

Materializing Ritual Practices

EDITED BY

Lisa M. Johnson and Rosemary A. Joyce

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1

This book examines a long history of ritual practice, illuminating the way the temporalities of ritual—duration, timing, and rhythm—are instantiated through materialities. It takes an interdisciplinary approach, engaging ethnographers, linguistic anthropologists, and archaeologists with a common focus: the long-term reproduction of social relations in Mexico and Central America accomplished through ritual practice.

Materiality pervades many aspects of ritual. Even actions such as singing, chanting, or praying, often treated as if they were ephemeral or immaterial, may be anchored in material objects and substances, produced through mobilization of the material—whether that material is conceived of as moving breath, sound waves, or vibrations perceived through bodily sensations. Materialities have tempos, durations, and rhythms. The contributors to this volume highlight just how deeply dependent ritual temporalities are on the rhythms of materiality, expanding the way ethnographers and linguistic anthropologists describe and recognize the production of ritual rhythms.

Both of the co-editors are archaeologists, specialists in understanding action through material residues. The contributions to the volume, taken as a whole, challenge the way materialities are sometimes understood when discussion takes place solely among such specialists. The result is more than simply mourning the absence of the kind of materialities of gesture, voice, and posture and of substances consumed or destroyed

*Introducing Materialities
and Temporalities
of Ritual Practice*

ROSEMARY A. JOYCE
AND LISA M. JOHNSON

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that ethnographers witness. Instead, as archaeologists, we are moved to recognize how the material traces we can document imply these other forms of materiality. This volume thus exemplifies the power of interdisciplinary exchanges. Ethnographers, linguists, and archaeologists have specialist procedures that practitioners of each discipline need to understand to fully assess the potential for cross-disciplinary work.

What emerges from the confrontation with detailed methodological discussions presented here are some convergences and some absolute differences. The scale of observation is one aspect of methodology that is worth attention. Multiple contributors use approaches that allow analysis of ritual temporalities and materialities at the micro-level. In archaeology, this includes documenting microscopic residues; in linguistic studies of the ethnographic present, attending to the smallest performative level of enunciation: the breath. As the contributors demonstrate, the microscale is always made more intelligible by linkage to macroscale phenomena, including the macroscale of long-term temporalities in which ritual action is reproduced over centuries through action at the fleeting scale of the moment, the event.

In the chapters that follow, the contributors explore temporalities of the event, ritualization of place, and the materiality of sound as three axes that unite practitioners from different research disciplines attempting to illuminate the historical trajectory of ritual in Mexico and Central America. These three axes grew out of a multi-year sequence of exchanges among participants in an international working group. Starting with temporality of ritual and with the critical junctures of repetition, transformation, and destruction as key sites of engagement, participants were free to explore multiple dimensions of the topic. In initial discussions in Paris in 2015, the emphasis was on temporalities at multiple scales, involving defining sequences, processes, and procedures through which ritual actions were coordinated. Repeated performance of rituals—some represented by new observations, some by older records, some by archaeological observations—formed the focus. At this point, the articulation of different research practices was bridged by the shared subject matter: rituals in Mesoamerica. Ethnographers and archaeologists found common ground in the ways ritual practices instantiated spatial settings, ritualizing place. In a second major conference held in Rome in 2016, discussion shifted to the question of the recomposition of time through ritual, directly engaging participants across methodological boundaries. The third major conference was held at the University of California, Berkeley, in September 2017, where all the contributors to this volume participated. Observing the salience of materialities in the previous events, the 2017 conference took the materiality of ritual as its central focus.

The specific focus of this volume, like the conference from which it was developed, is thus on materiality: the form through which temporal effects are produced. The sequences of creation, destruction, and transformation that are produced through ritual action always involve a variety of materialities. From a contemporary theoretical perspective, we argue, materialities must be understood as active and agential, as composing assemblages of humans and non-humans that come together to make things like transformation effective (Barad 2003, 2007; Bennett 2010; Chen 2012; Connolly 2013; DeLanda 2016; Dolphijn and van der Tuin 2012). Materialities may persist at temporal scales beyond the lives of humans or be as fleeting as spoken words, music, or scents. Yet they always contribute their own specific tenor to the practices we recognize as ritualized.

GEOGRAPHIC AND METHODOLOGICAL SCOPE

The authors in this volume connect the kinds of observed material discursive practices ethnographers witness to the sedimented practices from which archaeologists infer similar activity in the past. They address the way specific materialities encourage repetition in ritual actions and, in other circumstances, resist changes to ritual sequences. Contributors are attentive to the broader sensorium and the potentials to understand materiality in ritual performance through more than the study of representation of symbolic concepts in visual form, a well-established aspect of research by iconographers on ritual in Mexico and Central America. Contributors use the concept of materialities, understood to encompass visual, aural, olfactory, and tactile phenomena, as a focus to explore intersections that cross differences in methodological approaches to sounds (including words and music), actions (including historical sediments that are residues of action), and material context (including altars and buildings).

