THE HANDBOOK OF CONTEMPORARY ANIMISM

Edited by Graham Harvey

ACUMEN

Introduction

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Animism is a hard-working word. It identifies a range of interesting phenomena but also labels several distinct ways of understanding such matters. *The Handbook of Contemporary Animism* brings together expert contributors to debates in which the term "animism" is now playing a role. It is intended to advance discussion rather than either merely describe its current state or to bring it to a conclusion. It does this by allowing "animism" to continue working hard by referring to more than one thing or theory while also aiding our efforts to understand the meeting-points of shared interest and difference between contributors. One task of this introduction is to say something about that range and to make sense of the use of one word to convey different meanings. It will conclude that diversity provides refreshing perspectives and provokes new ideas and practices by requiring us to test and reconsider (and sometimes defend) our familiar views and approaches. In the most general terms, animism concerns the nature of human-being and the nature of our world – but what animates the contributors to this book is that these large questions are addressed in specific relationships, etiquettes, activities, ideas and encounters. Therefore, a blend of description and theorizing provide the most common ways in which we engage with animism.

WAYS INTO STUDYING ANIMISM

My interest in animism was initiated in ways that are distinctive but not entirely alien to other contributors to this book. I suspect that I first heard of animism in introductory undergraduate lectures about the history of the academic study of religion. The influence of Victorian anthropologists like Edward Tylor (who defined animism as the characteristically religious "belief in spirits") is bound to have been mentioned. This failed to interest me at the time. Postdoctoral research among varied groups of Pagans brought me into contact with people who named themselves "animists". What initially intrigued me was

that the name seemed to be used in two seemingly contrasting ways. Some Pagans identified animism as the part of their religious practice or experience which involved encounters with tree-spirits, river-spirits or ancestor-spirits. This animism was metaphysical and would have been recognized by Tylor. Other Pagans seemed to use "animism" as a shorthand reference to their efforts to re-imagine and redirect human participation in the larger-than-human, multi-species community. This animism was relational, embodied, eco-activist and often "naturalist" rather than metaphysical. In writing about this tension – initially in a journal article about Pagan cosmologies and later in a book-length introduction to contemporary Paganisms (G. Harvey 1993, 2006c) – I contrasted those discourses and rituals involving "spirits" with those that might involve hedgehogs. (I selected hedgehogs as an example of a creature endangered by human lifestyles and therefore as indicative of this-worldly and environmentalist trends among some Pagans.) These really should not be taken as strong contrasts but as exemplary of influential esoteric and animist currents in the ongoing evolution of Pagan thought and behaviour (see G. Harvey 2011a; Jamison 2011; Rountree 2012).

In an early publication about Paganism (1993), I cited Irving Hallowell's (1960) article, "Ojibwa Ontology, Behavior, and World View", primarily in order to use his phrase "other-than-human persons". I also cited Te Pakaka Tawhai's discussion of "Maori Religion" (2002) in which he defines the "purpose of religious activity" (among his people at least) as "doing violence with impunity". He explains that such activity "neither reaches for redemption and salvation, nor conveys messages of praise and thanksgiving, but seeks permission and offers placation" (*ibid.*: 244). It places religious activity firmly in this-worldly interactions between, for example, humans and trees or sweet potatoes. Hallowell and Tawhai have had a major impact on the direction of my research, and the phrases "other-than-human persons" and "doing violence with impunity" have become foundational in my efforts to understand animism and, most recently, to redefine what "religion" might mean (G. Harvey 2013). I soon discovered that Hallowell's article was gaining influence among other scholars – not so much in the study of religions as in anthropology. This inspired me to want to know more about the phenomena, theories and scholarly approaches that were being so vigorously debated. I read Tylor, re-read Hallowell, and followed up various leads to discover what colleagues in different disciplines were writing and researching. Nurit Bird-David's "revisiting" of "animism" (1999), and the responses that followed it, contributed significantly to the ferment of debate.

