Shared Breath

Human and Nonhuman Copresence through Ritualized Words and Beyond

Laura Siragusa, Clinton N. Westman, and Sarah C. Moritz

We introduce and elaborate on the notion of "shared breath" as a way of understanding human and nonhuman copresence and offer descriptions and narratives about three Indigenous groups in Russia and Canada, namely, Veps, Western Woods Cree, and Interior Salish St'át'imc. These data illustrate vividly how the underused metaphor of shared breath sheds light on active participation in life by and respectful relations with nonhuman beings, thus surpassing other overly used spatial, physical, and spiritual metaphors. We move beyond the physical aspects of discrete spaces and materials in extending consideration to pertinent metaphorical and tangible aspects of the verbal, sonorous, and ritual performances undertaken by humans in order to negotiate and reinforce relations with other beings. Relationality is continuously accommodated and regenerated by human and nonhuman agencies through ritual acts that include blowing, chants, breathing, drumming, visualizing, and smoking. The shared breath through which these encounters take place emblematizes turning moments, when new directions may be taken and long-term relations of respect may be established, validated, and reinforced. Shared breath is both a medium and a modality of shamanic and animist relationality, offering a new way of looking at human-nonhuman contact and exchange in animist ritual contexts and beyond.

In this paper, we introduce, elaborate on, and analyze the concept of "shared breath" as a way of understanding human and nonhuman copresence through ritualized verbal and nonverbal communicative practices. This concept also allows us to consider purposeful action in three comparative settings: in northwest Russia among Veps and in western Canada among Western Woods Cree and Interior Salish St'át'imc. Veps are a Finno-Ugric minority of northwest Russia, traditionally living in rural areas of the Republic of Karelia, Leningrad and Vologda Oblasts (Puura et al. 2013; fig. 1). L. Siragusa has conducted fieldwork in this territory since 2009. Western Woods Crees (*nehiyawak* or *sâkaw-iyiniwak* ["bush people"]) are the northwesternmost Cree-speaking group. Cree (*nehiyawewin*) is an Algonquian language spoken across a broad swath of the Canadian subarctic forests and plains. C. N. Westman's fieldwork has taken place since 1996 among Cree speakers in northern Alberta (fig. 4). St'át'imc (*Úcwalmicw* ["people of the land"]) are an Interior Salish–speaking (a.k.a. Lillooet) group living across the southern Coast Mountains and Interior Plateau (Fraser Canyon) region. S. C. Moritz's fieldwork has been ongoing since 2009 among Upper St'át'imc families in both the Coast Mountains and Fraser River Canyon regions of St'át'imc territory (fig. 5).

In examining the dimensions and processes of ritual contact in animist societies, we propose shared breath as an underrecognized idiom whose "intangible" aspect offers a way to imagine—and, paradoxically, solidify and sustain—alliances between humans and nonhumans. Such consubstantial rituals are effective and agentive in creating virtualities or ontological frames where the shared breath may be operationalized (see Handelman 2005). Our approach distinguishes itself from dominant spatially, physically, or even spiritually oriented accounts of hunters' and gatherers' religious practices (Anderson et al. 2017; Armstrong Oma 2010; Harvey 2013; Ingold 2000; Rival 1998; Stépanoff 2012; Viveiros de Castro 1998; Willerslev 2007). Rather, we argue for a relational theory resting in metaphors that are particularly meaningful to the societies that developed them. Therefore, we attempt to surpass some of the limitations of borrowing Western categories (cf. Bird-David 1999; Brightman, Grotti, and Ulturgasheva 2012) by introducing an idiom, shared breath, that has ethnographic resonance and that has been underacknowledged (at least in the northern literature) when relationality between humans and nonhumans is studied in specific contexts. The concept of shared breath is paramount among all of the groups we discuss and is manifested in various forms.

In our work, we draw directly on Indigenous language terminology. In the case of Veps, for example, the notion of shared breath resides in the words *puheged* and *vajhed* and *pakitas* (enchantments), that is, blowing powerful (specific) words. In St'át'imcets, the concept of shared breath has a direct translation

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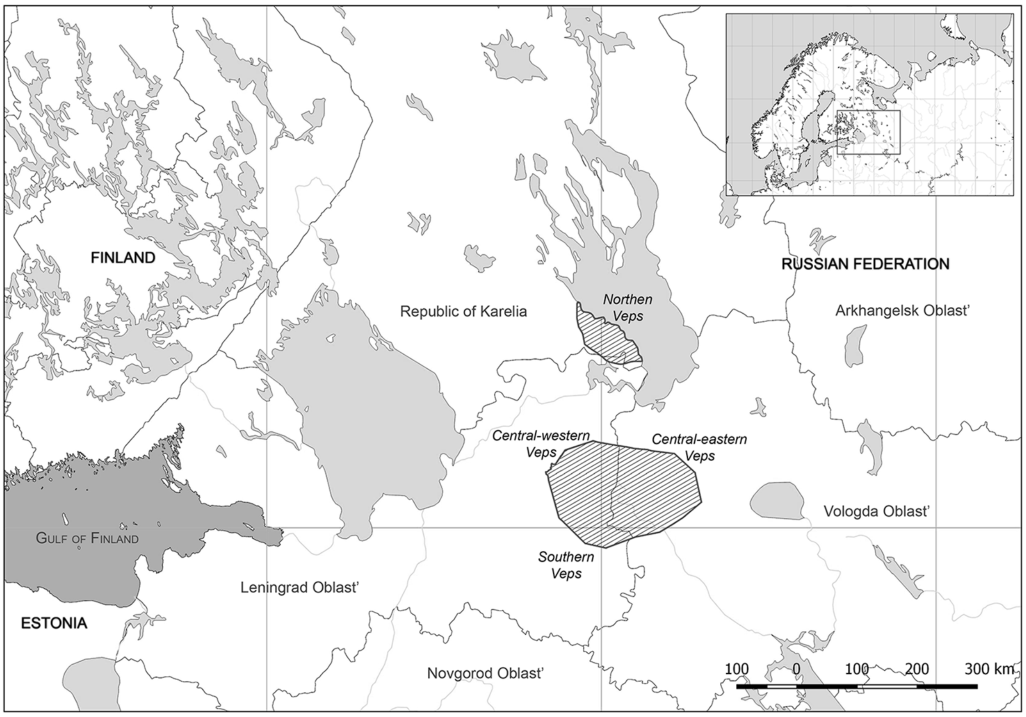

Figure 1. This map was adapted by Alessandro Pasquini. The two striped sections in the center of the map represent the territory covered by contemporary Vepsian villages.

and is called *Nuk'sup'*, meaning shared air and, by extension, shared life. In the Cree case, breathing or breath is *yehewin*; however, the importance of shared breath comes across more through terms and contexts such as gifting, feasting, and smoking. Because of the polysynthetic structure of Cree, cognate terms exist that invite one to contemplate smoking or feasting with or for another (nonhuman?) person (i.e., sharing substance and life force with them). Finally, the notion of life force itself is partly rendered in Algonquian languages through the concept of *manitow* (Westman and Joly 2017).

Shared substances and life force have been central concerns within animist relational practices in many settings, specifically with the flow of a "substance, fluid, force, power, or potency that is said to circulate between humans and non-humans to varying degrees" (Crépeau and Laugrand 2017:315). Shared breath stands metaphorically for these broader exchanges. With the senses of smell and taste, the shared experience of smoke, the notion of shared breath becomes clear as a modality of animist relationality and copresence (Harvey 2006:15). We further show that breath is a key image and metaphor in and of itself, exemplifying exchange of life force in animist contexts. Such an idiom is central to the circumpolar region (e.g., Ammann 1993 on Chukchi; Anderson 2005 on Saami; Fienup-Riordan 1994 on Yup'ik; Nattiez 1983 on Ainu and Inuit; Nattiez 1990:56 on Inuit), where Hallowell's seminal 1926 work on bear ceremonialism established a similarity among the regions we are examining in regard to their relations with powerful nonhumans. Similar dynamics are also found in other parts of the world (e.g., Appuhamy 1927 on Sinhalese; Evans-Pritchard 1956 on Nuer; Guanson 1997:65 and Tengan 2014 on Hawai'ians; Iwama 2007:23 on Māori and Pākehā; Metge 1995 on Māori; Riche 2013:48, 62–63, 67 on Indigenous peoples of North America; Rival 2005:296 on Huaorani).

The focus of the article is on how relations are cocreated by human and nonhuman agencies among three forest-dwelling Indigenous groups. This approach stems from our long-term fieldwork and work with archival materials, which have revealed how humans relate to nonhuman beings through ritual practices including speaking, breathing, blowing, drumming, visualizing, and smoking. Such practices allow for dialogue, negotiation, and the enduring augmentation of relationships. Shared breath represents a pathway to relations and a connective tissue where human and nonhuman agencies conjoin. It is defined by both ritualized verbal and nonverbal acts. Indeed, as stated by Leach (1966), "Ritual . . . is a complex of words and actions. . . . It is not the case that words are one thing and the rite another. The uttering of the words itself is a ritual" (407). In our paper, we extend the "words" to the nonverbal paralinguistic actions, whose sometimes "intangible" aspect favors a connection and a consequent deeper engagement between beings. Shared breath either enables the beginning of an encounter or supports relationality through a set of sequential formulaic acts for an extended period of time (see on rituals, Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1979; Gladigow 2006; Tambiah 1968). It allows for the reenactment of relationships that need renewal, regeneration, or reconciliation.

Fienup-Riordan (1994:141) shows how among Yup'ik the breath not only represents a passage to penetrate the liminal spaces and boundaries between beings but also is associated with life and regeneration. In a similar way, our cases show how the shared breath heightens relations of respect between beings and intensifies expectations for the change and innovation of existing relations. Our understanding of shared breath—as ritualized verbal and nonverbal acts—is that it is either a way to ratify relations or a joint generative and transformative force (in ritual studies; see Alexander 1997:139; Anttonen 1992:23; Bloch 1986:189; Douglas 1966; Drewal 1992; Feld 2012:182; Fernandez 2006; Laughlin 1990; Platvoet 2004; Senft and Basso 2009; Turner and Turner 1982). Rather than being based on exclusion and scapegoating as a dynamic principle of genesis (Girard 1987), our relational theory and the concept of shared breath show how transformation and innovation can be brought about when both human and nonhuman agencies are conjoined and become consubstantial. The nonhumans who take part in shared breath are not "visiting strangers" (Girard 1987:82); on the contrary, they are familiar entities with whom Crees, St'át'imc, and Veps share space and often interact.

In the case of Veps, the nonhumans are "spiritual" entities who are sometimes portrayed as humanlike (cf. Viveiros de Castro 2009:21). These masters have responsibility for a territory, which involves control, protection, and care (cf. Fausto 2012). Although they are not organized in any hierarchical order among themselves, the host of the forest (*mecižand*) is often depicted as the most representative of them all (cf. Ingold 2000:61–76). Specific ways of speaking, such as enchantments, have to be used when directly addressing the territorial masters. For Crees, nonhuman counterparts are to be found both among the animals and in other nonhuman persons, who are organized within local hierarchies and categories (cf. Brightman, Grotti, and Ulturgasheva 2012; Descola 2005:23). These nonhuman beings can be referred to as "persons" (Hallowell 1960; Willerslev 2007:74). Cree people may enhance relations between human and nonhuman persons through ritualized acts of smoking, sharing substances, drumming, and (in shamanic ceremonies attested ethnographically) sucking and blowing. Similarly, in the case of St'át'imc, relations between humans, salmon, and nonhuman persons are articulated through relational visualization practices, smoking, breathing, drumming, and praying. Among St'át'imc, the nonhuman is perceived not only as a person with agency but also as kin (cf. Rivière 1993; Vilaça 2000). Showing respect to nonhuman persons through nonverbal practices is meant to renew and sustain enduring social entanglements and thereby guarantee future relations.

Our focus on the nonhuman does not aim to provide a new definition of animism, a category that empowers purportedly natural beings with person-like attributes (Descola 1996) or relies on the exchange of vital energy between the human and nonhuman worlds (Ingold 2000). Rather, we aim to ground our work on a relational theory that shows how certain relations between different beings occur. The concept of shared breath as a metaphor, metonymy, and medium is based on "sharing and mutual responsiveness" and knowledge (sometimes with a certain level of improvisation) of specific ritualized practices. Thus, it is an experience that is both ontological and epistemological (Scott 2006:53) since it comprises changes and transformations in humans, nonhumans, and the environment while requiring knowledge of particular verbal and nonverbal practices to reiterate, rejuvenate, and guarantee relations.