All contributors consider a wide range of agential, active, animate, and vital entities that extend beyond the human to include non-human and supra-human actors and force in what Perig Pitrou (2012, 2016a), a participant in the project who was unable to contribute to this volume, describes as “co-activity.” Together, the chapters illuminate a deep history of ritual practices in an area extending from Mexico to Costa Rica (figure 1.1), where such co-activity is indicated in both ethnographic and historical times. Expanding the scope of the working group from Mesoamerica to encompass adjacent Central American traditions in Honduras and Costa Rica acknowledges that the boundaries drawn by scholars delimiting “Mesoamerica” in the early

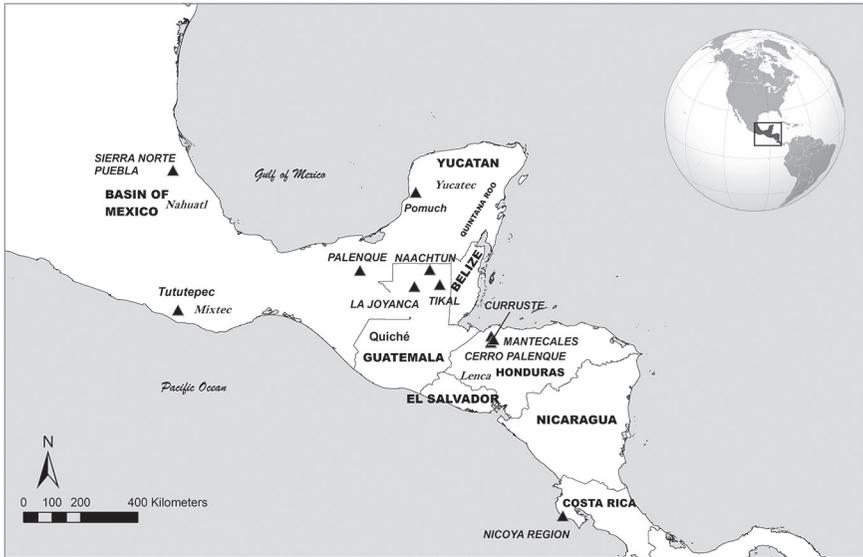


FIGURE I.I. *Map of sites and regions mentioned in the text*

twentieth century did not describe a fixed cultural entity (Joyce 2004, 2021). It opens the way to consider how ritual practices reproduced at the level of the individual, household, and village proved resilient even as government structures changed, so we can delineate long histories of related ritual practice.

A central focus of the contributors to the volume is the long-term historical tradition that links contemporary speakers of Maya languages with the architects of archaeological sites of the Classic Maya culture, inhabited in the first millennium AD. Three chapters, on Palenque (Johnson, chapter 2), La Joyanca (Arnauld, chapter 5), and Naachtun (Nondédéo and his coauthors, chapter 6), examine ritual over long historical spans of time that resulted in deposits visible at monumental scale today. The products of actions directed and carried out by the ruling and non-ruling noble families of highly stratified city-states, these contributions introduce some of the most enduring and unusual materialities, from large-scale carved stone monuments to precious stone crafted into items deposited during rituals. The same settings, however, allow us to focus on the more ephemeral and less visible traces of ritualized events, from the structuring of sediments observed at microscale (Johnson) and macroscale (Arnauld) to the micro-residues of substances used in part for fleeting affects, such as scent.

These chapters on early Maya history are complemented by studies of contemporary Maya ritual performances in Yucatan involving detailed analysis

of discourse (Vapnarsky, chapter 4) and of music (Zalaquett Rock and her coauthors, chapter 11). Here, the scale of observation and analysis using specialist methods mirrors the microscale achieved by the archaeologists, demonstrating the potential utility in both cases of a clearly articulated notion of the ritualized event (discussed by Johnson). The contemporary observations also reinforce the idea that materialities are not simply those things that are resistant to decay, such as stone and ceramics that preserve in archaeological sites. Instead, Valentina Vapnarsky shows us that in Yucatec ritual practice, breath, the animating force of speech, must be treated seriously as a materiality. Francisca Zalaquett Rock and her colleagues add a useful illustration of the way ritual implements, such as the wooden drum made and played in the case they study, are actively agential, reproducing specific performance effects.

Maya ritual practices, both ancient and contemporary, anchor the integrative study of a specific set of rituals carried out across the territory historically occupied by speakers of a range of Maya languages—stretching from Mexico to Honduras—by Johann Begel, Marie Chosson, and Cédric Becquey (chapter 7). For the archaeological examples, they draw on the kinds of stable, enduring objects that predominate as evidence of ritual in other archaeological studies. They emphasize certain kinds of assemblages that occur emplaced in particular ways, evident also in the archaeological studies by Johnson, Arnould, and Nondédéo and colleagues. To navigate the methodological distinction between the materialist approach of archaeology and the performative observations possible for ethnographers, they examine sacralization of specific places—buildings—showing that while the observable contents of ritual deposits in the present are different, the temporality of these rituals is comparable. Repeated instances of ritualizing structures are, in the ethnographic present, repetitions of the terms of agreements with animating forces of the earth. While the same cannot be asserted based solely on the structural similarities of the archaeological examples, the cross-disciplinary discussion directs us to consider whether there were similar compacts with animate spirits involved in more ancient rituals.