In addition to reading, I also made efforts to meet people who lived animistically – including Pagans and some indigenous people. Presenting research about shamanic healing traditions at a conference hosted at the Mi'kmaq reserve at Conne River, Newfoundland, provided me with the opportunity to attend the first powwow there in 1995. During the final "honour song" for veterans and elders, an eagle flew a tight circle over the central drum group and was greeted with exclamations of greeting and pleasure. More than a few people told me that although eagles are commonplace there, nesting just across the Conne River, this flight in this style at this moment was an auspicious sign. The eagle was celebrating this Mi'kmaq community's efforts to regain indigenous pride and cultural knowledge. No one spoke about "animism" but several became excited about "tradition". For me, however, this moment has become definitive of the kind of inter-species communication that exemplifies what I have come to think of as the "new animism" in contrast with Tylor's older approach (G. Harvey 2005a/2006a,[1] 2012). In this,

we look for animism "in between", in the relating together of persons (often of different species), rather than "within", in the possession of or by "spirits".

In 1999 curiously circuitous and serendipitous routes took me to a desk in a primary school at an Ojibwe reservation in Wisconsin. By colouring in drawings of various plants, animals and artefacts, the children and I learnt examples of the Ojibwe language's grammatical distinction between animate and inanimate genders. I had been familiar with this from Hallowell's writings and from those of scholars inspired by him. Nonetheless, like Hallowell, I realized that "relationality" is not merely theoretical but strongly pervades this and many indigenous cultures (and not only them). To engage with animism necessarily involves being provoked to think more carefully about what it means to be a person. Many of the following chapters will discuss the understanding that persons always live in relation with others and, in animist communities, are regularly encouraged to act respectfully – especially towards those one intends to eat. That is, this animism is always local and specific. It might not be at all romantic, transcendent or esoteric, but might instead be quite practical or pragmatic as people negotiate everyday needs.

My interest in animism has also influenced my choices of reading, film-watching and festival participation. Reading Harry Garuba's "Explorations in Animist Materialism" (2003) reinforced the realization that my enjoyment of fiction such as the works of Alan Garner (e.g. 1960, 2012), animated films such as Studio Ghibli's *Spirited Away* (2001) and festivals like "Riddu Riddu" is predicated on some degree of animism. In various ways, they explore and experiment with ways of engaging with a larger-than-human world. They also provide accessible entries into the creative thought- and life-world that is animism.

This book is a result of my varied interests in seeking to understand the ramifications of animism and of academic research and debate in relation to it. I invited contributors whose previous publications, lectures or conversations demonstrated expertise in one or more aspects of what can be called animism. Importantly, they do not all agree that one set of phenomena or one approach is most interesting or valuable. There is a debate here that excites us. Some of those I invited had not previously been aware that their work was relevant to animism. They are here because I convinced them (without difficulty) that their expert knowledges about indigenous matters, consciousness, ethology and/or ritual contribute importantly to particular debates. I have been privileged by the positive response of so many colleagues to my invitation to participate in this project. Their previous work is importantly influencing scholarship in many disciplines. This book brings them together to enrich research and teaching by taking this further.

DESCRIBING ANIMISM

By way of orientation to the more descriptive matters that nest under the term "animism", this section surveys the major uses of the term. It illustrates the ferment of new research (about ethnology, history, philosophy, cognition, performance, indigeneity, relationality, ethology, botany, cosmology and much more) that this book is about. This orientation will be followed by one that introduces the theoretical perspectives and approaches entailed in researching and teaching about animism.

It can seem simple or straightforward to state that "animism" can refer to beliefs about spirits or that people who "believe in spirits" are animists. However, major questions

have been asked about what "belief" and "spirit" might mean. How does the activity called "believing" manifest itself? How is it done and how is it recognized by observers? Is believing a kind of thinking or feeling, or is it a specific activity? Is believing radically different from rationally experimenting? Can we escape from the rather bad habit of thinking that "we know" while "they believe"? Since people who talk about "spirits" often allege that such beings cause illnesses or teach facts, we might want to find out how they (the putative "spirits") relate to the "material world"? We certainly should take care not to assume that non- or anti-empiricism is involved in the relevant discourses and/or behaviours. Not only scientists but people everywhere test and experiment with claims, ideas, interpretations, teachings and experiences (Latour 2010).