In the article, we draw parallels between three Indigenous groups in Canada and Russia not only because of the analogous ways they engage ritually with nonhuman entities and the territory in which they live through vibration, visualization, and movement of air but also because these three peoples have had a powerful influence on the history of anthropology. The ethnographies of Cree and St'át'imc (among other Algonquian and Salish peoples) have made a strong contribution to thinking and theorizing in English-language anthropology, as those of Veps have made to Soviet and post-Soviet ethnology. Correlating these case studies can help us bring different scholarly traditions closer; this is one of the factors that makes a comparison among these case studies so instructive. At the same time, each example—including the two Canadian ones—is distinct linguistically, ecologically, sociologically, and historically.

The Crees and closely related northern Algonquian peoples have provided for many classical studies in the frames of animism and shamanism (Brightman 1993; Hallowell 1960; Tanner 1979). Many such studies are well known beyond the community of Algonquianists. Likewise, the work on Veps or Chud' by Bubrikh (2005) and Pimenov (1965) has contributed to the Soviet discussion of ethnogenesis, which is still relevant today (Anderson and Arzyutov 2016). Work on human-animal relations among Veps by Irina Yu. Vinokurova (2006) has also become a point of reference for those conducting similar research in Russia or those countries, such as Estonia, where literature in Russian is well known. Similarly, complex social, ritual, and subsistence relationships of human and nonhuman persons among the Coastal and Interior Salish have been pivotal in the development of anthropology, particularly with regard to the importance of reciprocity to theory and ethnography (Benedict 1934; Boas 1921, 1966; Sapir 1922). Anthropological examinations of Salish environmental relations created a context within which Canadian anthropology came of age and Americanist anthropology came to encompass the study of all Indigenous peoples of the North American continent (Darnell 2000).

We have organized our work in the following way: each section is written in the first person. In their respective sections, each author engages with the concept of shared breath by showing how the notion directly speaks to active participation in the lives of Veps, Western Woods Cree, and Interior Salish St'át'imc by other human and other-than-human beings. In our paper, we draw on new fieldwork and unpublished data. Because of the different nature of the data, the section on Veps, which introduces six enchantments taken from Russian archives, will cite the spells in great detail, as indicative of the shared breath. A more ethnographic presentation will be used in the two other cases.

Shared Breath: Blowing Specific Words to Tune In with Territorial Masters (L. Siragusa)

On a September morning in 2013, I set off to visit Ekaterina Ivanovna (in her mid-60s) in Slobod, the easternmost *ag'/mägi* (Vepsian district) of the Vepsian village Pondal in the Vologda Oblast (fig. 1).[1] This was my first visit to Pondal despite my long-term work with Veps in other regions. My hostess and neighbors told me that Ekaterina Ivanovna had a vast knowledge of Vepsian healing practices (my interest at the time) and that she could help me with my work. Indeed, when we eventually got acquainted and I had explained the focus of my research, she introduced me to Vepsian puheged (Vepsian enchantments, spells, charms) as well as vajhed and pakitas, which could be translated as "specific words."

I soon discovered that these charms were used not only to cure and heal the sick but also as a way to interact with the territorial masters, spiritual entities with whom Veps share the environment (Vinokurova 2008). While puheged are attributed to human-to-human relationships, health, and human and other-than-human relationships and can be used for healing purposes (such as curing hernias, bleeding, earaches, and any sicknesses brought about by territorial masters), to protect and look after children, and to make people fall in or out of love, vajhed and pakitas are used to come to terms with the territorial masters concerning the bounty found in their territory, to build a house, to have success in hunting or fishing, to protect pasturing cattle, and so on (Makar'yev 1932:36–37; phonoarchives at the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Petrozavodsk, files 3, 7, 14, 18, 19, and 25). Their use mainly covers three broad functions: healing, interfering in human-to-human relations, and settling human-to-nonhuman relations. In this article, the latter function of the charms is at the center of my attention, as I show how human and nonhuman forces merge and comply in the act of blowing specific words. It is here that they metamorphose into something new and redefine the course of life.

While Ekaterina Ivanovna could not disclose her own puheged to me—lest these should lose their power and she would not be able to use them anymore (cf. Kurets 2000)—she recollected some episodes from her own life experience that involved puheged, and vajhed and pakitas. In particular, she remembered an elderly lady, who, despite being "deaf and not very talkative to people . . . was a very good lady and made use of her knowledge to help others." This excerpt is a direct translation from Russian since Ekaterina Ivanovna switched back and forth between Russian and Vepsian, her heritage language, while speaking with me. Indeed, like most of the other villagers, she is fluent in both Russian and Vepsian.

She recalled the moment when the elderly lady communicated with the forest master (mecižand in Vepsian) in order to find cattle that had gone missing. The old lady used to engage with the forest master in the silence of her own house by opening the small door of her chimney and whispering into it—a fascinating example highlighting the use of breath (and whispered breathy speech) to connect domestic and less domestic spaces through a liminal conduit (the chimney, which in some ways resembles the ceremonial pipes that will be prominent in the Canadian cases). After this interaction with the mecižand, she was able to tell precisely where to go to find the lost cattle and at what time they would be there. It is significant that, in all of our examples, we will see the words of the supplicant being carried up with smoke in a shared offering of breath and substance.

The Vepsian cosmology comprises a number of territorial masters with whom Veps engage—with some more openly than others. The mecižand and *mecemag* are the host and hostess of the forest, respectively. The mecižand is addressed in various ways, for example, as *mechine*, *mecamez'*, or *mecuk*—these attributes all make reference to the place he inhabits, the forest (*mec*); however, in places like Pondal and Šimgär', he is also referred to as *toine pol'* or *toine čura*, which literally mean "(on) the other side" (Vinokurova 2015:280–286). Other territorial masters are the *pertin ižand* and *pertin emag* (host and hostess, respectively, of the house and territory where the house is built); the *kül'bet'ižand* and *kül'bet'emag*, who host the Vepsian sauna (*kül'bet'*); and the *vedenižand* and *veden emag*, who have control over water (*vezi*; Vinokurova 2015). These spiritual entities are believed to look after a specific territory that Veps need to treat with respect by taking care of it, not swearing or screaming, and not fighting when dwelling there. Direct interaction with those spiritual entities usually takes place when one enters or leaves the territory they control, that is, in the threshold between the space controlled by humans and that controlled by nonhumans.

Vepsian puheged, and vajhed and pakitas, are ritualized and formulaic verbal arts that are believed to have an effect on the course of life and to turn it from its anticipated path (see Roper 2004:1). My fascination for turning moments, which are formed in the act of blowing when different forces meet, finds its roots in the etymology of the word *puheg* itself, in the knowledge of "specific words" and their use. The noun *puheg* is etymologically connected to the verb *puhuda*, literally "to blow," and the word *puhutuz* (whiff of wind), which leads me to interpret puheged as a way of intervening in a certain situation and bringing change through blowing and the movement of air.[2] In the act of blowing, human and nonhuman forces meet, merge, attune, and, consequently, often redirect events into a preferred track (for people, at least). The charms are expressed in the form of a request to be granted by the territorial master. These enchantments are performed quickly, in silence and concentration, in one breath, as if not to let any interference hinder their scope. The capacity to act and to determine a new life path is characteristic not only of human words (Austin 1975 [1962]) but also of the act of blowing—particularly in shamanistic or animist contexts—where the human desire to fix an issue or answer a question meets nonhuman forces. This is a critical encounter, a shared breath, during which life takes a new trajectory.

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[1] I am using pseudonyms in this section.

[2] Boas (1940:233) also indicates that speeches are called "breath" among Kwakiutl.

Obtaining specific words from those who know them is often challenging given that the enchantments would lose their power (Kurets 2000). I was kindly provided with a few recordings by Valentina Kuznetsova, director of the phonoarchives at the Karelian Research Centre of the Russian Academy of Sciences in Petrozavodsk, that Ol'ga Zhukova, researcher and teacher of Vepsian, helped me transcribe. Here, I present six texts in their original language, Vepsian, along with the English translation. While it is unfortunate that information about the settings, the context, and the interview was not provided in the tapes, as is often the case with archived recordings, I present these charms to show the different purposes to which Veps engage with the territorial masters and thus share a breath where change and transformation begin to take place.

This first enchantment was used to ask permission to build a house in the village. The villagers of Pondal used to grab a bit of soil from the place where they intended to build a house and ask for advice from the master of the land. They repeated the request three times in order to elicit an answer and know whether this was the right place to build:

Man ižandaine, emagaine,
Uidihikat neciš horomeižes,
Nügud mina stroiškamoi.
(ičeze nimen sanutas),
Nu, ka kut voiškab-ik kerata,
Voiškab—ka ozutade ves'oudan, hüvän.
Ii voiška—ka prämo kükso mindain.

Host and hostess of the land,
Leave this mansion,
Now I'm going to build.
(here they said their names),
So, will it be possible to bring it all together,
If it is possible, then be cheerful and good.
If it is not possible, then drive me away.
(Phonoarchives in Petrozavodsk, file 19, tape 2663, no. 22; 1981, Pondal, A. L. Kalinina)

The answer appeared in a dream. If the master ejected the villagers from the land, then they would not build their house in that place.

In the Vepsian village of Ladv in the Leningrad Oblast, the villagers used to summon the masters and their ancestors when wishing to stay overnight at a friend's or acquaintance's. They would say:

Ižandeižed, emägeižed,
Suguižed, hiimoižed,
Dedad, babad, dädäd, dädinad,
Pästkat magattaha tänna.
Sohranno, blagopolučno magata!

Hosts and hostesses,
Relatives,
Grandfathers, grandmothers, uncles, and aunts,
Let me stay here overnight.
[Let me] sleep safely!
(Phonoarchives in Petrozavodsk, file 25, tape 3197, no. 38; 1989, Ladv, O. P. Gerasimova)

Aware of the power of words and how its misuse would upset the masters, the villagers showed respect by demonstrating that they were ready to submit to the hosts' will. Addressing the masters directly secured protection and the continuation of good relations.

Another example showing how Veps use their language carefully is explicated by the following charm, where Veps apologize for a possible wrongdoing through speech acts:

Lävän ižandad, lävän emägad,
prost'kat minä hubin radoin,
aigoin hubin sanuin vei midä-ni.
Prost'kat, pästkat neciš vinnostiš.

Masters and mistresses of the barn,
I am sorry if I acted wrongly,
I might have said something wrong, or maybe something else.
I apologize, let me get rid of this guilt.
(Phonoarchives in Petrozavodsk, file 25, tape 3231, no. 44; 1989, Mäggärv', M. E. Grishina)

In the village, the *tedai* (literally, the one who knows the way), sorcerer (*noid*), or someone who has been instructed in such verbal practice would summon the forest master to request the return of lost cattle (Arukask 2002; Vinokurova 1988).

