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Biodynamic Wine-Crafting and the Spiritualization of the Workplace

The Negotiation of Relationality and Social Stigmas in Swiss Vineyards

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Abstract

In recent years, the involvement of Swiss wine-crafters (vignerons) with 'holistic spiritualities' has become more visible. Through the use of esoterically driven preparations, energetic crystals, and neo-shamanic 'vision questing' practices, vigneronns have incorporated alternative self-healing practices in their workplace. Under the umbrella term 'biodynamic farming,' vigneronns are experimenting and delineating a new professional and relational ethos, be it with humans or nonhumans (e.g., grapevines). In the context of the Swiss vineyards, however, the engagement of vigneronns with 'holistic spiritualities' has also forced them to grapple with potential social stigmas. This article examines the social uses, dynamics, and dilemmas resulting from the gradual 'spiritualization' of vigneronns' workplaces.

Keywords

biodynamic farming – holistic spirituality – contemporary spirituality – wine-crafting – Switzerland

1 Introduction

It is May 2017.¹ I am on my second day of fieldwork in the alpine and viticultural canton of Valais in Switzerland. My informant is an energetic man in his fifties who manages a wine-crafting domain spanning twenty hectares, the average size for an economically sustainable domain in this region.² This vigneron started his career in the 1980s as a private oenologist. He gradually bought land to settle on his own and became a promoter for the state-funded program for environmental resource management in agriculture. Ten years later, he underwent a shift in his professional posture. In regard to daily concerns with his grape-cropping activity, he became progressively preoccupied with deep ecological considerations related to health, wellness, and local ecosystems. He felt the state-funded environmental approach had several limits and was still too dependent on using agrochemical treatment products. He found inspiration in the holistic guidelines of the organic farming movement.³ More precisely, he was drawn to a practitioner-based and an esoterically driven strand of organic farming, namely biodynamics. He abstained from using any agrochemical treatment products and favored noninvasive treatments, such as herbal teas, solutions of sulfur and copper, and alchemical ‘biodynamic preparations.’ He also took cues from a lunar and astral calendar when orienting his employees’ interventions in tending to the vineyards. More generally, he emphasized an intimate and inner dimension to harvesting grapes and crafting wines. During our conversation, the vigneron also described his interest in several “metaphysical religions.”⁴ For instance, he spoke about participating in practical training courses on geobiology and envisioned the positive influence of “energetic nodes” and “vortices” that he had supposedly identified in his region and near his vineyards. He additionally referred to the influence of energetic crystals and musical vibes—especially jazz—on the fermentation of yeast in his *cuvées* (vats/tanks).

Since the early 2000s, Swiss vignerons have gradually adopted new agronomical practices aimed at reducing the doses and overall use of potentially harmful treatment products. They have also been socialized with secular

1 The author is thankful to Irene Becci, Christophe Monnot, and Avi Astor and to the anonymous reviewers who all have participated in many ways in improving this article.

2 The canton of Valais is home to 33 percent of national wine production and grape harvesting, which along with tourism and metallurgy is one of the canton’s main economic sectors.

3 Gregory A. Barton, *The Global History of Organic Farming* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

4 Catherine L. Albanese, *A Republic of Mind & Spirit: A Cultural History of American Metaphysical Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007).

and naturalistic understandings of their vineyards as complex ecosystems to be taken care of. Alongside this ‘ecologization’ process, some of the most renowned vigneronns in Switzerland have also ‘spiritualized’ their workplace and professional ethics. This is the case for this informant, as well for the other thirty-nine vigneronns I encountered, for whom ‘spiritual’ and ‘holistic’ dimensions appeared as important components of their everyday professional activities. Under the umbrella term of ‘biodynamic wine-crafting,’ vigneronns claim agronomical inspiration from Rudolf Steiner’s esoteric teachings (anthroposophy), as well as from counter-cultural and contemporary ‘spirituality movements’⁵ such as New Age, neo-shamanism, neo-paganism, and neo-orientalism. Drawing upon common insights from ‘ecospirituality,’ vigneronns often refer to a retrieval of a sense of unity, be it with ‘nature,’ the ‘living,’ the ‘cosmos,’ or the body/mind nexus. Yet, in the context of harvesting grapes, what does *spiritualizing* the workplace entail? More precisely, if we consider *spiritualization* as an ongoing process, what are the social uses, dynamics, and dilemmas ‘spiritual’ vigneronns are currently negotiating amid their everyday professional and private lives?

In this article, I focus on my informants’ social practices and discourses, as well as on their social interactions. I explore two entangled themes that are commonly expressed in their narratives of ‘reconversion’—an emic term referring to the embrace of organic with biodynamic farming. These themes include relationality and social stigma surrounding alternative plant-cropping practices. I provide empirical and methodological insights into the study of the specificities, professional components, and implicit norms comprising a ‘spiritualized’ approach to wine-crafting. I first analyze ‘spirituality’ as an emic category that operates as a discursive, relational and yet ontological construct. I then describe by which modalities so-called holistic spiritualities are adapted by vigneronns so as to fit their everyday professional practices and preoccupations.⁶ Through an in-depth ethnographic description, I introduce the reader to various relational features that revolve around alternative and holistic care-taking practices. Finally, I generalize my analysis through a sampling of forty vigneronns. I present methodological considerations and content analysis of how Swiss vigneronns negotiate and position themselves, either in regard to their professional milieu or their grapevines, which they sometimes regard as ‘working partners’ or ‘sacred plants.’

5 Anna Fedele and Kim E. Knibbe (eds.), *Secular Societies, Spiritual Selves?: The Gendered Triangle of Religion, Secularity and Spirituality* (New York: Routledge, 2020).

6 Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead, “Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 47/2 (2008), 259–276.

