Introduction

Multivocal Arenas of Modern Enchantment in Southeast Asia

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Spirits have haunted the human imagination since times immemorial. Conceptualized in countless human and non-human forms, they may appear as the disembodied souls of the dead, as fiery demons with drooling fangs, as seductive heavenly fairies, or as uncanny creatures that can assume any shape. They may be envisioned as an anonymous mass of hungry ghosts or spirit soldiers, or as clearly defined personalities with noble moral qualities.[1] Some are identified as ancestral beings, mythological heroes, or saintly guardians. Spiritual entities inhabit the landscape, including forests, fields, rivers, and mountains; they reside at the margins of human habitation, in abandoned spaces, cemeteries, or in shrines erected for them in various spaces, including bustling urban centers. As dwellers of the invisible world, they may manifest themselves as dreamlike apparitions, as bodiless, ethereal voices, or, spontaneously or summoned at will, in the bodies of human beings. Spirits depend on human care and need to be propitiated with offerings and rites lest they cause misfortune, illness, and disaster. For either good or evil, they may interfere in worldly affairs, local politics, and matters of morality. Tylor's classic minimum definition of religion as "the belief in spiritual beings" (Tylor 1871: I, 424) may be semantically debatable, but it speaks to the immutability of spirit conceptions throughout the world and thus still serves as a useful starting point for a discussion of spirits in and of modernity.

Scientific Enlightenment Meets "Superstition"

In East and Southeast Asia, the advent of modernity as an epochal concept was closely tied to the colonial project of exercising power and "enlightened control" over non-Western peoples who appeared to be prone to magic, sorcery, and other

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"primitive" beliefs, and therefore incapable of responsible self-government (Styers 2004: 14; cf. Watson-Andaya 1997). Whether or not their countries had been colonized, the emergence of Western science and scientific rationality as prime markers of European superiority thus became a key issue for native political and intellectual elites of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Their deliberations entailed a critical rethinking of popular religious beliefs and practices. The modernizers of the Japanese Meiji era unleashed a torrent of attacks against "irrational" beliefs in order to recast the people as enlightened, knowledgeable subjects (Fujitani 1993). Korean progressives of the early twentieth century faulted Confucian ritualism for Korea's humiliation at the hands of foreign powers and criticized popular forms of Korean folk religion as unscientific (Kendall 2001, 2009). Reformers in Republican China saw popular spirit cults as a major factor blocking the way of modern progress (Duara 1991; Anagnost 1994). French-educated intellectuals in colonial Vietnam blamed traditional customs and beliefs for the weakness and "backwardness" of the country (Phan Kế Bính 1995[1915]; Endres 2007).[2] Among the new vocabulary that emerged to express modern ideas and their opposites was "superstition." Coined as a neologism by Meiji-era Japanese modernizers, the term was subsequently adapted by other Asian languages as *mixin* (China), *misin* (Korea) and *mê tín* (Vietnam). As in the West, at least since the Enlightenment, it implied an irrational belief or action that was based on a premodern, unscientific worldview. In the modernizing agendas of these emerging nation-states, superstition would come to serve "as modernity's dark alter ego, the realm of unacceptable practices, of things irrational, invalid, and consequently harmful" (Kendall 2001: 29). Subsequently, both communist and non-communist authoritarian regimes launched vigorous anti-superstition campaigns that denied the existence of supernatural powers considered to influence human lives and banned all practices involving the invocation of the spirit world.

Other "new" Southeast Asian nation-states were somewhat less explicit in rejecting popular religious practices as undesirable remnants of the pre-modern era.[3] Thai Buddhism, for example, was "modernized" by establishing a national *Sangha* organization under the control of the monarchy. King Chulalongkorn's reforms primarily aimed at incorporating all regions of the periphery into the emergent nation-state of Thailand and sought to eliminate unorthodox regional variants that were considered dangerous to the project of national integration (Tambiah 1976; Kitiarsa 2009; cf. Keyes 1971). Local spirit cults, though not expressly prohibited, were seen as remnants of irrationality and subordinated to Theravada Buddhism (Kitiarsa 1999; White 2005). This was also the case in Malaysia, where folk religious and hybrid Indian Hindu elements of Malay culture were deemed as premodern and un-Islamic by the postcolonial ruling elites (Willford 2005). For the Indonesian independence movement, the heterogeneity of local cultural systems, cosmologies, and beliefs across the archipelago posed a big challenge to the project of building a unitary, modern nation-state. The five tenets of the "na-

