines—fulfill the same existential hungers as religious rites: meaning, belonging, transformation. But what if we go further? What if ritual is not just a substitute for religion but a *re-enchantment of the real*? The six operations of ritual (Chapter 4) propose that ritual is not a script but a *live wire*—a dynamic process that generates new ways of being in the world. With the following case studies, I will apply these six operations of ritual to contemporary meaning-making practices, and like the preacher father at the very beginning of this dissertation, hopefully, successfully argue that the sacred is, indeed, in the ketchup bottle.

As the practices I am highlighting are mostly not viewed as rituals by the enactors, I am in part, respectfully, appropriating them. I do not wish to make these practices into something they are not meant to be, but instead offer new language to their already felt significance. To classify a practice as ritual within this framework is to recognise it as:

1. **A Transformative Conduit** — Ritual does not represent change; it *is* change. Like a chemical reaction, it alters the composition of its participants, leaving them no longer as they were. This is not metaphor but *metamorphosis*—an alchemy of perception, body, and relationality
2. **An Attunement to Immanent Forces** — Ritual is not a petition to the divine; it is a *tuning fork* struck against the world, resonating with the frequencies of an immanent sacred. Think of it as echolocation: a way of sensing the unseen currents that move through matter, life, and social flesh.

3. **A Crucible for Relational Becoming** — Ritual is where subjectivity *liquefies*. It is the space between "I" and "we," between human and non-human, where new ways of being together are forged in the unfolding of a collective experiment.

4. **Embodied Epistemology** — Ritual knows through the body. Not the Cartesian body-as-machine, but the body as *porous membrane*, a site where the world's forces enter and exit, where knowledge is not held but *developed*.

5. **An Open System** — Ritual resists codification. It is a *living algorithm*, adapting in real-time to the needs of its ecosystem. Like mycelium, it thrives in connection, mutating as it spreads.

The following case studies are not passive illustrations but *active proofs*—evidence that ritual, as redefined here, is already at work in the world, bending reality toward new possibilities.



*Roots of Play - [www.rootsofplay.com](http://www.rootsofplay.com)*

## 5.2 EMBODIED PRACTICE - ROOTS OF PLAY

Roots of Play, a UK-based collective, offers nature-immersive workshops that combine somatic movement, parkour, martial arts, improvisational dance, and most importantly, play, into an embodied pedagogical framework. Their practices mostly take place in natural settings—riverbanks, forests, cliffs—where the land itself becomes an active co-participant rather than a passive backdrop. This setting illustrates the first operation of ritual: embodied practice.

Roots of Play does not merely use the landscape; it converses with it. When bodies scramble over rocks, leap between trees, or press palms into damp earth, they are not moving on the land but with it—a dialogue of muscle, gravity, and wind. This is ritual as embodied cartography, a way of mapping the world not with lines but with motion.

Merleau-Ponty (1945) called the body our "first and last instrument of understanding," but Roots of Play takes this further: the body is not just a tool but a medium of mutual inscription. The land writes itself into the body's reflexes; the body writes its presence into the land's memory. This is Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva* enacted at the speed of a falling branch—knowledge that arrives not through reason but through collision.

Through movement, breath, proprioception, and sensory engagement with the environment, participants enter into a deeper relationship with the world around them. The practices they engage in—whether climbing trees, jumping over obstacles, or engaging in collaborative movement—become a means to attune the body to the rhythms of nature and to the sacred immanence of the material world.

By rejecting the commodified "wellness" paradigm—where nature is a backdrop for self-optimisation—Roots of Play restores ritual's danger. The sacred here is not comfort but contact, a raw encounter with a world that has the ability to bite back.

### 5.3 SITUATED STRUCTURE - LABOFII

The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Labofii), founded in the UK in 2007, merges political action, ecological ritual, and participatory art into a radical, improvisational form of world-making. Their interventions—ranging from urban occupations to forest trainings—do not follow predetermined scripts. Instead, they emerge as what Deleuze (1990) would call events: ruptures that create new subjectivities and relational possibilities.