2 An Ethnography of the ‘Lived’ Ecologies and Religions of Swiss Vignerons

Between 2017 and 2019 I conducted ethnographic fieldwork in four wine-crafting regions in the French-speaking part of Switzerland (Romandy). I studied forty vignerons involved in biodynamic farming, on the basis of their involvement with holistic and spiritual harvesting practices. Aged between thirty and seventy, a majority of the vignerons had acquired their domains via inheritance and therefore had high levels of social and cultural capital. Biodynamic farming initially developed within Rudolf Steiner’s anthroposophical movement, one of the main European ‘spiritual questing’ movements of the twentieth century.⁷ Starting in the 1970s, several European and American wine-makers, including some at famous wine-crafting domains (e.g., Romanée-Conti in Burgundy), brought popularity, visibility, and legitimacy to this ‘spiritual’ approach to farming. They adapted Steiner’s guidelines and teachings to the specificities of wine-crafting culture.⁸

I met each vigneron in their respective domains for at least one semistructured interview. Interviews were often combined with visits to their vineyards and an informal tasting session. I conducted participant observation during important moments of the wine-crafting calendar (pruning, harvesting, vinification, wine fairs, training days, etc.). Following James Beckford, I consider the boundaries separating what counts as ‘religious,’ ‘spiritual,’ and ‘secular’ as social constructs that may vary depending on national, regional, or professional contexts.⁹ Alongside this, Boaz Huss’s insights on ‘spirituality’ as an “emerging social category” and a “discursive construct” used emically “to classify and interpret human practices, both in the past and the present” is also noteworthy.¹⁰ When referring to ‘spirituality’ or related notions such as ‘energy,’ ‘life forces,’ ‘cosmos,’ ‘body/mind connection,’ ‘soul,’ or ‘Mother Earth,’ Swiss vignerons usually refer to grounded observations and subjective dimensions

7 Helmut Zander, *Die Anthroposophie: Rudolf Steiner Ideen Zwischen Esoterik, Weleda, Demeter Und Waldorfpädagogik* (Paderborn: Schoeningh Ferdinand, 2019); Dan McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy: Anthroposophy and the History and Future of Environmentalism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2018).

8 Alexandre Grandjean, “Biodynamic Wine-Crafting in Switzerland: The Translation and Adaptation of Rudolf Steiner’s Cosmology into Dark Green Agronomies,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 14/3 (2022), 317–343.

9 James A. Beckford, *Social Theory & Religion* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

10 Boaz Huss, “Spirituality: The Emergence of a New Cultural Category and Its Challenge to the Religious and the Secular,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 29/1 (2014), 52.

of their professional practices. ‘Spiritual’ references are also embedded within a specific social scene and thereby integrated within numerous interactions with colleagues, customers, alternative agronomists, and holistic practitioners for whom ‘spirituality’ is a loosely defined—or even a contested—term. During the interviews, my informants discussed ecology not only as a discourse about ‘nature’ but also as a form of experience emotionally grounded in material settings.¹¹ Many expressed concerns about, as well as emotional and sensorial bonds with, their vineyards, which have already been successfully approached through the lens of the ontological turn¹² and of ‘care ethics.’¹³ As for myself, through an empirically grounded and in-depth analysis of Swiss vigneron’s discourses and social interactions surrounding ‘holism’ and ‘spirituality,’ I elucidate the lived ecologies of vignerons, as well as how they are combined with lived religions.¹⁴

3 The Encounter Between the Wine-Crafting Scene and Green ‘Holistic Spiritualities’

Since the early 2000s, social scientists and religious scholars have ceased focusing on heated debates over ‘cult scenes’ and ‘NMRS.’ It has by now become common to consider European and American religious landscapes as pluralistic and diverse, but also with respect to social movements to call for dechurched and creative contemporary forms of ‘spirituality.’ In the introduction, I discussed a vigneron who employed energetic and alchemical grammars and engaged in inspired practices. These grammars and practices are often recognized by scholars as an important marker of ‘holistic spiritualities,’ a term that Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead specify as referring to “forms of practice involving the body, which have become increasingly visible since the 1980s and that have as their goal the attainment of wholeness and well-being.”¹⁵ In ecological settings like the vineyards analyzed here, ‘holistic spiritualities’ frequently

11 David Morgan, “Introduction: The Matter of Belief,” in: David Morgan (ed.), *Religion and Material Culture: The Matter of Belief* (London: Routledge, 2010), 1–17.

12 Nadia Breda, “The Plant in Between: Analogism and Entanglement in an Italian Community of Anthroposophists,” *ANUAC* 5/2 (2016), 131–157.

13 Jean Foyer, Julie Hermesse, and Corentin Hecquet, “Quand Les Actes Agricoles Sont Au Care Et Au Compagnonnage: L’exemple De La Biodynamie,” *Anthropologica* 62/1 (2020), 93–104.

14 Meredith B. McGuire, *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

15 Sointu and Woodhead, “Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood,” 259.

become entangled with romanticized notions of a ‘sacred nature,’ often personalized as ‘Mother Earth’ or ‘Gaia.’¹⁶ In the following two subsections, I briefly present the novel and increasingly visible ‘holistic spiritualities’ accompanying ecological stances in the Swiss vineyards.

3.1 *When ‘Holistic Spiritualities’ Enter the Workplace*

According to Sointu and Woodhead, “holistic conceptualizations of the person have established powerful footholds” in many different cultural realms, which is “increasingly evident in mainstream public and private education and health care” and also “in the workplace.”¹⁷ As I will elaborate in further detail below, the diffusion of holistic conceptualizations in the workplace is particularly noteworthy in a segment of wine-crafting in Switzerland.

Currently, there are 5,000 wine-crafting domains in Switzerland, and the number has not changed much in twenty years.¹⁸ In 1997 only three domains had obtained official recognition from Demeter, the only biodynamic farm certifier. By the end of 2019, sixty-one had undertaken the three-year ‘reconversion’ course necessary for certification.¹⁹ Yet, although in practice many vigneron do not wish to (or cannot) obtain official certification, they still partially comply with biodynamic guidelines and occasionally make use of alternative agronomic and holistic practices. My informants often framed biodynamic farming as having ‘continuity’ with their personal trajectories, both agronomic and religious. They usually described their parents as pioneers of the state-funded environmental program in the 1970s and 1980s. To them, biodynamics and other holistic approaches fostered various forms of ‘inner’ personal development, such as learning to unlearn agronomical conventions, engaging with new intimate representation of the vegetal world, and becoming more aware of (supra)sensory experiences that provided meaningful information about soils, wind exposure, plant health, or imminent mildew attacks. They often linked their involvement to demands for alternative and critical models of modernity that stressed ‘spiritual’ and ‘inner’ dimensions.²⁰

16 Bron Taylor, *Dark Green Religion: Nature, Spirituality and the Planetary Future* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

17 Sointu and Woodhead, “Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood,” 260.

18 OFAG, *Rapport Sur Le Système De Contrôle Des Vins : Contrôle De La Vendange Et Du Commerce Des Vins* (Berne: Département fédéral de l’économie et de la recherche, 2016).