tional statement of purpose" (McVey 1999), the *Pancasila*, included the belief in a supreme God (*Ketuhanan Yang Maha Esa*), and the right to freedom of religious belief and conviction was enshrined in the 1949 constitution. Orthodox Muslim influence in the Ministry of Religion contributed to the institutionalization of a nuanced distinction between religion (*agama*) and current of belief (*aliran kepercayaan*) that would play a crucial role under the *Orde Baru* (New Order) regime of Suharto, when adherence to a religion became a requirement of citizenship. While religion was understood as a monotheistic faith based on a holy scripture, a current of belief was defined as "a dogmatic opinion, which is closely connected to the living tradition of several tribes, especially of those tribes that are still backward" (Ramstedt 2004: 9).[4] Adherents of local beliefs were consequently classified as *belum beragama*, or "not yet having religion." Converts to one of the five acknowledged "world religions" could nevertheless retain some of their indigenous religious practices, tolerated as traditional custom (*adat*) and part of culture (*kebudayaan*).[5]

Despite their different ideological underpinnings, the marginalization of indigenous religious belief systems constituted an important element in the modernizing projects of the emerging Southeast Asian nation-states. Local spirit cults, even if not explicitly outlawed, came to be looked upon as epitomizing irrationality and backwardness and obsolete remnants of premodern thinking by the enlightened subjects of the postcolonial era. Even those who did not subscribe to Marxist thinking would certainly not have defined religion in Tylorean terms as "belief in spiritual beings."

Modernity and (Re)Enchantment

For many decades, any effort to think about the relationship between religion (or magic) and modernity in the social sciences has been haunted by the spirit of Max Weber (Weller 2008). Weber saw the inevitable disenchantment of the world as part of an all-encompassing process of modernization that would gradually marginalize, and ultimately replace, religion as a major source of meaning and moral guidance. In the past few decades, however, the tenability of the secularization thesis has been called into question (Asad 2003; see also Hefner 1998a), not only by the (almost universal) pervasiveness and persistence of religion, but also by "the fact that religious traditions throughout the world are refusing to accept the marginal and privatized role which theories of modernity as well as theories of secularization had reserved for them," a process Casanova (1994: 5) characterizes as deprivatization. The current proliferation of scholarly publications dealing with modernity and re-enchantment indicates that spirits, too, have refused to lurk in the gloomy shadows of the enlightened world of reason to which they were relegated and from where they have continued to fulfill their "traditional" roles. Around the globe, they have returned (if they had ever disappeared) with a venge-

ance to address the risks and opportunities of economic restructuring and neoliberal globalization, social tensions, political insecurities, and the more mundane, everyday manifestations of modernity's malcontents.[6]

Southeast Asia is no exception. In Vietnam, the reforms of the 1980s, known as "renovation" *(đổi mới),* triggered an explosion of religious activity that led to a gradual change in state attitudes toward popular religious practices as part of national cultural identity (Malarney 2003; Endres 2011). While public discourse still retains a somewhat critical stance vis-à-vis "superstitions," temples dedicated to the worship of ancestors and efficacious deities are teeming with worshipers, and spirit mediums no longer have to hold their possession rituals in secluded privacy. Although the situation in Laos is influenced by a different religious landscape, the politics of religion there have largely been modeled after the Vietnamese example. Despite many years of repression under socialism and the current state-supported dominance of Buddhism over spirit cults (Ladwig 2007), here we can also observe a shift towards a greater acceptance and openness toward the performances of female spirit mediums (Evans 1998). In Thailand, spirit mediumship has likewise "enjoyed a comeback from the shadows of Thai public life" (George and Willford 2005: 18) and enhances the multiplicity of "Thailand's boom-time religions of prosperity" (Jackson 1999b). In Indonesia, since the 1980s, several indigenous religions have been re-molded as varieties of Hinduism and acknowledged by the state in response to local campaigns striving for official recognition of traditional belief systems as *agama* (Schiller 2002; Ramstedt 2004). Although the New Order considered the belief in ancestral spirits as antithetical to progress, politicians have continued to commune with and seek the blessings of potent ancestors (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002). Moreover, the political and economic insecurity of the post-Suharto era has led to a proliferation of witchcraft idioms (Bubandt 2006; Siegel 2006).