Taking a similarly long-term, integrative view, Rosemary Joyce and Russell Sheptak (chapter 3) expand the cultural range of the volume beyond Mesoamerica. The Lenca-speaking peoples of western Honduras were closely tied to the prehispanic Maya world, and there are aspects of their ritual practices that align them with those studied by Begel, Chosson, and Becquey. Yet Lenca history offers an interesting contrast to the Maya tradition. In the prehispanic past, Lenca political organization never developed the extreme levels of inequality seen in Classic Maya city-states (Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo

2014; Joyce 2017a). As a result, there are no monumental architectural complexes like those at Palenque, La Joyanca, and Naachtun in Lenca territory. Yet similar practices ensuring reproduction of continuity are evident in ritualized deposits in Lenca sites (Joyce 2015a; Joyce and Pollard 2010).

Joyce and Sheptak emphasize the methodological challenge of linking evidence created through different practices to trace continuity and change in materialities of ritual over the long term. Drawing on ethnographic studies that document rituals of payment to animate forces of the earth, like those central to Maya ritual in the analyses of Begel, Chosson, and Becquey, Joyce and Sheptak explore how the precise vehicles and performances involved in relations with such forces are differently visible in historical documents and archaeological sites. Treating the long term as a product of active interventions by Lenca people engaged in colonial projects, their chapter frames the question of ritual temporality at the largest scale as one in need of explicit consideration in each area where a deep history of ritual practice can be traced. The structural equivalences they trace between ancient fired clay figures and modern saint's images are not simply products of reproduction of practices. Instead, they demonstrate the continuing requirement for material vehicles for the animating spirits, which can equally be manifested in plants collected from the countryside. What endures is not the iconic form but the relationship humans forge with non-human spirits that come to rest in specific materials.

The chapter by Valeria Bellomia (10) also deals with a long-term history in which colonization is a context in which ritual materialities are reinterpreted. Her analysis of bone rasps removed from Mexico and taken to Italy early in the colonial period brings us another example of how microscale methodologies specific to one discipline can inform our understanding of phenomena observed using other disciplinary approaches. The product of these instruments in their past use was ritualized sound, music that formed part of the performance of ritual. Their preparation and use in producing ritual music can be reconstructed from the traces of manufacture and wear that are presented in the material itself. In their contemporary setting as museum display objects, they signify through sheer physical form, as icons of cultural identity.

The study of musical instruments is represented by two additional chapters, the ethnographic and historical research of Zalaquett Rock and her coauthors on a specific wooden drum used in modern Yucatec performance and the discussion of a large collection of archaeologically recovered fired clay ocarinas by Katrina Kosyk (chapter 9). In both cases, the focus is on the way instrumentalists engage with the things through which they produce sonic materialities of ritual. Kosyk expands the geographic and cultural scope even

further, to the Nicoya region of Costa Rica. Like the Lenca area discussed by Joyce and Sheptak, Nicoya did not see the kind of growth of inequality that resulted in monumental construction typical of the Mexican and Guatemalan Maya lowlands. Kosyk emphasizes the importance of ritual practice, including performances of music, in political structure in this area.

Kosyk brings to the volume an explicit emphasis on the way instruments imply both individual practices and the existence of communities of practice, groups of people who learn a way to carry out a practice (a ritual, a performance) and reproduce that way of acting in part through embodied gestures and in part due to internalized ideas of what the right way to act might be. Like Bellomia, Kosyk uses the material studies method of reconstructing the *chaîne opératoire*, the sequence of actions that results in the making of a specific object and in its repetitive, structured pattern of use. It is the repetition of actions that results from learning in a community of practice that makes it possible to link individual things to patterns of action such as those observed in the contemporary studies.

Zalaquett Rock's chapter demonstrates this kind of linkage well, even though it does not use the explicit vocabulary rooted in the material culture studies methodology employed by Bellomia and Kosyk. The wooden drum she and her coauthors discuss has agential capacity to enable the reproduction of a specific performance, in the hands of practitioners who have learned to play the drum in what Kosyk would recognize as a community of engaged performance. It is not just the drum that ensures the continued transfer of performative practices. The words of the song Zalaquett Rock and her colleagues analyze—rhythmically recapitulated in performance—also convey the sentiments, orientations, and meanings associated with the event they historically marked.

The capacity of words structured as song to assist in the repeated reproduction of ritual echoes the arguments made in the two chapters that examine ritual language in contemporary settings. Vapnarsky's case study, like that of Zalaquett Rock, takes place in Yucatan, although the kinds of ritual performances are quite different: highly personal, even intimate rituals for Vapnarsky contrasting with the community-wide celebrations of Carnival studied by Zalaquett Rock. Vapnarsky's case is more closely paralleled by the contribution of Alessandro Lupo (chapter 8), who carefully analyzes the effective force of Roman Catholic prayers in rituals among the Nahua people of the Sierra of Puebla in the highlands of Mexico. Using a combination of Spanish and Nahuatl, the modern language descended from that spoken by the makers of the bone rasps studied by Bellomia, the ritual specialists Lupo discusses

produce intertwined ritual discourses. Roman Catholic prayers, Lupo emphasizes, are marked by their repetition, included in measured numbers, and treated like material objects that can be “heaped” on the altar. Where Vapnarsky gives us an account of ritual speech as a corporeal phenomenon, Lupo gives us an account of the corporeality of a kind of speech act. The materiality of the prayers Sierra Nahua ritualists produce is demonstrated in their potential to over-stuff the bodies of the people for whom the rituals are performed.