19 Private communication with Demeter, January 30, 2020.

20 Bruce M. Knauft, “Critically Modern: An Introduction,” in: Bruce M. Knauft (ed.), *Critically Modern: Alternatives, Alterities, Anthropologies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 1–54.

Since the early 2000s, the growing involvement of vigneronns in biodynamic winemaking and the alternative agronomy's institutionalization have contributed to the dissemination of new norms and aesthetics cultivating vineyards and crafting new taste conventions. It has placed emphasis on nurturing local biodiversity (e.g., by letting weeds grow between vine rows), on valuing quality over quantity, and on promoting manual work and animals (e.g., sheep) over machines for tending the vineyards. In the cellar and during the fermentation process, this informal network also promotes the use of 'wild' yeast and a drastic reduction of oenological inputs such as sulfite.²¹ In biodynamics, vigneronns perceive themselves as stewards allowing their vineyards to express themselves through their crafted wines. This stands in stark contrast to dominant industrial wine-crafting procedures and to the importance of industrial oenologists have gained in recent decades in designing wines using oenological inputs.

In the perspective of the Swiss wine market, biodynamics represents a new "discourse convention" on wine valuation,²² based upon qualitative criteria such as craftsmanship, localness, and naturalness. Many debates and experiments are taking place in Switzerland involving sommeliers, wine critics, and sensorial analysts to determine whether organic and biodynamic wines taste 'better' or are given more value than conventional wines.²³ The price point of a bottle certified as organic and biodynamic ranges from around fifteen to forty euros, which is higher than nonorganic Swiss wines or imported wines from France and Italy. In the field, this premium is commonly reasoned by the extra workforce needed, as well as the reduction of grape production per cultivated square meter required in organic farming guidelines. For established vigneronns (with an international or national reputation and ten to twenty hectares of cultivated land), biodynamic wine-crafting is often envisioned as a profitable distinctive agronomy. For modest landowners and newcomers (two to five hectares), it is often correlated with a qualitative pursuit of values that are often described as ethical or 'spiritual.'

21 'Wild' or ambient yeasts are those naturally present on the grapes and in wineries, which increase when fungicides are not used in the vineyards.

22 Rainer Diaz-Bone, "Discourse Conventions in the Construction of Wine Qualities in the Wine Market," *Economic Sociology* 14/2 (2013), 46–53.

23 For example, see Pascale Deneulin and Xavier Dupraz, "Vins Sans Sulfites Ajoutés Et Labels Environnementaux: Quel Prix Pour Les Consommateurs?," *Revue suisse Viticulture, Arboriculture, Horticulture* 48/6 (2018), 176–182.

3.2 *The Diffusion of Self-Healing Practices and Organic Metaphors*

When detailing the caretaking of their plants, my informants also described how they tended to their own health. I gradually noticed that the *spiritualization* of the workplace was influenced by the increasing popularity of self-healing practices and alternative medicines and lifestyles in Europe.²⁴ Healing principles that were once kept private and applied only to humans, are currently being transferred by vigneronns to nonhuman entities and demanded in the workplace. For example, most of my informants considered that if herbal teas have effects on human bodies, then they surely have effects on plant metabolisms as well. This is an important dimension of the spiritualization of Swiss vineyards. Indeed, in Switzerland, it is estimated that nearly one-third of the population is involved with more or less exotic alternative forms of religiosity in which self-healing and holistic well-being practices are central,²⁵ ranging from naturopathy and homeopathy to more esoteric and engaging practices such as ‘channeling’ or neo-shamanic ‘vision quests.’ Swiss vigneronns are generally part of this societal trend, having become familiarized with holistic spiritualities through personal engagements and familial socialization. Holistic beliefs regarding a mind-body-environment continuum usually consider diseases as a product of imbalances in an otherwise harmonious system.

During my fieldwork, I observed how the transposition of self-healing practices to holistic caretaking practices occurred through the recurrent mediation of organic metaphors and analogies with the human body. This is well illustrated by one of my informants from the canton of Vaud, who ‘stabilized’ his social practices by relying on complex sets of organic analogies. He farmed livestock, grew medical herbs, and had a hectare of grapevines. For him, plants, soils, and an overall ‘nature principle’ shared common features with humans. The ‘self’ was therefore a key location for extracting implicit caretaking knowledge:

If you don't do anything to the soil, you don't need biodynamics at all. When you start plowing, then you will scratch off its skin. You gonna hurt yourself and open the door to diseases ... So what do you do? You gotta

24 Anne Koch and Stefan Binder, “Holistic Medicine Between Religion and Science: A Secularist Construction of Spiritual Healing in Medical Literature,” *Journal of Religion in Europe* 6/1 (2013), 1–34.

25 Jörg Stolz et al., *(Un)Believing in Modern Society: Religion, Spirituality, and Religious-Secular Competition* (New York: Routledge, 2016), 53. According to the authors, 19.2 percent of their sample represents a sub-type of “distanced alternative” while 13.4 percent encompasses the broad type of the “alternative” standing for the ‘esoteric milieu’ or one of alternative consumers.

have protection. That's what you do. From the instant you start working the land, you gonna harm her.²⁶ And again, you have solutions when you apply it to what you would do to yourself [in that situation]. What do you do then? What do I do if I get hurt? Well, I do the same to the soil ... All these biodynamic preparations are made to repair your mistakes, and to remind the soil how she was before I wasted her.²⁷

In this discursive sequence, my informant's use of metaphors and analogies blurs the ontological distinction between humans and nonhumans. Yet, this is not the only distinction that is blurred or reconfigured with the informant's use of biodynamic and holistic guidelines. By invoking holistic schemas akin to those featured in the New Age literature, my informants publicly promoted new ethos lifestyles, social practices, and worldviews that subverted formerly institutionalized classificatory systems.²⁸ For vigneron, spiritualizing the workplace also signifies adopting a specific and critical position toward dominant institutions (e.g., agronomical schools and research centers, public administrations, certification labels, and religious organizations) and forms of naturalistic knowledge.²⁹

It is nonetheless worth noting that the spiritualization of wine-crafting is still bound to the contextual needs and norms of the wine-crafting scene. Winemaking is often self-consciously considered as a luxury industry in which measures of quality are deeply codified. The engagements of most of my informants with biodynamics and holistic caretaking practices were described and legitimized in relation to the production of wines that were more "expressive" and "communicative" than those they produced prior to their reconversion. For example, one of my informants in the canton of Vaud detailed how drinking a Chardonnay produced by a colleague in Burgundy was a revelation—somehow a "tasting epiphany"—that spawned his reconversion to biodynamics.³⁰ His gradual involvement in reading Rudolf Steiner and progressively applying and promoting biodynamic guidelines grew out of his enjoyment of the Chardonnay and desire to improve his own craft. I admit that this is not the typical

26 In French, *la terre*, which variably translates into 'land' or 'soil' according to affective or biochemical emphasis, is grammatically a feminine word.