These are already complex issues, but again there is more at stake. "Spirits" might just be a way in which some people try to convey an idea about their personal relationship with trees, animals, rivers or ancestors that others consider inanimate and inert. Claimed beliefs about spirits can be thought of as addressing questions of what enlivens beings. What is it about persons that makes them "alive" rather than "inanimate"? Do people possess a spirit or a soul? If they do, are there other beings that are similarly animated by souls or spirits? Tylor's encyclopedic *Primitive Culture: Researches into the Development of Mythology, Philosophy, Religion, Art and Custom* (1871) draws together a vast corpus of available information about all kinds of phenomena to support a theory that religion was humanity's pre-scientific attempt to explain the world. According to Tylor, religion's core "belief in spirits", here meaning non-empirical realities, was a mistaken theory or explanation that would be superseded by the more advanced method of modern science.

While Tylor's theory and approach were soon contested and then marginalized in favour of other ways of defining and/or explaining religion or its origins, the claim that people (somewhere) "believe in spirits" kept the term "animism" in circulation. It survived, however, by accepting a limitation on its meaning. That is, in Tylor's work "animism" was synonymous with "religion" and identified what he proposed to be the core fact about all religions: belief in spirits. When it came to mean only *some* religions, that is, those religions that allegedly did not emphasize belief in a single deity but engaged with other "spiritual" beings, it had changed. It no longer drew attention to the defining characteristic of all religions but only to a subset of localized religions. It often implied a lesser degree of development, indicated by a lack of texts, institutions or theologians. It also indicated a view of the local reach of "spirits" over against the global or universal deities of the monotheistic religions. This usage remains current in books that identify some percentage of a nation's population as "Christians", "Muslims" or "animists" (e.g. Jok 2010). This might have made little sense to Tylor, for whom all religious people were animists, but it serves the purpose of drawing attention to people who maintain "traditional" practices. This changing usage underlies discussion in Chapters 4 and 5, while the acceptance of "animism" as a self-identification by some West African people is noted in Chapters 5 and 18.

On the surface, the identification (by themselves or those who study them) of an increasing number of Pagans as "animists" or of a facet of their religion as "animism" seems similar. This is noted in Chapters 26, 32 and 34 (but also see G. Harvey 2005b, 2011a; Rountree 2012). The didactic novels of Daniel Quinn (1995, 1996, 1997, 1999) and some creative literature (as discussed in Part VII; but for other examples see Justice 2011 and Garner 2012) illustrate the broader reach and attraction of using "animism" to identify

an environmentalist or radically emplaced spirituality. Perhaps too the fans of Japanese *animé* (animated films), discussed in Chapter 38, might be this kind of animist. It is not, however, so straightforward. While there is reference in these religious movements and cultural products to putative "beliefs in spirits" or to the animation of the world by "spiritual" beings (e.g. "nature spirits"), an alternative trend is evident. This resonates with a use of the term "animism" associated more with Hallowell than with Tylor. This animism refers to ways of living that assume that the world is a community of living persons, all deserving respect, and therefore to ways of inculcating good relations between persons of different species. Hallowell's writings (especially Hallowell 1960) are among the most frequently cited references in this book and in works concerned with "the new animism" (G. Harvey 2005a, 2006a).

