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Immanence

The striking feature is . . . how *empirical* these spirits are, how they seem to appear as very concrete, observable objects *in* the world, rather than ways of talking *about* the world.

—BARTH 1975, 129 (EMPHASIS ORIGINAL)

THE NORWEGIAN SOCIAL anthropologist Fredrik Barth's surprise at "how empirical the spirits are" was a concluding musing on various encounters people had with spirits during the eleven months he lived with Baktaman in 1968. Baktaman are a small group of Mountain Ok or Min people in central Papua New Guinea, a population of 183 in Barth's time, that had to contend especially with illnesses inflicted by *sabkār*, dead people. "In the course of my less than a year with the Baktaman, a number of persons suffered sporadically from having been entered by a *sabkār* who was slowly eating away their flesh" (Barth 1975, 127). Barth tells of a man who visited the land of the dead at this time. While hunting in the forest, he was carried away by a *sabkār* to the village of the dead where he witnessed a seventh-degree initiation (the highest stage ritual of the Baktaman men's cult) before returning home the next day. Then there was a young woman who disappeared for four days before miraculously reappearing from a sago palm people were harvesting. It was concluded she had been carried off by a *sabkār*, "as is known to occur not infrequently. . . . There was no evidence of doubt in anybody's

mind that these were indeed the concrete, literal circumstances of the case" (128). Beside the spirits of the dead, Barth speaks of two other kinds of malicious spirits in this context, apparently spirits of living people: one, strangers who at night lurk invisibly at the edge of the village and shoot men with magical arrows when they leave their house in the morning to urinate, upon which the men fall and are dead by the next night; and another, small invisible dwarfs, sometimes said to be souls of men from one's own village, who in groups of five attack men in the forest, and if not fought off inflict wounds that cause death in two or three days. The latter spirits "are often observed fleetingly in the forest, and sudden illness elicits discussions of them" (129).

Barth makes a general comment about the ethnography of such incidents to which I can largely subscribe, the functionalism apart, as it is pertinent to the discussions of spirits throughout this book. Essentially, it is what I shall call spirit-power thinking, following native North American usage. To consider the Baktaman experiences with spirits as fantasies, he writes, "would prevent us from asking the more useful question of how they serve the Baktaman as conceptual tools—what they enable a Baktaman to think, feel, and understand. . . . We should ask . . . how they make a person grasp aspects of his life situation and reality, and what consequences they have for the form which a person's reality takes" (123). This is what the people see and understand, the culture, and their *verum*.

Studying a related people, Australian anthropologist Donald Gardner (1987) cites Barth's observation on "how empirical the spirits are" and confirms it:

Among the Mianmin, too, spirits of one kind or another, are a basic feature of daily life. Events construed as involving "supernatural" beings are commonly reported and discussed. . . . But if we ask simply about beliefs in spirits, posing the question in terms of the categorical distinction between the natural and the supernatural, then we shall have carved out an artificial field for the investigation. For, it is well known, and perhaps no more than a truism, that animistic metaphysical schemes are characterized by an absence of the natural/supernatural

distinction. The crucial aspect of such schemes is the all-pervasiveness of [metapersonal] agency as a principle of the functioning of the world and in explanation of events of all kinds. This . . . amounts to a statement of the basic (metaphysical) principles of those who live in what Weber called an “enchanted world.” (161–62)

In an enchanted universe, the natural/supernatural distinction becomes meaningless. Many of its denizens are not only the all-pervasive, unseen agents of the events of this world, they often make themselves visible in its phenomenal forms, as all kinds of animals and notably as humans, to enter into people’s daily lives in all kinds of ways. But then, humans are spirits too. Composed of a physical body activated by an invisible “soul,” human persons are the same in constitution as embodied metapersons. By their own unseen powers of intellection and volition, moreover, by these attributes of their inner life, people are able to interact socially with the spirits: in dreams most commonly, where the interlocutors of human dreamers are thus as “real” as they are. By the same metaphysical powers, people—not only shamans but ordinary people—have been known to visit and live with spirit-peoples in their homelands under the water, under the earth, or in the sky. People even marry spirits and have children by them. All that and more being the ways of “how empirical the spirits are,” the familiar opposition of natural and supernatural is foreign to the constitution of the enchanted universe. It is ontologically out of place. It belongs in the transcendental universe.

Rectification of the Categories

The Achuar [Upper Amazonia] do not see the supernatural as a level of reality separate from nature, for all of nature’s beings have some features in common with mankind, and the laws they go by are more or less the same as those governing civil society. Humans and most plants, animals, and meteors are persons (*aents*) with a soul (*wakan*) and an individual life. (Descola 1994, 93)

[I]t is worth trying to evoke again the phenomenological realities of this world in which the living and the dead are co-participants in

everyday life. A substantial proportion of the conversations that take place in a Kwaio settlement [Solomon Islands] are not between living humans but between the living and the dead. . . . This is not a world where ancestral shades are remote presences, creations of theological imagination. They are part of the daily social life of Kwaio communities. (Keesing 1982, 112–13)

Within the single world known to them (for they dwell little upon fancies of any “other world” of different constitution), the Dinka [East Africa] claim that they encounter “spirits” of various kinds, which they call generally *jok*. . . . These Powers are regarded as higher in the scale of being than men and other merely terrestrial creatures, and operate beyond the categories of space and time which limit human actions; but they are not imagined to form a separate “spirit world” of their own, and their interest for Dinka is as ultra-human forces participating in human life and often affecting men for good or ill. . . . I have not found it useful to adopt the distinction between “natural” and “supernatural” beings or events in order to describe the difference between men and Powers, for this distinction implies a conception of the course or laws of Nature quite foreign to Dinka thought. (Lienhardt 1961, 28)

To join the awakening ethnographic chorus: the distinction between “natural” and “supernatural” is not receivable in cultures where ancestors, gods, the *inua* or spirits of things, and other such metapersons are immanent presences in human lives. What perhaps needs emphasis here is where that distinction comes from, where it is ontologically appropriate. The differentiation of a “supernatural” realm from an earthly “nature” refers to the kind of world that the Christian God made of “nothing”: a world devoid of other-than-human subjects, that accordingly works by its own inherent laws and forces—physical, chemical, biological, meteorological, and so on. “Nature” is part of the ongoing capture by transcendentalism in the world, what is left on earth by the translation of the Deity & Company (angels, saints, the deceased human elect) to a supernatural “other world.” The cultures of immanence, enspirited cultures, know only one world in which people interact with the myriad of

nonhuman subjects, from the deities to the dead. These species of meta-persons may have their own habitats, from the heavens to under the ground or the sea, but they are co-present, visibly or invisibly, with human beings in the one great cosmic polity. There is no “other world.”

In a brilliant essay on the issues raised by translations of traditional African thought into Western categories, Nigerian philosopher Kwasi Wiredu (1992) explains that the notion of “supernatural” is not African precisely because it is not empirical. Wiredu speaks of Akan groups of southern Ghana more particularly, but he takes their cosmological concepts as typical of many African cultures. Here is the complement to Barth’s surprise at “how empirical the spirits are” in the life of Baktaman: namely, how implausible is the notion of “supernatural” for Akan people, since unlike the empirical “spirits,” what is “supernatural” is not phenomenal—indeed, unlike the spirits, it is not material. The empirical is not the transcendental. On the contrary, Wiredu points out, “not even Onyame (‘God’) is supposed to exist outside the world. That would be a veritable contradiction in Akan terms. To exist is to be *there* (‘*wɔhɔ*’), and existence is the being there of something (‘*sɔ bribi wɔ hɔ*’). To exist outside the world would mean to be *there* but not at any place, an idea lacking in coherence” (325). *Immanence is a quality of being*. Being is being there, and being there is being here. Wiredu’s philosophical insight is golden, including in the Vichean sense that he reveals the essential mentality of immanentism: how it is that the dead, the ancestors, the demons, and other denizens of the enchanted universe are, for humans, present and “real.”