27 Interview, Vaud, September 5, 2017.

28 Mary Douglas, *How Institutions Think* (London: Routledge, 1987).

29 In that sense, as studied by Nadia Breda, they experiment with forms of reasoning that can be linked to Philippe Descola's famous category of 'Analogism.' For further analysis see Breda, "The Plant in Between."

30 Chardonnay is a commonly grown grape variety (*cépage*)—the second most planted white variety worldwide.

conversion narrative one finds in studies led by scholars of religion, such as in evangelical milieus.³¹

4 What it Takes to be a Holistic Vigneron: Envisioning “Cosmic Forces” and “Dancing” Vines

The wine-crafting scene is not the typical site that religious scholars and social scientists generally consider when seeking empirical insights into changing socioreligious landscapes. Wine-crafting is an industry in which religious practices and discourses are creatively adapted. For my informants, ‘spirituality’ was not framed as a fundamental and essential category. It was, however, described as a “subtle” element,³² referenced as important for enhancing everyday secular life and constituting ‘ecological selfhood.’ It was integrated within a variety of secular perspectives and techniques. The following section analyzes this dynamic by looking empirically at how processes of ‘greening of the self’ among Swiss vigneronns involve an apparent spiritualization of their professional ethos.

4.1 *Under the Umbrella of Biodynamics: From Texts to Fields*

The morning I encountered the vigneron described in my introductory vignette, he rapidly and proudly detailed his involvement with ecological and holistic views about plant health. He declared finding some inspiration in biodynamics, but was not seeking any official recognition from the Demeter certification. He was critical of Demeter’s stakeholders for not being holistic *enough*, as they forbade the use of essential oils and did not specify minimum wages for collaborators in their guidelines. In his life-course narrative, my informant stated that he came upon biodynamics when a colleague urged him to read Steiner’s *Agriculture Course*.³³ The book is a compendium of eight lectures given in 1924 by Rudolf Steiner on agriculture, and it is the main textual reference for biodynamics. My informant admitted that the first reading of Steiner’s esoteric worldview was as complicated as reading Umberto Eco’s *Foucault’s Pendulum*, a novel about the Italian and French esoteric milieu. Nevertheless,

31 Cf. Tanya M. Luhrmann, “Metakinesis: How God Becomes Intimate in Contemporary U.S. Christianity,” *American Anthropologist* 106/3 (2008), 518–528.

32 Irene Becci, Christophe Monnot, and Boris Wernli, “Sensing ‘Subtle Spirituality’ among Environmentalists: A Swiss Study,” *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 13/3 (2021), 344–367.

33 Rudolf Steiner, *Agriculture: Fondements Spirituels De La Méthode Bio-Dynamique* (Geneva: Editions anthroposophiques romandes, 2006 [1924]).

for reasons that he could not fully explain, he felt he had to read *Agriculture Course* over and over again so that he could better understand it.

This text mentions the existence of “forces” and “energies” related to alchemical molecules such as nitrogen or carbon, but also to astral principles personified by planets such as Pluto or Mars. These forces are assumed to give shape—to do “cosmetic” work as one informant defined it—to the material expression of plants which bear “sympathies” with such molecules. This cryptic dimension is only one level of understanding in Steiner’s text, which also advances a strong critique of modernization and industrialization processes affecting agrarian and scientific landscapes. The text also promotes a specific view of the cow as a “spiritual animal.”³⁴ This view resonates in part with the attachment of Swiss peasants to this kind of cattle as a symbol of their ‘traditional’ way of life. For Steiner, materialism and the spread of industrialization signify the end of so-called traditional peasantry and their intuitive knowledge. Through what he labeled a “spiritual science” (*Geistwissenschaft*), Steiner aimed at revitalizing folk traditions by providing metaphysical insight into the suprasensory and invisible dimension of plants’ growth, as well as into anthroposophical specificities that McKanan has termed “cosmic holism.”³⁵ However, my observations revealed a large gap between Steiner’s writings and the general understanding and application of biodynamic guidelines by my informants.

On the field, biodynamics was mostly envisioned by my informants as a pragmatic way to ground their own professional ethics. They inherited Steiner’s legacy, to a degree, via somewhat codified agronomical procedures developed by an initial ‘experimental circle.’ Agronomical engineers such as Ehrenfried Pfeiffer participated in translating Steiner’s esoteric discourses into an applied agronomy. As a result of their contributions, biodynamics underwent a ‘secularization’ process throughout the twentieth century, as specific words and esoteric references were adapted or reframed. For instance, in Ehrenfried Pfeiffer’s principal book *The Soil Fertility*, initially published in 1941 in German, what was then termed “biodynamic” referred mainly to products, plants, or livestock grown with the “biodynamic method.” The method outlined in this pragmatic handbook for farmers comprised “knowledge of the rules of the organic world.”³⁶ The first secularization of biodynamics was evident in the fact that

34 Todd LeVasseur, “Methane Dispensers and Bio-Dynamic Beings: Cattle as Polysemous Symbols in Environmental Religious Discourse,” *Ecozona* 7/1 (2016), 112–127.

35 McKanan, *Eco-Alchemy*, 226.

36 Ehrenfried Pfeiffer, *Fécondité De La Terre: Méthode Pour Conserver Ou Rétablir La Fertilité Du Sol—Le Principe Bio-Dynamique Dans La Nature* (Paris: Editions de la Science Spirituelle, 1941), 222 (my translation).

terms such as “cosmos,” “energy,” “forces,” or even “spirituality” appeared only in the book’s conclusion, for instance when the author mentioned a “spiritual force of organization” that gave a specific form to nature as a living organism.³⁷ Yet, the inspiration of Steiner’s holistic worldview was still evident for “initiated” readers.

