



SPECIAL SECTION: RITUAL AND CRITICAL REFLEXIVITY

Introduction

Doing Ritual While Thinking about It?

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■ **ABSTRACT:** Religious anthropology and ritual studies have increasingly acknowledged that ritual and religion are subject to criticism. There is still a tendency, however, to argue that doubt, skepticism, and forms of ‘critical reflexivity’ develop somewhere outside the ritual ‘frame’, in connection with external processes. In presenting this special section of *Religion and Society*, this introduction harks back to past research arising out of structural and performative approaches to rite, introduces the notion of critical reflexivity, and outlines the ways it is used to shed light on overlooked formal aspects of religious rituals. In order to stress the subtle connection between ritual action and (local) reflection on this action as evidenced *in situ* in the course of performance, linked with internal features of ritual activity, the article evokes two lines of empirical inquiry: institutionalized episodes of ritual assessment and ritual ‘accidents’ that do not necessarily imply ritual ‘failure’.

■ **KEYWORDS:** anthropology, Christian K. Højbjerg, critical reflexivity, ritual accidents, ritual assessment, ritual criticism, ritual formality, ritual specialists

Focusing on the reflexive attitudes that religious specialists adopt toward their ceremonial practices, this themed section proposes to renew a line of inquiry developed around the complex and protean link that exists between ritual and reflexivity. In the wake of an anthropological trend centered on the study of ritual ‘in itself and for itself’ (Lévi-Strauss 1971) or ‘in its own right’ (Handelman and Lindquist 2005; Kapferer 2004), several works have stressed the significance of forms of reflexivity that are inherent in ritual action (e.g., Bonhomme 2005; Højbjerg 2002a, 2002c, 2007; Houseman 2002, 2012; Severi 2002). Later termed ‘inner reflexivity’ (Højbjerg 2007) or, in a recent synthesis, ‘derived reflexivity’ (Rozenberg 2011), this reflexivity of ritual has been shown to depend on the internal, often mirroring dynamics through which ritual (re)shapes individual and collective identities. It has thus been seen as a major factor in the ‘workings’ of ritual and in its formal efficacy, regardless of the initiatory, shamanic, divinatory, or even secular nature of the rituals involved (e.g., Handelman 1990). So far, however, other concomitant forms of ritual reflexivity relating to how participants question, (re)assess,



and (re)think their ceremonial practices—not only before and after performing them, but also *in situ*, in the course of the rituals themselves—have received less attention. Indeed, both the empirical manifestations of what we will call ‘critical reflexivity’ and the role they play in the formal economy of ritual performance have remained largely unexamined. In drawing on various empirical case studies to address these issues, this collection of articles proceeds from the idea that the reflexive dynamics in question derive from the ritual process itself and may be understood as enacting underexplored aspects of inner reflexivity. It thus aims, in particular, to mitigate the persistent tendency to relegate criticism toward ritual activity to somewhere outside the strict ritual ‘frame’ (*sensu* Bateson 1956, 1972; Handelman 1992; Kreinath 2012) or to some external dynamics.

Framing Critical Reflexivity

Scholars have often evoked the idea of ritual (or religious) reflexivity in a generic way to refer to situations in which ceremonial performers or ‘believers’ turn back or reflect upon themselves, their ideas, and/or their actions (Babcock 1980; Højbjerg 2002c). Conflating a large variety of phenomena in this fashion, they have endowed the term with a great polysemy, associating it with dynamics located at a variety of different levels.¹ By introducing the notion of critical reflexivity, we hope to clarify some of the ways ritual reflexivity works and, above all, to shed light on some of its overlooked dimensions.²