Wiredu’s general observations on Akan spirit-concepts can be understood as sequitur to the premise that being is being there. “The intellectual orientation of the Akan is empirical,” he writes. And yet,

this does not mean that the metaphysical bent is absent from their thinking. It does not mean, furthermore, that they are unused to thinking with concepts of the highest abstraction. What it means is only that they do not employ in their thinking certain kinds of abstract concepts, namely, those that cannot be defined in terms deriving from human experience. Now, quite clearly the concept of the

“supernatural” goes beyond the world of human experience. It envisages a world over and above this world. By no manner of deduction, extrapolation, or imaginative projection could one arrive at such a concept from empirical beginnings. . . . Of a piece with this also i[s] the absence of any conceptual cleavage between the spiritual and the physical. [The Kenyan Anglican theologian-philosopher] Mbiti observes, speaking of African thought generally, that within it “no line is drawn between the spiritual and the physical.” (324–25)

Africans and others whose worlds are populated by “spirits” are commonly supposed to be “mystical”—that is, by Westerners operating on their own distinctions of the spiritual and the physical or the supernatural and the natural, their own transcendental suppositions. The irony is that these peoples are all-around, complete, world-constituting empiricists. Rather than “superstitious,” “deluded,” or otherwise taken in by wishful fantasies, their enchantments are effects of a sustained and radical empiricism. *Being is being there* is a basic epistemological premise of the enchanted universe.

As imported from our own transcendentalist ontology, the depiction of African “religion” and similar cosmologies in terms of a natural/supernatural opposition is a kind of ethnographic original sin. Yet it is only one of a series of related categorical distinctions that have for too long and too often corrupted the ethnographies of enspirited societies: including spiritual and material, nature and culture, subject and object, reality and belief. Based on the assumption of a divine other world apart from the human world—where “religion” is superstructural and “spirits” are immaterial—what these distinctions commonly ignore is the cosmic subjectivity of the immanentist cultures they purport to so describe. They ignore cultural worlds where “subjectivity, not physicality, is the common ground of existence . . . a sentient ecology positing a universe of communicating and interacting subjects,” as the Swedish anthropologist Kaj Århem (2016b, 91), who also worked in Amazonia, describes a Vietnamese hill people. Or, in the words of Levy-Bruhl, they ignore that for humans in this enchanted universe, “the surrounding world is the language of spirits speaking to a spirit” (1923, 60).

The opposition of the spiritual and the material cannot be received where the “material” is “spiritual”; or properly said, where the phenomena of the human world are the manifest forms of indwelling persons. The opposition of “culture” and “nature” cannot be received where nature is cultural, inasmuch as the communication of its interacting subjects, focused on the one finality of the human fate, necessarily entails a universal conceptual scheme. The opposition of “subject” and “object” cannot be received where objects are subjects—that is, in a non-Cartesian world universally composed of *res cogitans*, as many have observed. Likewise, the “secular” is “sacred” inasmuch as it is inhabited by metaperson powers, and “belief” is “real” inasmuch as being is being there. One might say of enspirited societies that their idealism is materialism—and vice versa. But again, of the validity of all such distinctions as spiritual/material, it is wiser to keep in mind the (Ho)cartesian question: “How can we make any progress in the understanding of cultures, ancient or modern, if we persist in dividing what people join, and in joining what they keep apart?” (Hocart [1939] 1953, 23).

Visibility

The realm of nonhuman agencies [for Montagnais-Naskapi (Innu) of Labrador] which the European calls the unseen *is* to the northern aboriginal as often sensed by sight as are the familiar creatures of everyday life that surround the most pragmatic minded. The cannibal giant, the underwater people, the animal owners are to him not questionable beings, but realities, proved by personal experience of a nature as satisfactory to him as it would be to have seen a bear or seal. (Speck [1935] 1977, 242; emphasis original)

[T]he activities of the gods and spirits [of the dead] in helping mankind have no mystical quality [for Ngaing of interior Madang Province, Papua New Guinea]. They are believed to take place on the same plane of existence and are, therefore, just as real as those of human beings working together at any joint task. (Lawrence 1965, 218)

To judge from specific inquiries made among the Winnebago and Ojibwa, and from much of our data in general, reality does not depend necessarily upon sense-impressions. (Radin 1914, 352)

To keep in mind: the “spirits” are real, active co-workers in human economic projects. To consider here: for all their usual invisibility, the spirits are co-present with humans in the same reality. The spirits may be invisible to the people, but the people are visible to the spirits. Because they are normally—but not always or necessarily—invisible does not mean they are somewhere else, on some other plane of existence. Lots of things I know for a fact I have never seen, like the Sahara Desert; some I could not possibly see, like George Washington or Geronimo. It is incorrect to conclude, as ethnographers sometimes have, that the gods, ghosts, and other metapersons, because they are unseen or exist elsewhere as in the sky or distant mountains, are denizens of a reality or world beyond the human. More often, however, anthropologists report, as the linguist and anthropologist Roger Keesing (1982) has on Kwaio people of the Solomon Islands, that “this distinction between the visible and invisible implies no transcendence, no ultimate separation between the ancestral realm and the human” (73).

The Kwaio ancestors—especially the kindred spirits of dead parents, grandparents, siblings, and children—have an immediacy as members of one’s group and participants in everyday life. People talk with them daily, Keesing notes, and encounter them nightly while their bodies sleep—the implication being that humans too have unseen spirit-powers. A substantial proportion of the conversations in which Kwaio engage are not between living people but between the living and the dead. Already by age three, a child learns that the social universe includes actors he or she cannot see, and soon enough that these unseen ancestral powers are the “source of success, gratification, and security, and the cause of illness, death, and misfortune” (33).

No child could escape constituting a cognitive world in which the spirits were ever-present participants in social life, on whom life and death, success or failure, depend. No child could fail to construct a world in which boundaries of sacredness and danger—male and

female, living and dead, and their mapping out in space and expression in rules about substances and conduct—were clearly defined. (38)

Rules govern the universe, Keesing writes, and people must follow them in thousands of everyday ways or risk punishments from these ever-present ancestors, especially the kindred spirits who, despite the close relationship, do not hesitate to inflict illness and death on wrongdoers.

Rather than elsewhere, the spirits' invisibility is likely to put them everywhere. The Scandinavian ethnographer Kenneth Sillander deftly makes a point about the ubiquity of invisibility for Bentian, a small up-river Dayak group in Eastern Kalimantan (Borneo). Inasmuch as the spirits cannot be seen, "it can never be known for sure where they are, or what they are up to, meaning they should be treated a little as if continually present, with care taken so that they receive respect and are not offended by human behavior" (2016, 169). For all the uncertainties about the spirits—at one point, Sillander says, "they live somewhat as if in another dimension," or even a "parallel world" (2016, 170)—people know a lot about them and indeed often encounter them, not only shamans but also ordinary people.

Deep in the woods, under water, and in the heavens, they [gods, the dead, some animals, species masters, demons] have villages and houses of their own, and human cultural institutions such as marriage, kinship, and leadership. Spirits are also talked to as if they were people, and given gifts similar to those appreciated by people. (168)

Both shamans and others may be possessed by spirits, which happens quite frequently, especially in rituals, and "anybody's soul may encounter spirits in dreams" (167). Hence the spirits' invisibility does not entail an existence apart from humans, and if they live in a "parallel world," then humans also inhabit it. For people themselves have invisible "souls," inner consciousnesses; they are symbolizing beings that, awake or asleep, can perform prodigies of extra-body adventures in space and time, where they meet and interact with spirits. People are spirits themselves.