Returning to my original informant, like his colleagues, he did not bother to explain to me the genealogy of the two main preparations he employed each year. His descriptions of these preparations were detailed in regard to the efficacy of direct sensorial experimentation. In the jargon, these two preparations are the “500” and the “501.” They both involve filling cow horns with either manure or crushed quartz (silica), and then burying them for six months to ferment. Using indications from a lunar and astral calendar, my informant inserted diluted micro-doses of these preparations in demineralized water³⁸ and then sprinkled them on his vines. Interestingly, throughout our interview and further interactions, this vigneron was insistent on mentioning his scientific background as an oenologist and as a “Cartesian” man. What seemed to matter to him was that his practices empirically showed pragmatic results—results he could sense and taste despite not being able to measure them experimentally. Interestingly, he also brought up specific ontological considerations when discussing his plants, mentioning that they had relational personhoods.³⁹

4.2 *The Vigneron Go-Between: Negotiating Relationality with Plants and Humans*

Right after our interview, this vigneron brought me along to inspect his grapevines in three different plots scattered in the valley where the Rhone starts flowing. He said that soils had a “memory” and specific “energies” of benefit to autochthonous vine varieties (*cépages*). He also told me an anecdote about one of his plots, which was previously owned by his ex-father-in-law, whom he described as a pious man. This man had condemned my informant following the divorce from his daughter; according to my informant, his ex-father-in-law’s plot he was still cultivating would not grow well because the plants did not recognize him as their rightful holder. The informant then described organizing a ritual with his own daughter to settle the issue and “explain” to the vines

37 Ibid., 227.

38 This is a particularity of my informant. Most vignerons I interviewed stored rainwater for their ‘dynamization.’

39 Amy Whitehead, “A Method of ‘Things’: A Relational Theory of Objects as Persons in Lived Religious Practice,” *Journal of Contemporary Religion* 35/2 (2020), 231–250.

that he was just a temporary owner, before the daughter would inherit them once again. One week later, according to his narration, the vines had flourished impressively, and no significant difference could be found with neighboring plots. In another location, he spoke of the vines as being a sixty-two-year-old “dame” with a personality and inner dispositions.⁴⁰ He told me that she was “coquettish” and would “dance” to greet him.⁴¹ Interestingly, as other colleagues engaged with holistic and eventually “animistic” views on plants, my informant considered a plot as encompassing multiple plants yet sharing similar attributes and personalities.

This vigneron was fond of rituals in general. He explained how he meditated on Wednesday afternoons among his vines to “sense” their overall state, enabling him to adapt and plan the agronomical interventions of his employees. During harvest time, he described ritually asking the vines whether he could take away their “children”—in other words, their grapes. At the end of our excursion, we had established a certain rapport. As he offered me some wine bottles and I chose to buy some others, he said that he was cautious in describing these ritual and holistic practices. He showed me some meaningful keywords (e.g., “stars,” “moon,” or “alchemy”) he had written on his bottle labels for “initiates” so they might recognize he was working within biodynamic guidelines. However, he explained that he felt he had to be discrete and selective about his own holistic practices. He was particularly concerned with the potential reaction of one of his employees affiliated with the traditionalist Society of Saint-Pius x.⁴² He was also anxious about being publicly accused of belonging to a cult. In this still very Catholic and conservative alpine region of Switzerland, he feared this would impact his sales and business reputation.

This ethnographic description illustrates how the spiritualization of the workplace associated with the holistic guidelines of biodynamics entails having to negotiate relationships with both humans and nonhumans. By engaging with organic farming and ‘holistic spiritualities,’ this informant was socialized into experimenting with nonconventional models and framings of the vegetal realm. My informant was nonetheless reflexive about the social connotation of his practices. He was aware of how they challenged traditional and popu-

40 Giving a personality to plants is an important feature in biodynamics; for other examples, see Foyer, Hermesse, and Hecquet, “Quand Les Actes Agricoles.”

41 In French, *la vigne* is a feminine noun.

42 The Society of Saint-Pius x is a Catholic movement that emerged from a schism within the Catholic Church in 1970, following the Vatican II council. One of their most influential seminaries for francophone countries is based in the same canton as my informant (Valais).

lar Christian worldviews, especially in a canton generally perceived as being attached to its folklore, and which still features popular apotropaic practices such as the Tschäggtätä during carnival.⁴³ For my informant, being selective about his spiritual practices had a specific meaning for running his business, as well as being engaged as a deputy in the political life of his region. He could not afford rumors and the suggestion of him being in a cult.

Although biodynamic wine-crafting has achieved public recognition and legitimacy in Switzerland, it still receives some bad press in neighboring countries. Criticisms of biodynamics emanating from France and Italy, or even from the Swiss specialized wine press, have been varied. Authors who trace biodynamics exclusively to Rudolf Steiner and anthroposophy denounce it as “cultic,” “superstitious,” “parascientific,” or “irrational.” These criticisms commonly advocate ‘science’ over ‘religion,’ and take their cues from the modern Western version of secularism.⁴⁴ In Valais, one informant described her engagement with neo-shamanic practices and worldviews. She said that she dreaded being “burned down like a witch” if other colleagues discovered her discrete practices involving drums and “vision quests” to communicate with the “spirit of the plot’s vine plants.”⁴⁵ Other informants framed their engagement with biodynamics in regard to secular concerns, thus promoting biodynamics as an ‘entrepreneurial ethic.’

This ethnographic description also highlights the importance the principal informant of this article places on ritualizing his relationship with plants and his ‘self,’ notably through promoting specific ontological models and ‘biosocial’ metaphors stating that his vines have personalities and intrinsic values, as well as kinship relations with their vigneron.⁴⁶ This perspective emphasizes the centrality of nonhumans and of integrating their presence as part of an ecosystem that vigneron have been socialized to care about. As illustrated by this ethnographic description, my informant uses rituals as a means for expressing his specific ‘ecological self.’ In a way, these rituals enable him to express a social and ‘authentic’ way of being that he was proud to describe to a young

43 The Tschäggtätä are frightening beings who march into alpine villages during Carnival (Fastnacht) to scare away bad spirits, principally in the German-speaking valley of the Lötschental. In the French-speaking part of this region, the tradition is less prominent, though narratives and tales about spirits and the devil are still to be found in alpine villages.

44 Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003).