On ‘External’ Reflexivity: Narrowing the Perspective

In recent years, some ritual scholarship has taken seriously the idea that religion and, more broadly, rituals are subject to evaluation and negotiation by those who perform them, something the founder of the broad, transdisciplinary field of ritual studies has named ‘ritual criticism’ (Grimes 1990). Thus, both the anthropology of religion and ritual studies have helped document aspects of ceremonial activity relating to critical reflexivity, to critical reflexivity, which is understood as an often discursive dynamic through which ritual participants critically (re)assess, sometimes adjust, their ceremonial practices. Resonating with earlier accounts stressing the ‘flexible’ and evolving nature of rituals (e.g., Bell 1992; Goody 1996), several authors have emphasized, for instance, how the dynamics of ritual and religious change depend on reflexive, sometimes conflictive forms of critical thinking about ritual practice, stimulated by varying socio-historical contexts (e.g., Brown 2003; Colas and Tarabout 2006; Højbjerg 2007; Hüsken and Neubert 2012; Kreinath et al. 2004; Schilderman 2007). Others have sought to understand how critical assessment determines ad hoc adjustments, variations that occur from one ritual performance to the next, and more encompassing or radical processes of ritual creation and/or invention taking place in wider religious or secular contexts (Gobin et al. 2016). Still others, notably in Christian traditions, have stressed how doubt and reflexive questioning are part of religious experience and may develop alongside institutionalized practice (e.g., Claverie and Fedele 2014; Coleman 2009; Kaell and Hardin 2016). In general, however, because most of these studies approach ritual as a tool or an arena allowing for the negotiation of broader social and/or (micro-)political issues, they often reduce critical reflexivity to processes whereby participants are involved in manipulating, adapting, and rethinking ritual in keeping with personal or collective agendas (Rozenberg 2011). As a result, with few exceptions,³ they tend to treat critical reflexivity as forms of what Christian K. Højbjerg (2002a: 58) called external or extrinsic ritual reflexivity, defined as such because it is “generated by events that must be considered external to ritual action.”

By exploring how critical reflexive dynamics are put into effect within the ritual frame, and by documenting how their forms, contexts, and modes of operation are linked to internal, even structural dimensions of ritual, this collection of articles proposes a shift in perspective. Certainly, performance-centered approaches to ritual have emphasized the degree to which criticism regularly pervades the “inner circle of ritual enactment” (Grimes 1988b: 217). A few have even pointed out that this may relate to inner ‘virtual’ dynamics that expand on rituals’ technological or mechanical dimensions (Kapferer 2004, 2006), and/or that criticism may arise in connection with forms of uncertainty induced by formal features of the ritual themselves (Howe 2000). However, with rare exceptions, most authors have related such reflexive dynamics either to situations of ‘ritual failure’ (Hüsken 2007; McClymond 2016; Oustinova-Stjepanovic 2017; Schieffelin 1996), and hence to ritual politics, or to the notion that ritual negotiation derives mainly from ongoing behavioral deviations or from the gap that separates a rite’s abstract rules and their actualization in situated contexts.

Although the performative dimensions of ritual undeniably favor critical reflexivity among ritual participants, this collection of articles aims to stress how, concomitantly or alternatively, such reflexivity can be stimulated and even institutionalized by the design features of rituals themselves, that is, by ritual formality. In this light, it has proved to be useful to combine what are generally thought of as antagonistic perspectives: a performative, pragmatic approach to ritual events and a more normative or ‘text-based’ one. Let me hasten to add that the expression ‘text-based approach’ as one that emphasizes the analytical importance of overarching explicit or implicit ritual rules or scripts is to be understood in the broadest possible sense, applicable to what anthropology generally refers to as ‘oral traditions’ as well. An attempt to articulate these opposing viewpoints may seem analytically somewhat perilous. However, one might also be encouraged to agree with those who have argued that these two perspectives can actually be complementary rather than mutually exclusive (e.g., Howe 2000). Proceeding from the idea that critical reflexivity may be upheld by the nature of ritual itself (Kapferer 1984: 180) and imply previously overlooked organizational and morphological features of ritual, the approach adopted here thus enters into dialogue with another line of analysis that is directly focused on forms of what has been called the ‘inner reflexivity’ of ritual.

Ritual Action and the Issue of Inner Reflexivity

In line with certain seminal works (e.g., Rappaport 1999; Staal 1979), a number of studies carried out within the framework of a formalist approach have emphasized the degree to which religious ritual (and ritual in general) is a distinctive form of action based on the enactment of standardized rules, regardless of what actors may say and think about them (e.g., Houseman and Severi 1998; Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994). These studies, echoed in other works (e.g., Kapferer 2006), have also argued for an understanding of ritual that reaches beyond issues of meaning or social function. Within this overall perspective, some authors have described forms of reflexivity as intrinsic to ritual behavior, that is, as a quality of ritual acts themselves rather than of their agents. Depending on their theoretical leanings, scholars have linked these forms to patterns of relation and interaction (Bonhomme 2005; Houseman 2002, 2012), processes of self-representation (Handelman 1990; Severi 2002), and/or cognitive frames of cultural transmission (Højbjerg 2002a; Whitehouse 2002). In these works, the analysis of forms of reflexivity on or about rituals has, however, been more or less dismissed as merging with that of the local, sometimes contradictory and external exegeses that surround ritual performances. Because these authors see such reflexive efforts as being circumstantially deployed outside the ritual frame, as post hoc comments or ‘addenda’ to ritual performance itself (e.g., Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Severi

2002: 27), they tend to treat them as an epiphenomenon of ritual action, as extrinsic to it and therefore superfluous to a structural or formal understanding of the internal workings of ritual.