The myriad ways in which devotees transact with the spirit world in dealing with the discontinuities of their lives reveals that spirit beliefs and practices possess a tremendous creative potential and easily adapt to changing circumstances. Moreover, the fleeting, amorphous nature of spirit beings allows them to constantly hybridize and "reinvent themselves in novel situations" (Moore and Sanders 2001: 3). It is precisely the fact that they have (re)entered the public sphere to engage with the complexities and ambiguities of the contemporary world that has led to calls for a (re)conceptualization of spirit beliefs and practices as eminently modern.

This book contributes to the re-enchantment debate by providing ethnographic evidence from various Southeast Asian societies. A key assumption of the authors is that local traditions of engaging supernatural entities are important arenas in which the dynamics of political, economic and social change are confronted and negotiated. Accordingly, the contributions investigate the role and impact of different dynamics (market relations, economic opportunity, social change, political power struggles, and so on) in the reconfiguration of local spirit worlds, and how these

dynamics have in turn (re)shaped discourses on cultural identity, morality, power relations, and interpretative control. The spirited modernities that have emerged in the process defy the conventional dichotomies of modern/traditional, rational/irrational, religious/secular, scientific/indigenous, progressive/backward, global/local—and thus they invite a critical rethinking of the concept of modernity itself.

Southeast Asian Spiritscapes of the Alternatively Modern

Modernity is a problematic term. As Gaonkar has aptly pointed out, "Western discourse on modernity is a shifting, hybrid configuration consisting of different, often conflicting, theories, norms, historical experiences, utopic fantasies, and ideological commitments" (Gaonkar 2001: 15). It goes beyond the scope of this introduction to reiterate the different perspectives and theoretical positions on "modernity" (and "postmodernity") in Western sociology.[7] What many of the classic approaches shared was the assumption that modernization and modernity—construed as nation-building, rational, technological progress, economic development and institutional differentiation—would ultimately result in cultural homogenization on a global scale. These theories conceived of modernity as a set of cognitive and social transformations which each and every culture would be (eventually) forced to undergo. Such a view is essentially acultural, inasmuch as it assumes that these transformations are culturally neutral processes that operate in the same way across the globe (Gaonkar 2001; Taylor 2001).

In recent shifts away from these acultural notions of a homogenizing force, modernity has been reconceptualized in the plural rather than the singular. Concepts of multiple, vernacular, alternative, or hybrid modernities have drawn significant attention to the fact that "modernity always unfolds within specific cultures or civilizations" (Gaonkar 2001: 17; see also Randeria 2006; Raffin 2008). Different societies (or cultures) may thus bring forth "other" forms of modernity that diverge from the Western model—a model that, in fact, has also been revealed as an imaginary, ideological construct. Whereas Eisenstadt's focus is on "culturally specific forms of modernity shaped by distinct cultural heritages" (Eisenstadt, Reidel, and Sachsenmaier 2002: 1; see also Eisenstadt 2000), the alternative modernities perspective provided by Gaonkar focuses on site-specific creative adaptations as expressions of an active and critical engagement with modernity. Timothy Mitchell describes modernity as a "complex rearrangement of social practices driven by a series of different and intersecting logics" (Mitchell 2002: 14). Knauft, meanwhile, suggests that alternative modernities "happen" in a multivocal arena that is delimited and framed by local cultural and subjective dispositions on one side, and by global political economies (and their possibilities and limitations) on the other (Knauft 2002). His conception emphasizes the hybridity and interwovenness of local and global processes through which political, economic, societal, and cultural interests are articulated and negotiated. At the

same time, it underscores the dialectical relationship between past and present, or tradition and modernity, and thus allows modernity to become "spirited"—a feature once thought of as modernity's very antithesis.