45 Interview, Valais, January 17, 2018.

46 Tim Ingold, *The Perception of the Environment: Essays on Livelihood, Dwelling and Skill* (London: Routledge, 2000).

PhD student in the social sciences. In line with his unconventional life-course, he valued and also struggled with the modern imperatives of ‘sincerity’ and ‘self-coherence’ between his professional and private ethos.⁴⁷ However, given his awareness of social stigma, describing the religious landscape and reminding me of his scientific background were some of the ways that he shared his everyday concerns with me. He also impressed upon me how, in an agrarian setting, private and public dimensions can hardly be separated. For instance, his remarks combined familial issues—divorce, ownership, and succession—with the personalities and physical attributes of his plants.

5 Grounding the Spiritualization of the Workplace in Context: Methodological Insights

I have highlighted what it takes to be a vigneron adhering to biodynamic guidelines. I now focus my analysis on insights from a coding procedure that enables me to generalize my grounded analysis to my overall sampling of forty vignerons.⁴⁸ I acknowledged that terms such as ‘biodynamics,’ ‘forces,’ ‘spirituality,’ ‘nature,’ or ‘holism’ had “various levels of meaning and various meanings that can be contained ... especially if the meaning is left vague by the speaker.”⁴⁹ To better understand how these terms were incorporated into the lived ecologies and religions of my informants, I then returned to my raw notes and ethnographic descriptions of our encounters. This allowed me to contextualize the meanings attributed to the terms. ‘Context’ is understood here as “structural conditions that shape the nature of situations, circumstances, or problems to which individuals respond by means of action/interaction/emotions.”⁵⁰ My findings enhance scholarly awareness and understanding of the spiritualization of the workplace in Swiss vineyards.

5.1 *The Multiple Motivations for Reconversion*

In June 2017 I had another appointment with a wine-crafting domain, this time in a familial setting near Lake Neuchâtel. The domain was small, and its two hectares were not sufficient for making a living from selling wine. I con-

47 Charles Lindholm, *Culture and Authenticity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008).

48 Using the qualitative analysis program MAXQDA, I undertook a coding based on recurrent semantical fields and themes raised by my informants.

49 Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss, *Basics of Qualitative Research: Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 2008), 78.

50 *Ibid.*, 87.

ducted a semi-structured interview with the vigneron, who was also a father of two. He, his daughter, and his son were all involved in tending to the domain. They opened one of their bottles—an Oeil de Perdrix, a specialty rosé from the canton—and we started having a casual conversation. The father was a former chaplain who worked for the mainstream Protestant Reformed Church (Calvinism). When he retired, he returned home and took over his father's land. In 2012 an agronomist and promoter of biodynamics gave a lecture in an anthroposophical center located a few kilometers away. Other notable vignerons of the region who were starting to engage with biodynamics were also present. This regional trend motivated the vigneron and his family to experiment with biodynamic guidelines.

The father was a self-described (leftist) libertarian. He regarded biodynamic agriculture and the use of tisanes and preparations made of cow manures (500) and crushed quartz (501) as a means to counteract the growing influence of agrochemical firms such as Bayer and Monsanto, and their recent moves to enter the market of organic agriculture. The son described himself as “the most rational of the band.” He believed that promoting naturopathy and local products had “added-value in relation to standard and legalist organic agriculture.” The daughter was the only one that spoke of being motivated by “nature spirituality.” She explained:

I do not reckon it to be esoteric. Well, for me I am speaking to plants but to me it has nothing to do with esotericism. It is more that each time I see a plant and it looks sick, I am asking her⁵¹ “how do you do?” ... I am connecting it to biodynamic agriculture because it suits me, but I used to do it already before [engaging in biodynamic agriculture].⁵²

During the course of a single interview, this family provided numerous ways of framing and considering what engaging with biodynamics entailed. These framings were not all necessarily related to ‘holistic spiritualities.’ Indeed, spiritual dimensions of tending to plants were but one aspect raised during our conversation. Various political and marketing insights were described by the two other members of the family. Spirituality and ‘inner dimensions’ were also not central for other wine-crafters I encountered, though they were still a part of their narratives regarding why they decided to turn to biodynamic guidelines. For instance, they relied on a language of ‘enchantment’ and of the ‘self’ to

51 In French, *la plante* is a feminine word.

52 Interview, Neuchâtel, June 20, 2017.

describe their untrustworthy relation toward agrochemistry and their view that it was ‘injurious’ to their soil and plants, and potentially harmful for employees and family members. These spiritual motives were however employed casually.

The father was a reader of Paul Tillich, and he described how pruning vines was similar to the theologian’s insights on faith as a means of constituting a “space of freedom” and a “space of encounter” between divine and earthly matters. He thus was bringing traditional and yet highly philosophical religious insights into his workplace. However, when I asked about the efficacy principles of biodynamic preparations, Paul Tillich’s theology had no relevance for him. The father instead framed matters of efficacy in relation to the common “stock of (biochemical) knowledge” he had on micropollutant molecules. In the environmentalist milieu during the period under study (2017–2021) growing demands were being made to better regulate or prohibit agrochemical treatment products. According to my informant, just as cocktails of agrochemical molecules could be toxic at small doses in the long term, homeopathic doses of biodynamic preparations could be helpful for restoring local ecosystems. This illustrates, in part, how religious and spiritual references easily blend and may have ‘elective affinities’ with specific secular and scientific discursive constructs. Indeed, discourses about spiritual motives are often entangled with other discourses, making them difficult to isolate.

5.2 *The Paradox of Not Mentioning the ‘S’ Word*

Most of my informants referred to biodynamic agriculture as a means of crafting wine or enacting an ethic of entrepreneurship. In the field, vignerons I interviewed were often initially reluctant to mention ‘spirituality’ or related terms. They usually did so only after I had given indications I would be receptive to such language. Interestingly, when my questions focused on agroecological involvements, my informants described specific interventions they had undertaken in their vineyards and in their cellars (e.g., sowing particular plants between the rows, working with animals to control the grass, bringing animal manure to fertilize the soil, promoting local biodiversity, and using wild yeast during vinification). When my questions centered on their life-courses and choices to turn to biodynamic farming, they were more likely to mention ‘spirituality,’ especially when relating narratives of intimate feelings or descriptions of moments of ‘rupture’ (e.g., alcoholism, divorce, disease, or other difficult times) that ‘opened’ them up to new values and lifestyles. In such instances, ‘spirituality’ and ‘alternative’ were often used synonymously.