Hallowell's ideas were shaped by learning among the Ojibwe or Anishinaabeg of Manitoba, Canada. A first step in understanding this can be made by appreciating that in the Ojibwe and related Algonkian languages there is a pervasive grammatical distinction between animate and inanimate nouns and related parts of speech. (See the online *Ojibwe People's Dictionary*, http://ojibwe.lib.umn.edu/, with its search tool and its "key to Ojibwe parts of speech".) Rocks, for example, are deemed to belong to the "animate gender". In a now classic and widely discussed question, Hallowell asked a respected elder, "Are all the rocks we see around us here alive?" In Ojibwe grammar rocks are animate just as tables are grammatically feminine in the French language. So it is legitimate to ask whether such ways of speaking reveal anything distinctive about the wider culture. Hallowell learnt that rocks can indeed be treated in various locally and culturally specific ways as animate persons. The implications of this observation have been foundational for much of the contemporary debate about animism. Hallowell, therefore, is discussed in many of the following chapters. For now, in this orientation to the descriptive roles played by the term "animism", it is enough to note that the putative personhood of rocks is one feature of the animated, relational cosmos of traditional Ojibwe people.

When animism is taken to mean "beliefs about spirits" another set of phenomena has been considered to exemplify it. Dramatic rituals to deal with unwanted "possession" by "spirits" have attracted considerable scholarly attention. Some chapters in Part V focus on possession and those who deal with it, especially shamans and mediums, promising to enliven studies of relevant activities and ideas. These have not always attended to the wider cultural context but have sometimes focused on dramatic rituals or experiences (e.g. of "trance") but things are changing (see G. Harvey 2010; Schmidt & Huskinson 2010). Similarly, but also with significant differences, when animism is taken to mean "treating the world as a community", it can entail unwelcome aggression by "other-than-human persons" (Hallowell's term for a larger community, not to be mistaken for a reference only to "non-empirical" postulations). Many chapters, especially in Parts II and III, engage with the fraught relationships entailed in hunting and consuming animate beings. Sometimes people aver the need to converse with or mollify the otherworldly "owners" of prey species. In such contexts, "animism" might label hunter-gatherer inter-species etiquette as well as their ontological and/or epistemological concerns.

A related range of possibilities for considering what the term "animism" and ideas about "spirit possession" might identify or describe is that they are about cognition, consciousness and/or the attribution of agency. The psychologist Jean Piaget proposed (1929, 1932, 1933, 1952, 1954) that animism is a standard phase in childhood development

in which every experience is assumed to be the result of someone's deliberate act. However, many adults continue to do animistic things even in cultures that do not vigorously encourage them to do so. Naming cars and swearing at recalcitrant computers are common examples of the personalizing of the world – even if, when pressed, people insist they do not really expect a positive response from inanimate machines. Chapters in Part IV re-examine the possibilities that emerge from attention to lively roles of things, objects or materials in animating human lives. Similarly, Chapter 27 uses examples of the widespread attribution of agency or intentionality or the projection of animacy or anthropomorphism to consider current issues in the field of cognitive studies. Whether all this demonstrates that we "moderns" continue the "primitive" mistake alleged by Tylor or whether it illustrates a different style of personalism (closer to that theorized by Hallowell perhaps) remains open to question.

Research concerned with developmental processes is not the only kind to be interested in consciousness and cognition. Part VI features chapters that discuss not only the various ways in which humans know (or act as if they know) the world but also how animals and plants know and act knowledgeably. Some but not all of these chapters could be read as suggesting that perhaps humans do, after all, share something that could be called "soul" or "spirit" with other species. Alternatively, perhaps all living species share a thoroughly material consciousness rooted in brains and bodies but arising out of the inherently aware matter of the universe. If so, "animism" might usefully label the recognition of matter's consciousness (something also identified as "panpsychism").