People Are Spirits

There were no strict boundaries [for Inuit of the Arctic Circle] between different kinds of spirits and between spirits and human beings. Some spirits [such as Sedna] were of human origin. Other spirits could hardly be distinguished from human beings. . . . *The Inuit themselves were spiritual beings . . . and could interact with spirits. . . .* The conceptions of the spirits expressed a fundamental notion in Inuit religion, that the world was a spiritual world, consisting of innumerable personal forces. (Oosten 1976, 29, emphasis mine)

[For Kanak of New Caledonia], the *ko* [or “soul”] during its journeys far from the man it animates has an existence of its own; it can steal the goods of another; it can commit adultery. And if the man is then declared guilty, far from invoking an alibi of sleeping, he is frightened. “Perhaps,” he says, “my *ko* did it when I was sleeping. . . .” The *ko* energizes thought. Of a man who acts for an unfathomable reason or intention, one says . . . “it was done by his *ko*.” (Leenhardt 1930, 213; my translation)

[For Bentian Dayak of Borneo,] the human soul has the double function of being both animating principle and agency. It may become temporarily lost or weakened, resulting in illness or loss of vitality, and it may travel during sleep, or to spirit abodes during rituals in the case of the shamans’ souls. It is a life force, whose condition—strength and fixity—explains well-being, but also a person-like being, which may experience things (such as affronts, fright or contentment). In the latter sense it is essentially spirit-like: an unseen agency endowed with consciousness. (Sillander 2016, 165)

[T]here seems to be a general consensus that certain parts of the deceased’s body take on a life of their own [for Achuar of Northern Amazonia] . . . and after death assume the bodies of certain species of animals. The lungs turn into butterflies . . . the deceased’s shadow, a brocket deer . . . the heart, a slate-colored grosbeak . . . and the liver, an owl. (Descola 1994, 92)

After hours of tedious questioning, the Innu (Montagnais-Naskapi) elder was finally able to give the early American ethnographer, Frank Speck, some understanding of the local concept of the “Great Man” or active soul of the individual using the branch of the Canadian National Railway recently run through the reservation. On this day in 1922, Joseph Kurtness explained that the *Mista’peo* or Great Man is to the body of man as the chief of the cabin (locomotive engineer) is to the fire/toboggan (locomotive engine). “He knows his engine and just what he can do with it, and the engine works just as he directs it. Without him it is a dead mass; when it [the engine] is worn out or when it collapses, he [the soul, the engineer] goes into another one” ([1935] 1977, 39). Just so, the soul of an ancestor is reincarnated in the embryo of the child to become the person’s guide through life, and notably “the means of overcoming the spirits of animals in the life-long search for food” (33). In the beginning of the world, animals lived in so many tribes of their own, just like the people with whom they could freely converse. Conflicts led them to take on the covering and shape of animals, but as the shaman says to them by song or his drum, ““You and I wear the same covering and have the same mind and spiritual strength”” (72).

This is what Naskapi call “spirit-power thinking,” a useful concept of engagement of people’s souls in a metaperson universe, and more generally for the efficacy of the spirit world. It consists of various means, from total concentration to drumming, singing, and rattling, for arousing and strengthening the Great Man. Drums themselves have their inner persons, even as the designs acquired from souls in dreams and embroidered by women on hunters’ clothing have powers of attracting and subduing animals. Moreover, drumming induces dreams. Dreams are the main means by which the person’s Great Man guides him or her through communication with other spirits. Hunting was essentially accomplished in dreams. It remained only to locate the prey by divination, primarily by means of lines on the scapula of dead animals, and finish it off by bow, gun, or trap.

Humans are essentially spirit-beings, even as spirits are essentially human. Although the current wave of interest in animism tends to highlight the latter, the person-qualities of spirits, it is critical for human

existence that the two are ontological congeners. It is by humans' own spirit-powers that they articulate with the metahuman agents of their life and death. People have the same composition as embodied spirits, consisting of an invisible, internal, and intentional person ("soul," *inua*) animating a physical body, as said before. The anthropologist Erik Jensen's detailed account of the Iban could be duplicated the planet around: "All life has two parts, all life which is essential to the Iban, human, animal and even vegetable, has a physical and spirit side. "The physical, mortal, visible body (*tuboh*) is one part; the other is the spirit counterpart or spirit/soul, the *samengat*" (1974, 106–7). Or again, the American anthropologist Irving Hallowell demonstrates the point from the people's vantage: "Speaking as an Ojibwa, one might say: all other 'persons'—human or other than human—are structured the same as I am. . . . All other 'persons,' too, have such attributes as self-awareness and understanding. I can talk with them. Like myself, they have personal identity, autonomy, and volition" (1960, 43).

By frequent ethnographic report, the human soul is the condition of the "reality" of the dreamwork, the means of relating to the spirits there in attendance. As Hallowell wrote of Saulteaux (or Anishinaabe, westernmost of the Ojibwa nation) in the 1930s: "It is through dreams . . . that the individual becomes directly acquainted with the entities which he believes to be the active agencies of the universe about him. But he only sees them with the eyes of the 'soul,' not with the eyes of the body. To him, moreover, these spiritual entities of the cosmos represent a continuum with the ordinary world of sense perception. They are an integral part of reality and are not super-natural beings in any strict sense of the term" (1934, 399).

It needs to be stressed, for immanentist cultures, the issue is universal and existential: the human soul is *the* essential means of articulation and communication with the cosmic host of metahuman beings, and dreams are essential spaces of that necessary intersubjectivity. In dreams, typically, the bodily differences are resolved: plants, animals, species masters, and others appear as humans. Communication issues are resolved: the different species of spirits may have their own languages, but in dreams they typically speak the language of the dreamer. The dream,

moreover, is democratic. As Descola puts it for Achuar, “Anyone, man, woman, or child, under certain circumstances, is capable of sending his soul beyond the narrow confines of the body in order to dialogue directly with the double of another of nature’s beings, be it human, plant, animal, or supernatural spirit” (1994, 100). Not to underestimate relations to spirits in the waking state—“I can talk to them”—as indeed the encounters with spirits in dreams are incomplete without the subsequent wakeful interpretations.

The ancestors and gods, demons and *inua*, are always there: as witness the growth of crops, the spawning of the fish, the course of the sun, the movement of the caribou, the illness and death of kin. The recurrent in-bodily encounters and dealings with metahuman powers by means of humans’ invisible cognitive capacities is not that different from dreamwork, and potentially much more extensive in scope. These spirits met or invoked in waking life are no more empirical and no less real than those of the dreamwork. In fact, dreams are often highly symbolic portents gifted by spirits that require considerable daytime interpretation. Like the dreams of Iban people concerning important undertakings from building a new longhouse, or starting a rice garden, to migrating to a new location. These dreams “provide the essential spirit endorsement” of the project, such as the dream of a successful fishing expedition by the longhouse community using the poisonous derris root: this signifies there will be a good rice harvest (Jensen 1974, 118). Likewise, if a person dreams he or she has successfully swum across a river after initially fearing to do so, this also “means that there will be a plentiful harvest” (117). As I said, the interpretation is not obvious. When Achuar men dream of plump, naked women eager to have sexual intercourse, it is a favorable sign for success in hunting peccary. (By Freudian lights, an American man who dreams of hunting plump animals might rather be symbolizing his desire for sexual success with a beautiful woman.) Waking or sleeping, humans are metaphysical beings, and by means of that quality, spiritual beings.

This is not original but in the present context it is critical: human metaphysical powers are doubly operative in speech. First, because the arbitrary relation between the signifier and its worldly referent

establishes the spoken word as an autonomous, creative force; and second, because speech has potent pragmatic effects on interlocutors and their situation independent of any physical contact. These symbolic powers of speech are effectively on display in social anthropologist Stanley Jeyaraja Tambiah's seminal essay, "The Magical Power of Words" (1985), in which he elaborates on Malinowski's ([1935] 1978) observations about the potency of magical spells in Trobriand gardening and canoe construction. Tambiah cites Isaiah 55:11 in this context: "So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it." Tambiah's analysis of the relations between magical spells and practical techniques are relevant as an excellent example of the creative agency of words: "Language is within us; it moves us, and we generate it as active agents. Since words exist and are in a sense agents in themselves which establish connections and relations between man and man, and man and the world, and are capable of 'acting' upon them, they are one of the most realistic representations we have of the concept of force which is either not directly observable or is a metaphysical notion which we find necessary to use" (29).

This sense of the creative power of words makes an interesting connection with the Italian anthropologist Valerio Valeri's analysis (1985) of the associations between Hawaiian *mana* and the efficacy of speech. Noting a man may transmit *mana* to another by spitting in his mouth or breathing on his fontanelle, Valeri deduces that this "gives clues to what kind of 'substance' *mana* is: it seems be connected with speech, with which spit, breath, and mouth are obviously associated. Moreover, breath is connected with life . . . thus we may deduce that *mana* is a sort of life in speech and life-giving power in speech" (99). The implications are large. Speech has the power of creating social relations and meaningful situations. Speech is impelled by breath. Breath is life. Ergo, speech is the symbolic, life-giving power of the creation of cultural order. In which case, humans are not only spirits, but the original spirit, the genesis of spirit.

The present work can hardly be accused of anthropocentrism. "Religion" is not here conceived as the ideal projection of real-social or

real-political relations. Humans are here considered as limited beings, their own existence dependent upon and subordinate to a cosmic host of metahuman powers. But in this enchanted mode of unhappy consciousness, humans' symbolic power is the model of divine power itself. Divinity or spirit is the hypostatization of speech, of symbolic power. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God" (John 1:1). Human speech is the essence of divine power.