While most of the contributors to this special section sympathize with a formalist approach to ritual, they are wary of the monolithic idea that all non-‘liturgical’ discourse is necessarily incidental to ritual action. In particular, and in line with the initial idea of this special section, their original case studies allow them to point out the neglected fact that in several religious or cultural contexts—regardless of whether they are ‘performance-centered’ or ‘liturgy-centered’, to use Atkinson’s (1989) famous distinction—ritual specialists and participants are often required to adopt distanced, reflexive attitudes toward their ceremonial practices while engaging in them, often in collectively acknowledged, prescribed ways. By exploring such situations, our goal is thus to address several related issues. The main hypothesis that most of us have in common is that critical reflexivity may be seen as a constituent aspect of ritual action. If this is so, studying the forms it takes should allow for new understandings of the dialectic that virtually and actually connects the internal workings of ritual and the reflexivity of its actors. Specifically, how, in light of this hypothesis, does reflexivity *on* or about ritual (as related to the reflexivity *of* ritual mentioned above) connect different levels of ritual experience and commitment? How might such a perspective allow us to rethink the interplay of ritual rules and their concrete implementation? In other words, how does it prompt us to re-evaluate the connection between ritual action and reflection on this action in the course of ritual performance? And finally, if critical reflexivity is carried out under regulated conditions both inside and outside the ritual frame, what does this tell us about the linkages between the internal and external dynamics of ritual and religious performance?

Two New Issues to Think About

In order to tackle these questions, two interconnected topics of concern are particularly worth considering. Before indicating how the contributors to this section have dealt with them, let me briefly outline the issues they raise.

Coping with the (Un)predictable or the Institutionalization of Reflexivity

One line of empirical and analytical inquiry draws attention to heretofore often unacknowledged ritual sequences or institutionalized episodes that inspire or even impose the systematic assessment of the ceremonial action of which they are a part. Such formalized procedures in which rituals incorporate reflexivity in a structural fashion—thereby situating reflexivity on rituals or critical reflexivity “within their own scope” (Severi 2002: 27; see also Højbjerg 2002c: 6)—come in a variety of forms. They may be part of ritual scenarios, occurring as sequences located at the core of the ritual process and whose undertaking is necessary for the rite to be carried out (see Daugey, this volume). They may also take place immediately after the ritual’s most crucial moments but nonetheless inside the ‘frame’ in a way that implies that the ritual in question is not fully complete without them (see Teisenhoffer’s and, to some extent, Sihlé’s contributions to this volume). Causing participants and ritual experts to question the correctness, efficacy, and other aspects of their practices, configurations such as these routinize performers’ critical attitudes toward ritual enactments from within the ritual itself. In other situations, such routines, while not always proceeding from stipulated rules, may be regularly brought about as a result of the ritual’s organizational features, in connection, for example, with the intrinsic opacity or uncertainty of certain ceremonial procedures.