Inviting the masters from afar aimed at creating a shared breath through which answers could be provided:

> Mecižand da mecemag, kazakad da lapsuded, babuško, deduško, abutagat mini pördutada živataine. Otkat neno tomaižed. Tomaižed otkat, tiile, živataine ningimale rababožjale. Mina postupimoi, povinimoi, laimoi, oigenzin, nu i kaik.
>
> Host and hostess of the forest, workers and children, grandmother and grandfather, help me return the livestock. Grab these gifts. Take the gift for yourself, and [leave] the cattle to this servant of God. I gave up, apologized, swore, fixed [things], and that's it. (Phonoarchives in Petrozavodsk, file 19, tape 2662, no. 25; 1981, Pondal, A. L. Kalinina)

It is not only cattle that can get lost in the forest. Ekaterina Ivanovna and other villagers admonished me every time I ventured away from the village since one can easily lose track

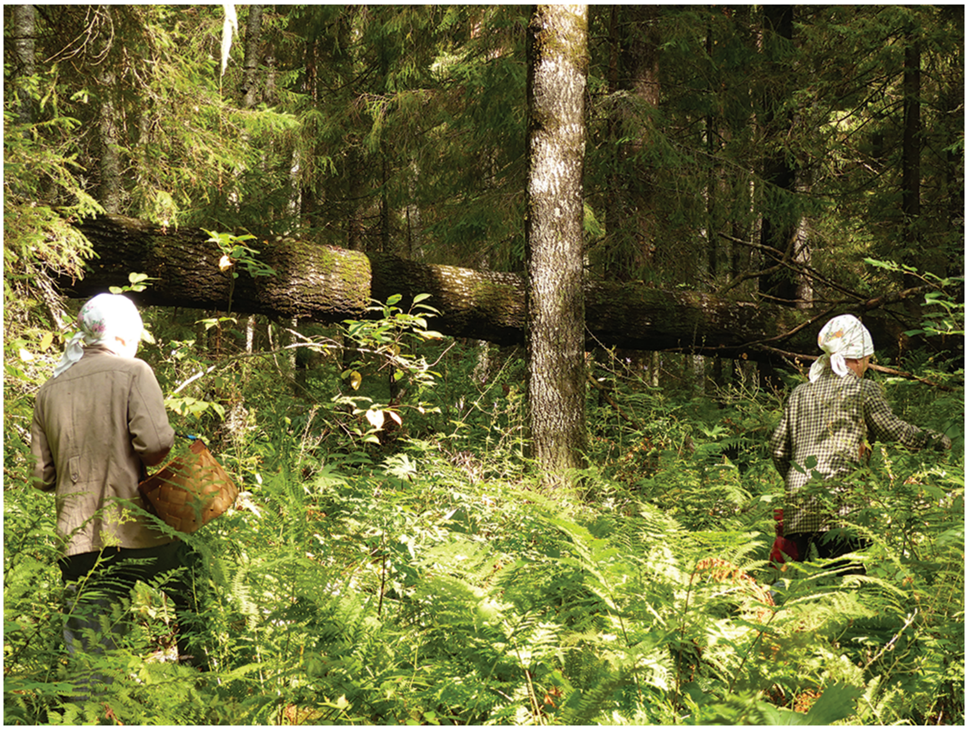

Figure 2. Entering the forest near Nemž, a central Vepsian village, summer 2013.

of the path and all of a sudden become lost in the forest. Therefore, they often warned me not to say that I will be "quick" once entering the forest, as, in fact, I could never know how long it may take to get out (cf. Vinokurova 2015:340; fig. 2). In the forest, humans may accidentally step onto the mecižand path and suddenly lose orientation. "*Putta hondole jäl'gele*" in Vepsian literally means "going along a bad track"—the track of the mecižand, who, in response, might blur people's minds and make them unable to hear the others and find their way back (Vinokurova 2015:340). Ekaterina Ivanovna shared a story about a couple of elderly ladies who said that they would go "quickly" to the forest to pick up some cranberries to make some pierogi (Russian pies). Needless to say, as evening came, they had not come back yet, so the whole village mobilized and went searching for them. The next morning, Ekaterina Ivanovna's mother went off for a bit, invited the master of the forest to dialogue, and asked for the return of the two ladies. As soon as she was done, the ladies came out of the woods.

Alternatively, Veps can try to find their own way back to the villages once they have realized that they have become lost. One way to trick the territorial master is to turn one's clothes inside out (L. Siragusa, field notes, 2010; Vinokurova 2015:341). If this does not work, one can directly ask the territory masters:

> Ižandaihed, emägaihed,
> lapsuded, dedaihed, babaihed,
> sötkat, jotkat i oigekat kod'he!
>
> Hosts and hostesses,
> children, grandfathers, and grandmothers
> eat, drink, and send me home!
> (Phonoarchives in Petrozavodsk, file 25, tape 3231, no. 44;
> 1989, Mäggärv', M. E. Grishina)

Aware of the fact that in the forest nonhuman forces rule, Veps tend to pay respect to the local hosts, for example, by greeting them before entering the forest or thanking them after returning from fishing (Vinokurova 2010). People may even inquire about the use of the resources available in the forest by asking the territorial masters for permission.

Here is an example of such behavior, where the person asks to drink water from a river or lake:

> Mecaižandeižed, mecaemägeižed,
> Ankat minei vedut!
> Blaslovigat otta!
>
> Hosts and hostesses of the forest,
> Let me drink your water!
> Take my blessing!
> (Phonoarchives in Petrozavodsk, file 25, tape 3197, no. 38;
> 1989, Ladv, O. P. Gerasimova)

Blowing specific words to invite nonhuman spiritual masters through shared breath is meant to open a dialogue that is expected to resolve a situation or give answers to questions that would otherwise remain unanswered. The following cases also provide other concrete and metaphoric examples of shared breath, resembling in some respects but also going beyond the Vepsian metadiscourse of blowing specific words through ritual encounters.

Shared Breath of Human and Nonhuman Persons among Crees (C. N. Westman)

I focus on the copresence and relationality of Cree (*nehiyaw*) people with animals and other nonhuman persons. The choice of the terms "nonhuman" and "other-than-human person" in particular ontological contexts has direct reference to previous scholarly work. For example, Hallowell (1960) shows how, among Algonquian hunters, it is understood that nonhuman entities can be considered persons within a frame of specific localized hierarchies and categories. Additionally, given that many nouns in Cree narratives are considered animate (saliently here including the words for stone, pipe, and sacred narrative), the discursive stage is set for relational interactions with empowered entities that may in other linguistic circumstances seem surprising or nonsensical. How does one show respect toward other-than-human persons and accept their blessing peacefully and thereby ensure good relations? Here I am discussing the means of actualizing such copresence within the shared breath of the Cree lifeworld. Although these data are specific to Cree examples known to me, there are strong connections as well as intriguing divergences among our three case studies. Such similarity includes a reluctance to claim knowledge or control within the human realm, as seen in the Vepsian case.

At a recent (May 2016) meeting I organized for Indigenous representatives, academics, and environmental educators (held at a lake in the boreal forest of northern Alberta), participants experienced the shared presence of loons swimming in the water. During our morning discussion on the lakeshore, one participant—a graduate student—was competing with the loons' melodious calls interrupting her remarks. While the student—trained as a singer and thespian—gamely made the most of the situation, Cree elder Mike Beaver (fig. 3) calmly reassured her by saying, "They're blessing you." Many other Cree and Dene participants then nodded. Several Indigenous people in attendance subsequently told me that they viewed this moment as a magical one, signifying good relationships not only between people but also between different classes of beings. Later, during a break in the discussions, Elder Mike walked down to the water and offered a small amount of the tobacco I had given him earlier, placing it in the lake as a gift to the loons, the land, and the water. Afterward, Mike explained to the group that loons are very territorial, and they had been telling us that they were there. Generously, the loons had offered their blessing in any case. Still, one must make a respectful offering when sharing such a beautiful place with them. At other times during our discussions, elders prayed and sang songs to grandfathers and grandmothers, including the earth, the sun, and the four directions—for one is always sharing the territory and the cosmos with these and other powerful entities (Westman and Joly 2017). Loons are particularly symbolically resonant because they can travel in, on, and through multiple cosmological realms or levels, such as air, land, and water, and because they are associated with key ceremonies and narratives.

Figure 3. Elder Mike Beaver. Photo courtesy of Roberta Cross.

The central point for analysis here—and the broader comparative issue—is that Cree people continue particular speech and paralinguistic practices in relation to nonhuman entities. There is always the potential that someone else is listening. Through speech, silence, listening, embodied copresence, and contemplative action, the shared breath enacts itself. These assumptions in turn ground the pragmatics of certain characteristic cultural and discursive practices connoting respect among Cree people, such as reticence when speaking (Darnell 1974, 1991). In this context, sociolinguistic considerations cannot be separated from ontological ones. This principle of achieving relationality through speech and through paralinguistic practices is reflected in numerous enchantments and utterances across our three ethnographic studies.

The Crees are the most populous group of Indigenous people in Canada, living across a large part of the country (fig. 4). The focus here is on the Western Woods Crees or *sâkawiyiniwak* ("bush people"), particularly those residing in northern Alberta.[3] I have been working in small, semi-isolated subarctic communities (generally of fewer than 1,000 inhabitants) in the Peace River watershed, north of Lesser Slave Lake, since 1996. My fieldwork has embraced ontological as well as ecological questions relevant to Cree and closely related Métis communities, providing many examples where the shared breath and consubstantiality between humans, animals, and other entities occur through relationality and dialogue (and smoking).

The knowledge that people carry about nonhumans is closely connected to their ongoing use of the Cree language, and relational practices are thus reflected in speech practices (Westman and Schreyer 2014). In the semi-isolated northern

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[3] See Smith (1981) for further contextual discussion.

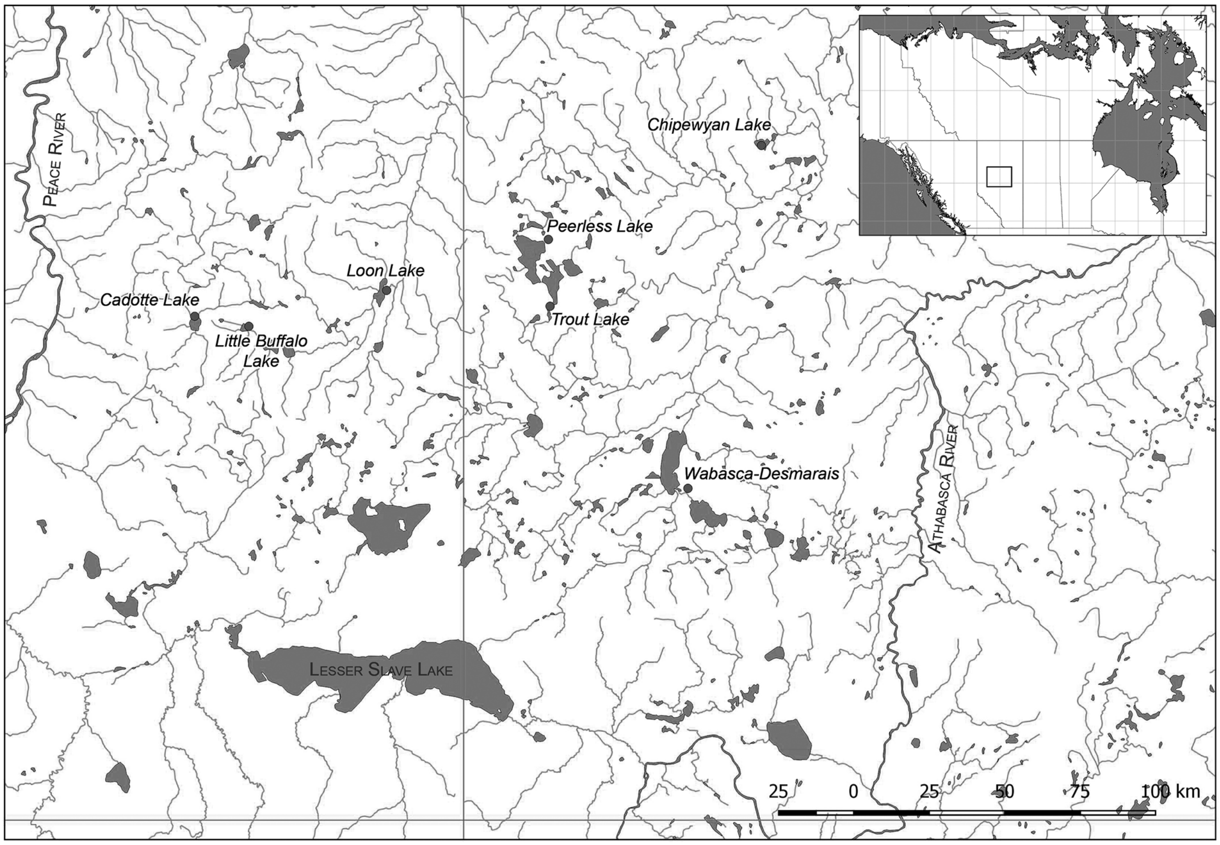

Figure 4. Forested region in northern Alberta in western Canada inhabited by Cree speakers.

communities that I know best, most people aged under 70 years are bilingual in Cree and English to varying degrees, while most people over that age prefer to operate in Cree. As Mike Beaver says, the Cree language more clearly reflects the ecological connections and processes inherent in the boreal forest. In the sentient and relational ecology (Anderson 2000) of the boreal forest, it is the Cree language that enables its speakers to retain, contextualize, and transmit their knowledge to the fullest extent.

The world of northern Cree hunters is a “living world” (Ghostkeeper 1996). Under the gift-specified relationships that constitute Cree animism through “spirit-gifting” (Ghostkeeper 1996), different types of beings are brought together in exchanges that unite body, mind, and emotions through shared substance and relationality. Moose, for example, are recognized as having the potentiality of persons. Individual moose, though they have a spirit owner, may give themselves to hunters who treat them with respect. Respect might include meat sharing, elevating part of the remains, or making an offering or feast such as the *wihkohtowin* ritual (Westman 2015). The latter ceremony, with its invitational lodge where nonhuman persons eat, smoke, drink tea, and dance with the people, provides a key enactment of the shared breath as shared smoke (carrying prayers and songs) and substance (embodying connection). It is a deep symbol of solidarity and sharing with nonhumans, prominently including loons and other waterfowl (see Dale Auger’s 2006 painting *Medicine for the Children of Mwâkwa*; Auger 2009:150).