Human souls are typically immortal, a main reason they are typically called "souls" in the anthropological literature, their array of person-qualities notwithstanding—consciousness, will, emotions, and so forth. The usual perspective, moreover, is solipsist and soteriological, concerned with the existence of the individual after death, if not exactly with the salvation of the soul. We are again misled by ethnocentric-cum-transcendentalist preconceptions. As a general rule, in immanentist regimes, the principal cultural value of the soul's immortality is its life-giving transformation into another being, into an ancestor, ghost, animal, or another human, rather than the perpetuation of the individual as such. The soul remains in this world, as the animating-power of an altered form. Following something like the Law of Spiritual Dynamics, souls are not created or destroyed, but transferred from one being to another. Ironically, the soul in immanentist societies is guaranteed the perpetual life that the soul of transcendental orders only aspires to—and may well fail to achieve.

The Arctic explorer Knud Rasmussen reports of Iglulik (1929) and Netsilik (1931), in a way similar to the Naskapi Great Man, that in addition to the inner soul that all humans have, a child also acquires through the reincarnation of a dead kinsman's soul certain individual powers—or indeed generations of individual powers, from all those whom that soul had inhabited. Reincarnated souls pass with names, the names of dead relatives bestowed on children when uttered at the moment of birth. Rasmussen explains the Netsilik practice: "To every name is attached a certain store of power that is transferred to those who bear the name. It is a kind of magic power, difficult to explain. It is as if a name had its own particular soul acting quite independently of the body's

soul . . . According to some people, this means that the soul of the body, the real fountain of life, is the one that makes mankind human, while the soul of the name merely makes it generally strong, keeps it up and protects it" (1931, 219).

As the ethnographer and filmmaker of Netsilik people Asen Balikci put it some decades later, beyond the soul of the body, "name souls . . . possess a personality of their own characterized by great power and distinct ability to protect the name bearer from any misfortune. In fact they acted as guardian spirits, highly beneficial to humans" (1970, 199). Likewise Rasmussen: as people are continually being named generation after generation, these powers in some accumulate in the one who has the name, and "are with him, work inside him, keep danger away and become his guardian spirits" (1931, 220). The choice of recipient is made by the dead, motivated by a desire to join the living.

Rasmussen further says that people try to acquire as many names as possible, obviously later in life, the one example described being an older woman who took the name of a powerful spirit that cured her during a serious illness. Reciting her several name-souls or spirits, the woman said that through them she had been able to grow old, withstanding the attacks of shamans and "all the dangers that would otherwise have uprooted me from the dwelling places of man" (221). For Iglulik, in a briefer discussion, Rasmussen recounts how a series of names is recited when a woman is about to give birth, and the name that coincides with the appearance of the child becomes his or her name-soul, at which time "care must be taken that all the qualities that soul possessed are communicated to the child" (1929, 172). Take note, then, of this duplex soul formation, comprised of an inherent life-giving soul, of a kind shared by others inasmuch as it "makes mankind human," and an individuated soul or souls acquired from outside that give a person a differentiated identity while empowering him or her bodily, that is externally.

In these ensouled cultures, human spirit-powers are often double, consisting of a social soul of divine or ancestral derivation, shared by a determinate collective group, and personal souls or metapersonal qualities, as acquired individually. The social or ancestral soul is invariably

the inner core of human being, and the means of people's powers of reproduction, growth, health, material and other success, at least in potential; but the extent to which these are realized in life typically depends on the outer soul or powers immanent in the body. Explicitly, I am not speaking of a Cartesian opposition between soul and body composed simply of an inner subjectivity and an outer physicality. Indeed, if the body were a mere physical "thing," it would be the only such significant entity in an otherwise animist universe. The body members and properties themselves are differentiated by values and powers—superior and inferior, masculine and feminine, intellect and emotion, and so forth—often as transmitted by one or the other parent in the process of procreation. Physicality is metaphysicality and, in that sense, spirituality.

It would be misleading, then, to think of the contrast between soul and body as antithetical on the order of a Christian struggle between spirit and flesh. That again is transcendentalist thinking, motivated by ethical and soteriological suppositions. Rather, both body and soul being spiritual, the relation between them as hypothesized here is complementary. The body's powers are the means by which living individuals realize, to a greater or lesser extent, the vital potencies of the ancestral soul. Only together do soul and body—inner and outer, collective and individual, eternal and conjunctural, potential and actual—make a complete human existence.

To speak first of the social soul, as, for instance, the missionary Hermann Strauss took notice of it among Mount Hagen peoples in the central highlands of Papua New Guinea: "This concept is not the individual soul in the sense in which we understand it," he writes, "but the individual's *share* or *participation* in the *communal* life-force and spiritual power, and every member of the group shares it some way or other. . . . The *min*, or [clan] 'soul,' is tied to its individual bearer, the self, but it comes to him as something else. It is something greater than the individual, for it is simply his participation in the power and the spiritual life of the community" (Strauss 1991, 99; emphasis original).

Mervyn Meggitt's (1965a) description of the mode of procreation among the neighboring Mae Enga people illustrates how a collective

soul comes about. An Enga child is conceived by the mingling of paternal semen and menstrual blood in the mother's womb. However, "four months after conception a spirit animates the foetus and gives it an individual personality." Although it comes from the paternal side, this spirit is not transmitted through the father's semen. "Instead it is in some way implanted by the totality of ancestral ghosts of the father's clan and seems to be an emanation of their generalized potency. . . . The existence of the ancestral ghosts is thus as necessary for the birth of a normal child as the initial conjunction of semen and menstrual blood." In people's everyday comments on procreation, they put little emphasis on the father's sexual role; they are more concerned "with the child's acquisition of a spirit and ultimately of a social identity as a consequence of his father's clan membership. The father's agnatic affiliation legitimately relates the child both by descent and through ritual to a group of clan ancestral ghosts" (163).

Note particularly the ritual connection to the clan ancestors, here characterized as a collective and the source of a "generalized potency"; as well as the fundamental consubstantiality with the founding ancestor, making the members, as they say, children "of one penis" (Meggitt 1965a, 5–6). The inner soul thus acquires the powers of human and agricultural fertility (on ancestral clan land), of growth, health, wealth, and other essentials of existence afforded by the ancestors and ultimately the gods.

Enga people also stress that the mother's blood, the woman's contribution to the fetus, produces the child's skin and flesh: the maternal kin bestow the outward, bodily components and powers that enclose and protect the inward soul-powers bestowed by the paternal clan ancestors (Meggitt 1965a, 163). And to judge from Mount Hagen peoples again, the maternal contribution itself is spiritually endowed—if regrettably and resentfully so on the part of the mother's people. "They also find it regrettable that when they give their daughters in marriage, they are necessarily giving away some of their own life-force and power to another . . . [totem-] group and thus strengthening it against their will" (Strauss 1991, 92). In the event, at birth the person is doubly enspirited.

Whatever else they are, kinship relations are spiritual endowments. And apparently, to demur from Edmund Leach's influential formula in this connection, "in any system of kinship and marriage," the spiritual endowments come from both the relationships, which give an individual membership in a "we group" of some kind (relations of incorporation) and those other relations which link "our group" to other groups of like kind (relations of alliance). Recall that in Leach's formulation, whereas the "we group" relations are those of common substance, the "relations of alliance are viewed as metaphysical influence" (1966, 21; emphasis original). It was already evident from Leach's own examples, however, that the relations at issue were more complex. As in the case of patrilineal Kachin, who like many other Southeast Asian peoples hold that the father contributes bone to his child and the mother her blood, an individual has relations of common substance both with a "we group" (bone from the father) and an allied group (blood from mother). Besides, there is that third endowment, markedly in unilineal systems, of the ancestor of the "we group" whose "metaphysical influences" on the child include the powers of life, growth, fertility, and possibly other capacities such as bravery, intelligence, and so on.

Without taking the full Leachian gamble of *any* system of kinship and marriage, I will risk the idea that the human spirit/soul is double, consisting of an inherent social soul, generically human or specifically ancestral, and an acquired individuated soul, by means of which the life potentials of the former may be realized. As a rule, the social soul is an internal quality of the person, the acquired, an external quality. Where there are determinate "we groups" and allied groups, the individual abilities are not only birth endowments of the latter but often ritual practices by which the ancestral endowments are achieved.