In these situations, critical reflexivity appears to be less circumstantial than one might first think. Taking such situations into account allows us to shed light on how critical attitudes toward ritual are enacted as forms of inner or intrinsic reflexivity, that is, as determined by the implementation of the rite's rules. If certain ritual rules prescribe 'canonical' acts (Humphrey and Laidlaw 1994; Rappaport 1999), it would seem that in some cases they also imply ways in which such acts are distanced so as to be able to speak about them *in situ*, in a non-liturgical—although obviously formally constrained—fashion. They thus potentially set up a reflexive tension within ritual action itself and underlie a complex interplay between the morphological elements they put into effect and the agency of ritual participants. To transpose Kapferer's (2004: 46) observation on the 'virtual' aspects of rite, critical reflexivity may somehow "be described as a determinant form that is paradoxically anti-determinant, able to realize human constructive agency." Such configurations indeed suggest that ritual may not always consist in a linear succession of normalized actions but also comprises possibilities of bifurcation (or micro-circularity) as a constitutive feature. Drawing on a textual metaphor, I cannot help but think of children's books in which the reader is the 'hero', whose choices allow him or her to navigate through the text in multiple, at once flexible and predetermined ways. This forces the readers—the performers, in the case of ritual—to distance themselves from the story they are immersed in and to question themselves about what they are doing and the direction they are consciously taking.⁴ Transformed by a kind of *mise en abîme* into the heroes of their own ritual practices, those who carry out rites may be seen as being placed in a somewhat similar situation. In many cases, their choices are obviously collective, negotiated, sometimes divergent, or even conflictual, but they are also, in much the same way, both constrained and not totally predictable. They are 'predictable uncertainties' as de Vienne (2012) has designated some complex interactions generated by joking relationships.

From this perspective, religious ritual appears as a labyrinth of sorts in which doubt and criticism are prompted not only by its complex 'forests of symbols' (Turner 1967), but also by singular morphological features that imbue it with a degree of inherent uncertainty (see also Howe 2000). Conversely, one could also see this as a way whereby ritual provides itself with the means of ensuring certainty under conditions of unpredictability—a way, so to say, to integrate event into structure. Although these analytical options are not as incompatible as they might first appear, my aim here is to raise the question of their relative usefulness, rather than choose between them. In this respect, it is interesting to observe that, in some cases, the formal processes whereby ritual is critically assessed also intervene as a means by which the ritual itself seems to generate 'accidents' by making the unpredictable almost inevitable. This directly leads to the second area of study we propose to explore.

On Ritual 'Accidents' and Kafkaian Leopards

The second line of inquiry to be considered concerns what can be generically referred to as ritual 'accidents'. Any ethnographer knows that ritual performances are full of accidents, slip-ups, and glitches. All too often, they are left out of the analysis or, when taken into account, are treated mainly as somewhat unwanted sticky bits that gum up the ceremonial works, jeopardizing its efficacy in various ways, or as instances of ritual 'failure' (Hüsken 2007). In our view, however, although the specter of failure is always waiting in the wings—and taking it into account certainly allows us to think about ritual out of the functionalist box (*ibid.*)—ritual accidents are not totally reducible to failure. First, as we shall see, such accidents do not always result in 'infelicitous performances' (Grimes 1988a), from either the actor's point of view or a formal perspective, nor can they always be reduced to deviations from a 'model' or a 'script' due to micro-political or purely sociological dynamics. They can also be understood as arising from

the ritual's concrete conditions of execution, as occurrences that are perhaps even repetitive or cyclical in nature. Let me draw on a literary reference to expand on this idea.

In one of his notebooks, Franz Kafka wrote a number of mysterious observations. One of them begins: "Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers." (We can only guess, but it would seem that the author has an ancient Jewish temple in mind.) "This is repeated over and over again," Kafka goes on to say, until "finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes a part of the ceremony" (see Kafka 1969: 94).⁵ The mishaps, glitches, and unforeseen events that we refer to here as ritual accidents are similar to these leopards, and treating them together with the reflexive reactions they provoke is one of the tasks some contributors have assigned themselves. Indeed, such events can sometimes act as significant 'triggers' for reflexive, critical comments and for the renegotiation of ritual rules, harking back to the issue of ritual change. Parenthetically, one might be tempted to push this idea further by asking what would happen if, after a while, the leopards did not show up. Would their absence become another 'accident', launching new reflections and assessments of the ritual? Be that as it may, such mishaps may involve ritual specialists and other participants in ad hoc exegeses aimed at evaluating the rite's correctness, potency, and efficacy, constraining them, in other words, to adopt distanced attitudes toward the very actions they are involved in. As already mentioned by a number of authors, the ways that these accidents are handled may crystallize to become adaptive measures that reveal how participants adjust the workings of ritual to contextual conditions. Yet discussions and debates about such events may also connect inner and extrinsic forms of reflexivity, generating ritual modes of interaction that also participate in emerging framing dynamics (see Kreinath and Sariönder's article, this volume). In all cases, understanding the ways in which ritual actors respond to ritual accidents, as well as the structural procedures they mobilize to encompass such mishaps and/or provide for their resolution, is highly relevant for thinking about these two interconnected issues.