What all this amounts to is that "animism" has been, and continues to be, used as a label for a range of phenomena. It can identify definitive characteristics of religion or of specific religions. It can point to putatively interior components of living beings or to cognitive mechanisms arising in the deep evolutionary past but continuing to affect contemporary behaviours. In such cases, the term resonates with its etymological predecessor, *anima*, to suggest some enlivening aspect (soul or spirit) within persons. Alternatively, it can direct attention towards the continuous interrelation of all beings or of matter itself. Then "animism" describes performative acts in which people engage with other species or with material things. In all these cases, animism points to scholarly and popular efforts to understand what activates, energizes and motivates the ways in which lives are lived – either as individuals or with others. In short, a range of cultural phenomena are brought into view by the word "animism". Whether they are all one thing is debateable. Bringing them all together could advance a contest to establish which definition or usage is most helpful or convincing. More excitingly, what is proposed here is that setting diverse phenomena and approaches alongside each other invites interpreters and theorists to look again and think again. Even rejected theories and falsified data can provoke new perspectives and new openings for further discussion.

THEORIZING ANIMISM

Animism does more than label phenomena and, just like other human activities, research is not complete when it has identified and described or labelled. We want to know how one fact relates to others, how one act affects others, how one perspective challenges others. We seek to interrogate facts for meaning, relevance, application and value.

Animism is currently a topic of considerable debate among more than a few disciplines – sometimes crossing the boundaries between arts, humanities and sciences and provoking the thought that these insert unhelpful divisions between related matters. Indeed, more than a few contributors argue cogently for the necessity of these rich interdisciplinary conversations. For one thing, a list of the people who might be labelled "animist" in one way or another includes all of us. All humans, indeed all animals, have the propensity to respond to events as if they were intentional and personal. For some analysts this is animism. It seems likely that all humans are tempted to personalize even the artefacts with which they live: if they do not ask "fetishes" to guide them or amulets to protect them, they are likely to name their vehicles or weapons (from spears to atomic bombs). Many of us treat particular animals as members of our families. These personal engagements can be considered to be kinds of animism. Most humans remain enchanted, to some degree, rather than entirely rationalist. Even scientists speak of "sunrise" and "sunset" as if they lived in a world around which the sun travelled. They may not make offerings to the sun, but linguistically they seem to dwell still in an animist cosmos. Examples could be multiplied to reinforce the only partly humorous claim that we are all animists of one kind or another. The point is that such facts require explanation. "Animism" does not label only one explanation but identifies competing efforts to understand the world. There are not, despite my reference to "old" and "new" animisms, only two kinds of explanation. The chapters that follow open up some different approaches, perspectives and interpretations of the varied phenomena of interest. Some even want to rise to the challenge not merely of describing and theorizing but also of changing particular human behaviours.

Linda Hogan's opening essay recognizes something vitally important in this new scholarly interest in animism. She sees at least the beginning of a more respectful approach to previously marginalized cultural knowledges. Danny Naveh and Nurit Bird-David carefully correct an elision of animist knowledges with conservationist approaches to "nature". The late Ken Morrison's chapter reaches for a post-Cartesian way of doing anthropology which takes up the challenge to focus on the "who-ness" rather than the "what-ness" of the world without "primitivizing" indigenous animists. Robert Segal and Martin Stringer approach the foundational writings of Edward Tylor to test their application in varied contexts, including that of academic theorizing.

In Part II others examine the still prevalent but frequently contested dichotomy of "nature" and "culture". Again, what is at stake here is not "simply" (as if such a thing were simple) the description and analysis of "other cultures", but the value of deeply rooted, generative notions in the now dominant "modern culture". If we were to take that challenge to heart (or to our writing) how would the previous sentence read? It is easy enough to attend to the constructedness or non-naturalness of "modern culture" but if we experimentally cease using culture/nature to distinguish human acts from those of animals, plants or planets (as some animists are alleged to do), how will we conduct ourselves as "social scientists" or "natural scientists"? To what discrete facts and divisions do "social" and "natural" refer? Is there a limit to taking others seriously? Should we resist or insist on relativism or some other way of engaging with those who share the world but not worldviews? Animism is playing a significant role in raising and clarifying the issues here. Indeed, if Viveiros de Castro's emphasis on Amazonian "perspectivism", "multinaturalism" and "monoculturalism" is persuasive (which is not to say that it is, as

several contributors here demonstrate), then the world might seem a very different place (also see Latour 2009b; Halbmayer 2012a).