Southeast Asia offers a particularly rich field of inquiry into the dynamics and processualities of multiple, alternative modernities, as these have produced and (re)shaped a wide variety of religious phenomena. Arjun Appadurai has suggested conceptualizing alternative modernities and the global flows that link them through a variety of "-scapes": ethnoscapes, mediascapes, technoscapes, financescapes, and ideoscapes, composed of ideas, terms and images. The suffix -scape emphasizes the "fluid, irregular shapes of these landscapes" and indicates that they are "deeply perspectival constructs, inflected by the historical, linguistic, and political situatedness of different sorts of actors" (Appadurai 1996: 33). By ethnoscapes Appadurai means "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles … and other moving groups and individuals" (ibid.: 33). Similarly, the spiritscapes of Southeast Asia consist of transworldly, transreligious, and transethnic beings who move freely in and out of the permeable boundaries between material and metaphysical realms, between different religions and ethnicities, and between historical pasts and political presents (Lauser and Weissköppel 2008; Hüwelmeier and Krause 2010).

The various manifestations of spirits and ghosts in possession cults, popular rituals, and the media in different parts of Asia include Philippine Christian spirits and faith healers who express their devotion by having themselves crucified (Bräunlein 2010), vengeful spirits of aborted fetuses in Taiwan and Japan who need to be placated (Hardacre 1997; Moskowitz 2001), spirits of resistance to the capitalist mode of production who possess Malay factory workers (Ong 1987), spirits of prosperity who are believed to support those facing risks associated with the modern market economy (e.g., Jackson 1999a, 1999b), hungry ghosts who haunt the memories of the living and demand their share in consuming their new-found wealth (Kwon 2006, 2008; Kendall 2008, 2009; Ladwig, this volume), and melodramatic ghosts that appear on movie screens to entertain a young, educated and upwardly mobile pan-Asian audience (see McRoy 2006; Kitiarsa, this volume). The themes that emerge from the ethnographic encounters with these entities and their human hosts underscore the entangledness of local worlds and global flows and reflect the "hybrid or composite character of much of what one recognizes as modern" (Venn and Featherstone 2006: 461).

One recurrent issue in the literature is that spirits have always been closely associated with the implementation of power. As potent and efficacious supernatural beings, they may exercise power over human bodies and make them bend to their will. On the other hand, mortals may acquire certain techniques that enable them to tap into the powers of the spirit world and enhance their own potency. Kari Telle (this volume) describes how the Hindu minority on the island of Lombok responded to a prevailing sense of ontological insecurity by creating their own

security force of Dharma Wisesa, or "spirited warriors," a civilian defense group that is understood as being backed by an invisible spirit army. Lee Wilson (this volume), in contrast, looks at the relationship between knowledge and power in Indonesia through the West Javanese martial art Pencak Silat. He notes that traditional knowledge practices of invulnerability entailed mediating relations with the denizens of the unseen world, whereas contemporary institutionalized forms of invulnerability practices are defined by rational scientific explanations.

In many places, spirits play an essential role in bringing the past into the present (Kramer 1993; Stoller 1995; Levy, Mageo and Howard 1996; Lambek 2010). Their historical dimension intimately ties certain spirits to issues of legitimacy and authority, and thus also enables them to act politically in this world (Bubandt 2009). Spirits and politics, in fact, have at all times gone hand in hand in many parts of Southeast Asia (Chambert-Loir and Reid 2002; Willford and George 2005; Platenkamp 2007). The civilian defense force established on the island of Lombok, described by Kari Telle (this volume), derives its strength from the same protective supernatural powers that once backed the last Balinese king to rule Lombok. Lee Wilson (this volume) characterizes the knowledge of invulnerability in the Indonesian martial art of Pencak Silat, be it conceptualized as a transmission of spiritual potency or as a chemical reaction in the body, as a "state-forming knowledge." Claire Chauvet (this volume) mentions that in an attempt to bring their spirits in line with an official state ideology that celebrates patriotism and heroic sacrifice for the good of the nation, Vietnamese spirit mediums emphasize the historicity and meritoriousness of their spirits. Kirsten Endres and Andrea Lauser (this volume) illustrate how the glorious dead of the Vietnam War may become efficacious spirits that mediate between the needs and requests of the living and the deceased. These ghosts thus actively engage the living in the project of challenging official state commemorative practices. On the Indonesian island of Ternate, the souls of past rulers possess human mediums in order to debate proper procedures in the re-establishment of the sultanate in the Moluccas (Bubandt 2009). Spirits, ghosts and ancestors thus deal with contemporary political processes, power relations, and moral values by bringing "the authority of the past to bear in the present" (Lambek 1996: 239).