Central among the mechanisms to activate relationality is speech and, conversely, silence about certain things and at particular times. As Regna Darnell (1991) insists in her study of Cree speech, it is always best to assume that a powerful entity—a nonhuman person—might be listening or speaking (see Hallowell 1960). Darnell has shown how Cree ontological principles about powerful nonhuman spiritual persons are reflected in talk about people and animals (Darnell 1974). Many animals are able to understand Cree (like Vepsian in northwestern Russia and St’át’imc in British Columbia); therefore, one must be careful when discussing or addressing them. Animals might also be manifestations of spirits or the dead, carrying messages and portending grave dangers to those who inadvertently insult them (Goulet 1998). Thus, people’s interactions with animals occur within a generalized communicative framework governed by principles of reticence, caution, respect, and precision. Such practices and principles resemble those seen in other sections of this article.

Hunting, fishing, and gathering plants not only are important cultural pursuits but also contribute substantially to tables in the region. Trapping furbearers continues to be important both culturally and—in some households—economically. While Indigenous trappers frequently consume the meat of many species commonly trapped as furbearers, this marks a boundary with the Euro-Canadian population, who generally do not eat animals such as beaver or muskrat (or organ meat from big game animals). Such land-based practices remain an important means of making contact with animals and spiritual beings. I have witnessed hunters making offerings of tobacco and elevating parts of slain animals to honor them. Many hunters talk to animals and receive messages from birds (Westman 2016, 2017). To a considerable extent, this is also the case for practicing Christians, including Pentecostals, who are supposed to eschew many aspects of traditional culture (Westman 2013). Indeed, contemporary Cree society is quite pluralistic religiously, but one common thread across many religious scenes is the sense that the world remains, so to speak, enchanted. Thus, animals are intelligent, dead persons talk to us, and some people have the power to curse or to cure. As such, although animist rituals are not performed or discussed in every household, such rituals continue to provide the vocabulary for understanding relations and sharing with other types of beings. Moreover, sharing breath through smoking and sacrifice is an important part of most such rituals.

Honoring spiritual entities may take the form of complex prayers and rituals or simpler utterances of respect. An elder might begin the day by praying at the lakeshore or might sing a simple refrain of “ah, *manitow*” (quoted in Waugh 1996:136) throughout the day in recognition of the personalized spirituality inherent in a sentient landscape. The *manitow* concept itself is likely untranslatable but reflects aspects of spirit, god, nonhuman person, and immanent life force (see Westman and Joly 2017). Furthermore, given the verb-oriented nature of Algonquian languages, such prayers and speeches are dynamic and pragmatic material actions, with words (*itwewinisa*) etymologically considered as little parts of talk, an action taking place through the shared air.

As Darnell (1991) points out (see also Westman 2015), many ritual practices have communicative elements, just as day-to-day communication takes on a ceremonial aspect. Devotional acts that may occur on their own or as constitutive rites within a larger ceremony such as the *wihkohtowin* feast include the burnt offering of food, smoking or offering tobacco, drumming, singing, and praying. Shared breath takes shape in such moments of encounter where human and other-than-human persons are invited to participate. Mike Beaver’s offerings of tobacco to the lake and the loons fall into this category of rituals. Determining who the participants of a given discourse are is an important prerequisite to understanding it; thus, Cree ontological principles call us to extend ideas of parole cross-culturally to include a broader range of copresent potential speakers and hearers (Darnell 1991:91). On this point our examples and data are all in accord: the shared breath we seek to document is created both ritually and verbally. As with the St’át’imc case, consuming food (as well as tobacco) and uttering appropriate speech (as in the Veps case) are ways to cocreate the shared breath with and for nonhuman persons.

Drumming is particularly significant (both in the Cree and St’át’imc examples, as elsewhere in the circumpolar North) as a kind of praying, and the hand drum appears in many ritual and ceremonial contexts (Westman 2015). Drumming signifies the heartbeat of creation, inciting people to dance and move with the spirits who are also present. The drum forms the membrane (Tanner 1979) separating (or drawing together) different levels of reality, vibrating through the shared air and other media, reminding us again that a song may have many listeners. Musical modes and formal aspects of discourse play an important role in creating the mood for such a prayer and recognizing copresent spiritual entities in nature. Such communion is enabled through embodied copresence. This may be, in part, what Cree people today seek when they go to cabins in the bush in search of peace and quiet or go to ceremonies to find healing and inner strength.

Now is the time to talk about tobacco and burnt offerings, many of which are fragrant and thus pleasing to *manitowak* and other nonhuman persons. For it is here that the shared breath and substance with unseen persons are most apparent. Pipe ceremonies, where tobacco is shared and offered ceremoniously, are both stand-alone rites and components of larger rituals and political exchanges. In the *wihkohtowin* lodge (Westman 2015), smoking is done with and for the nonhumans who have come to dance; in the same sense that one eats to feed nonhuman persons (animals, the dead, etc.), one smokes to satiate them—shared breath in the most literal sense—and then dances alongside them. The burnt offerings of meat and food have a similar function, as do the fragrant offerings such as sweetgrass and diamond willow fungus that are present at ceremonies. By prayerfully smudging with these gifts, people can purify themselves and come into the presence of the *manitowak* and one another with respect and with open hearts.

In some relational and ceremonial contexts, embodied copresence is experienced within the mouth, nasal passages, lungs, airway, and stomach. Indeed, shamanic practices (such as sucking and blowing) during healing and other rituals also correlate to such an embodied sharing (activated through the breath) with nonhumans. Such practices are widely known as part of the repertoire of shamanic healing performances and are well attested in the Cree, St’át’imc, and Vepsian cases, ethnologically.

The paintings of the late Cree artist and scholar Dale Auger show a particular concern with the breath: this is especially the case for Auger’s later work (2006–2008), which is solidly within the Shamanic Art tradition. Auger displays a consistent concern with oneness expressed through the shared breath of smoke, offerings, and the simple creative power of the shaman’s exhalations as life force. Paintings such as *The Unknown*, *In Honour of My Mother*, and *Prayer to the Morning Star* focus on solitary figures smoking and otherwise inhaling plant medicines—the essence of the sacred. Similarly, *Offerings of New Life*, *The Shapeshifter*, *Giver of the Medicine*, and *As Though They Were One* (among others) suggest the shaman spontaneously creating small birds and insects through his exhalations, sharing life force from out of his mouth (see these paintings in Auger 2009). Such small creatures themselves would be emblematic of spiritual power and communication. The latter-mentioned paintings focus on shared breath with faunal life force, but several of these again feature inhalation or exhalation of smoke from plant medicines. Truly, these paintings, as exemplars of Auger's formidable artistic, scholarly, and spiritual vision, suggest the power of shared breath within shamanic and animistic ontological frames. Notwithstanding their ethnographic specificity, comparable practices can also be seen in the Vepsian and St'át'imc examples as means to cocreate shared breath beyond the human.

Cocreation of the St'át'imc and Salmon People through Shared Breath (S. C. Moritz)

I examine the social relationality and continued cocreation of St'át'imc Salish people with salmon or other-than-human persons within a communicative sentient multispecies world (Hallowell 1960). How are enduring relationships established, maintained, and reenacted respectfully within a shared breath relationship while being of *pala kalha muta7 sptínusem ama* ("one good and unified mind" or "one people")? What is involved in the cocreation and maintenance of relations? Here, I will discuss notions of the relational shared breath, focusing on visualization, smoking, breathing, drumming, and praying as a way to enable a life force through which social relations of kinship and respect are articulated and social entanglements reinforced sustainably.

Fish, water, and the Upper St'át'imcets Salish language are profoundly socially entangled in a web of life (Smith 1998). A constructive social metaphorical and metonymic vernacular exists in regard to fish and other nonhuman persons. These are guiding tropes to "live by," to quote Lakoff and Johnson (1980; cf. Peacock and Turner 2000). As our documentary film, "St'át'imc: The Salmon People" (SGS 2016), clearly illustrates, statements in both English and St'át'imcets, such as "fish is there for our descendants," "fishing is life," "fish is our life's blood," or "we are the Salmon People," are frequently employed to describe and reinforce this relationality and consubstantiality (SGS 2016).

As a researcher and newcomer, I am invited to take these tropes and their narrators seriously, embracing both metaphorical and literal understandings in their complex entanglements (Cruikshank 2005; Haraway 2008; Scott 2013). Thus, I pay particular attention to the social concepts of respect, sharing, and positive reciprocity (and by extension its corollary—negative reciprocity or uncertainty) as relational ontological frameworks for ecological knowledge.

St'át'imc Salish communities have, in intricate social entanglement with their land, thrived in governing their traditional fisheries and waters for centuries (Drake-Terry 1989; Prentiss and Kuijt 2012; SLRA 2004; fig. 5). This is not just the case because there were laws and social institutions in place but because these laws and institutions are grounded in a particular way of thinking about, communicating with, visualizing, and honoring fish, fishing, and fishing technologies.

Upper Tsal'álh St'át'imc community members reside between two lakes adjacent to the Fraser River in the Southern Interior region of British Columbia and call themselves "the

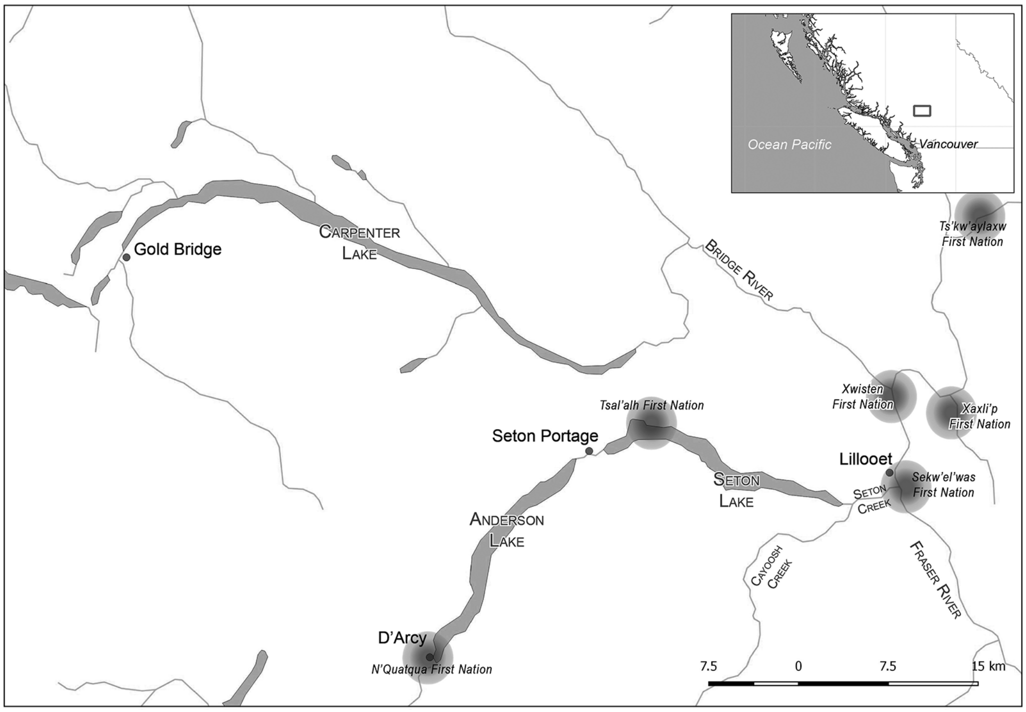

Figure 5. Coast Mountain and Fraser River Canyon regions of St'át'imc territory.

Crane People," "the Blue Heron People," or "the people of the lake." The blue heron (or crane) relies on the water, the fish, the air, the forest, and practical stewardship and knowledge of the land to live well, nest, and survive. Reciprocally, the Blue Heron People share the same human reliance on other beings and their stewardship of the land, which allows them to maintain a good quality of life (Tsal'álh elder, personal communication, June 2016).

For the past decade and during most of my anthropological and ethnographic training, I have been engaged in the Tsal'álh and surrounding communities conducting community-based, collaborative ethnographic, oral history, and archival research on local governance, knowledge practices, and the history of science. Most of my work examines ontological, cosmological, and socioecological bearings central to St'át'imc life and premised on fundamental transspecies communication, relationality, copresence, and shared identities among humans, animals, spirits, past, and present.[4]

In many Indigenous contexts and within what is commonly termed an animist ontology, salmon have personhood (the attribution of social relationality) and agency (the claim that salmon act with influence; Harvey 2005; Jones 2002; Losey 2010; Scott 2013). A specific way that salmon are afforded respect and proper treatment in Indigenous relational ontologies of the Pacific Northwest and surrounding areas is the sacred First Salmon Ceremony, which regularly occurs before the annual harvest (Boas 1921; Gunther 1926; Teit 1906, 1912). Ritualized practices such as prayers, songs, dances, feasts, and ceremonial actions are conducted on catching the first salmon of the season to give recognition and offer respect to the (master) spirits of the salmon, or the chief of the salmon, to ensure continued returns (Teit 1906, 1912, n.d).