Part III casts these issues into sharp relief by considering human–animal relationships and relatedness. Darwin's influence should be so securely embedded in our thought and performance of human living that our kinship and dwelling with other animals should be more radically influential than it arguably is. This part of the book approaches a range of ontological and epistemological issues by examining what we might call animist anthropology, ethology and a wider-than-human ethnology. That is, questions about humans and animals are asked (by animists and by scholars interested in animism) in light of a notion of society or community that includes more species than is common in normative sociologies. Again, however, remember that these chapters present debate. Animists and scholars (and those who are both) ask questions about humans and animals because social activities include predation and consumption. People (of one species or another) get eaten by others. What, then, can be made of human–animal kinship? What do the facts of death tell us about animism, and vice versa? All this, as if it were not enough on its own, is made more stark by the intimations of global environmental changes that are already making some species extinct.

Parts IV–VI confront us with further challenges in considering both the nature of the world and also of ourselves as humans. All our lives are lived with things. Humans are sometimes distinguished from other animals on the grounds of our tool use – even though chimpanzees, Caledonian crows and many other species are also tool users to some degree. Many people insist that what others call "non-empirical realities" or "spirits" have considerable, quantifiable and observable impact on physical realities. It seems legitimate to ask why "mind" and "agency" are commonly accepted as legitimate attributes of animate beings whereas "spirit" or "soul" are commonly relegated to the suspect category of "religious beliefs". Questions about how people (human or other-than-human) "know" place animism in the arena of proliferating arguments about consciousness. They invite conversations between those of us interested in human cultures, religions or performances and those of us interested in the ways in which bodies, plants, animals and matter itself "know". These brief indicators of the interests of some of the following chapters will be expanded upon in the introductions to the different parts but should already reveal the important contribution animism can make to vital contemporary debates.

Chapters in the final part of the book reflect on some of the ways in which animism is performed and how different types of performance (especially literature, film, dance and ritual) involve animist issues. Expertise in approaches and methods produces both analyses of specific activities and, sometimes, further provocative incitement to change the ways in which academics make the world. As editor and contributor, my hope is that readers will enjoy considering the issues presented under the dynamic heading of "animism". Agreement or disagreement is a less interesting consequence of study than developing more carefully and critically considered understandings and more skilfully performed and lived responses to the world we discover and make in each moment. Performance, therefore, brings these issues into stark relief.

WRITING AND READING

There are some things that it is worth remembering about the writing and the reading of the following parts and chapters. Having embarked upon a project to bring together as many as possible of the leading thinkers and writers interested in different kinds of animism, I have tried to fulfil my ambition to produce as complete a book as possible. I have made sure that the main forms of what different people call animism are discussed. I have included writers interested in history because they provide a longer view of the phenomena but also because they ponder whether theories proposed in the nineteenth century remain valid and/or useful in relation to phenomena observable today. I have included ethnographers who write about contemporary indigenous "animisms" (in someone's terms at least) from all over the globe. Certainly this is not a complete coverage of every animistic nation or group. Because animism seems entangled or, to be more positive, embraided with questions about animals, plants, things or artefacts, and "spirits" – and not only but especially those questions that concern human inter-species relationships – I have invited experts about these species (if I can use this term to include "things" as well as "beings") to contribute. Colleagues interested in "consciousness" (to use one word where dozens are probably required) among or within animals, plants and matter itself have also contributed. Because "animism" is expressed and performed in literatures and media of many kinds, and in actions as various as ritual and activism, there are contributions that focus on such matters. All of the authors are (or have been) scholarly, if not institutionally employed academics. Because animism has permeable boundaries and creative provocations, I have welcomed creative but never less than careful and thoughtful writing. I have, in short, tried to make sure that all manner of things related to contemporary animism, and contemporary debates about animism, are included.