The Laboratory of Insurrectionary Imagination (Labofii) does not stage protests; it composes liturgies for a world still unborn. Their actions—forest encampments, occupied plazas, pirate radio broadcasts—are not demands but rehearsals, speculative rituals for futures still in beta to which they offer a situated structure.

Labofii's ritual logic aligns with Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of "order without hierarchy", where structure is not rigid but emergent, flexible, and adaptive to the context. Each action is framed, but never fixed. It allows a choreography of collective improvisation in response to the environment—whether that environment is a city square, a protest space, or a forest. This fluid, responsive quality means that Labofii's rituals are deeply situated, attuned to specific political, ecological, and social contexts. Where Deleuze (1990) saw the "event" as a tear in the fabric of the ordinary; Labofii stitches these tears into temporary autonomous zones (Bey, 1991) where time bends and power falters. A protest becomes a sacrament of disobedience; a barricade, an altar to collective courage. Foucault's heterotopia is too static—this is heterotopia unfolding, a space where the rules are not suspended but rewritten mid-ritual.

Labofii's impact lies in its improvisational rigor that composes these situated structures. Like jazz musicians attuned to each other's breaths, participants co-create structure in real-time, proving that ritual is not a script but a live current.



## 5.4 TECHNE OF ATTUNEMENT - REIKI

Reiki is often dismissed as “another New Age practice”, but frame it as *diplomatic negotiations with the unseen*, and its ritual potency sharpens. The practitioner is not a healer but an *ambassador*, mediating between the recipient’s body and the swirling *ki* (life force) that Satprem (1970) called “the intelligence of the cells.”

Reiki is a Japanese energy healing system developed by Mikao Usui in the early 20th century, and exemplifies the *technē* of attunement—a practice dedicated to the fine-tuning of one’s sensitivity to energetic forces, or, in line with this dissertation’s focus, the immanent plane. Reiki rituals are grounded in the belief that the practitioner can channel universal life force energy, known as “ki,” through their own energetic system, into the body of the recipient to facilitate healing, balance, and overall well-being. The focus of Reiki is not just on the mental or cognitive aspects of healing but on a deeply embodied, affective practice that fine-tunes both practitioner and recipient to the energetic dynamics present in and around the body, aligning them with a felt, immanent sacred, that is said to be present in all of life, in line with Foucault’s (1988) concept of “technologies of the self”.

Massumi’s (2002) *attunement* is key here: Reiki is less about “fixing” than *tuning*—aligning the body’s frequencies with the hum of the immanent. Through deliberate touch or non-contact techniques, Reiki practitioners guide and manipulate the flow of energy, essentially attuning themselves and the recipient to the rhythms of the immanent world. This resonance with “ki,” or life force, links Reiki to Massumi’s (2002) notion of attunement, where both the healer and recipient engage with an affective, energetic intensity that is not fully conceptualised but experienced directly in the body. The hands hover not as tools but as *antennae*, picking up signals from a world alive with invisible chatter. Reiki challenges the Western mind-body split by treating energy as *material*, blurring the line between metaphor and physics. The ritual is the *technē* of listening to what the body already knows.

## 5.5 ONTOLOGICAL CONTACT - COMPOST CEREMONIES

To compost is to *collaborate with decay*. Children of the Compost doesn’t ritualise death; it *lets death ritualise us*, folding our bodies into its dark, fecund logic. This is Bennett’s *vibrant matter* in action: the sacred is not in spite of rot but *because of it*.

The Children of the Compost project, a speculative community featured in the *Camille Stories*, extends these themes by imagining a future where humans and non-human entities, such as monarch butterflies, form symbiotic relationships for mutual survival. This multispecies collaboration centres on environmental justice, fostering radical healing and ecological restoration through interdependent relationships with the earth. These communities are based on the cultivation of mutual care, reciprocity, and the recognition of interconnectedness as foundational to survival in a rapidly changing world.