Boas and Teit described the first fish ceremony in their ethnographic "Salish Notes" as follows:

> Salmon which have been caught in the rivers become men. They return to the sockeye country. If they should throw them away, they become angry and take revenge. If they look after them carefully, they will have good luck. When the first salmon is caught, the fisherman takes it to the house and gives it to the chief. He is put on a new mat or a good board. Then the chief's wife cuts and washes it. She holds it with her foot and says. Who sent you here to make us happy. Which chief sent you. Then she cuts it. She holds taul [sic] with foot. She must not turn it but rinse and then sit down at the head and end hold its head with her foot. They are put over fire. When one side is done it is turned over and skin and bone are left on it. Then all the people are invited and the chief says: take medicine and they take pepekoi and equisetum. They rub it in the basket and drink. Then everybody eats part of the salmon. (Boas 1910)

St'át'imc believe that all living beings were once people and are (to be) respected as such (Teit 1906, 1912). Salmon runs were lineages in relations of kinship to human lineages, and as long as salmon were provided adequate conditions to thrive and were "invited" back (home), they would abundantly return to spawn, and both lineages would prosper simultaneously. This system of beliefs and practical knowledge includes profound notions of respect and collaboration in cocreating the relationships that sustain life, body, mind, and spirit and that ultimately condition possibilities for the maintenance of a good home. Let us have a look at the continuities, changes, and accuracy of this Boasian description for today's relationship with salmon and the first catch of the fishing season.

Roughly 100 years following Boas's and Teit's investigations, on the first day of fishing and during a particularly poor year (2016) for salmon returns, when the St'át'imc fishing authority had opened the net fishery for the midsummer runs, elder and spiritual facilitator Qwa7yán'ak Carl Alexander of Xwisten (Bridge River) and Tsal'álh (Seton Lake), his wife, some of their children, and I waited at Carl's house for the first fish, to conduct a ceremony (fig. 6). Carl had alerted me that, as soon as fishing opens officially, he would conduct the First Salmon Ceremony, depending on when someone brings a first catch. This could be any time. We waited patiently all day, and no one appeared. On the second day, a nephew brought two freshly caught sockeye salmon to his house. We were delighted when movement began. We packed potatoes, carrots, beets, onions, aluminum foil, wood, and the fish and then headed to fish camp, a site at the confluence of the Bridge and Fraser Rivers also known as Sxetl', meaning "drop-off," a key fishing site for St'át'imc (Art Adolph, unpublished term paper, 2009:1; see fig. 5). According to St'át'imc *sptákwalh*, "knowledge rooted in ancestral mythological accounts," Coyote formed the rock ledges where the Bridge River meets the Fraser by jumping back and forth across the river, with the rocks rising to meet his paws. Once finished, he barked

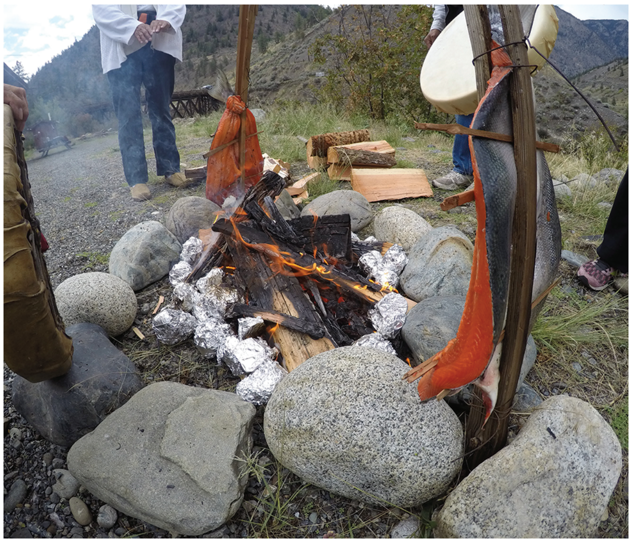

Figure 6. Honoring the first salmon through ceremony at Sxetl', summer 2016.

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[4] St'át'imc are descendants of communities researched by Boas; his associates, such as James A. Teit; and his students.

audibly, "Get your nets ready! The salmon are coming, the salmon are coming!"

Five people joined us there at Sxetl' wishing to participate in the ceremony. We gathered in a close circle around the salmon, which was then carefully placed on the ground on a blanket. Prayers to land, salmon, water, the creator, and the ancestors were spoken in St'át'imcets, and a pipe was handed around for several ceremonial rounds of smoking, during which we also hand drummed songs to the salmon and prayed, expressing our gratitude and respect.[5] Smoking the sacred pipe and sharing our breath with the ancestors, each other, the land, and the fish created the essential conditions for (re)vitalizing shared life force between people and fish. The cycle of life was rendered visible for us in this moment: shared breath reinforced (the power of) shared life, and life reinforced mutual recognition and copresence, which in turn allowed us to be alive and to continue to breathe.

Such practices can establish a new connection or recreate old, broken ones through healing and sacred properties for both human and nonhuman needs to be met and to stay alive and be well. Simultaneously, we were asked by those in the know about the ceremony and its ritualized practices to think ourselves into the ancestors, the fish, the water, and the wind; to visualize the hard, long route it takes to swim up the Fraser River from the far-off ocean; and to see, smell, and feel the movement and paths, routes, and trails of connection, belonging, and entanglement (cf. Willerslev [2007:91] on mental projection when hunting among Yukaghirs). We were further encouraged to ponder the adversity salmon must, will, and used to face in order to return home and the will and power it takes for them to continue. We were asked to be of one good and acceptable mind, thought, body, and people (*pala kalha muta7 sptínusem ama*) to connect to the spirit of the salmon and the creator and to respect the way of the land. Drums were laid down systematically in line with the salmon before a closing round of prayer. These intangible moments of reflection and encounter enabled us to reinforce relations of kinship with the salmon for us presently and, potentially, for all people who identify with this way of life. Carl and his wife prepared fish and vegetables for cooking, again using sacred smoke. We roasted the vegetables and salmon on both sides, flesh and skin, over a sacred fire until they were fully cooked. We consumed most of it in feast after another prayer of gratitude and meticulously collected any leftovers in a little bag, which Carl and I returned to the river as an act of respect after making an offering of tobacco and saying a few words of prayer. There are many ethnographic particulars of ritual and shared substance here that closely mirror Cree, Veps, and other well-known animist relational practices.

Upon concluding, I asked Carl to reflect on this particular First Salmon Ceremony. He noted (personal communication, July 2016):

> It was eight people there, a real honorable number. We had all four sacred directions covered. With this we ensure success. It also depends on your mind, what you think, what you see. Spiritually that is how we help the salmon, help us, help the salmon, and so on. You go down there and enter the spirit of the chief salmon so they all come together. If you want fish to continue and coming up the river, you need to honor them. Just take what you need and let others fish, too. For the First Salmon Ceremony: if someone who fishes willingly brings me a fish to conduct the ceremony, the creator will listen. There will be fish. . . . I learned from a *Scwenā́7em*, an Indian doctor with spiritual powers, who prayed for the fish. He taught me. A *Scwenā́7em* learns the ways of the land and can shapeshift and transform with both positive and negative outcomes. For instance, they can bring a spirit to people and help them get what they want. The sockeye salmon can talk to all the fish. It's for all the fish. A lot of people traveled a long way to attend the ceremony. Actually, it was for all the four-legged people. We used to have elk and moose, but they left us. The ceremony is helping them too, they're coming back now, back home.

Furthermore, creating the conditions for a shared breath implies understanding and adapting to the basic notion that we all share the same breath and air, as "fish get their oxygen from water. We share the water, which is life to all living things. Without water nothing lives" (Carl Alexander, personal communication, autumn 2018).

Many St'át'imc who partake in such a ritualized ceremony understand these dialogues as potentially transformative gift-reciprocity relationships entailing shared peoplehood with the living land and its inhabitants (Johnsen 2009; Mauss 1967 [1925]; Miller 2014). Prayers, songs, speeches, and ceremonial actions are engaged in to reenact the life-giving relationship. They are conducted to give recognition to the spirits of the salmon and to cocreate a shared breath by establishing the conditions necessary to ensure the possibility of continued life, growth, and unity. The primacy of the salmon in this positive reciprocal relationship sustains the livelihood and well-being of the human and other-than-human community. Shared breath and visualization of each other's presence and influence create the conditions necessary to cultivate a beneficial relationality. Much like with the Veps or Crees, there are qualms about claiming knowledge that places humans in positions of superiority, dominance, and control against a relational ontology, ecology, and communicative framework so fundamental to cocreating a shared breath. Systems of reciprocity and kinship that transcend human and nonhuman differences cannot be equated with absolute certainty about each other's will, influence, and power or conduct. Life or the relationships that make life possible in this fishing context are never to be taken for granted, even if one possesses profound knowledge of and respect for one another (Tiiya7, personal communication, June 2016).

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[5] Prayers are not supposed to be written down in detail because of their sacred nature (Carl Alexander, personal communication, July 2016). Therefore, I refrain from quoting specific words or phrases.

Through engagement in these dialogues, St'át'imc and Salmon People collectively become able to understand and share all the different meanings and actions appropriate to their situation (Tully 2016). In Salish terms, this is to be of one mind, spirit, and body or of one people. This means to be copresent through shared breath. It lays the groundwork for negotiating and acting together responsibly and respectfully in response to life through both social and environmental continuities and transformations.

Conclusion

In our paper, we brought ethnographic data from three forest-dwelling Indigenous groups in Russia and Canada into dialogue to show how ritualized communicative acts and their "intangible" qualities aim to establish, reinforce, and renew relations of respect between humans and nonhumans. We have referred to these ritualized encounters as shared breath to match metaphors and metonymies as well as concrete practices used by Veps, Crees, and St'át'imc in northwestern Russia and western Canada. The shared breath is present as both a medium and a modality in each of our examples, providing a new way to look at commensalism, consubsantiality, and other animist and shamanic relational dynamics. While the connection of particular rituals or utterances to the metaphor or phenomenon of shared breath may be more or less explicit and concrete depending on the particular case, we have illustrated ethnographically how such concepts provide a relational context, a poetics, an imaginary, and an ontological framework within which the shared breath is operationalized.

We see shared breath being realized in the enchantments among Veps in Russia, and similar practices occur among Crees and St'át'imc. Shared breath also emerges in the acts of smoking, smudging, drumming, sucking, and blowing among Crees (as elsewhere in Russia and Siberia). It comprises acts of visualization, smoking, drumming, and praying among St'át'imc. Our cases each show the sharing of substance through food consumption and food sacrifice. All of these verbal and nonverbal communicative acts, which take place in rituals, express oneness with nonhuman persons, who are invited into dialogue to sustain relationships of respect and kinship. This sense of unity, life force, and oneness not only manifests spatially but also takes place in "intangible" ways (and also tangibly, through the air and the body), which gives depth to an understanding of how relations between humans and nonhumans are built and maintained.

We began by thinking of this paper as a comparative study of Indigenous peoples' communication practices involving nonhuman persons, but the dimensions of reciprocity and consubstantiality embodied in shared breath as a key animist ritual modality quickly became our central focus. We realized that, while it remains a common idiom, shared breath is often underrecognized in academic discussions. We have responded by indicating how such an idiom is relevant for Indigenous groups from three different regions of Russia and Canada. Thus, we have decided to put it in the spotlight and make it our core concept, inviting other scholars to explore it in more depth if we want to understand how humans and nonhumans come to resonate in unison with other entities. Such practices are not particular to the North alone (the Salish example is arguably a marginal case vis-à-vis the North). Our hope is to elicit discussions with research conducted elsewhere. Furthermore, we argue and implore that more comparative ethnographic studies of Indigenous religious practices and ontological frames are required.

The idiom of shared breath complements previous work on hunters, gatherers, and animistic societies, as it indicates how relationality among beings is initiated, performed, and reproduced through consubstantiality that is either concrete or metaphorical—but that in all circumstances remains experientially real. Ethnographically, we have documented instances of shared breath as incantations entailing utterances of power and as a gift-endowed multisensory phenomenological encounter. Engaging in such verbal and nonverbal practices and exchanges has the power to transform people, perceptions of the world, and situations.