Just so, it is written of BaKongo in Central Africa, "Man is considered a double being, made up of an outer and an inner entity," referring thus to body and soul; but the body itself is again doubled, as it were on the same oppositions of outer and inner, body and spirit. "The outer body again consists of two parts, the shell (vuvudi) which is buried and rots in the ground as quickly as a mushroom, and the inner, invisible part (mvumbi) which is eaten by the magic of the bandoki [witch]"

(K. E. Laman, cited by MacGaffey 1986, 135). In his own ethnography of the BaKongo of Lower Zaire, anthropologist Wyatt MacGaffey provides an unusually elaborate and instructive description of these spiritual aspects of the body, beginning with an allusion to the same duality as the Swedish missionary K. E. Laman recorded in the early twentieth century. "Human bodies," MacGaffey writes, "provide the personalities or spirits they contain with a physical locus and a metaphorical expression of an appropriate identity" (122). Otherwise put, to the same effect, "people generally think that the personality exists independently of the body that contains it and the vitality [soul] that supports it, that it is perdurable and that in the next life it adopts another body" (36).

A matrilineal people, BaKongo commonly say the person is composed of four parts, derived from four matrilineages, the mother's, father's, mother's father's, and father's father's. It appears, however, that the primary contributions are from the mother's and father's people. While the former conveys in the soul a generalized ancestral vitality, the "breath," and certain bodily qualities similarly having to do with reproduction, the latter, the paternal kin, are responsible for the bodily personality or spirit-qualities by which individuals socially realize these maternal powers in actual life. Or so I read MacGaffey: "The power of a personality, its capacity to engage effectively with others, is believed to be derived, in the case of an ordinary human being, from the father, in the form initially of semen, which turns into blood in the mother's womb" (1986, 135).

The observation is capital as an expression of a common rule of exogamous unilineal orders, matrilineal or patrilineal: that the life-giving and death-dealing ancestral powers of one's own line, the social soul of people's inner being, is complemented by the individual outer powers contributed by the in-marrying others—affinal/maternal kin in patrilineal organizations, affinal/paternal kin in matrilineal systems—who compose the bodily powers by which the person manages in life. More precisely, in Kongo and often elsewhere one's own matrilineal kin are also responsible for certain body parts and powers; but they are amorphous and disorganized, except as they are governed and achieved by the superior affinal or patrilineal bodily elements—in particular,

the head. The complementary roles and powers of one's lineage and one's affinal lineage are thus played out in the body and career of the person.

MacGaffey spells out two related ways this is organized. In one, the body is divided into upper and lower parts, meeting at the navel and "linked through the values assigned to the head" (1986, 123). The upper part, including the head, is of paternal origin and accordingly the site of the masculine attributes of intelligence, perception, authority, and rigor. The lower part, of maternal origin, "is associated with organic functions, sexuality, emotion, and other 'feminine' attributes regarded (by men) as powerful, obscure, and disorderly" (123). MacGaffey comments that some Kongo psychologists agree with Freud that "'the secrets of the ancestors come from below the navel and emerge above it' as wisdom." In confirmation, the BaKongo ritual practice of shaving "to keep the top of the head clear for spirits that might want to land there" (124). Ritual treatments of the lower body include incisions on the hips to release potency, both in men and women.

By a second conception, the body is divided into three parts: the masculine and paternal head, the feminine and maternal loins, and a mediating region of the shoulders. The shoulders manifest divinatory powers, trembling in the case of possessed persons. The armpits convey blessings, as from father to son (of another lineage). Head hair has spiritual and masculine powers, axillary hair is associated with life transitions as well as blessings, and pubic hair more obviously with sex and reproduction. And so forth: from a lineage standpoint, the individual is bodily endowed with life-potential by his or her "own people," to be realized by the endowments in acumen, strength, valor, and other such spiritual qualities contributed by his or her "other people." Godfrey Lienhardt (1961) observed of neighboring Dinka during the late 1950s: "It is . . . not a simple matter to divide the Dinka believer, for analytic purposes, from what he believes in, and to describe the latter then in isolation from him as the 'object' of his belief. The Dinka themselves imply this when they speak of the Powers as being 'in men's bodies', but also 'in the sky' or other particular places. Their world is not for them an object of study, but an active subject;

hence the world (*piny*) as a whole is often invoked for aid along with other Powers" (155–56).

Aspects and dispositions of the body are not "objects" independent of the subjective forces that they embody. Not to speak loosely of apparently secular capacities as spiritual powers, then, for that is indeed the significance of the display of them, and especially the (political) implication of any differential manifestation of them by particular individuals. Human bodily or intellectual capacities are not exempt from the general rule of the immanence of metahuman powers in things. (Indeed, Greenland Inuit bodies have animating spirits at every joint.) There is no biology, neither of humans or others, where life and personhood extend far beyond anything organic.

Beside the animal and vegetable, are alive the mineral, the artifactual, and even the ineffable: winds, rivers, thunder, mountains, air, stones (well, some stones), fishing nets, ice, and curare. Of course, the human inhabitants of this enchanted universe know lots about bodies, including these other kinds of bodies, in what we would consider a naturalistic way. But their vital principle, the inner force of their health, their growth, their reproduction, and their death is not itself bodily; it is their indwelling "soul." Moreover, the soul or the person of things (the *inua*) is what humans share with the metahuman multitude who are the primary agents and arbiters of this vitality. Spirits in their own right, people are thus known to enter into direct social relations with the many nonhuman spirits, people in their own right: to marry them, raise families with them, play with them, trade with them, feast them, fight them, and more.

Community Relations of People and Spirits

Humans and metahumans engage in a variety of social intercourse, ranging from daily or nightly encounters with spirit-beings, to marriages between humans and metahumans, to festive occasions in which they join together. In the pages that follow, I draw on societies that are distinct in culture just as they are alike in their intercourse with ancestors, species-masters, gods, and other metapersons. I again take the Leachian risk of generalization—perhaps we will learn something new.

The American ethnographer C. A. Valentine (1965) writes of Lakalai of New Britain (Papua New Guinea): “In spite of distinctions in nature and conceptual boundaries, the world of man is thus also a world of spirits. Human beings are frequently in direct or indirect contact with non-human beings, and there is always the possibility that they may encounter such creatures at any time” (194). The contacts are often hostile, which helps explain the usual fragility of marriage between humans and spirits: “There are numerous tales of living men who marry spirit women of various categories, sometimes bringing them to their human communities but more often going to dwell with the spirits. Spirit-beings also capture living human women to be their wives. Only in a few mythological cases do such tales of exile work out happily. Otherwise [in non-mythological cases?] the captive becomes homesick, one of the parties to the arrangement becomes offended, or some other misunderstanding arises. Then the exile returns to his or her previous home” (168).

The formal unions of Achuar men with beautiful water spirit (Tsunki) women in Upper Amazonia are—unlike the Lakalai spirit marriages—highly compatible, if apparently perceived as adulterous (Descola 1994, 124, 282–83). Although the Tsunki water spirits are the source of shamanic powers—they lend their own dangerous familiars, the anaconda and jaguar, to shamans—they are for Achuar the model of domestic tranquility. In their own homes under rivers and lakes, they are not only human in appearance and customs, but in family etiquette and household architecture they provide the norms for Achuar conduct. (Unlike our own homebred social scientific notions of the projection of human social structures and relations onto metahumans, in the anthropology of immanentist cultures it is typically the other way around: spirits are the model for people, rather than people for spirits.) It is not unusual, Descola writes, to hear married men talking freely about their double married life, involving on one hand of a legitimate terrestrial family, and on the other an “adulterine aquatic Tsunki spirit family.”

By Descola’s report, these are not stories from primordial times, although something like that is a “mythical” topos among related Jivaro peoples. Rather, he heard tell from different men in different places under different circumstances roughly the same account of meeting a very

beautiful Tsunki maiden who came out of the water and invited a man to make love. Finding the experience fulfilling, the Achuar man meets the girl regularly, and after a while she invites him underwater to meet her father. Her father turns out to be a majestic man, positioned on an impressive turtle seat in a fine house. He proposes that the Achuar man take his daughter as his legitimate wife. When the latter explains he already has human wives he cannot abandon, the Tsunki father suggests that he divide his time between his land and water families. “Each of the storytellers,” Descola relates, “described at length the ensuing double life, naming his water children or boasting of his Tsunki wife’s cooking” (1994, 283).