Compost ceremonies provide a transformative engagement with the sacred through the processes of death, decay, and rebirth. These practices reconceptualise decomposition not simply as a biological event but as an ontological contact with the sacred. They reject the separation of life and death, recognising the sacredness embedded in the materiality of existence. Composting thus becomes more than returning organic matter to the earth; it participates in the cycles of interrelation and transformation that sustain life.

Drawing on Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva* (1677), compost rituals are framed as practices of embodied participation that reveal the immanence of the sacred in decay and renewal. These ceremonies align with Jane Bennett's (2010) concept of vibrant matter, where the material world is seen as an agentic participant in the sacred process. Composting rituals emphasise that the earth is not passive; it is alive, responsive, and intertwined with the cycles of life and death.

The radical nature of Children of the Compost lies in its speculative approach, imagining a future where human communities interact with non-human entities to heal the earth and reframe our understanding of life and death. These compost ceremonies are not merely symbolic rituals but practices of relational becoming, prompting us to reconsider the ontological relationships between humans, non-humans, and the planet. Through these rituals, participants directly engage with the immanent sacred, recognising death and decay as necessary stages in the continuous cycle of life. By framing decay as sacred labor, compost ceremonies dissolve the hierarchy of life/death, positioning humans as participants in, not masters of, ecological cycles.

## **5.6 PRE-DISCURSIVE AFFECTIVITY - COUNCIL OF NON-HUMAN BEINGS**

The Council of Non-Human Beings, led by Dr. Sechaba Maape, offers a profound ritual that redefines the relationship between humans and the land. Grounded in Maape's Setswana-speaking community's belief that the landscape is a living entity—specifically a great water snake—this project challenges Western conceptions of the earth as passive. Instead, it views the land as a vital, sentient being deserving of reverence and dialogue. Dr. Sechaba Maape's work is not "animism" but radical receptivity—an architecture of listening. If the land is a great water snake (as his Setswana tradition holds), then ritual is the art of hearing its whispers.

Maape's work draws on Negritude thinkers, especially Leopold Senghor's notion of the vital force, blending indigenous knowledge with contemporary influences like Ama-Piano music and South African urban culture. His Kuru-mytho-futurism challenges conventional architectural practice by proposing a relational, multi-species approach to design. The Council becomes a ritual space where human and non-human beings collaborate, creating a new architecture of mutual care and ecological justice. Negritude's vital force (Senghor) merges with Ama-Piano's rhythms to create a sonic ritual, where buildings are not constructed but grown in dialogue with the earth. This is Kuru-mytho-futurism: a way of designing that treats the non-human as co-author.

The Council reframes ritual as interspecies diplomacy, where humans are not speakers but scribes of pre-discursive affectivity, transcribing the desires of rivers, stones, and soil.

## **5.6 WORLD-MAKING PRACTICE - QUEER NIGHTLIFE**

Excalibur XO, created by Bompas & Parr during London Cocktail Week 2022, exemplifies ritual as world-making, blending queer culture, luxury, and historical references into a unique, immersive experience. This event, centred around the world's first super-premium poppers, reimagines the boundaries between queer celebration and public joy. Hosted at The Standard Hotel, it offered a dynamic evening of performance, conversation, and bespoke cocktails, celebrating sex positivity, queer innovation, and historical defiance.

Bompas & Parr's Excalibur XO is not a party but a counter-liturgy. By elevating poppers (amyl nitrite) to the status of sacramental incense, they perform a sacrilegious consecration, turning queer pleasure into a ritual of sacred defiance.

The event was rooted in the historical context of Karl Heinrich Ulrichs' 1868 speech, considered the first gay rights protest, with the product name, Excalibur XO, a tribute to his legacy. Bompas & Parr's fusion of medieval armory aesthetics, pop culture references, and contemporary luxury defined a world in which the ceremonial use of poppers—long part of queer culture—became an elevated, celebratory experience.