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Comments

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Marilyn Strathern (2018) has recently reflected on concepts that travel and in particular on concepts that travel well. She ironically reflects that her own "partible person" happens to be a traveler who has to explain its origins in order to be able to carve out a home for itself. The circumpolar North has been a rich supplier of worldwide travelers like the Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) kinship term *ototeman*, which came to frame multiple generations of interpretations of totemism, animism, and personhood (Anderson 2017). In this pathbreaking article, we are presented at once with the long-familiar but scarcely spoken idiom of "shared breath"—as a way of stressing commensality and copresence. With three clear ethnographic examples from across the North, we can recognize an action that does not need to explain itself but that can enact its relationality in multiple contexts.

It feels to me that it has been a long time since we have read an ethnographic account of actions and rituals that brings worlds together rather than separating them apart. Sentient worlds, not least in the North, seem to have come to be fragmented into multiple ontologies—each one coherent in its own terms—that are to some extent invisible and untranslatable without the expert opinion of a learned ethnographer. In their critique of the ontological turn, Bessire and Bond (2014) place their emphasis on the somewhat negative and "disruptive" agency of pollutants that travel sinisterly between ontologies, binding them together in a climate of precariousness. Here, in contrast, we have a compellingly positive account of human and nonhuman actors that become familiar and stronger through sharing air, smoke, and time.

Up until now, the ethnography of northwest Russian and of Salish and Cree peoples has been viewed through the prism of animism or nonhuman personhood—through echoes of our well-traveled Ojibwe *ototeman*, who perhaps now speaks with a strong accent. This essay brings the matter home by cleaving closer to the way that these peoples understand disparate entities sharing and breathing the same atmosphere and thereby creating connections. One wonders, if the authors were to revisit John Ferguson McLennan (1869–1870) and Irving Hallowell (1960) keen to reread their accounts for whispers of shared breath, would the metaphor of the person be reframed? Would an ethnography of substances that connect build a stronger metaphor of interrelationship than a juridical-legal concept that frames property relationships and boundaries? Or would this traveler have to spend a bit of time explaining itself? It would be interesting to push the authors not only to suggest a new idiom but also perhaps to reimagine how northern ethnography might be different.

There are some metaphors in the article that strike me as unexplained, and perhaps with more ethnographic work they would become clearer. Shared breath is described as "intangible"—a perhaps unfortunate surrender to materialist rationality. On the one hand, breath, smoke, and air might not seem as solid as architecture, but they do seem one strong step more tangible than legal categories. From my own fieldwork in eastern Siberia, I am strongly reminded of how Orochen hunters and reindeer herders experience the evening "breathing" of the mountains surrounding their camp—a calm draft that suggests the weather of the following day and that carries the scent of smoke from the camp. For the domestic *Rangifer* that they keep, the smoke itself speaks of relief from insects, protection from predators—it speaks of home. Despite the gear that is used to guide reindeer and the fences sometimes used to enclose them, the key to human-animal copresence in this area is the shared smell of smoke. It is the very tangible substance that brings beings together.

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In reading this article, I am reminded of lines from a poem by Natalie Diaz (2018), a Mojave writer: "From the right distance, I can hold anything in my hand—the hawk riding a thermal, the sea, the red cliff, my love glazed in fine red dust, your letter, even the train. Each is devoured in its own envelope of air." These lines, especially the one that mentions the "envelope of air"—the air's ability to hold anything ensconced within it—were invoked for me by the authors' metaphor of shared breath. I was reminded of how it is indeed very much a connective substance, ever present, anything but empty. Air is a force unto itself, but it also transmits (life) force; it both sustains the existence of bodies and is the body. Siragusa and her coauthors write eloquently of three different ethnographic cases that lend support to their metaphor, which is anchored in a translation of the St'át'imcets *Nuk'sup* as "shared air" or "shared life." Air is substantive and generative, both source and conduit; it is transferred and even consumed (through food, as a manifestation of the life it enables) in the various scenarios discussed here. The authors make a valuable contribution to highlighting different understandings of "reciprocity and consubstantiality," as they put it, through the focus on what this shared breath communicates.

This communicative aspect of the breath that goes beyond words, I think, is key, as this work contributes not only to discussions of relational ontologies but also to discussions of "language materiality" (Shankar and Cavanaugh 2017), which is an emerging thematic trend in linguistic anthropology in recent years. Through incorporating a discussion of further communicative forms alongside words and the waves of sound they create, they focus on the tangible medium of air itself through looking at how blowing, creating and conducting smoke, and even the sharing of foods that were once nourished by air are fundamentally both material and relational. These, too, are paralinguistic actions that are ubiquitous and that communicate reciprocity and relationality, which enable that "deeper engagement between beings" that they write about.

In research I have been doing on language over the previous decade with speakers of Sakha in northeastern Siberia, I continue to return time and time again to their ontologies of language, which suggest that language's power to affect in the world is intertwined with how it is understood as intrinsically part of a broader animate world; this article has reinforced certain nuances of previous understandings that I held. First, the element of reciprocity that is enabled through shared breath, as these authors discuss, dovetails with what many Sakha speakers say about language: not only can you "give" words as offerings to others through blessings, but also there is a broader reciprocal relationship between (spoken) language and sustenance. There is a guardian spirit of language, *tyl ichchite*; as one Sakha speaker, Yuliana, shared, engaging with that spirit through speaking your native language sustains your language, and in turn that spirit will sustain the speaker's life force (Ferguson 2019:102). I read echoes of this in the St'át'imc ceremonies for salmon that the authors mention, with "think[ing] [oneself] into" another and gifting songs and drumbeats that move through that air between them to give thanks for what has been provided as the salmon becomes part of their bodies through feasting.

As I read about the Veps *puheged*, I was struck by similar descriptions in David Guss's (1989) discussion of Yekuana chanting and links to the process of creating, when he discusses how speakers in Venezuelan Amazonia harness a "language of the invisible" (66) that resides in breath. He continues, "powered by the breath that animates them, the words of the chants are blown . . . to the forces they are meant to influent. Words are not simply uttered or sung but are infused with the actual spirit of the chanter who, breaking at certain points in the performance, disseminates them with short, rapid blowing" (Guss 1989:66–67). Bringing back comparisons to other regions of the Global North, both what Guss writes and what Siragusa, Westman, and Moritz have detailed in their piece resonate with what I have been told in Siberia. In beliefs (*Sakha iteghele*), words themselves are spirited, animate, as they possess that *ichchi*. Like humans, *tyl ichchite* possesses an air soul (*salgyn kut*; humans have two others as well); when words are spoken, they gain their power from both the speaker's spiritual body (*kut-sür*) and that of the spirit of language. Siragusa, Westman, and Moritz's discussion illuminated a new angle for me: through speaking words, which are inherently part of the air as they are spoken, the speaker and the *tyl ichchite* are essentially "sharing breath."

While a list of references to similar metaphors and cosmologies in other parts of the world is provided, suggesting familiarity with a wide variety of cases, I would advise going deeper into parallels between the circumpolar and Amazonian understandings in particular in further explorations of this theme. I understand the authors' rationale in focusing on these specific case studies in the present article and do not consider it a shortcoming. However, I would certainly urge further exploration within these two regions specifically. The similar understandings of animist relationalities in Siberia and Amazonia have been explored before (Brightman, Grotti, and Ulturgasheva 2012), but that edited volume, too, calls for further investigations. To my knowledge, there is nothing comparative between those regions that shares a focus similar to Siragusa, Westman, and Moritz's focus on elements of communication and relationality or on the phenomenon of language materiality; thus, working between the Amazon and other parts of the circumpolar region could be especially illuminating for further understanding what we might find, in Diaz's (2018) words, in the sharing of "air [as] a body, moving."

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The notion of shared breath put forth in this paper focuses on how the relations between humans and nonhumans are coconstructed and raises for me two fundamental questions. First, is it a concept that can be extended to explain beliefs and practices in other communities? And second, does it have explanatory or predictive power for when things are out of sync, when breath is not shared?

The authors consider case studies in different regions, with communities who speak very different (typologically and genealogically) languages, but all live in roughly the same climate zone, the boreal forest. Is the concept of shared breath unique to these communities? Does it have to do with the kind of lifestyle that one finds in a boreal forest (and so unique to or perhaps characteristic of forest dwellers)? Or is the notion of living in such close commune more characteristic of people who live a subsistence or partial subsistence lifestyle (not connected to a particular kind of climate)? Or is it a characteristic of Indigenous societies more generally? The last question threatens to essentialize Indigenousness and does not provide any informative analysis. But there is strong evidence that the concept of shared breath is not unique to the three communities examined here, as the authors point out in the introduction: one example is a set of studies of the relationships between people and wild and domesticated animals in Africa and northern Eurasia (Stammler and Takakura 2010). Among herding communities, it is often the animals who are the decision makers, determining when the day begins and ends, where the herds will go (and not go), and so on. This suggests that a lifestyle where humans and nonhumans are in close contact, a kind of symbiotic domesticity, a "daily enacted closeness," shapes human and nonhuman persons and, along with them, the human perception of the environment (Stammler 2010:216).

The communities I have been working with over the previous 20 years or so live north of boreal forests, many north of the tree line, in Greenland, the Russian Far North and Arctic, and Norway. Shared breath encapsulates the practices of those people engaged in subsistence or partial subsistence practices—hunting, fishing, and reindeer herding—who have a deep respect for the animals and the natural world that is home to everyone, and many see them as codwellers in this shared environment. In a kind of self-sacrifice, wild animals provide food by willfully giving themselves up to hunters, an act that the hunter ritualistically thanks them for. At the same time, they are spiritual partners. This is shared breath.

What happens when things are out of sync? If the model of shared breath captures the connections between humans and nonhumans, we would anticipate repercussions when these relations are not in harmony. We should see effects in what Greenland Inuit call *sila*, which is defined roughly as weather, outside, intelligence, the world (Fortescue, Jacobsen, and Kaplan 2010:85). Translation into English forces us to choose one or the other word, but in Kalaallisut they are one—not synonymous words for different concepts but rather a single unified concept. This is shared breath in a word, and a spectacular modern example of being out of sync is climate change. It has had visible effects on Arctic life for a very long time, coming earlier, sooner, and more rapidly there than to regions farther south because of the polar amplification effect. In the Arctic, we witness dramatic changes in the world, almost on a daily basis. As an Alaskan elder, Mabel Toolie, now famously said, "The earth is faster now" (Krupnik and Jolly 2002). Across Arctic communities today, many elders are talking about the Earth's need to cleanse itself, predicting massive environmental disruption, after which the Earth will right itself. Note that this disruption is not at odds with current models of climate change in the models of Western scientists.

Another example of the repercussions of being out of kilter with shared breath comes from Greenland and the notion of *qivittoq*. Within a model of relations between human and nonhuman persons, the qivittoq is arguably a third category, a nonperson human. The qivittoq (plural *qivittut*), sometimes translated as "field wanderer" or "mountain hiker," is a social outcast, someone who has either chosen to leave society or has been banished for some kind of social problem (unwedded pregnancy, broken heart, disagreements with family or neighbors) and is living on the land, in the mountains, away from the settlements and other people. Survival in Greenland depends on close-knit communities where people support one another, and the price one pays for violating societal norms is isolation in the wilderness, which transforms humans into nonhuman agents. In Vebæk's (2006) collection of stories about qivittut from southern Greenland (which correspond to stories I have heard farther north), the exiled human takes on supernatural powers, appears and disappears magically, and is very scary and often very dangerous. The tellers of these tales often truly believe the stories, citing firsthand, personal encounters with a qivittoq (and the near-death experiences that often result).

Stories of qivittut are widespread and told with gusto, like ghost stories in some cultures, but the qivittoq is not a ghost. It has become a cultural emblem, found even in the common name *qivittut assaat* (qivittoq's forearm) given to two different plants (*Diphasiastrum alpinum* and *Huperzia selago*) whose bristly stalks can be seen as resembling a monsterlike forearm and hand growing out of the ground. It is a deep part of Greenlandic culture, a lesson to all as to what happens when the shared breath is out of sync and people leave people, unsettling the delicate balance and shared breath in the Arctic.

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The transformative power of air: breathing and blowing:

> Dans cette vie imaginaire du souffle, notre âme c'est toujours notre dernier soupir. (Bachelard 1943:276)

Breath conveys life and death. To die is to take one's last breath, whereas to give birth is to breathe life into a new body. The authors are right: breath can symbolize a turning point, a time for a new direction.