My questions usually oriented the answers of my informants in the form of an interactional performance. Yet my informants also made me aware of their ability to select and frame their discourses within different interactional set-

tings. One interviewee from the canton of Vaud spoke explicitly about how he situationally and interchangeably used different words depending on his audience. The same term might be viewed as legitimate or might generate social stigma depending on the specific situation. During our interview at his eco-farm, which included permaculture students, he explained:

So, everything is spiritual. It is clearly seen. So it is necessarily spiritual. I am cautious with this word, as it can be discomfoting depending on the person. Me, I would rather say “in connection with the universe,” stuff like that you see. “Connection with nature.” It’s just that too many people are linking cults and spirituality, something like that. Right now, it is complicated enough like that.⁵³

My informant described how certain terms have explicit connotations that make them more socially desirable. This kind of explanation was often provided by informants who described their own discursive strategies for positioning themselves in the wine-crafting scene. This speaks to the porosity, blurring of boundaries, and ambivalence that is related to spirituality in agrarian settings. This informant’s reflections also echo those of the other vigneron who feared discussing his practices with some employees or customers, thereby running the risk of being accused of adhering to a cult.

6 Grounding the Spiritualization of the Workplace in Discourses: Relational Features

While coding my interviews, two specific usages of ‘spirituality,’ or related concepts such as ‘energy,’ ‘cosmos,’ ‘life force,’ and so on, caught my attention. I noticed a relational pattern in the way my informants framed issues related to spirituality and to their ‘self.’ As highlighted by Eeva Sointu and Linda Woodhead, in holistic spiritualities “there is an attempt to reconcile individuality with relationships in a way that can do justice to both.”⁵⁴ Against the backdrop of threatening an ‘authentic self’ while engaging with a conventional agrochemistry-based agronomy, which several of my informants described as “a death industry,” the vignerons I interviewed usually spoke of how engaging with spiritual dimensions expressed new ‘harmonious’ lifestyles and relations with

53 Interview, Vaud, August 17, 2017.

54 Sointu and Woodhead, “Spirituality, Gender, and Expressive Selfhood,” 267.

fellow humans and nonhumans. On the one hand, claiming to be spiritual or claiming spiritual dimensions in their everyday professional lives enabled them to mark boundaries within the wine-crafting scene, thus delineating commonalities or differences with colleagues and neighbors. On the other hand, marking boundaries also implied breaking down the common Western ontological distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘culture,’ as well as between ‘subjects’ and ‘objects.’ My informants described how reconverting to biodynamics changed their views about plants and the ‘nature principle.’

6.1 *Marking Boundaries in the Milieu*

My informants commonly used three derogatory labels for colleagues whom they viewed as displaying an *excess* of spirituality and enacting opposing models of ‘mysticism’: “Ayatollah of biodynamics,” “extremist,” and “radical Steinerian.” These labels were often applied to individuals who called for an orthodox reading of Rudolf Steiner’s esoteric teachings. Many of my forty informants were critical of other vignerons whom they saw as *too* involved in particular types of spiritual experimentation, such as ethereal pacts with mildew and slugs,⁵⁵ and as failing to ground their caretaking practices in common agronomical knowledge and standards. These informants feared that these colleagues would harm the image of biodynamic wine-crafting, and they strove to be ‘exemplary’ agronomically as to better promote organic and biodynamic agriculture. This strategy was ideological but also pragmatic as compliance with organic guidelines by neighboring vignerons reduced the potential for residual agrochemical products to pollute their own plots.

However, vignerons following organic and biodynamic guidelines also marked boundaries from other colleagues still adhering to state-funded agroecological conventions, and thus continuing to employ agrochemical treatments for curative purposes. Biodynamic vignerons often associated agrochemistry with ‘artifice’ and with social norms they had rejected. This way of marking boundaries enables some vignerons to consider themselves as the vanguard of a ‘silent revolution’ in the sense that they are paving a way toward a renewal of agriculture in Switzerland. Reconverting to biodynamics is then envisioned as part of a personal quest and quietist posture over an ‘authentic self.’ This dynamic was captured well by an informant from the canton of Vaud when he explained his choice to abstain from agrochemical treatment products:

55 Ethereal pacts are a practice that was rarely mentioned in the field. It is based on the idea that the practitioner may establish rules and delineate territories between humans’ needs and non-humans through an act of will.

I've worked with my father. And afterward I took over [the domain] in 2000. And then I said, "Well, we really stop with herbicides." I used some from time to time ... and then I said, "No, come on, we stop with all that." I don't like them anyway. I don't like applying them. I don't like applying chemicals. It bothers me. That is rather spiritual, so it is really me.⁵⁶

After recounting his personal biography, he mentioned some colleagues he considered as narrow minded. He stated that "those who only believe what they see" needed to "go further" in their own investigations "because the solution is not in what we are experimenting today." He thought that humanity was currently "elevating its level of thoughtfulness and perception to seek new solutions for us to negotiate an [ecological and societal] shift." He then exclaimed, "Now it's time to open [our minds], and drop everything we have learned to make space for everything we don't know yet."⁵⁷ Through the notion of the changing of an era, a theme common in New Age spiritualities,⁵⁸ my informant related and contrasted secular institutional and scientific epistemologies with a focus on the self as a new locus for knowledge-building. He then criticized dominant institutions such as the local school of viticulture, which he judged to be too biased in favor of agrochemistry and the development of new resistant and hybrid grape varieties, rather than in promoting organic farming principles. Though my informant still had contact with colleagues who remained in conventional wine-crafting, and occasionally trained with them, he became increasingly involved with an association of organic vigneron that co-organized promotional events and even a yearly festival promoting organic wines in their region. In this way, his engagement with biodynamics reshaped his professional networks.