Often the humans who marry spirits are themselves endowed with special spiritual talents as mediums or aspiring shamans, whereupon the spirit-wives or husbands lend themselves to their spouses’ social careers. This is apparently true for at least some of the spirit marriages of Kaluli people of the Papua New Guinea Southern Highlands, as described by Edward Schieffelin (2005). The metapersons in question, *ane kalu* or “gone men,” include both the dead and others who were never human. Relations between humans and these spirits are generally cordial—unlike the problematic relations between people and kindred spirits in much of Melanesia. Besides dreams, Kaluli rely on mediums for their communication with these spirits. The medium is always a man who married a woman “of the invisible world” in a vision or dream. When he has had a child by her, he is able to leave his body in sleep and walk around in her realm. “At the same time, the people from the invisible world may enter his body as they would a house and converse through his mouth with people assembled for a *séance*” (97). All the people of the longhouse community gather excitedly for these *séances*. They ask how the dead are doing, if they have enough to eat, and how to cure their own sick, where their lost pigs might be, and what witches may be creeping about (96–98).

Besides mediums, there are the immanent dead who live among and converse regularly with the living, especially kindred spirits such as the Dobuan “Sir Ghost” and the ancestors of Solomon Island Kwaio. Recall that people talk to their Dobu and Kwaio forebears almost as much as to other people. Roger Keesing notes how even young children quickly

construct an idea of these ancestral beings from evidence all around them, “first of all [because] adults *talk* to these beings—to dead parents, grandparents, siblings, or children” (1982, 33). Kwaio souls are double: one component goes to a land of the dead: and another, the “shadow” remains as an ancestral spirit (*adalo*) in the community. The child is taught that the shade of deceased relatives she or he meets in dreams are *adalo*, “ancestors,” and from there it appears that the latter are more than a dream, that they are present and perceptible even when one is awake.

There was the time when a whole clan of Mianmin people in the Northern Papua New Guinea Highlands escaped the war party of an enemy group by sheltering inside a mountain with an allied community of the dead. Lest this sound simply “mythical,” note that Donald Gardner, who reports it, assured his readers that although the event was unusual, the account is “regarded as an historical narrative by all West Mianmin” (1987, 164). Also of note, the Mianmin dead (*bakel*) have their own proper descendants, those born in the land of the dead; in this case the deceased protagonists consisted of a community of spirits inside Mount Bunie. The nearby living clans, the Ulap and the Ivik, although closely related, had a recent history of sorcery accusations, their antagonism culminating in the treacherous slaughter of the Ivik at a feast to which the Ulap had invited them. When the news came back to the Ivik group, they called for help from their affines and allies and assembled a large raiding party, intending revenge. But they were foiled when the Ulap called upon a spirit group to which they were allied through a strategic exchange of sisters in marriage between an important Ulap man and a big-man of the spirit people. When the latter heard of the danger threatening his Ulap brother-in-law, he suggested it was time they exchanged the pigs they had been raising for each other. The feast the two groups then prepared took place on the day the Ivik raiding party planned to attack. But when the Ulap big-man killed his pig in the manner instructed by his spirit brother-in-law, and the sky darkened as the latter killed his pig in return, both the spirit-pig and the spirit-people became visible to the Ulap. Having cooked their respective pigs, the spirit big-man rubbed all the Ulap with the fat from his, causing them to lose their “heaviness,” that is, to become spirits themselves. The two

groups then exchanged their pigs and settled down to eat. The Ivik raiding party came upon the scene, heard the festivities, surrounded the village, but unaccountably found it empty when they attacked. Twice more they heard festive singing from various places on the mountain, but the best they could do was break their axes on a stone from which the songs were emanating. All of the West Mianmin people know this is how the Ulap escaped destruction (Gardner 1987, 163–64).

The periodic return of primordial gods or ancestors to renew the fertility of the country, ensure the food supply, and maintain the health and reproduction of the population takes the communal relations of people and spirits to another level—in terms of intensity as well as collectivity. These are typically prolonged annual ceremonies, rituals of the New Year, set between the dry and rainy seasons, between winter and spring, or in agricultural societies notably, between the harvest and the replanting. Often a mandatory period of peace, it is the highpoint of the year, marked by festivity and levity, song and dance, status inversion, and in many places, sport.

But all is not simply amusement. Especially as accompanied by heightened sexuality, the celebrations also have ritual effects: as in attracting the gods, amusing the gods, and evoking their regeneration of the world. To do this work, the gods appear in various societies in various forms: embodied in decorated or masked human surrogates; in images; in possessed mediums, priests, or chiefs; or invisibly but making their presence known by perceptible happenings. The great displays of feasts and valuable goods accompanying the ceremonies are often said (by the people) to “honor” the gods, the honor indeed being tributary sacrifices to them—the effect of which would be the people’s prosperity in the coming year. Besides, in consuming the food that had been offered and eaten in essence by the gods, the people ingest some of the divine being and power. At the end of the festivities, the gods may be perfunctorily sent back to their places, leaving the people free to reap the fruits of their generative passage—another testimony, this, of a certain ambivalence in the relations of humans and the metahuman powers that be.

“Despite the ultimate seriousness in the aim of these ceremonies, there is no uniform tone of awe on the ceremonial ground,” reports

American anthropologist Nancy Munn about Walbiri of the Central Australian desert. “On the contrary, Walbiri performances are usually casual, filled with joking, sexual allusions, conversation, and banter” (Munn 1973, 185). Also mentioned for Walbiri by Mervyn Meggitt (1962, 226), one wonders if the levity is not a prescribed aspect of these fertility ceremonies (*banba*). Held in secluded areas of the bush, the *banba* renewal ceremonies involve large numbers of men divided in two intermarrying groups (moieties): one, the “masters,” performing ancestral songs and dances; the other, the “workers,” having ornamented the performers’ bodies with highly symbolic designs. Meggitt reports that in the mid-1950s as many as four hundred to five hundred people gathered for combined circumcision and *banba* ceremonies.

In her own marvelous study, *Walbiri Iconography* (1973), based in the same period, Munn uncovers a fundamental relation between the graphic designs covering the dancers and the fertilizing powers by the ancestor: a relation that transforms the dancers into surrogates of the ancestor, and the songs and dances of the renewal ceremonies into the well-being of the country. The same term, *guruwari*, denotes both the pertinent designs and the ancestor’s potency. Walbiri ancestors emerged from the ground in the primordial Dreamtime and wandered through the country creating its topographical features as well as rain, fire, wild oranges, yams, humans, kangaroos, and just about everything else—which, upon the ancestors going to ground, still embody them. Each patrilineal lodge or descent group has a number of ancestors, consisting of all whose ancient tracks intersect in their territory. By embodying especially the important ones in *banda* ceremonies, the members of the group maintain the fertility of the country—the wild yams, the kangaroos, and not least, the people. Here is where *guruwari* designs come into play. Munn explains: *guruwari* “is the name for graphic designs representing the ancestors (primarily designs owned by men) and may be extended more generally to any visual sign or visual embodiment of ancestors such as footprints, topographical features resulting from their imprints or metamorphoses, ceremonial paraphernalia, or design-marked sacred boards and stones left by them in the ground” (28–29).

Effectively then, *guruwari* as sign equals *guruwari* as ancestral potency. Enspirited with primordial power, the designs are themselves instrumental. “This effective vitality of designs may bring about the achievement of specific, objective ends such as nourishing children, attracting a lover, maintaining the fertility and supplies of species, and so on” (55). Just so, the worker-moiety men hiding the bodies of lodge members with ancestral designs in *banba* fertility ceremonies thus transform them into active Dreamtime ancestors. “You mak’em father [ancestor]. I want to eat.” So a lodge member may call on a worker of the opposite moiety to prepare the paraphernalia of the ceremonies. And then in the performances, the ancestor “gets up” (as from sleep), he is “pulled out” (from the country). In the event, “the ceremonial constructions reembody the ancestor and as part of this process aid in continuing the supply of kangaroos in the country; that is, in effect, they reembody the kangaroos as well” (186).