This is a prime example of ritual as world-making practice, where the event's design, from curated media artworks to the Nostril Nostalgia station, facilitated a reimagining of queer culture through embodied experience. Here, ritual was not simply about symbolic gestures but the active creation of a living, evolving world through collective participation and sensory engagement. Through Excalibur XO, Bompas & Parr transformed a cultural product into a space for relational becoming, offering a vision of queer existence that is celebratory, transformative, and continually in flux.

The event's impact lies in its temporal layering: 1868 (Ulrichs' protest), 1980s AIDS activism, and 2022 collapse into a single eternal now. This is ritual as time travel, collapsing history into a sensual present, that can be consumed as an exquisite cocktail. Excalibur XO proves that ritual need not be solemn to be sacred. Ecstasy, too, is a way of knowing.

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## Chapter 6:

# CONCLUSION

Throughout this dissertation, I have argued for a radical repositioning of ritual: not as the residue of archaic traditions, nor as a symbolic placeholder for lost transcendence, but as a contemporary, vital, and ontological technology. By reframing ritual as a practice of immanence, I have demonstrated that it is not concerned with reaching toward a distant sacred, but with intensifying contact with a world already suffused with significance.

I have drawn from Spinoza's *scientia intuitiva*, Deleuze's plane of immanence, Hermetic mentalism, and Braidotti's affirmative ethics to reveal how ritual functions as an embodied, affective, and relational practice. In doing so, I position ritual as a *technē* of attunement: a disciplined, situated, and generative mode of encountering the world. Ritual, in this view, is not a static representation of meaning but a living practice that enacts, amplifies, and recalibrates it.

This approach contests the separation of epistemology, ethics, and ontology. Through ritual, I contend, knowing is inseparable from becoming, and becoming is inseparable from care. Ritual is a site where truth is neither universal nor abstract, but affectively and relationally negotiated — what Foucault might call a “truth game,” an open but disciplined structure where subjects are formed and transformed.

I have advanced the argument that ritual operates through six interwoven mechanisms: embodied practice, situated structure, *technē* of attunement, ontological contact, pre-discursive affectivity, and world-making practice. These operations do not function as rigid checklists, but as fluid conditions of possibility — akin to the physics of music or the grammar of a living language. They sustain ritual's capacity to work on bodies, relations, and worlds, transforming not merely what is believed, but how life is lived.

Through the case studies — from *Roots of Play* to compost burials, from queer nightlife to climate vigils — I have illustrated that contemporary rituals remain neither hollow nor nostalgic. Instead, they stand as fierce and tender practices of world-making, refusing to separate the sacred from the immanent, the aesthetic from the political, or the ethical from the affective.

If there is one through-line in these diverse rituals, it is the courage to stay with the trouble, as Haraway (2016) writes: to dwell with complexity, to remain in tension, and to open a practice of presence rather than a fantasy of transcendence. Ritual presses against reality until it presses back. It is the site where the sacred becomes perceptible: in the friction of the body, in the rhythms of collective care, in the shimmer of the moment when what *is* briefly yields to what *could be*.

In an era marked by ecological devastation, algorithmic abstraction, and social fragmentation, this matters. Ritual, I argue, is neither superstition nor empty repetition, but a generative practice through which humans co-create the conditions of meaning, ethics, and belonging. It is a way of *inhabiting* the sacred, not chasing it.

I want to leave the reader with this final provocation: perhaps ritual is how logic remembers its origins — in breath, in gesture, in resonance. Perhaps ritual is how the world, through us, reminds itself that it is alive.

In this, I locate the profound potential of ritual today: to re-enchant the everyday, to attune us to a cosmos already vibrant, already relational, already sacred.

Ritual is not an escape from the world. It is how I return to it.

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