The integration of different disciplinary approaches united by a common focus on ritual practice as materialized at a variety of temporal scales that this volume represents is a challenge to discipline-specific and even culture-area-specific understanding. Bringing together researchers who work by observing living people in action and those whose understandings of action are mediated by residues, and thus shaped in the face of chronological disjunction, required a degree of convergence in initial terms of engagement that was produced by the series of conferences that preceded the one represented by this volume. Before returning to the content of this volume, we briefly frame the main domains in which practitioners using different methodologies sought ways to coordinate their observations about ritual, temporality, and materiality.

TERMS OF ENGAGEMENT

Archaeologists who once used definitions of ritual that separated them from ethnographers have increasingly drawn on theories of ritual practice that were developed for understanding ritual in ethnographic situations (Bradley 2003; Joyce 2017b; Swenson 2015). As this transformation took place in the last decades of the twentieth century, the work of religious studies scholar Catherine Bell (1992, 74) proved especially influential, including her call for a shift away from identifying ritual objects and places to understanding ritualization, defined as “a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege that which is being done in comparison to other, usually more quotidian, activities.” Building on Bell’s work, archaeologist Richard Bradley (2003, 12) proposed that treating ritual as action made it possible “to consider the contexts in which particular rituals are created and performed, and the consequences of such actions, whether they have been intended or not.” He identified ritualization as both “a way of acting which reveals some of the dominant concerns of society, and a process by which certain parts of life are selected and provided with an added emphasis” (12).

Ritualization is a process, and as a process it takes place in time, directing attention to changing relations among participants in action. Ritualization

is accomplished “through materialities that produce the effect of a ritualized body, ritualized spaces, and ritualized things” (Joyce 2017b, 143). Joyce (144) notes the way the editors of the journal *Material Religion* follow in this framing, linking religion (and thus ritual) to materiality: “Religion is about the sensual effects of walking, eating, meditating, making pilgrimage, and performing even the most mundane of ritual acts . . . what people do with material things and places, and how these structure and color experience and one’s sense of oneself and others.” For Joyce (144), this connection implies that “the materiality of religious practice is both a productive site for recommitting to existing beliefs, and also provides the only medium through which to transform beliefs.”

Johnson (chapter 2, this volume) links ritualization explicitly to contemporary theoretical perspectives on the co-activity of humans and non-humans acting together, arguing that ritualization “occurs through a stylized way of acting that illuminates relationality between humans, places, things.” A growing number of scholars working in Mesoamerica are addressing the idea of the animacy of such assemblages (Brown and Emery 2008; Harrison-Buck 2012; Hendon, Joyce, and Lopiparo 2014; Joyce 2018). The materiality that is the focus of contributors to this volume concerns how humans, places, and other beings are organized relationally during the events contributors recognize as ritualized performances.

The shift from thinking of rituals to considering ritualization paralleled a shift in anthropology and archaeology to thinking of materials as active, as materializing practices. Active things, vital materiality, and animist ontologies are now common elements of scholarship in these fields (Alberti and Marshall 2009; Brown and Walker 2008; Hill 2008; Hodder 2012; Ingold 2010, 2011, 2012; Jones and Boivin 2010; Joyce 2008, 2012a, 2012b, 2015b; Kohn 2013; Walker 2008; Watts 2013; Zedeño 2008). The differences among various theoretical approaches often lie in how agency is understood, either as an inherent quality, in which case objects can be alive and active in ways symmetrical with humans (Olsen 2003), or as a capacity to act, typically through relating to other materials, humans, plants, and animals (Barad 2003, 2007; Bennett 2010).

In all contemporary theoretical perspectives, materiality is understood as relational, shifting the human from the center of all things to a position in relation to a larger world of materials and recognizing that other forms of matter are agential, having the potential to cause effects alone or in concert with humans (Barad 2007). This is different from simply granting human-like intentionality to non-human things. A concept of agential materiality is especially useful in ritual studies, where it is understood that a wide range of

entities can exercise agency. The ways materiality is perceived as active vary, but generally, we can say that materials—including nonliving things, animals, and plants—can have an effect on outcomes, outside of direct human intervention, and can alter the outcome of human action as well as human perception of those actions (Van Oyen 2018).

Materiality should not be confused with physical substance. When we discuss materialities, we are including everything with a presence that enables relational action, or what Karen Barad (2003, 2007) calls intra-action. Intra-action, Barad argues, is the way phenomena are configured in action, through the drawing of boundaries around regions of what in fact is a continuous plane of material in action. Intra-action implies the coming into existence of phenomena through the definition of topologies that demarcate them rather than labeling the instantiation of relations between preexisting things. Intra-action aggregates the potential for action with the definition of that which acts and is acted on: entities emerge as bounded agential materialities in action; they do not precede action.

We thus include in our understanding of materiality things that would be recognized conventionally as objects and substances, some ephemeral or invisible to the human eye, alongside living landscapes of plants and animals—not because any of these are given but because they have the potential to produce effects. What is material, understood as having agential possibility, may act through media that are not observable visually but can be sensed through its effects. Sound, produced as instrumental music, singing, or chanting, has a substance, a materiality, as contributors to this volume demonstrate.

