



Editors' Preface

Silvie Kotherová

Department of Sociology, Andragogy and Cultural Anthropology Faculty of Arts, Palacký University Olomouc

This issue of e-Rhizome is dedicated to *Dr. Dimitris Xygalatas'* newly published book, *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living*.

Dr. Dimitris Xygalatas is an anthropologist and cognitive scientist who has brilliantly connected these two disciplines and created a new subdiscipline that we could call experimental anthropology. His main research interests are religion – mainly the study of ritual, group cooperation – the interaction between knowledge and culture, the impact of various cultural practices on psychophysiological well-being, and sport and its related behavioral manifestations. His research combines laboratory and field methods to study real-life human interaction. He held positions at the universities of Princeton, Aarhus, and Masaryk, where he served as Director of the Laboratory for the Experimental Research of Religion (LEVYNA). He currently works at the University of Connecticut, where he directs the Experimental Anthropology Lab. He has published more than 100 articles and given interviews to The New York Times, Guardian, The Washington Post, National Geographic, and others.

Dr. Xygalatas' new book *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living* describes his journey throughout the world as he explains human rituals in different societies and communities – from fire walkers in Spain and Greece to indigenous traditions in Australia and Mauritius. The book contains rich ethnographic details, we read about prayers to countless gods, firewalking, and the wearing of feathered gloves full of biting ants. The book is imbued with personal narratives showing that rituals developed since ancient times can help us improve our health, strengthen our communities and elevate our lives. At the same time, the book is enriched with examples of scientific research and evolutionary theories which provide the reader with a deeper understanding of ritual behavior and cultures themselves. The book is not only an engaging introduction to the cognitive study of ritual based on contemporary social science but also a very successful attempt to bring the social sciences and humanities closer to the public. This issue contains reviews of the book from three academics with different perspectives: historian and religionist, Martin H. Luther; psychologist, religionist, and Africanist, Joel Mort; and cognitive anthropologist, Andrej Mentel. Therefore, we believe you will enjoy this issue dedicated to exploring the cultural and academic ideas presented in *Ritual: How Seemingly Senseless Acts Make Life Worth Living*.