It will become evident that many of the chapters refer to works by authors of other chapters. Additionally, some colleagues who could not contribute (most noticeably the Amazonianist Eduardo Viveiros de Castro) because of other commitments are often cited. This is not because animism is of interest only to an incestuous cabal. Rather, it arises from and demonstrates the definitive feature and most valuable practice of academia: continuous debate. In reading these chapters you will be listening to an ongoing debate. Authors will set out what they mean by "animism" or they will give their assessment of other writers (e.g. Tylor, Hallowell or Viveiros de Castro). Sometimes they will disagree. It is possible that one of more of us is wrong about matters of more or less importance. Debates will continue. We will clarify our arguments or change our minds (and actions). There will be other books about animism. This will not only take place in academic venues but also in performance and exhibition spaces – or fusions between these, as exemplified in those organized or discussed by Descola (2005), Latour and Weibel (2005), Halbmayer (2012b), Karadimas (2012), Kapfhammer (2012) and Franke (2012). Research and theorization arising in one location will fertilize or problematize work done elsewhere – as exemplified by vibrant conversations between Amazonianists and Siberianists (e.g. in Brightman *et al.* 2012). The vitality of animism debates means that publications and venues for reflection and dialogue will continue proliferating. Each of us will be challenged again. We will listen again to each other and to people who identify themselves or may be identified (willingly or not) as animists. Perhaps we will not only improve our understanding and analysis but we might also learn better ways to be human, better ways to live in the world.

If we do not hope for something like that it seems to me that we ought not to be taking up so much of other people's time with our questions and our stories (G. Harvey 2011b).

As befits any focused conversation or intense debate, there are some difficult words and some curious turns of phrase in some chapters. As if it was not enough that "animism" does not have one clear reference or usage, some chapters discuss perspectivism, totemism, fetishism, shamanism, anthropomorphism and multinaturalism. Perhaps Hallowell's term "other-than-human persons" seems odd. When you follow up works cited here you will also encounter Marilyn Strathern's (1988) term "dividual" and Halbmayer's (2010, 2012c) "multividuals" and "multiply partible persons" (all parts of his "mereology" of Amazonian understandings of human ontology). Indeed, words like "ontology" and "epistemology" are rife in what follows. All of these are deemed necessary because they force us to think hard about what constitutes persons and their relations with the world. Some derive from the languages of animist cultures (e.g. "totem" originated as an Ojibwe word for a "clan", understood as a multi-species kinship group), from intercultural encounters (e.g. "fetish" comes from Portuguese merchants' perception of how some West Africans treated objects) and others from the technical languages evolving within academic disciplines (e.g. "ontology" is the "study of being" and "mereology" is "study of parts"). These terms will repay some thinking if you are unfamiliar with them. They are required because the topic that interests us here is not necessarily self-evident. If we are to understand the implications of animistic world- and person-making discourses and practices we should expect to encounter some potentially mind-bending and perspective-shifting thoughts and words. However, if chapter authors fail to explain their use of terms, you are encouraged to follow the index to other locations for possible enlightenment. Failing that, there is always the internet (always good for information if not always for wisdom).

Meanwhile, then, readers have a task too. Precisely because the contributors to this book are discussing various ideas together, it is open to readers (if it is not compulsory) to participate. You do that by attentive reading, careful consideration and clear response. But you also do that by choosing how to read. While I have grouped the chapters together in seven "parts" that bring together related chapters, there are other ways of organizing chapters. All the chapters are about different kinds of animism and could therefore have been grouped together – perhaps under the more cumbersome plural "animisms". Many chapters concern hunting or other ways of engaging with animals and could be read together. Almost every chapter contributes something to thinking (again) about consciousness or performance, and could come under different headings. Most particularly, questions about "spirits" could invite a detailed engagement with Tylor's animism while debates about "relationality" could invite a different structuring of the chapters. It is possible to read chapters that focus on a geographical or cultural areas (e.g. Amazonia, Siberia or Algonkian territories). Readers might, therefore, wish to ignore the book's grouping of chapters and use the index to identity and follow some other path through what follows. Certainly you are invited to make connections and pursue contradictions and the tracks of riddles that emerge when different authors treat similar and different topics.