What materiality implies, then, is a capacity to have an effect, an effect that is consequential enough to become observable. Ritual materialities have effects, among them maintaining, changing, and ending social worlds. The effectiveness of ritual materialities is seen in the way worlds proceed and change over time. In examining apparently common things that recur in ritual, we are exploring time and temporality as nonlinear and examining multiple kinds of time, exploring ritual as a stylized, materially potent phenomenon through its effects. In the process, contributors to this volume are interrogating the relationality of matter and subjectivity and the presence and distribution of agency within ritual, recognizing that subjectivity is fluid and agency is active.

Some of the contributions to this volume discuss non-human things and spaces as animated. We want to distinguish this from a proposal that these societies were or are “animist.” This would undermine the goal of agential realist thinking, which is to assert the intra-activity of materialities as a condition of existence, not simply a belief some people hold (Barad 2003, 2007). There is a history

of anthropological debate surrounding animism that has brought the idea that things, plants, and animals have souls, or are the same as human persons, under scrutiny (Wilkinson 2017). The recent revival of animism was an attempt to move away from a “Western ontology” in the consideration of non-Western ritual practices (Haber 2009). In a Western—or, better, Enlightenment—ontology, there were clear divisions between subjects and objects, nature and culture. Yet materials never ceased to be active, despite the temporary dominance of this philosophical framework. Ritual practices provide one of the clearest domains for exploring how materials, in relation with human and non-human persons, are agential. This volume presents one such exploration, with a particular history, that of ritual in a specific geographic area: Mexico and Central America. Here, it is clear that animating force inhered in other-than-human materialities and that ritual, among other things, engaged these animating forces in rhythms from the moment to the generation and beyond.

THEMES

The contributors to this volume provide case studies from locations across Mesoamerica and Central America. Throughout the volume, contributors discuss the materiality of ritual, considering such things as instruments, altars, mausoleums, and houses as active. Each section of the book is organized around a common theme that extends across different research approaches: events and temporalities, ritualizing place, and the materiality of sound.

In part 1, authors consider the temporality of ritual and the ways ritual temporality can be distinct from temporalities in other contexts. Johnson discusses how actions and experience inside ritual events can produce a special temporality. Using methods developed in recent microarchaeology, she presents microstratigraphic residues as archaeological evidence for sequences of ritual actions practiced over multiple generations in a non-ruling noble residential household at the Classic Period Maya city of Palenque. Johnson links the repetition of action she can detect at the fine scale of microstratigraphy to the concept of the event, described as an inflection point in the ongoing flow of activity. She shows how events, visible in microstratigraphy, contribute to longer cycles of historical reproduction. She describes the event as having “an impact that extends beyond the moment and place of its occurrence” (Gilmore and O’Donoghue 2015, 6). Johnson argues that “what constitutes the ‘event’ is its memorable, effecting qualities. It is set apart from other repetitive moments that blur together in memory.” From this perspective, ritualization is a particularly important way moments become events with agential effects.

In their chapter, Joyce and Sheptak combine ethnographic, historical, and archaeological data to consider the historical depth of ritual practice in western Honduras. They consider two types of rituals carried out historically by Lenca people, speakers of a group of non-Maya indigenous languages who occupied most of western, central, and southern Honduras. These rituals are called *compostura*, or “payments to the earth,” and *guancasco*, ceremonies in which the statue of a patron saint of one town moves to visit the patron saint of a partner town. Joyce and Sheptak examine historical documents to understand the link between prehispanic period and modern Lenca rituals, a process of relating temporalities observed at the scale of the event to temporalities of the long term. They argue that relating modern ritual practices to archaeological predecessors requires taking historical change into account. They thus relate the ritual event (in the present, the colonial past, and the prehispanic past) to a punctuated rhythm of long-term repetition, transformation, and disruption. They find that in the contemporary world, ritual events repeatedly relate Lenca people to spirits understood to animate places. The historical examples of ritual events in which Lenca people related to spirits animating places can then be seen as part of a sequence of repetition and transformation of ritual. The longer rhythm includes changes in the ways rituals engage with materialities and vary even at the same point in time for these rituals to have effects.

Johnson, Joyce, and Sheptak deal with ritual temporalities mediated by materialities over long periods of history. In the final chapter in this section, Vapnarsky turns our attention to a temporality and rhythm of the shortest possible duration: the “breath group,” defined as “a stretch of speech between two pauses of sufficient length for an intake of breath.” Vapnarsky considers the sensorial perception of voice in ritual among the Maya of Yucatan. To understand variations in tempo and rhythms, she argues, one must also consider the relationship between voice and other gestural actions. An important argument she makes is that voice has physical, material effects. When expended through strong force, the breath of the voice can be felt. Sound, she demonstrates, is material, producing the temporality of ritual as its effect.