Shared breath is a topos in Canadian Inuit culture. Victor Tungilik, an elder from Naujaat, explained how he was taught to hunt seals at the *aglu*, their breathing hole: "My stepfather told me to recall the first time that I had had sex, and to remember what my breathing was like. . . . He said that's the kind of breathing that the seal would have when it was approaching the *aglu*" (Laugrand and Oosten 2014:272). The hunter should feign sexual excitement and breathe as he would when making love, as if the final death blow were a sexual climax.

Inuit shamanism has many references to "shared breath." To drive out evil, a shaman must close his eyes, "cough with every word he speaks, and frequently change his voice" (Rasmussen 1929:145). When he invokes his helping spirits, he speaks in an "unrecognizable" voice, sometimes "breathing deeply as if under extreme pressure" (Rasmussen 1929:133). This example illustrates the complex interactions between speaking, coughing, breathing, and other sounds during a shaman's performance. Breathing takes place during human contact with nonhumans, such as in near-death experiences, dreaming, or drumming. It shows that a connection has been made with ancestors, deities, animals, or spirits. Conversely, blowing is sometimes used to disconnect. When a shaman is semiconscious, others have to blow in his ear to help him regain full consciousness.

It is a pity that the authors do not explore the analogy between breath and wind. This analogy appears in two Inuit myths: one about Naarsuk, the giant baby who incarnates Sila, and the other about the origins of shamanism. When the giant baby breathes and shakes its garments, air is said to rush out from the loose spaces in its clothing, thus causing the winds to howl and the weather to turn bad. A shaman then has to go up into the sky and thrash the baby with a whip until it calms down and the storms subside (Rasmussen 1931:210, 229–230). Alternatively, he slackens the force of the wind with a hook (Therrien and Laugrand 2001:283). Sila is the master of the winds, the climate, and all that breathes. It gives living things their breath and takes it back when they die (Laugrand 2017:328). The second myth recounts that before the time of shamanism, people would cure illness with a sea urchin's shell—by inhaling its healing power from its anus-shaped opening and then blowing this power at the sick person. A similar effect could be produced by holding the sea urchin tightly in one's hand and farting in the sick person's direction (Saladin d'Anglure 2001:133). Breath, wind, and vitality are thus interconnected.

Breath is essential, but so are other components of the body. In the case of the Inuit soul, it is composed of bones and blood. So, although I agree with the authors on the key role of shared breath, we should not ignore all of the body's components. Moreover, some nonhuman entities, that is, certain stones, lakes, or caribou trails, which are called *nabluit* and were much respected in the past, do not breathe. In such places, one communicated with these entities through offerings rather than through breathing, although Inuit did practice *qinngarniq*, a shouted prayer to appease the land. These "inanimate" entities are nonetheless credited with strong vitality. The concept of shared breath is therefore insufficient to explain human and nonhuman interaction unless we extend the metaphor. In the case of a sacred stone located in Arviat (Nunavut) and said to have healing properties, Inuit explain that people would gain protection from illness by slurping on a small hole in the stone (Laugrand and Oosten 2010:140). Slurping is not simply breathing. It involves making an audible noise. The authors are consequently right to argue for the importance of sounds that so easily escape the anthropologist's notice.

Let us turn to the nonanimistic context of the Ibaloy in the Philippine Cordillera. In this society, dominated by analogism in Descola's terms (Descola 2005), the soul within the body (the *karashowa*) is conceived as being like the wind. In a major ritual, deceased ancestors are said to feed not only on the meat offered to them after the ritual killing of pigs but also on the smoke and vapor rising from the meat being cooked. Similarly, when the pigs are killed with a wooden stick (*owik*), they are left to die slowly until they give up their last breath. They are meanwhile expected to squeal loudly enough to be heard by the deceased ancestors, the hope being that the pigs' vitality will be transferred to them. This example again shows the value of the authors' proposal to look more closely at shared breath as a medium for relationships between living things, whether human or nonhuman.

This role is not specific to animism or shamanism. It seems rather universal, even in naturalism. It appears in many African traditions, in Hinduism (see Dumézil's work), in Taoism (see yoga), and obviously in the three Abrahamic religions, which see breath as a sign of vitality. The Holy Spirit is often described as the breath of God, and pneumatology is a discipline in Catholic theology. This concept appealed to many indigenous peoples when they came into contact with Christianity. The Inuit, for instance, refer to God as Anirnialuk (the big breath).

Shared breath is thus an interesting subject for cross-cultural comparison. It is a passage from one state to another; it initiates transformation and exchange; it is an enactment that connects the material body to the spirit world. It invites us, as anthropologists, to look at speech and silence, at the utterance of words and the problem of intentionality, and at orality and pragmatics (Headley 1994; Mauss 1968).

Last, the authors quote Franz Boas (1940), who reported that "speeches are called 'breath' among Kwakiutl" (233). According to Bachelard (1943:85), the poet and essayist Paul Valéry likewise said that a poem is composed by breathing one's breath into it.

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In . . . out . . . in . . . out: as you read, you are taking in the atmosphere and converting it to energy. So frequently do humans forget that they have this talent that it is often taken for granted. In "Shared Breath," the authors trace the way breathing is used in some cultures to connect humans to nonhuman hosts and teachers that both form and animate the earth. By carefully documenting the way that three forest-dwelling indigenous groups of Russia and Canada, the Veps, Western Cree, and Interior Salish St'át'imc, include breathing as an embodied ontological practice, Siragusa, Westman, and Moritz construct a network of global place-based traditions. The essay brilliantly achieves several goals, including a review of existing literature on the topic, clear documentation of specific examples, and relevant interdisciplinary conclusions.

The authors begin by addressing the need for detailed comparative work on this topic and reviewing the previous efforts of anthropologists and ethnographers who have written air-based methods of worship, communication, and celebration. Building on the work of Boas, Hallowell, Darnell, and others, they also offer important corrections to the hypotheses of a few scholars, including Girard, who may not have taken adequate time to understand the full context of some traditions despite a clear attempt to document details. By contrast, Siragusa, Westman, and Moritz each describe the art of embodied word offerings, lyric supplication, and dialogue with nonhumans using a sufficient level of detail but not with an invasive or offensive level of intrusion. In several instances, the authors explain the importance of navigating the limits of inquiry without sacrificing the ability to sketch the bigger picture, reveal the architecture of a paradigm, and draw conclusions in collaboration with expert practitioners.

Drawing on specific linguistic terminology from each culture, the authors discuss the Veps notion of *puheged* and *vajhed* and *pakitas*, blowing words; the St’át’imc concept of *Nuk’sup’*, creating meaning through shared air and, by extension, shared life; and the Cree use of *yehewin*, or breathing as a part of gifting, feasting, and smoking. In each of these examples, participants are engaged in respectful relations with one another and with nonhuman beings. Through verbal and nonverbal communicative performances, relationality is continuously negotiated and accommodated. The authors note that in each community the exchange of breath, sometimes in the form of speech or song, “allows for the reenactment of relationships that need renewal, regeneration, or reconciliation.” They speak clearly and concisely of liminal conduits, cosmological entities, and points of balance. The traditions that they write about are translations of conscious and subconscious knowledge shared between species and spaces, in some cases across time as well as place.

Each segment focuses on a specific culture and offers reasons that breathing practices relate directly to the holistic resilience of the community. Referencing the Veps, Siragusa explains, “Blowing specific words to invite nonhuman spiritual masters through shared breath is meant to open a dialogue that is expected to resolve a situation or give answers to questions that would otherwise remain unanswered.” Interaction with nonhumans is essential for humans as they determine the placement of dwellings, seek information about various unseen places, and strive to sustain well-being and extend their welcome in a space inhabited by many. Blowing words, for the Veps, is recognition of an interdependent ecosystem. In the section on the Cree, Westman describes how words and blessings are part of a gift economy that requires humble acceptance and acknowledgment of blessings, permission, and advice. As humans give thanks, they receive. As they speak, they learn to listen more broadly to nonhumans and are reminded that “there is always the potential that someone else is listening.” In St’át’imc society, Moritz writes, “Laws and institutions are grounded in a particular way of thinking about, communicating with, visualizing, and honoring fish, fishing, and fishing technologies.” Breathing, especially singing, enables unity and is done to communicate and mark ontological, cosmological, and socioecological bearings. St’át’imc practitioner Qwa7yán’ak explains, “We share the water, which is life to all living things. Without water nothing lives.” This model of a relationship between human and nonhuman is based in equal agency and is supported by giving thanks and asking permission, asking forgiveness, offering apologies. The practices are diverse but aligned, and they offer valuable insight into life on the planet.

The authors conclude that “engaging in such verbal and nonverbal practices and exchanges has the power to transform people, perceptions of the world, and situations.” This is a lesson essential to all societies but especially for those communities engaged in the revitalization of traditional knowledge. Too often, the metaphor of loss and uniqueness overrides the opportunity for comparison and exchange. This essay is one that should encourage all readers to breathe more mindfully, and, for those who already honor the power of practices based in air, this is an affirmation and invitation to collaborate and coconsecrate the ability of humans to reach out to all responsive agents in the universe.

To conclude my own response to these genealogies of breath efforts, I offer a poem written many years ago, for which these authors have traced a network of relations.

Ode’ng
Ningoogii
ode’ng
okong
omisadong
aanjitooyaan
ningaabaaweyaan
  zhaab-odoodikwasiwagong
    zhaab-onagazhiining
agindamaan e-gikendamaan miskweyaabiing
giziibiiga’amaan wenda-debwemigad.
Okaninawemaagan aawiyang.
Aabita eta gikedamang nisawayii neseyang.

Into a Heart
I am diving
into a heart
a liver
a stomach
changing
dissolving
  through kidneys
    through intestines
counting what I know in my veins
washing all of what it true.
We are bone relatives.
Each knowing half
between breaths.

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Anthropology’s ontological turn has reignited interest in animism. Animist studies are sometimes reminiscent of Lévy-Bruhl’s notions of a primitive mentality in which prescientific or non-Western others believe all lives to be linked by a shared force of *mana*, *Seelenstoff* (soul stuff), or whatnot (Lévy-Bruhl 2002 [1927]:9). In order to evaluate the originality of Siragusa, Westman, and Moritz's article, it is important to ascertain whether their concept of "shared breath" is just another mystic life force or whether it reveals something new.

The article ambitiously unites research among the Veps, the Western Woods Cree, and the Interior Salish St'át'imc. Justifying the comparison, the authors characterize all three peoples as "forest-dwelling Indigenous groups." This glosses over the historical differences that constitute indigenous peoples under international law. The Cree and the St'át'imc were colonized by settler states created during the expansion of capitalism beginning in the seventeenth century. The Veps, in contrast, have shared geographical space much longer with the Russians and converted to Christianity around the eleventh century (Davidov 2017:38). They became designated as nationalities or national minorities (not indigenous peoples) only because of Soviet-style ethnic politics. It is not surprising that, as Siragusa points out, the Russian literature is often about ethnogenesis. This confusion about indigenousness suggests that the authors use the term indigenous, not in a legal sense, but as a replacement for primitive or traditional. This raises a red flag.

The Veps case fits poorly with the others and not just because the Veps are Russian Orthodox. In this case, the nonhuman entities with whom they seek interaction are spiritual masters of territory. Although these entities may manifest themselves as bears or other animals, they are mostly represented as men wearing coats with red sashes (Davidov 2017:40). Siragusa provides the example of a woman who communicates with the spirit by whispering into her chimney to seek assistance finding lost cattle. The shared breath consists of "blowing specific words" to these beings. The nonhumans in this case are folkloric representations of humanlike entities. Unlike the other cases, this is not an attempt to understand the nature of nonhuman animals.

For the Cree and St'át'imc, relationality is sought with nonhuman animals. Westman tells stories about the Cree experiencing the shared presence of loons during an environmental education event, evokes rituals seeking connection with moose or waterfowl, and discusses how animals can understand Cree speech or convey messages. Shared breath during rituals of smoking food, sharing tobacco, drumming, singing, and praying enables copresence with nonhuman animals, *manitowak* ("spirit, god, nonhuman person, and immanent life force"), or other humans. The St'át'imc Salish people similarly live in a communicative multispecies world. They call themselves the Blue Heron People and use ritual, especially the First Salmon Ceremony, to communicate with fish. They seek shared breath, or reciprocal relationship, above all with salmon.