You do not have to agree with everyone – or anyone (though this seems less likely). You do not have to be provoked into reading novels or performing rituals. While you will not escape acting in the world in relation to objects (e.g. the text you are holding) or other persons (e.g. those you are reading) and so on, you do not have to agree that "animism" is a useful label for every kind of action – whether cognitively hard-wired into brains or

learnt in enchanting performances. It is hoped, however, that beyond seeking information and understanding, you will – in vigorous conversation with what you read – engage more fully with a world that might seem somewhat more diverse, somewhat more rich and, in some sense, somewhat more animated.

CONCLUSION

At stake in this *Handbook of Contemporary Animism* are big questions everyone might ask. All the animisms we introduce, examine and debate in this book constellate around the questions "What is the world like?", "What makes us human?" and "How do humans live in the world?" There are other questions of importance such as "How do bodies and matter itself relate to consciousness?" and "In which sense is a person an individual when they are made up of many non-human organisms and are also formed of shifting relationships?" (Millions of bacteria of many species live in the crook of your elbow, and your relationships to other beings might take you quite a while to list once you start.) Simultaneously, even if they are not always explicitly spoken about, all the debates and theorizing in this book involve important questions about the ways in which we conduct ourselves as researchers and authors.

It can seem surprising that "animism" is now provoking so much discussion. Not long ago it seemed almost entirely obsolete. Lectures on superseded nineteenth-century theories about religion or on minority traditions in West Africa might mention animism or animists. Now, however, an unruly plethora of theories approach quite distinct phenomena. The innermost workings of the brains of humans, frogs and dogs (among others) might be examined for "animistic" cognitive mechanisms that benefit beings evolving in a world full of surprises, enemies and potential dinners. The elaborate gift-sharing economies and/or multi-species kinship structures of specific indigenous communities can generate intense theorizing about ontological and/or epistemological knowledges. This book promises to engage with a fascinating range of material.

In 1993 Bruno Latour famously asserted that "we have never been modern". His claim has been quoted, debated, tinkered with or opposed. Given the range of things that have been called "animism" it might be tempting to think that if we have not been modern perhaps we have always been animists. Perhaps not all the kinds of things interpreted as animism are part of our lives. Perhaps, for instance, you resolutely do not believe in spirits. Perhaps you have trained yourself not to respond to shadows as if they might hide hungry predators. You might still hold conversations with cats or computers in ways that suggest you expect them to respond appropriately (telling you which food they'd like or actually printing the chapter you have just completed). When you encounter some of the things identified as fetishism or totemism you may be even more tempted to think that you have seen or indulged in some kind of animism. Manuel Vásquez (2011) has described Brazilian football, mega-churches and Oprah Winfrey as examples "of a global polymorphous hyper-animism that is emerging out of the ruins of Western modernity, particularly out of the crisis of overproduction and overconsumption in contemporary 'casino capitalism'".

Just when it begins to look like everything might be animism, however, Isabelle Stengers forcefully argues that:

> nobody has ever been animist because one is never animist "in general," always in the terms of an assemblage that produces or enhances metamorphic (magic) transformation in our capacity to affect and be affected – that is also to feel, think, and imagine. Animism may, however, be a name for reclaiming these assemblages because it lures us into feeling that their efficacy is not ours to claim. Against the insistent poisoned passion of dismembering and demystifying, it affirms what it is they all require in order not to devour us – that we are not alone in the world.
>
> (2012: 9)

In the chapters that follow, debates about the nature of the world and about humanity come into view because the word "animism" stands as a signpost to exciting possibilities. This is a topic of rich and varied academic and more-than-academic interest and it is just beginning.

NOTE

1. The UK and North American editions of this book came out in different years but are substantially identical.