Another central theme in recent anthropological scholarship on modern enchantment is the dynamic interplay between spirit phenomena and market forces (e.g., Kendall 1996, 2009; Weller 1994). In Southeast Asia, as elsewhere, the onslaught of unbridled global capitalism has resulted both in substantially greater (though unequally distributed) wealth and in increased economic insecurity. The "sacred canopies" of the region have been deeply impacted by these dynamics (Kitiarsa 2008). Not only has the emergence of "market cultures" (Hefner 1998b) spurred processes of religious commodification, it has also propelled the rise of "prosperity cults" and "occult economies" that promise wealth and riches mediated by supernatural forces (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999). Vietnamese spirit

mediums, as well as Korean shamans, conceptualize some of their spirits as particularly responsive to the material needs of their adherents. On the other hand, spirits and ancestors also demand a share of their devotees' and descendants' accrued wealth in the form of lavish rituals and modern consumer goods as offerings, as can be seen in the chapters by Chauvet, Endres and Lauser, and Kendall. As Laurel Kendall shows (this volume), this enhanced religious materiality has also resulted in a renegotiation of the term "superstition" as part of modernity talk among thoroughly modern spirit mediums and devotees in contemporary Vietnam. Patrice Ladwig (this volume) addresses the relation between the material and the immaterial from yet another angle. Based on ethnographic examples from Laos, he explores the ontological status of ghosts and spirits through the traces of their presence left in the material world.

In comparison to other spirits in the region, the Malay Muslim *keramat* demand rather little from the Chinese property developers who encroach on the land they guard. Beng-Lan Goh (this volume) traces the movement of *keramat* from their hybrid Islamic origins to their adoption by middle-class Chinese and Indian communities in contemporary urban Malaysia. In transcending these religious and ethnic divides, *keramat* challenge Malaysian nationalist discourses about ethnic and religious identity and remind us that both tradition and modernity must be seen as "hybrid assemblages in a state of flux" (Venn and Featherstone 2006: 457). In a related vein, Bénédicte Brac de la Perrière (this volume) interprets the interaction between the normatively separate spheres of Burmese spirit worship and Buddhist-oriented practices as part of an ongoing dialogical process of defining the boundaries between different religious practices, a process she describes as the autonomization of spirit possession. A separation of (formerly) multi-religious spaces into separate spheres also seems to take place in southern Thailand. Alexander Horstmann (this volume) looks at the *manora rongkru* as a hybrid, multi-religious spirit possession ritual-cum-performance art that can be traced back to a shared ancestry of *manora* teachers. Formerly rejected by Theravada Buddhism, the recent proliferation of the *manora* has contributed to the re-enchantment of popular Buddhism, while at the same time losing its footing in Muslim communities.

The Presence of Spirits: Voice and Agency

Spirits are essentially characterized by their "coming into presence" (Lambek 2010). In doing so, they do not depend so much on human beliefs as on their practices. As Chakrabarty puts it, "They are parts of the different ways of being through which we make the present manifold" (Chakrabarty 2000: 111). The most common form in which spirits come into presence is through the mediating body of a human host. This may happen unexpectedly, even involuntarily, in the sense of an affliction, or in rather controlled ways of deliberately summoning a spiritual

being into the body of a medium. Scholars have attempted to classify and theorize spirit possession in many ways (see Boddy 1994). Ioan Lewis's interpretation of spirit possession as a strategy of the weak and marginalized to command attention, voice their grievances, and achieve their goals (Lewis 1989[1971]) has been influential and spawned numerous anthropological studies in this vein. Although illness and human suffering is often at the core of spirit possession, recent scholarship proposes that possession phenomena must not be taken as an index of social deviance or psychological pathology. Ethnographic evidence from various parts of the world instead suggests that, rather than being peripheral, spirit possession phenomena are central to cultural production and may serve as important strategies of self-empowerment (e.g., Boddy 1989; Sharp 1993; Kapferer 1997; Carrin 1999; Phạm Quỳnh Phương 2007, 2009; Kendall 2009).