The authors describe shared breath as an ontological framework while eschewing Descola's attempts to redefine animism as ontology. Since the spirit of Descola lurks in the background, it is worth recalling that he compared four possible ontologies, the most salient being animism and naturalism. Animists see humans and nonhuman animals as sharing a similar interiority in spite of having dissimilar physicalities, whereas naturalists (moderns) see humans and others as sharing similar exteriorities but having dissimilar interiorities (Descola 2013:122). Animists perceive humans and nonhumans as sharing some life essence, even if they wear different clothes. The Cree and St'át'imc cases fit very well into the Descolian definition of animist ontology. The Veps case does not. Westman's approach is very Boasian, even arguing that sociolinguistic and ontological considerations are inseparable. This cultural rendition of ontology is very different from Descola's (2013), who explicitly states that ontologies are not cultural models and "co-exist potentially in all human beings" (233). Perhaps ontology is not the right concept.

The article would have been stronger had the authors examined shared breath as epistemology rather than as ontology. Epistemology is how we know what we know, whereas ontology is the philosophy of what is. By focusing on relational ontologies that differ according to sociolinguistic context, ontology becomes a correlate of culture, a thing possessed by some peoples and not by others. The article, however, shows that shared breath indicates how people come to an awareness of ways in which they resonate with others. Calling it "ritual modality" implies that shared breath is accessible to anyone who participates in the rituals. It would thus be more appropriate to speak of animism as relational epistemology, as Nurit Bird-David (1999) did.

Thinking of shared breath as epistemology permits a broader understanding of relationality. It is sometimes said that indigenous peoples prefer oral over written teachings or that learning happens by observing and trying rather than by reading books (Nadasdy 2003:96), thus emphasizing relationships between an experienced person or elder and the learner. Understanding teachings as shared breath clarifies why the most important ones are shared in rituals of sweat lodges, pipe ceremonies, or talking circles. An epistemological approach renders visible how teachings are shared between peoples, as when medicine wheel teachings or sweat lodges spread to new contexts. By not just thinking through what other people think (culture), we can imagine that nonhuman animals really are thinking selves in ontological fact (Kohn 2013:94). We humans really do share breath with loons, moose, salmon, trees, and perhaps even ritual rocks in sweat lodges. We just need to learn to perceive the relationality that was always there.

The article's success will be proven if the concept is used by other researchers. I think that it can be employed elsewhere, for example, to study Chinese concepts of qi in healing practices related to qigong. There is room to debate the authors' understanding of indigenousness and ontology versus epistemology, but it is a good sign if an article sparks debate. Shared breath, as long as we refuse to limit it to culturally bound beliefs, is potentially a departure from old animist studies and an important theoretical contribution.

Reply

We would like to express gratitude to our colleagues, who have commented on our text and engaged with its core concept, "shared breath." Their comments focus on copresence, relationality, reciprocity, and consubstantiality but also attend to the comparative approach that our article suggests. Such a deep engagement is expressed both in their recognition of the value of the notion we propose and in the vivid and heterogeneous ethnographic examples they provide. The aesthetic features of shared breath, which frequently manifest in implicit fashions, are elegantly addressed in the poems and philosophical remarks that this notion evokes for some of the authors. In his comment, Laugrand begins by quoting French philosopher Gaston Bachelard, who succinctly reminds us of the importance of breath, which marks the frail liminal space between life and death. The poems cited by two authors especially enable us to become open to the often-concealed meanings and subtleties that life offers. The potent phrase "envelope of air," which Ferguson foregrounds from the work of Natalie Diaz, particularly resonates with the metaphor we introduce in this paper, given that it both "sustains the existence of bodies and is the body." Through shared breath, beings connect just as organs do, within one whole body. In a like manner, Noodin's poem, which she generously offers in English and in its original Anishnabemowin, brings breath and internal organs into dialogue, as part of a unity, through a journey of exploration, a reinforcement of relations within—akin to the composite, breathing body that Ferguson references. What is particularly significant here is that these two poems are by Indigenous authors.

One of the goals of our article was to stimulate further discussion among scholars whose work engages with comparative notions similar to shared breath. We were hoping that they might further problematize the qualities of the notion by indicating the multiple shapes in which it may manifest and by drawing on examples from their own work. Thus, we were extraordinarily pleased to read the many rich ethnographic details the authors provided. This suggests that such an idiom is indeed paramount among several Indigenous groups of the North (and beyond). Our colleagues have spiritedly answered our resolve to spur debate and to develop more intricate nuances from the notion of shared breath. Anderson presents the case of Orochen hunters and reindeer herders and remarks on how significant it is for them to experience shared breath in the evening hours. Ferguson's research with Sakha speakers led her to see possible new connections between our proposed idiom and her own analysis of the ontological characteristics of speech itself. As she notes, "through speaking words, which are inherently part of the air as they are spoken, the speaker and the *tyl ichchite* [i.e., spirit of language] are essentially 'sharing breath.'" In Grenoble's inquiry into what happens when things are out of sync, she provides many examples from her research that deepen our understanding of aspects of shared breath. We do not present a romantic view of the world, and the people we work with face multiple social and ecological hazards, in addition to powerful nonhuman persons who must be recognized. Indeed, as we argue, shared breath can be purposely employed to try and solve such complex and precarious situations, which are not always favorable to human survival. Laugrand provides many telling examples of situations where shared breath might manifest. We appreciate his reference to the *aglu*, for example, as it relates to the case studies we present in the article because of its focus on the shared life of human and nonhuman beings through the idiom of breath. Noodin honors our relationships with our research participants and provides a nuanced, creative, literary consideration of our work, for which we are deeply grateful. Finally, Simon also cautiously recognizes the potential for our concept to travel and perhaps spark debate. We appreciate these connections immensely. Our ambition to highlight a pluralist polyphony of ontologies (see Blaser 2009) or to bring "worlds together," as Anderson puts it, through comparison, has already materialized in the responses our colleagues have written.

We wish to emphasize that we are not aiming to provide a law-based, universalist concept through shared breath, be it in response to ecological or other factors. Notably, we must highlight that we are not all working in the boreal forest, as the mid–Fraser River region of British Columbia does not share geoclimatic conditions with Alberta or Russia. Our hypothesis is thus not limited to the North or the boreal forest, moving away from assumptions that shared breath is ecologically derived or solely characteristic of one type of ontological disposition. We have begun with a comparative analysis of three Indigenous groups from two continents and at least two ecological zones. Our commentators have broadened the frame of reference considerably with their own contributions. Our relativistic yet discerning approach may show the relevance of particular Indigenous categories for a deeper and broader understanding of cosmological encounters and lived experiences. Thus, we welcome further comments and critique of the idiom we introduce to see how it manifests in different contexts across time and space. We are particularly grateful for Ferguson's suggestion of comparisons with the Amazon, and we hope that Amazonian specialists will further elaborate on our work. As Descola (2013) posits, "The fact is that the idea of a material continuity linking all organisms together is common to most animist ontologies" (130). We agree with Ferguson that shared breath resonates with the animist and specifically the Amazonian focus on what Aparecida Vilaça (2009) calls "a continuous process of constitution and transformation through the exchange of bodily substances, commensality and the sharing of affects and memory" (150). Yet we also advocate for continued attention to sometimes neglected northern literature. Our work and the insights of our commentators suggest that there are indeed common experiences concerning the sharing of substances extending from the Amazon through North America and into Eurasia, with parallel practices seen in a range of other social, historical, and religious contexts. We were delighted with the suggestions of parallels with yoga and qigong. We three are each aspiring amateur practitioners of yoga, and one of us has dabbled in qigong. In yoga, practitioners are encouraged to breathe rhythmically so that their neighbors can hear them and thereby share energy. Similarly, one purpose of chanting in yoga is so that practitioners can feel the vibrations in their torso, as neighbors each offer their own om in unison. While we did not consciously reflect on yoga in our writing process, our desire to think with shared breath resonates with our yoga practices.

In deliberately using quotation marks for the term "intangible," we sought to indicate that shared breath does not solely have immaterial qualities. The scare quotes hinted at the fact that among many Indigenous groups, connections glossed by outsiders as spiritual are often locally understood to be part of the material world. Indeed, binary notions of tangible and intangible and the broader separation between language and materiality have recently become prominent topics in linguistic anthropology (Cavanaugh and Shankar 2017; Keane 2008; Nakassis 2013; Wiener 2013). Transspecies ways of speaking and paralinguistic phenomena are not separate as entities from the material world. Rather, in the acts of blowing specific utterances, smoking, visualizing, and so on, Veps, Cree, and St'át'imc collectively illustrate that it is possible to shatter such presupposed boundaries. As Laugrand notes, in ritualized performances, many body parts and objects might be employed, and one should not neglect their importance by focusing only on shared breath. In fact, we would like to elucidate that shared breath and the body parts and objects used in the rituals should not necessarily be perceived as separate.

With regard to indigeneousness, its definition comprises a varied history of colonization and cultural disruption that differs in each case. The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations 2007) has no codified definition of the term "Indigenous peoples." This is by design, as Indigenous peoples resisted the inclusion of a formal definition, instead stressing flexibility and self-identification. In the case of Veps, besides having the status of an Indigenous minority group of the Russian Federation, many self-identify as Indigenous.

We do not see the relevance in pointing out that the Veps are Russian Orthodox. Each of the other two groups also encountered Christian missionaries well over a century ago, and most individuals would have converted, at least nominally, to either Roman Catholic or Protestant variants of Christianity. The same would be true with many of the examples given by our commentators. Christian conversion or missionary contact does not presuppose the extinction of Indigenous cultural practices and patterns; analytically, to suggest this would indeed essentialize Indigenous societies by trapping them in amber at a fixed point in the past. Rather, there is a growing and rich body of literature from around the world that examines ethnographically and historically the indigenization of various forms of Christianity (e.g., Laugrand and Oosten 2010), including Russian Orthodoxy (e.g., Kan 1999). Indeed, as Aparecida Vilaça and Robin M. Wright (2009) have suggested, for Indigenous Christians, often "it is the native system that encompasses Christianity . . . bearing in mind that shamanism continues to be the key domain for understanding the experience of Christianity" (17). Religious conversion does not presuppose an overall Western system of thought accompanying Christianization but rather a reception of Christianity in Indigenous terms (Laugrand 2002).

We value Simon's reflections on the relationship of epistemology and ontology. Like others, we see in the ontological turn a potential way around some of the shortcomings of epistemological analysis in cross-cultural settings, so as not to characterize others' frameworks of experience as merely beliefs (see Holbraad and Pedersen 2017). Ethnographically speaking, ontological inquiry properly encompasses epistemological questions since it examines not only "what entities can exist" but also "into what categories they can be sorted" and "by what practices and methods they can be known" (Sullivan 2017:157). In our article, we have argued that shared breath constitutes a mechanism, a metaphor, and a relation that has both ontological and epistemological ramifications since it comprises and entails changes and transformations in humans, nonhumans, and the environment while requiring profound knowledge of particular verbal and nonverbal practices to reiterate, rejuvenate, and guarantee relations. We also point to an older, perhaps neglected northern genealogy for ontological thinking.

We would like to conclude by responding to Anderson's challenge "not only to suggest a new idiom but also perhaps to reimagine how northern ethnography might be different." First of all, we agree on the need for a historicist and revisionist revisiting of the classics in anthropology, as Anderson advises and Laugrand also hints at. This would help us better understand not only how certain phenomena, such as those involved in religious practices and cosmologies, may have developed over time but also to what extent they are relevant today, in a time of rapid socioecological change. There is a need for comparative investigations of sustainable practices (cf. Sullivan 2017:165–166). Neglected motifs and practices, such as those emblematic of shared breath, could gain center stage in such debates, as we consider our proper relations to the air and the earth. A concern with the wind is implicit in our analysis of shared breath. Further ethnographic research on wind and its qualities (perhaps starting with Hallowell, who recognized the primordial animacy of the winds) would be most interesting. As Laugrand suggests, this would be amplified by a consideration of Christianity and its own embedded connections and metaphors with the wind, breath, and spirit. Similarly, again with inspiration from Hallowell, one could ponder the question (raised by at least two of our commentators) of whether rocks—or at least some rocks—might actually breathe, given that Ojibwa narratives refer to rocks sharing gifts with humans through their stony mouths. We might then question whether such rocks—or other primal animate entities such as winds—can die because of human actions (Povinelli 2016).

Shared breath potentially encompasses diverse embodied and ethical interactions between multiple beings. With Anderson, we hope that this will become a concept that can travel. Conceptually, like any good northern paddling trip, our traveler's journey to new shores will require some nimble rebalancing during windy crossings and rocky portages, later to be savored in memories and anecdotes around the fire. We thank our commentators as well as our research participants for their guidance in setting out on such a journey.

—Laura Siragusa, Clinton N. Westman, and Sarah C. Moritz

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