Where Johnson examines the materiality of sediments and Joyce and Sheptak look to three-dimensional images and two-dimensional documents as the material ground of ritual temporalities, Vapnarsky demonstrates that breath and articulated speech itself are materialities. She considers ritual speech as a timing mechanism, setting the pace for the temporality of ritual. She argues that the materiality and temporality of voice creates the rhythm of the contemporary Yucatec Maya rituals she observed and analyzes. Chants or prayers, she demonstrates, are considered as substance in these rituals and can

serve as offerings much like candles and incense, substances whose materiality has never been in question even though they, like breaths, are ephemeral and are consumed and disappear with time.

These chapters serve as an introduction to the nesting of multiple temporalities in action and their relationships to materialities from the most ephemeral to the most enduring. In part 2, we turn to case studies of ritual materializing place. Again, the theme crosses boundaries among ethnographic, linguistic, and archaeological analysis and involves temporalities of different durations that overlap in the same context. What binds these chapters together is a concern with how places—from the short-term place represented by the altar constructed for a contemporary ritual to the long-enduring ritual places, built thousands of years ago, that remain as parts of archaeological sites—are produced through the transformation of materialities in ritualized events.

Arnauld provides an introduction to “ritual stratigraphy” as an investment in place and place making. Ritual stratigraphy recalls Bradley’s (2003) discussion of ritualization through “structured deposition” (Richards and Thomas 1984). We argue that a concept like this is critical to linking archaeological scales of analysis to ethnographic ones (Joyce 2015a; Joyce and Pollard 2010). Structured deposition produces ritual stratigraphy, recognizable traces of stylized actions repeated over time as part of sequences of ritual action.

Like Johnson, Arnauld explores the layering of materials stratigraphically on a temporal scale equal to human lives and generations, a scale that her work again shows can span centuries. Arnauld avoids interpreting offerings buried in house platforms and monumental structures in functionalist terms, as intended to animate the structure, departing from a long-established approach in Mesoamerican studies. Instead, she argues that the burial of materials, forming ritual stratigraphy, constitutes acts of place making—the same conclusion reached in studies of structured deposition through which the Neolithic landscape of Britain was shaped. Approaching the Maya lowland example, she analyzes ritual stratigraphy with an eye to ethnography; she likens the insertion of caches and offerings in a stuccoed surface or temple as similar to farmers preparing a field and planting seeds, invoking ideas of futurity at different scales, in distinct cycles. “Place making,” she writes, creates “a ‘common ground.’”

The building of structures takes on greater significance when it is understood to be place making. Archaeological analysis allows for observations of ritualized place making over time, across the space of a settlement, that might not have been recognized without a self-conscious orientation to observe the creative, repeated acts that produced the ritualized stratigraphy. Arnauld suggests

that inhabitants of one influential household at La Joyanca may have intentionally excavated occupational debris and soils from their original homesite, to be transported and used as fill material inside a newly constructed public structure. This practice, she argues, not only kept exterior spaces clean, but the discarded occupational debris may have served as “ritual rubbish,” carrying personal knowledge and history with it into this new space.

The relationships Arnould demonstrates between the apparently inert medium of sediments and the active constitution of place, at scales ranging from the house to the city, are complemented by the discussion by Nondédéo and his colleagues of place making in engagement with stone sculptures identified as altars, material agents in ritual action. The altars they discuss from the site of Naachtun are constructed of stone, but they arguably served the same purpose as altars of more perishable material constructed in contemporary rituals out of wood and other organic materials, examples of which are discussed in other ethnographic cases (see chapters by Vapnarsky [4], Joyce and Sheptak [3], and Lupo [8]).

As in the instances described by Arnould, Nondédéo and his colleagues recognize both longer-term temporalities and fine-scale events in the ritualization of place associated with the placement of the two altars they document. The stone altars they describe were ritualized by the placement of ceramic vessels in a series of events that would have involved repeated emphasis on the sacrality of the place. Among the usually ephemeral materialities they are able to suggest were engaged in these events, organic traces suggest the burning of resin to produce scent. More durable inclusions in the deposits resulting from these ritual events, jade and marine shell and coral fragments, may be viewed from the perspective of agential realism as media for intra-action relating the newly created place to the places where these materials originate—the stony earth and marine waters. They conclude their detailed discussion of the stratigraphic history of events related to the two altars they document by pointing to the agential role of the altar stones themselves. Rather than serving simply as objects on which ritual actions took place, the altars forged “a link between a deposit and a building.”

An integrative study of ethnographic rituals of house building and archaeological deposits viewed as likely residues from analogous practices in the Maya past serves as a bridge from the two archaeological chapters that open this section, to the final chapter in the section, by Alessandro Lupo, which examines contemporary ritual activity. In their comparative archaeological and ethnographic study, the penultimate chapter in this section, Begel, Chosson, and Becquey demonstrate that built structures in contemporary Maya towns

require repeated rituals to bring the occupants into harmony with entities that own and control the earth. The reciprocity they demonstrate between humans and non-human entities recalls the description by Joyce and Sheptak of the effect of Lenca rituals. It appears that in both cases, humans must maintain relations with a landscape of living beings, structuring the reproduction of ritual practices, even as the kinds of buildings constructed and the available materialities for ritual practice change.