Possession practices are widespread in Southeast Asia. Many of them are strongly, but not solely, associated with healing, such as the ritual possessions of the Vietnamese *bà đồng* and *ông đồng* (Nguyễn Thị Hiền 2002; Chauvet, this volume; Kendall, this volume), the seances of the Malay *bomoh* (Laderman 1991), or the numerous "shamanic" practices of ethnic minority groups in the interior or upland areas of Southeast Asia (Neumann Fridman and Walter 2004). Other possession practices are instrumental in communicating with spirit entities for divination purposes and establishing contact with the ancestors. Several of the contributions to this volume focus on spirit possession in one form or another (Brac de la Perrière; Chauvet; Endres and Lauser; Horstmann; Kendall). The Burmese *natkádaw* of the Thirty-seven Lords conceive of themselves as married to one of the spirits in the pantheon and couch their experience of trance-like states during ritual possession in metaphors of erotic love (Brac de la Perrière, this volume). Possessed by their ancestors, the spirit-mediums of the *manora* in southern Thailand seem not to be their human selves until after the ancestral souls have left their bodies (Horstmann, this volume). The spirits of the Vietnamese cult of the Four Palaces are said to descend on, or mount, their hosts who often claim they have no control over their actions and utterances during possession (Chauvet, this volume). Many possession idioms in fact construe possession as the displacement of the host's agency by the agency of the possessing spirit. The spirit medium, taken over by the spirit, deity, or ancestor, is perceived as a mere vessel for the expression of the supernatural entity's will. As such, the possession idiom stands in stark contrast to the image of the human individual advanced by modernity—that is, a bounded, rational, autonomous agent that is not to be seen as acted upon by cosmic forces or divine will. Despite the apparent displacement of their human agency, however, spirit mediums generally feel empowered by the experience of possession. In many cultures, possession practices have real therapeutic effects on mental health and overall well-being and provide a forum for social networking and mutual support. Possession practices may also enable spirit mediums to exert effective social influence and accumulate material wealth (Boddy 1994; Behrend

and Luig 1999; Keller 2002; Johnson and Keller 2006; Cohen 2008). How, then, does this apparent paradox relate to the question of agency?

Over the past few decades, "agency" has become a prominent topic of debate in the social sciences, particularly in the fields of feminist and subaltern studies. Most commonly, agency refers to the capacity of individual persons to act independently and pursue their interests within (or despite) the constraints of structure. With regard to (female) spirit possession, Mary Keller has theorized an "instrumental agency" in which "possessed bodies share the same paradoxical agency in that the body is not speaking, it is spoken through; the body is not hammering, it is being used to hammer; the body is not mounting, it is being mounted" (Keller 2002: 82). This emphasis on the instrumental dynamics of possession highlights the subject/agency aspect in a different way: It is the apparent "passivity" of the subject that is wielded like a hammer or played like a musical instrument that actually endows the possessed body with the special authority accorded him (or her) by the community in the context of the ritual.[8] Rather than conceptualizing this agency as "instrumental," however, it seems more apt to speak of a distributed, relational agency, as it is in the interrelationship between the spirit or deity who needs the human body in order to come into presence, the possessed body that is worked on by a supernatural power, and the ritual community for whom the spirits have an ontological reality that agency resides. This emphasis on the relational aspect of agency also resonates with anthropological perspectives on selfhood that challenge the idea of an autonomous individual as "simply another local model" (Moore 1994: 30)— that is, a Western construct that does not necessarily apply to other cultures where people do not think of selves and persons as indivisible and bounded, but as unbounded and dividual (Marriott 1976; Strathern 1988; Smith 2006). Moreover, it indicates that agency is not essentially a property unique to human beings. A broader definition of agency that can include both human and non-human entities is, for example, suggested by the proponents of Actor-Network Theory (ANT). One of its key progenitors, Bruno Latour, defines an actor or actant as: "something that acts or to which activity is granted by others. It implies no special motivation of human individual actors, or of humans in general. An actant can literally be anything provided it is granted to be such a source of an action" (Latour 1996: 373). From this perspective we can discern that agency is not limited to human beings but may also be found in material objects, works of art, landscapes, or rituals (Gell 1998; Tilley 2004; Sax 2006; Allerton 2009). It is not so much a matter of intentionality and free will as it is one of the ability to bring about transformations in the external world. From this assumption it is only a small, but radical, step to the claim that spirits and deities, too, have agency and are "part of the agentive network" (Sax 2009: 133; see also Ladwig, this volume; Kendall, this volume).