Of course, 'accidental' episodes of this nature are not to be confused with the morphological, intrinsic features of ritual evoked previously; they are essentially circumstantial, linked to the performative and practical nature of rites. While occurring during rituals, these accidents obviously involve forms of reflexivity brought about by external events that pervade and influence ritual action, that is, extrinsic forms of reflexivity (in Højbjerg's terms). However, both situations or configurations may be closely intertwined and may bring about 'meta-pragmatic' moments of critical reflection (Boltanski 2009). Both raise the question of how ritual actions and actors' reflections on these actions are articulated in the course of ritual performance. In other words, as suggested by the title of this introduction, what if doing ritual actually also implies critically thinking about it while performing it?⁶

The Contributions

Within this twofold framework, the articles in this collection build on well-grounded empirical case studies in different religious contexts to examine how critical reflexivity—a notion explicitly adopted by some authors, implicitly addressed by others—takes place among ritual participants in the course of performance.

Marie Daugey's contribution focuses on formal divinatory processes that, in West African Kabye society as elsewhere, give rise to reflexive, critical stances toward ritual procedures themselves. In doing so, it draws attention to a distinctive way in which sacrificial practices are embedded within divinatory ones. Bringing to mind features already pointed out but not fully explored in Africanist anthropology, such a configuration recalls the pattern of ritual *mise en*

abîme mentioned above: these processes force ritual specialists to question and critically assess their sacrificial practices while being engaged in them. They also guide ritual proceedings in such a way as to give rise to more or less controlled ritual accidents. However, as Daugey interestingly shows, these processes are not intended to bring about corrective or adaptive measures, or even to prompt a ritualized ‘expiation’ of procedural mistakes, as observed in other contexts (e.g., McClymond 2012). Rather, what is at stake is a collective acknowledgement of such mistakes and, in a roundabout fashion, an explicit, public, collegial, verbal commitment to the ritual rule. This suggests that ritual efficacy relies in part on the reassertion of its own virtual principles rather than on their scrupulous actualization, as though ritual was incapable of failing—a dimension that Daugey connects to the pragmatic or action-oriented logic and the dialogical nature of this kind of rite.

Viola Teisenhoffer’s article, which deals with a New Age variant of Brazilian Umbanda in France, focuses on ritualized discursive practices of ‘sharing’. Emblematic of contemporary New Age and Neo-Pagan ceremonies, which often make use of reflexive processes in connection with the extended idiom of self-transformation, these sharing practices involve mandatory critical assessments of mediumistic sessions entailing complex relational patterns. Drawing on Houseman’s (2012) notion of ‘ritual refraction’, Teisenhoffer argues that these episodes, which could be taken for ritual addenda, are in fact necessary for the ritual to be complete, making them an intrinsic aspect of its performance or, even, a ‘ritual on its own’. As she shows, these forms of sharing are essential to ritual efficacy, notably from the standpoint of both mediums and their ‘clients’, whose respective positions, in this case, are in principle interchangeable. Because ritual is an opaque experience whose conditions and effects must be collectively evaluated and, in this case, discursively reiterated, this type of ritualized debriefing plays a crucial role with respect to both the internal workings of ritual performance and its effect on those who undergo it, thus intimately intertwining reflexivity of and on ritual in a way that allows the author to speculate on the generative power of language.

Jens Kreinath and Refika Sariönder’s contribution looks at how intrinsic and extrinsic modes of reflexivity as defined by Højbjerg are combined in Turkish Alevis practices of the *cem*, a collective ritual that today is open to the non-initiated. They show how critical reflexivity pervades the ritual frame and propagates outside it, giving rise to what can be thought of as two orders of critical reflexivity. One of them, which I would describe as ‘routine’, draws on the *cem*’s powerful discursive, ‘conversational’ dimension to allow participants to reflect on issues of ritual commitment and, in the course of action, on how the ritual is and should be performed. The other, which overflows the ritual script, is triggered by ritual accidents, mishaps, or unexpected events. Such episodes imply other kinds of negotiations, resulting mostly in admonishments and at times moralizing speech from religious leaders. Echoing Handelman’s seminal statements on the reflexivity of public events and Kapferer’s on the notion of ‘dynamics’, Kreinath and Sariönder show how ritual acts as a reflexive tool, thereby illustrating a further case in which reflexivity of ritual can be embedded in reflexivity on ritual, or vice versa. Lastly, they stress how this embedment involves forms of interactional adjustments that result in emergent dynamics of ritual framing.