Begel and his colleagues describe ritual deposits interred in archaeological sites, like those associated with the altars at Naachtun discussed by Nondédéo and his coauthors, as agential, based on their equation of these deposits with those created in the practice of house building rituals today. In her work at Palenque, Johnson (2018b, chapter 2) discussed such combinations of active material agents as “assemblages,” following Manuel DeLanda (2016). His assemblage concept accounts for the ways humans and materials emerge intra-actively, through relating, with their boundaries and properties defined only in relationship to each other. In considering an assemblage, no one component is given priority. The components and the agency that is enacted through their coming together must be described as potentially unique, even if similar to other instances.

DeLanda’s assemblage theory reminds us that even when the elements assembled look similar, the historical moment is different, as is the effect of their agential possibilities. In the Classic Maya archaeological sites discussed by Johnson, Arnauld, and Nondédéo and his coauthors, the agential effects of buried deposits take place at very large social, temporal, and spatial scales. They create monumental histories of dynasties and noble families, appropriate to the durability of the stone materials used. Yet like the ethnographic rituals of more modest scale in the lives of individuals and their houses documented by Begel, Chosson and Becquey, the archaeological rituals create ritualized place through repetition at intervals timed by human life events.

In the final chapter in this section, Lupo provides an ethnographic examination of prayers as materialities that, like other things employed in rituals, can be heaped up on altars, ritualizing these critical active places. He shows that the way prayers are produced has a material impact on the participants in the ritual. As in Vapnarsky’s Yucatec Maya example, Lupo’s Nahua case study demonstrates that verbal forms need to be treated as weighty materialities, no more or less ephemeral than many of the other things assembled for ritual events—the flowers, incense, and food that will decay or be burned or consumed. As the capacity for archaeological detection of micro-residues of such fleeting substances increases, it is becoming ever more possible to harmonize

descriptions of ancient ritual events with those observed today, in which flowers, burning resin, and foodstuffs play prominent roles on the altar (Morehart 2017). Lupo's account of the effects prayers have should remind scholars also to attempt to account for the materiality of the vocal (or better, aural) performances we can assume accompanied rituals in the past, even when we have no direct way to assert their existence.

The third section of the book turns deliberately to this question of the aural as material, using both archaeological and ethnographic studies to extend implications of the linguistic work by Vapnarsky and Lupo. Collapsing any possible distinction between studies of living performance and studies of things, the contributions to this section all involve consideration of the activity of musical instruments in a variety of historical contexts. They demonstrate that it is through relating that things act, from the interrelation of wooden drum and singing in a Carnival celebration discussed by Zalaquett Rock and her coauthors, to the ancient, historical, and contemporary engagements of bone rasps examined by Bellomia, or the assemblage of fired clay, human breath, and moving fingers considered by Kosyk.

This section opens with work by Kosyk on ritual performance and its embodiment implied by the form of musical instruments, ocarinas recovered in excavations at a site in Costa Rica. The large number of instruments present makes this an especially good place for rethinking the materiality of sound. Similar instruments are present in archaeological sites throughout Mexico and Central America, usually in smaller numbers. In ethnographic rituals recorded in the recent past and the present, other instruments, including instruments introduced through colonization, may be employed; but the same kind of analytic efforts can be brought to bear on their particular implications, as the chapter by Zalaquett Rock and her colleagues demonstrates.

Musical instruments are exceptionally rich ritual materialities because they implicate three different subject positions contributing to ritual practices: those of the makers of instruments, those of the players, and those of the participants who listen to the music and respond to it in the ritual. Attentive to the creation of agential possibilities through the making of instruments, Kosyk explores the intertwined agencies and relationalities of makers of instruments and performers. The breath that flows through the fired clay of the aerophones in her case study animates the instrument intra-actively. It would have produced material effects similar to those seen in the studies of contemporary verbal performances described by Vapnarsky and Lupo. The bodily effort involved in producing sound from instruments underlines how verbal performances in ritual are more than merely uttering words. They have,

as both Vapnarsky and Lupo emphasize, material force, felt in the body of the speaker (who must not be exhausted by the effort, Lupo's Nahua interlocutors tell him) as well as in the body of the subjects of the ritual.

The preservation of musical instruments made of fired clay is in one sense incidental, an outcome of the need to fix the material to produce specific tones. As Kosyk notes, the fired clay of the Costa Rican ocarinas actually absorbs moisture, creating a challenge for the musician. In another sense, when the instruments are viewed as ritual agents themselves, the choice to produce highly durable instruments allowed for inter-generational rhythms of ritual reproduction. This is one of the points made by Bellomia in her study of Mexican bone rasps preserved in a museum in Italy. It is also a central lesson of Zalaquett Rock's study, with her colleagues, of the performance in Yucatan of a specific song using a traditional wooden drum.

Bellomia demonstrates that archaeological instruments continue to exercise agential possibility today. Following Igor Kopytoff (1986), she considers the "cultural biographies" of two bone rasp instruments. She argues that "in a museum context, this means recognizing the ability of materiality to dynamically act as a cultural agent, able to convey meanings, stories, knowledge, and creativity." Kopytoff's highly cited work marks one of the first attempts to follow and account for the shifting values, meanings, and functions of objects as they moved from context to context. Kopytoff (1986, 66) explains:

In doing the biography of a thing, one would ask questions similar to those one asks about people: where does the thing come from and who made it? What has been its career so far, and what do people consider to be an ideal career for such things? What are the recognized "ages" or periods in the thing's "life," and what are the cultural markers for them? How does the thing's use change with its age and what happens to it when it reaches its usefulness?