Keller's notion of the medium as being acted upon also draws attention to the other side of agency, namely "patiency." A key text for understanding the concept of patiency in the context of spirit beliefs and practices is Godfrey Lienhardt's

study of the religion of the Dinka (Lienhardt 1961; see also Kramer 1993). Lienhardt argues that in contrast to the interpretation of such phenomena in modern Western thinking, the Dinka of Southern Sudan do not conceive of their dreams and memories as inner processes of an autonomous individual's remembering or imagining mind. Rather, certain dreams are seen as personal encounters with divine powers—spirits, deities, and ancestors—that are held to influence human lives "for good or evil" (Lienhardt 1961: 147). While we, as Westerners, construe ourselves as active agents in many situations, the Dinka see themselves as passive objects, or patients, of actions initiated by spiritual powers that work on them and, at times, even enter the human body. Lienhardt chose the Latin word *passio/passiones* because it describes the opposite of action not as mere passivity or as non-action, but as the experience of being acted upon.

Building on this notion of *passiones*, Schnepel (2008, 2009) urges us to pay more attention to the dialectics of agency and patiency. He illustrates his point with the example of the East Indian *Dando Nato* ("dance of punishment"), a ritual dance dedicated to the deities Kali and Shiva. During the time of the festival, which lasts for fourteen days, the male dancers have to renounce their worldly lives and fully devote themselves to divine worship. The constant sound of drumming, the wafting smell of incense, the physical exertion of dancing in the heat of the day, and the spiritually charged atmosphere may cause the participants to experience trance and even spirit possession. Schnepel argues that the way in which the devotees take on their roles during the ritual dances must not be understood as an active process. Rather, the dancers understand themselves as acted upon by external powers that take possession of their bodies and inscribe them with divine wisdom and knowledge. The encounter with the divine thus imbues the devotees with an agency that is effective "not although, but exactly because it is embedded into and encompassed by the (actively sought) experience of 'patiency' or *passio*" (Schnepel 2006: 125).

From the above it should have become clear that a focus on alternative modernities also calls for a recognition of alternative subjectivities and of multiple forms of agency beyond that of a bounded, autonomous self. Moreover, for the people whose cultures we study, the spirits may be as real as any material object or living being. In contrast, as anthropologists we generally do not share this ontological certainty and instead tend to think of spirits as metaphors, symbols, and collective imaginaries (Ladwig, this volume; cf. Turner 2003). Personal convictions and uncanny encounters notwithstanding, a conventional social-science perspective does not allow us to presume otherwise, lest we risk the ridicule and consternation of our peers. The ethnographic examples presented in this book, however, buttress Dipesh Chakrabarty's claim that gods and spirits are "existentially coeval with the human" and "that the question of being human involves the question of being with gods and spirits" (Chakrabarty 2000: 16; see also Kendall, this volume). Conceiving of spirits as authentic social and political actors/agents in networks of distributed agency (Sax

2009) also brings us nearer to the point of view of the devotees, for whom spirit phenomena represent powerful encounters with the ontological reality of a supernatural presence. As Kendall shows (this volume), the deployment of material things as gifts and enticements serves to secure their positive presence in the here and now. This presence, in turn, also drives the expanding and diverse market in ritual goods: new intricate costumes, better-produced statues, and more elaborate and luxurious offerings are felt to cause the deities to be more responsive, and thus more present, in the contemporary human world. In this regard, Nils Bubandt suggests understanding spirits as "methodologically real," and treating them as "key informants who can be engaged, interviewed and analysed very much like the conventional key informant technique suggests" (Bubandt 2009: 298, 296).

Closing Remarks

Neither the Western conception of modernity, nor the notion of the modern individual as a bounded, rational subject applies uniformly throughout the world. In most Southeast Asian societies that are the focus of this book, the self is experienced as a radically relational entity. The networks of such relational selves may even transcend the boundaries of the human world and include close exchange relationships with gods, spirits, and ancestors. Cosmologies and belief systems shape and are shaped by powerful social structural and political forces; they are models of and models for the world. From an anthropological point of view, then, it does indeed make a difference whether a jealous god reigns or a multitude of spirits needs to be propitiated, because these conceptions also have an impact on how individual agency and subjectivity are perceived in different cultures. In theorizing spirit phenomena in modernity, we thus need to be sensitive to local concepts of self, personhood, and agency. A focus on networks of distributed, relational agency may enhance our understanding of how processes of global integration, social fragmentation, political alienation, cultural commodification, and various other transformations associated with modernity are experienced and resolved in different cultural contexts.