Finally, Nicolas Sihlé’s contribution examines a remarkable ritual sequence that takes place during a unique large-scale annual collective ritual in Tibetan Tantrist Buddhism. Within this ceremonial cycle, whose accomplishment is crucial for the renewal of community sentiment, the ‘elders’ meeting’ is an exemplary instance of a formalized or routinized episode of critical ritual assessment inserted into a ritual scheme. It consists in a collective (in this case ‘retroactive’) evaluation of the ritual’s performance, aiming to assess its circumstances and effects. In his article, Sihlé focuses on an occasion in which this review led Buddhist ritualists to question not only their own religious and ritual discipline, but also the relevance of a particular component of the ritual.

Although highly valued, this component was seen as being increasingly problematic from a social point of view, a fact that led to its being abandoned. While resonating with other studies dealing with the connections between external reflexivity, ritual adaptation, and innovation, the originality of Sihlé's analysis is twofold. First, the process he documents takes place in what is a liturgy-centered ritual par excellence, one that is highly scripted on the basis of revealed sacred texts that are usually thought to be rigidly normative, leaving no room for debate. Second, he illustrates how such critically reflexive dynamics are both displayed during rituals (although outside a 'sequence' properly speaking) and made to extend beyond the confines of the ritual itself. The article also suggests that such institutionalized critical reflexivity is oriented toward dealing not only with accidents but more broadly—as notably suggested by Howe (2000)—with risk.

Final Remarks

While offering a range of detailed ethnographical studies, the contributions in this special section have quite similar theoretical orientations: they are concerned to show that critical reflexivity, that is, reflexivity on or about ritual, may be an essential part of ritual action. Like the reflexivity of ritual with which it interacts, it is often brought about by the formal, rule-governed features of ritual performance itself. As such, and by contributing in any case to the efficacy and ongoing relevance of ritual action, critical reflexivity can be understood as an integral aspect of the internal workings or inner dynamics of ritual. To conclude this presentation, two further remarks referring back to the interconnected issues outlined above are perhaps in order.

First, the importance we attribute to critical reflexivity within religious ritual behavior may seem to be at loggerheads with recent approaches that have insisted on the cognitive dimensions of ritual experience or on the particular types of bodily, sensorial, and emotional commitments it entails (e.g., Cohen et al. 2017; Csordas 2002; Meyer and Houtman 2012). In our view, however, there is no contradiction here. The ways in which ritual actually does things to those who are engaged in it need to be understood in terms of actions and of meanings pertaining to a variety of different analytical levels. The challenge facing participants is precisely to undertake the ritual correctly, in an appropriate fashion. However, insofar as ceremonial activity while it is being performed is concerned, this does not warrant making a sharp, mutually exclusive division between a "pre-critical, if not pre-rational" (Grimes 1988b: 217), pragmatic register of action or commitment, on the one hand, and the realm of thought and deliberation, on the other. As convincingly argued by Grimes (1990: 1) in the introduction to *Ritual Criticism*, "it is a mistake to assume that dancing one's religion precludes thinking about it."

Similarly, there is no reason to reinstate such a body-action/mind dichotomy at the level of performance. Indeed, the case studies presented here strikingly reveal the constant dialectic tension that connects these two dimensions, something that is likely to be found in even the most 'invented' or 'reinvented' rituals (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983) and in secular rites as well (e.g., Moore and Meyerhoff 1977; Wahnich 2016). While in some cases prevarication may be indicative of forms of 'lateral participation' in religious or ritual activities (Coleman 2009), here it is seen, on the contrary, as a clear sign of ritual commitment. It is hoped that our insistence on the notion of critical reflexivity as a way of highlighting this tension (somewhat less present in the looser notion of ritual criticism)⁷ may favor a deeper dialogue between performative and structural approaches to ritual. Might it not be that the reflexive properties of ritual action cultivate and sustain forms of critical reflexivity among the performers themselves? If, as has been argued, the acquisition of religious ideas, ideologies, and mythologies initially stems from a commitment to ritual behavior rather than the other way around (Boyer 1990; Rappaport 1980),

should we not recognize that critical reflexivity plays an important role in this process, notably for ritual specialists? This leads to my second and last point.