Recent reconsiderations of this approach have proposed alterations, describing the historical movement of things as "itineraries" rather than biographies (Joyce 2012a, 2012b; Joyce and Gillespie 2015). This involves two main changes: first, acknowledging that the itineraries of things "have no real beginning other than where we enter them and no end since things and their extensions continue to move" and second, not subsuming the experiences of things to the life course of humans with birth, death, and "afterlives" but allowing for different biographies with moments of renaissance and revision (Joyce and Gillespie 2015, 3–4).

Tracing the itineraries of things can be a means to follow an object's changing relationships, as in the instance when musical instruments are transformed

from active agents of ritual performance to agents producing multiple temporalities in their new museum context, bringing to Europe a feeling of antiquity, of being outside of the modern, while simultaneously indexing their colonial acquisition. As does Kosyk, Bellomia employs technological and use-wear analyses to determine how things were made, used, and altered after being transported away from their use-context, to identify the rhythms they produced. She shows that the temporality of rhythms created by these instruments extends to their contemporary incorporation in museums.

In the final chapter in this section, Zalaquett Rock and her colleagues present a multi-layered study of the materiality of music that links the performance of a specific song to the activity of a specific wooden drum. In a wide-ranging exploration of the joined histories of the song and the drum, Zalaquett Rock and her coauthors explore materiality at scales ranging from the event of the Carnival to its annual repetition and the generational reproduction of skill required to play the song using the drum. Bringing oral narratives into the assemblage, they add more temporalities, including those of the creation of the category of instrument and its socialization.

Like Kosyk and Bellomia, Zalaquett Rock and her colleagues are concerned with the specificities of the musicality of the instrument, a materiality itself that produces additional materialities in the form of sound. Like Vapnarsky and Lupo, she is also concerned with the performative weight of the sung narrative, with its powers to effect ritualization. The song she and her coauthors explore is agential on its own, reproduced both through performance and through documentary media—recalling the role of documentary media in bridging long stretches of time demonstrated by Joyce and Sheptak in their study of Lenca ritual practice and implicit in the archaeological studies of Classic Maya Palenque, La Joyanca, and Naachtun, where the documentary media involved were produced using Maya script.

A person acting as part of assemblages with any of the musical instruments described in the final section of this book would be immersed in the materiality of the grouping, evoking a multiplicity of the senses. Authors of many chapters address aspects of the sensorium, from acoustics (Kosyk, Bellomia, and Zalaquett Rock) to the smell of copal incense or burning food in a ritual feasting event (Johnson). These represent efforts to adopt a more embodied approach to materialities that can account for human perceptions as well as material relationships. The senses are both culturally and contextually constituted. In ritual, the senses are heightened through engagement with matter, which includes the material effects of sound generated through song or instrumental music.

CONCLUSION

What became apparent after the sequence of conferences that led to the present volume was that we were all witnessing the ways indigenous peoples of Mexico and Central America establish, maintain, and reinvent relationships with active beings, including ancestral and earthly spirits. Those relationships temporarily coalesce into material assemblages that were experienced directly by the ethnographers and linguists of this volume and indirectly by the archaeologists. The experience of those assemblages extends beyond visual display; they are heard, ingested, and felt in ways distinct to the time and place.

Following a consideration of the case studies presented in this volume, we can argue that the perception of things as agential only takes place through intra-action-producing effects (Barad 2007). We are essentially describing material transactions between humans and non-humans that are accessible across our diverse disciplines. Inside some events, those transactions take the form of song and instrumental music; in others, they are collections of materials inserted into the earth.

The ritualized event, its material components, and its temporality form an assemblage that takes on its material form through a process that is historical. As DeLanda (2000, 11) argues, “All structures that surround us and form our reality (mountains, animals and plants, human languages, social institutions) are the products of specific historical processes.” From this perspective, we can see why interdisciplinary exchange such as the initiative we have formed here is not only beneficial but necessary. Archaeologically recovered material assemblages provide evidence of a deep history to ritualized transactions among the peoples of Mexico and Central America. Ethnography and linguistic anthropology reveal the ways those transactions have emerged as similar to or distinct from the history of transactions that took place before, highlighting the fluidity of materiality and temporality in intra-action.

This volume shares similarities with other works, particularly in our efforts to bring together a multidisciplinary consideration of ritual in the Mesoamerican region (Mock 1998b; Tiesler and Scherer 2018). We do not focus here on specific practices and religious themes but rather, bring discussion of ritual in the region in line with larger theoretical discussions surrounding ritual, materiality, and temporality—discussions we see happening in many other parts of the world among physicists, historians, and political scientists, as well as anthropologists and archaeologists. A widely held consensus across these various disciplines is that space, time, and material configurations occur as a series of possibilities afforded by a history of configuring in particular ways—emergent, but also shaped by the past. What we present in this volume is consequently

a series of distinct configurations and re(con)figurations of making time. The rhythm of ritualization in this part of the world began centuries ago and continues to flow in a series of overlapping, nonlinear temporalities mediated by the intra-action of materialities that become ever more visible as practitioners of different disciplines compare their insights.