The project of modernity not only promises happiness and material well-being, but also produces tensions, ambivalences, and anxieties. "Religious capital" in Bourdieu's sense can be both an asset for prosperity and a resource against the unsettling disquiet fostered by modernity. The upsurge of spirit religions in times of economic prosperity and social transformation is not just a recent phenomenon, however. Neither does it represent a retreat to archaic traditions as a response or solution to the uncertainties of life in times of political, economic, and social change. On the contrary, the various spirit beliefs and practices discussed in this book have effectively engaged with the actual historical and political contexts of their times. In doing so, they have been continuously recreated and reinvented into creative strategies of confronting the existential uncertainties, economic opportu-

nities, and political upheavals that many Southeast Asian societies face today. Hence, in connecting local and global flows, past and present meanings, human and spirit worlds, the Southeast Asian spiritscapes discussed in this volume not only embody a distinct feature of the contemporary moment, but also challenge the grand narrative of a unitary, globalized secular modernity.

Notes

1. In this Introduction, we do not wish to draw a clear line between different categories of spiritual beings (for an overview of typical categorizations, see Levy, Mageo, and Howard 1996). In many societies, the most relevant distinction seems to be the one between "spirit" and "ghost." Pattana Kitiarsa (this volume) distinguishes between the two categories by associating "spirit(s)" with the sphere of religious belief or cult and reserving the term "ghost(s)" for the malevolent and revengeful dead. In contrast, Mu-Chou Poo defines "ghost" in far more general terms as "a kind of post-earthly existence of a dead individual, which can be perceived by those still alive in a variety of different forms" (Poo 2009: 4). Yet he also points out that the application of the term "ghost" in the familiar Western sense is likely to distort other meanings associated with "ghosts" and "spirits" in different parts of the world. We therefore leave it to the individual authors to define and draw lines, if necessary, between different categories of spiritual/ghostly existences within the cultural context of their research.
2. Popular forms of spirit worship had of course also been attacked in precolonial times. Confucian rules of propriety, for example, prescribed other forms of ritual than those practiced by sorcerers and spirit mediums. In Vietnam, popular religious practices such as spirit possession, fortune telling and sorcery were expressly prohibited by the Lê Code, a law code enacted in the fifteenth century under the Lê dynasty (Dror 2007: 165). Yet the repressive stance towards such practices, characterized as superstition only in the twentieth century, had not been continued in an unbroken line by imperial successors (ibid.: 166), nor was it rigidly enforced at the grassroots level of Vietnamese society.
3. By Southeast Asia, we shall primarily cover the following countries in the region: Myanmar (Burma), Malaysia, Thailand, Laos, Vietnam and Indonesia. For critical discussions of Southeast Asia as a regional construct, see Chou and Houben (2006).
4. For a wider regional perspective, see DuBois (2009).
5. In 2006, Confucianism (again) joined Islam, Protestantism, Catholicism, Buddhism and Hinduism as the sixth formally recognized faith of Indonesia. While Confucianism had originally been recognized during the Sukarno era, after 1965 all open displays of Chinese religiosity were prohibited.
6. See, e.g., Comaroff and Comaroff (1993), Geschiere (1997), Behrend and Luig (1999), Morris (2000), Moore and Sanders (2001), Meyer and Pels (2003), West and Sanders (2003), Fjelstad and Nguyễn Thị Hiền (2006, 2011), Willford and George (2005), Taylor (2007), Kendall (2008, 2009), Kitiarsa (2008), Taylor (2008), and Hüwelmeier and Krause (2010).
7. For overviews, see Gaonkar (2001), Eisenstadt, Riedel, and Sachsenmaier (2002), Friedman (2002), Knauft (2002), and Pels (2003).
8. With this argument we do not wish to imply that spirit mediums merely serve as unconscious or passive vehicles of the possessing spirit. Ample ethnographic evidence has shown that this is clearly not generally the case. However, Keller's analogy of the hammer and the flute resonates with the fact that spirit mediums typically deny their capacity to act willfully during possession and ascribe agency, intentionality, and authority to the ancestors, spirits, and divinities that possess them.

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