As studied here, critical reflexivity is primarily considered to be displayed by ritual specialists rather than by those who are intended to be transformed by rituals (e.g., initiates or diviners' clients), that is, it is wielded by those supposedly skillful protagonists who ensure the continuity and reproduction of religious rituals. Here again, the stance that we adopt could be seen as going against approaches that have stressed that a full understanding of ritual requires looking beyond specialist-centered perspectives (e.g., Kapferer 1984), especially because they inevitably accentuate order, certainty, and, generally, the non-reflexive dimensions of ceremonial acts. By enriching such perspectives, we hope that our approach overcomes such a limited focus and even manages to raise a seldom addressed issue.

Let us ask, indeed, the somewhat artless question, why is critical reflexivity so central to ritual from the performers' perspective? This 'why' question links up with an important point made by Højbjerg (2002b) in the special issue of *Social Anthropology* that, thanks to his editing initiative, (re)launched discussion on religious reflexivity. There he maintains that, on the whole, religious reflexivity is characterized by "doubt, uncertainty, skepticism, critique and *make-believe*" (Højbjerg 2002c: 2–3; my emphasis). So far, the last element in this list—make-believe—has received the least attention. Should we not understand the reflexive tension induced by ritual action itself as a specific form of make-believe that involves not only those who benefit from ritual services but also, and even especially, the ritual specialists who are moved to turn their attention back upon themselves and their knowledge? To treat this idea seriously would entail dealing with many other matters that would lead us beyond the limited scope of this special section. For now, let us keep the question open. Let it suffice to focus on the issues we have raised, so that readers can temporarily lose themselves in rites where the ritualists portrayed in the following contributions are the heroes—and, with them, face some leopards.

■ ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This introduction and special section are dedicated to Christian K. Højbjerg (1961–2014), whose work on religious reflexivity has inspired most of us. We hope the ways that we engage with some of his thinking constitute a fair tribute to his work. Maxime Vanhoenacker, with whom I organized the conference from which this section derives, helped me gather some of the articles presented here, and I thank him for our ongoing exchanges over the last six years. I also thank all the conference participants, including the contributors to this section, for their input. I am especially grateful to Nicolas Sihlé and Viola Teisenhoffer for their insightful comments, and to Michael Houseman for his invaluable help with English usage and his multiple readings of this text.

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■ NOTES

1. While space does not allow for an exhaustive overview, synthetic surveys can be found in Babcock (1987), Højbjerg (2002b), Nijhawan (2006), Rozenberg (2011), and Stausberg (2006).
2. This focus on critical reflexivity as realized within the ritual frame in religious contexts is an attempt to pursue further a line of thinking partially outlined in another collection of articles (see Gobin and Vanhoenacker 2016; Gobin et al. 2016). Like this special section, this collection stemmed from the conference “Assessing, Adapting, and Transmitting Rituals in Religious and Secular Contexts,” held in June 2014 at the musée du quai Branly – Jacques Chirac, under the auspices of its Department of Research and Teaching. In this introduction, I have deliberately chosen not to address issues regarding the definition of ritual or of religion, the latter being basically linked to ‘traditions’ involving a set of representations and normalized behaviors relating to the interaction between human agents and non-human beings.
3. Both external and internal aspects of ritual reflexivity are considered, for example, in Højbjerg’s (2007) monograph and other recent works (e.g., Gobin 2012; Pimenova 2016; Sorrentino 2016).
4. On this aspect, see also Robbins (2015), although from a quite different perspective that questions the relationship between ritual and value.
5. I thank Nicolas Adell for drawing my attention to this reference. For other interpretations of this quoted text, see Schechner (1994: 638) and Seligman et al. (2008: 129).
6. Even if quoting out of context is a bit unfair, one can take the measure of such a hypothesis when reading, for example, certain radical statements famously made by Staal (1979: 4), who asserts that in ritual “the important thing is what you do, not what you think, believe or say.” In referencing performers, Staal states: “Isolated in their sacred enclosure, they concentrate on correctness of act, recitation and chant. Their primary concern, if not obsession, is with rules. There are no symbolic meanings going through their mind when they are engaged in performing rituals” (ibid.: 3).
7. As initially conceived by Grimes (1988b, 1990), the notion of ritual criticism aims to articulate in a single, wide interpretive framework all kinds of criticism regarding rituals, made by ‘insiders’ or by ‘outsiders’ in varying contexts, in particular in order to improve their performance.

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