The gods and the dead descend often from the heavens to the villages of Araweté in the Middle Xingu region of the Amazon. They come for the feasts following the taking of many larger game animals; they come constantly in the small hours of the morning in the songs shamans intone in the voice of the gods—by which means the deities largely rule the people. All collective ceremonies are banquets of the gods and the dead, as Brazilian anthropologist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro (1992) observes in his remarkable study of Araweté. After the gods have invisibly eaten, the people consume the substance, “the ex-food of the gods” (126). The feasts thus have a sacrificial structure—with an immediate return to the people in the form of the consecrated offering for their own consumption (75). The great feast of the year, the “Feast of Strong Beer,” comes after the end of the five or six months of the dry season, during which Araweté have been living in villages, hunting and harvesting their maize gardens. Soon they will begin clearing new gardens in preparation for dispersing into the forest in family groups during the rainy season.

As the culmination of the annual ceremonial cycle, the “Strong Beer” feast, however, will not only unite the village of its familial sponsor (the “owner”), but uniquely attract other villages of the territory or “tribe,” making it “the occasion when the group experiences its greatest physical

density" (Viveiros de Castro 1992, 93). (There will certainly be "collective efflorescence," but, *pace* Durkheim, the frenetic sociality does not sediment itself in a totem.) For many weeks before the festival, with increasing intensity as it approaches, bodies of men dance into the deep night "to make the beer heat up," that is, to effect the fermentation of the maize brew (93). Then, for some twenty days before the great inebriated dance at the height of the festival, the men are out hunting. On the eve of their return, the gods and the dead descend from the sky to the patio of the festival sponsor where they will partake of the beer. They are escorted to the scene and served one by one by a shaman, who is smoking and singing violently, having taken the position of the gods as well as their server, and manifesting an inebriated staggering and jolting (125).

The night of the festival is a dangerous time, as the gods are infuriated by the light of the fires and knock the village shamans down with their invisible lightning bolts. Dancing in warrior diadems of macaw feathers, the men in this way among others give the occasion a militant meaning, but in light of the forthcoming gardening season, the sexual aspects of the festival seem especially significant. The leader of the divine procession from the heavens is one Yičire očo, "a lascivious divinity who . . . always comes accompanied by a female soul" (126). (The gods marry deceased human women; they are in-laws of the living.) And more generally: "The beer festival . . . has a strong erotic tinge. Araweté say that the days after the festival are witness to intense sexual activity, for the drink causes hunger and sexual desire" (131). The hunger is satisfied by the smoked meat from the long hunt, and then they dance.

Dancing, feasting, and fornicating are also hallmarks of the Trobriand Islands' *milamala*, the annual festival of the return of the dead, well known and often remarked by anthropologists since first described by Bronislaw Malinowski (1948, 148–54). But the *milamala* is hardly the only time the Islanders encountered the *baloma*, the ancestral souls, for all these spirits' usual invisibility. Not only would the *baloma* visit their native villages from time to time, but living Trobriand Islanders might come upon them in their own communities on or beneath the extant isle of Tuma—only ten miles north of Kiriwina, the main island of the Trobriand archipelago. "All my informants from Omarakana [the village of

the Kiriwina paramount chief] and the neighboring villages knew Tuma quite well,” Malinowski reports (160), providing several examples of people physically meeting up with spirits there, among the many stories he had heard tell. Others regularly visited Tuma in dreams and trances. (In a version of the classic dissent of the Omaha skeptic, “Two Crows denies it” [Barnes 1984], at least some of Malinowski’s interlocutors accused others of feigning such contacts in order to gain material advantages from their offices as seers.)

The *milamala* itself involved the mass movement of the ancestors from Tuma to their original villages, where they joined their matrilineal kin in festivities that lasted several weeks. The ceremonies coincided with the waxing of the moon following on the major yam harvest (August or September), though they might begin some days before the new moon, building to a crescendo of drumming and dancing at the full moon, to end in something of a whimper two days later, when the *baloma* were drummed back to Tuma. Although Malinowski claims the festival had no explicit connection to the growth of the gardens, he does note that if the ancestors were displeased by the meagerness of the *milamala* feasts, they would visit drought and destruction on the next year’s crop—resulting in another poor *milamala*, more drought, and so on, in something of a vicious circle. In a recent comprehensive synthesis of anthropological writings on Trobriand Islanders’ relations to *baloma*, however, Mark Mosko identifies the *milamala* as a New Year rite, “marked by activities expressive of fertility and sexuality . . . understood to be efficacious for productivity and generativity of gardens and women in the coming year” (2017, 195).

Sometimes known to camp on the beach during the *milamala*, but more commonly to live in the villages, the *baloma* made their presence felt by unusual spates of falling coconuts (which they were plucking), by intensified appearances in people’s dreams, and if displeased with the performances or the sacrifices, by raining on the ceremonies. In any event, their ubiquity was evidenced by the taboos imposed during the period to shield them from injury: prohibitions on spilling hot fluids or cutting wood within the village, playing about with spears or sticks, or throwing missiles. For the most part, however, the *baloma* were seated

on platforms built especially for them, from which they viewed and enjoyed the feasting and dancing. Or more precisely, platforms from which they consumed the spiritual substance of the feasts abundantly displayed as sacrifices set before them: two major village feasts at beginning and end, the waning and waxing of the moon, and daily meals provided there or in their relatives' houses. The foods of the major feasts were not eaten afterward by the providers but were reciprocally distributed by them to relatives or friends for their respective consumption. The sacrificed foods of ordinary meals were apparently consumed by the relatives who supplied them, as in the normal ritual practices of domestic meals. Mosko makes an observation of major significance about this ex-food of the gods. Having consumed the "shadow" of the food, the *baloma* leave a residue in the form of their saliva, which, when then consumed with the food by humans, enspirits them with divine power (*peu'ula*). Mosko recalls conversations on the matter: "Without the 'hot' . . . input of the spirits' . . . images incorporated in our meals through their depositions of *bubwalua* [saliva], the foods, however they were prepared, would have only minimal capacity or strength (*peu'ula*) for fueling human labors and existence generally. The eating of food by humans in any amounts without the benefit of the spirits' *bubwalua* is considered barely, if at all, sufficient . . . to sustain human life" (2017, 180).

Similarly, for the important goods offered to the spirits: the sweat the latter deposit on these Trobriand treasures, apparently including *kula*-trade valuables (*veguwa*), gives such riches their exchange and political value. The gods are thus doing what the people do. (Although the ideology is that the gods and people mutually feed each other, it does not appear that the former starve to death if they are neglected; at least in the short term they are the stronger for it, unleashing bad weather, even dreaded droughts, on their undutiful kin.) By the communion with the gods, the sacrifices of the *milamala*—as indeed the offerings that precede ordinary meals as well—thereby have immediate benefits for humans, as they are in this way endowed with divine powers of production and reproduction. Through the *milamala* period, as villages meet to dance and feast with each other, sexuality increases in the artistic and the actual performance, evidently with a proportionate

loosening of exogamic rules. Accordingly, it is not just the fertility of the coming crops that will benefit, but the overall fertility of the people.

The *milamala* began with drumming, and the beat continued through the waxing of the moon. (In the mid-1950s, during the prolonged Christmas and New Year festivities—the “time of joy” [*gauna ni marau*])—in a large Fijian village, I had the similar experience of noisy sleepless nights as Malinowski had in the comparable *milamala* of Kiriwina. Only the young women and children, some gaily dressed, who were marching around the village were beating sheets of tin rather than drums.) At the full moon in the Trobriands, however, the beat changes to one recognizable as the send-off of the *baloma*. In Malinowski’s day the exit was unceremonious as the gods were escorted to the road to Tuma by a small raggedy band, mostly of young children. The gods are gone but they are not. They are constantly brought to the assistance of people in spells (*megwa*); and recall, there are spells for practically everything. They are doing what the people do in gardening, canoe making, lovemaking, baby making, kula trading, woodcarving, curing, fishing, witching, sorcerizing. There is a realm and existence of the god, Tuma, as distinct from the existence of the living, called Boyowa—Mosko speaks of them as two different “worlds.” But as the perpetual force in human affairs, the potentiating agency of human success and failure, Tuma is immanent in Boyowa. Or as Mosko sets forth in a capital passage, worthy of citing at length:

Tuma . . . is not some place physically distant from Boyowa. Rather, in the view of Omarkanans, it is the hidden, invisible, “inner” . . . dimension of the universe, interpenetrating the visible, material, “external” . . . world of Boyowa so that the two realms coincide. This is how humans, animals, plants, physical features of the world, and so on, in their material manifestations can exist outwardly in Boyowa, yet harbor inwardly the *momova* [vitality] of Tuma. . . . The two realms are not spatially distant from each other . . . They coincide. It is through this intimate, simultaneous, coterminous mystical connection of the two realms, the visible and the invisible, that living humans of Boyowa are able to communicate and interact with ancestral and other spirits. (2017, 121)

As they say, examples could be multiplied. Indeed, many times over in the pages of the twelve-volume, third edition of Sir James George Frazer's *Golden Bough* ([1911–15] 2012). A brief notice of the *milamala* itself appears in volume six, in a section on the “Feasts of All Souls” (6: 51–84). Frazer begins with British missionary George Brown's (1910, 237) notice of the Trobriand *milamila* in his book about Pacific island cultures. As an annual festival celebrating the return of the ancestors and/or the gods, thus often coinciding with the rites of the New Year, the *milamala* in Kiriwina shares this space of All Souls with a variety of immanentist societies, a number of which Frazer does not precisely identify: Alaska “Esquimaux” of the Yukon; certain Amerindians of California and Mexico; Sumba of eastern Indonesia; “Sea Dayaks” (Iban) of Sarawak; Nagas of Assam and certain peoples of Bengal and Central India; some hill tribes of Burma; “Cambodians”; peoples of Northern Vietnam (“Tonquin”) and Central Vietnam (“Annam”); “Cochin China” (Laos?); a Caucasus group; “Armenians”; Dahomey; two Abyssinian peoples; ancient Persians (Achaemenids); and numerous folk all over western Eurasia. (*The Golden Bough* is the world champion of the “among the” books, not unlike this one, except that Frazer was a transcendentalist, while the selective documentation of ethnographic examples here is driven by an account of immanentism.)

Often, as for Trobriand Islanders, the New Year rite is also a celebration of the harvest, and the ceremonies last for several days or even many weeks. Elaborate feasts and valuable gifts as well as daily provision are offered to the returning dead, who come either as invisible presences or as personated by the living, to be honored as well by dances, songs, and perhaps games, until after a period they are peremptorily, but more often ceremoniously, escorted back to their homes. Ceremoniously as in Sumba, when

a little before daybreak the invisible guests take their departure. All the people turn out of their houses to escort them a little way. Holding in one hand the half of a coco-nut, which contains a small packet of provisions for the dead, and in the other a piece of smouldering wood, they march in procession, singing a drawling song to the accompaniment of

a gong and waving the lighted brands in time to the music. So they move through the darkness till with the last words of the song they throw away the coco-nuts and the brands in the direction of the spirit-land, leaving the ghosts to wend their way thither, while they themselves return to the village. (Frazer [1911–15] 2012, 6: 55–56)

Apparently they have left behind their blessings for the coming period, as in the many references to celebratory New Year and harvest or first-fruit rituals the world around scattered through Frazer's volumes (see especially "The Sacrifice of First-Fruits" [8: 109ff.] and "The Saturnalia and Kindred Festivals" [9: 306ff.]).

Also often testified as prelude or part of the New Year celebrations are encounters with spirits of another sort: demons or other "evil spirits," which must be driven out of society, or so that the world may be purified and renewed (see especially "The Public Expulsion of Evils" [9: 109ff.]). This exorcism of evil spirits is in many ways the opposite of reverential treatment of the visiting divinities. Whereas the gods and ancestors are invited into human society from their celestial or other homes, to be honored and feted with a view toward enlisting their beneficial powers, the pestilent demons and accumulated evils of the year are reviled and driven from society.

In Frazer's account of the Iroquois New Year, "on one day of the festival the ceremony of driving away evil spirits from the village took place." It seems that humans personated other greater animal beings to do so: "Men clothed in the skins of wild beasts, their faces covered with hideous masks, and their hands with the shell of the tortoise, went from hut to hut making frightful noises; in every hut they took fuel from the fire and scattered the embers and ashes about the floor with their hands. The general confession of sins which preceded the festival was probably a preparation for the public expulsion of evil influences" (9: 127). (*Nota bene*: the extinction of domestic fires, the scattering of the old ashes, and the ritual rekindling of new fire is a feature of traditional New Year rites in Polynesia and elsewhere.) The Iroquois drama of the expulsion of evil is part of what Frazer calls "a kind of saturnalia," a "time of general license," when people were out of their senses, breaking all kinds of social

norms. As in the Roman Saturnalia, which was for Frazer the prototype of New Year festivals (of which the descendants are the European carnivals), society as constituted was effectively dissolved.

Or rather, as in the Roman Saturnalia, in conjunction with the return of the ancient god, all manner of political and economic distinctions were abolished in a lawless frenzy, with the effect of the reconstitution of the society as *communitas*, or a primordial *civitas* of equals under a lord of misrule, here the autochthonous god Saturn (cf. on European carnival, Bakhtin [1984, 6–8, ch. 3]; P. Sahlins [1994]). (I risk: in any chiefly or kingly system, as the reigning dynasty is characteristically foreign by origin, the annual return to the original god and communal society takes the form of a ritual rebellion of the underlying indigenous people. We miss you, David Graeber. [Graeber and Sahlins 2017].) The New Year rituals do not necessarily entail this return to the origins, but they often include saturnalian episodes, such as the suspensions or inversion of hierarchical ranks, laughter and pranks, drunkenness, wild and amoral behaviors, including heightened or orgiastic sexuality. Some of that, as noted, attended the Trobriand *milamala*, a festival that Mark Mosko (2017, 195–96) compared to the Hawaiian New Year rite, the Makahiki—which itself, as the joyously celebrated return of the primeval agricultural god Lono, compares well with the Roman Saturnalia.

In the Makahiki, the advent of Lono is preceded, and as it were made possible, by a *communitas* at once of sex and society. The night before the god appears, the people in general, sated on sacrificial meats (pig for men, dog for women) and drunk on kava, indulge in a variety of blasphemous doings and cursing. The social leveling is realized when commoners and nobles together enter the ocean where, as the Hawaiian Catholic Kepelino writes, “one person was attracted to another and the result was by no means good” (1932, 96; cf. Valeri 1985, 200ff.). When they finally emerge from their revels at dawn, there on the beach is the image of Lono, about to begin his renewed sovereignty of the kingdom. Circling the island in state, Lono receives the tributary offerings of the people in district after district, leaving them in his wake to continue their merriments. Coming at the winter solstice to renew the world and the society, the Makahiki is indeed similar to New Year rituals

elsewhere, besides the Saturnalia. Likewise widely reported is the accompanying renewal of human rule, chiefly or kingly, upon submission to ritual humiliation by the god or defeat in ritual battle by the god's popular party. In Hawai'i, the erstwhile human king, heretofore in seclusion, comes in from the sea—he is thus a foreigner—to be ritually speared by a partisan of Lono, at which moment he becomes (again) the king. The ancient regime of the god gives way to human authority, but only on the condition of the submission of the latter to the former. The king rules by subjugation to the god.

A similar scenario of royal submission to the god occurs in Frazer's account of the old Babylonian New Year rite, the Akitu Festival, lasting eleven days, probably including Spring equinox. The Akitu ceremonies honored Marduk, the principal god of Babylon, and were focused on his great temple of Esagila in the center of the city:

For here, in a splendid chamber of the vast edifice, all the gods were believed to assemble at this season under the presidency of Marduk for the purpose of determining the fates for the new year, especially the fate of the king's life. On this occasion the king of Babylon was bound annually to renew his regal power by grasping the hands of the image of Marduk in his temple, as if to signify that he received the kingdom directly from the deity and was unable without divine assistance and authority to retain it for more than a year. Unless he thus formally reinstated himself on the throne once a year, the king ceased to reign legitimately. (Frazer [1911–15] 2012, 9: 356)

In immanentist cultures, the gods, ancestors, and other metaperson denizens of the cosmos are not only occasional visitors; for all their distance and invisibility, they are also and ever present in human affairs, ever on call. People couldn't live without the immanent metaperson beings and forces that invisibly power their endeavors, making them efficacious or, too often, fruitless. If the gods are doing what people do, they are present, for all their distance, as an integral part of human existence, even as they manage their own affairs. Partible beings, the gods are present for all that they are distant; they are potent agents of humans' fate for all that they are unseen.