Conversely, conventional vigneron and institutional stakeholders position themselves in various ways vis-à-vis organic and biodynamic vigneron. I interviewed several vigneron who remained in the secular and technical strand of 'integrated production.' These vigneron saw themselves as sufficiently 'sustainable' and believed that a drastic reduction of agrochemical treatments was in the making. They nonetheless expressed doubts upon the quality and underlying science of biodynamic wine-crafting. Some of these informants related the taste of wine to standards of typicity and described biodynamics as an excuse certain vigneron would use to justify defects in taste caused by volatile

56 Interview, Vaud, September 6, 2017.

57 Ibid.

58 Steven J. Sutcliffe, *Children of the New Age: A History of Spiritual Practices* (London: Routledge, 2003).

acids and the like. These postures and accusations were known to vignerons claiming to follow biodynamic guidelines. This motivated them to find a balanced position between those they judged as being too materialistic and narrow minded, on the one hand, and those they perceived as having an excess of spirituality or as adhering to forms of anthroposophy depicted as too intellectual and mystical, on the other. Most biodynamic vignerons described themselves as “down-to-earth” and pragmatic. I noticed that my informants were constantly positioning themselves in the biodynamic milieu, as well as in the broader wine-crafting milieu, in Switzerland and in Europe. In a sense, claiming to be *more* or *less* ‘spiritual’ than other vignerons and anthroposophists is an important means of assessing one’s position in the religious and wine-crafting landscapes alike.

6.2 *Relating to ‘Nature Principles’ through Plants*

Informants often described their motives to reconvert to biodynamic agriculture as being the “next step” after the secular and technical strand of ‘integrated production’ and organic farming. They framed reconversion as a transformational event in which they expressed their own concerns over finding and cultivating a balance between ‘domesticated’ and ‘savage’ biodiversity, or between what the plants could produce and what is needed for economic subsistence. What caught my attention during the coding procedure is that vignerons usually described how biodynamic guidelines made them aware of their soils, which they saw as a revolutionary insight in regard to agronomical conventions. For instance, vignerons had common stocks of knowledge and often described the ecosystemic interactions between mushrooms, bacteria, root systems, geological layers, grape varieties, biodiversity, and the global climate as constituting “ambiances,” “frames,” and “complexities” that could be tasted in their wines. By doing so, they relied on popular knowledge of environmental sciences such as pedology, botany, or entomology. This complexity and the acknowledgment of ecosystemic interactions were usually summed up by mentioning a nature principle such as ‘Mother Earth,’ ‘Gaia,’ or ‘life forces.’ One frequent idea put forth by biodynamic vignerons was that the complexity of wine was the expression of a more complex and harmonious set of interactions between humans and non-humans, as they professionally arranged it in their own vineyards.

Another notion that surfaced regularly during interviews was that of ‘nature’s intelligence.’ My informants used this idea to explain their observation that when they stopped employing agrochemical herbicides, specific seeds and plants began to spawn year after year. They attributed this to principles governing the restoration of soil. In that regard, plants such as dande-

lions and clovers were considered as bioindicating plants that gave meaningful information about soil composition, pH, humidity, and mineral and microbiological vitality. This perception of plants was associated with broader ideas of planetary agency akin to the popular readings of Lovelock's Gaia theory.⁵⁹ Some informants stated that "nature had a plan," illustrated by its covering of soils with forests to protect the planet. However, in many cases, it was unclear whether the evocation of 'Mother Earth' was used metaphorically or literally in relation to the agency of a type of nature principle. I met a few vigneron who intervened as little as possible in their vineyards. One because he was overwhelmed by the work, and the other because he felt each time he mowed the grass between the vines, he committed what he called "biocide."

I noticed my informants were increasingly concerned with so-called anthropocentrism, insofar as they were trying to distance themselves from human-centered modes of valuation. This viewpoint was in tension with certain moral concerns and pragmatic needs. For instance, one of the pioneers of biodynamics in the canton of Neuchâtel explained to me:

Biodynamics involves considering plants as beings that need to sort things out by themselves in a cultivated environment. And we are more or less responsible for it. It also means respecting them as partners and not as tools. It involves creating an environment that favors their defenses ... And then, it is by aligning them in any way possible with the cosmos that we try to stimulate their health, rather than fighting against diseases.⁶⁰

Later in the conversation, he nonetheless spoke of more pragmatic issues regarding his relationship with vines. He explained: "I like staring at my plants, walking beside my vines. But yeah, when we are tired and we need to get the job done, we don't take time to chat with every plant." This illustrates, in part, the multiple entanglements between holistic spiritual references to interconnectedness, relationality, and valuing every living being, and the everyday necessities related to grape harvesting, as well as the economic exigencies of a competitive globalized economic wine industry.

I distinguished two distinct ontological positions regarding vines: (1) an animistic position; and (2) a secular, yet still 'spiritualized' pragmatic position. For instance, vigneron in the animistic camp usually spoke of a relational care-

59 James Lovelock, *Gaia: A New Look at Life on Earth*, 3rd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

60 Interview, Neuchâtel, January 9, 2018.

taking history between plants and humans. One of my informants working in the region of Lavaux (Vaud) described to me how he tried organizing his vineyards as an Amazonian canopy. He was influenced by the writings of Jeremy Narby, a promoter of the ritual drug-taking of Ayahuasca, and his famous best-seller, *Cosmic Serpent*. He envisioned vines as a “sacred plant” that civilized Mediterranean populations. Amusingly, he stated that he was passively “brought to do biodynamics” after his vines inspired him to engage in specific caretaking practices. According to him, “Humans believe themselves dominant, but in fact it is the plants that have you weed them and feed them.” He therefore believed he was working “in service of his vines.” This ontological posture was thus a mean to self-present as being ‘passive,’ but also to stage an attitude of humility toward non-humans.

In the other camp, biodynamic vignerons spoke of secular and pragmatic motives blended with the spiritual references I previously mentioned when describing plants as part of an ecosystem that had to be stewarded and organized by humans in accordance with presumably anthropocentric needs. For this camp, biodynamics was a distinctive and quality-oriented agronomy. These ‘secularizing’ and ‘established’ vignerons were nonetheless still in contact with vignerons who had animistic views of plants. Indeed, they even collaborated with each other at times. For instance, in an emblematic case in the canton of Neuchâtel, one vigneron who claimed to have a spiritual bond with plants was in charge of elaborating herbal teas and biodynamic preparations, while three other colleagues took care of the logistic concerns related to sprinkling these products on the vines.

7 Conclusion: ‘Spirituality’ as a Contextual and Relational Resource

This article revolves around the social modalities through which the Swiss vineyards have become a locus of spiritualization. I have detailed these modalities by describing the social discourses, identities, and interactions characteristic of Swiss vignerons who adhere to biodynamic guidelines. I have used biodynamics as an umbrella term for the adaptation of self-healing alternatives and holistic practices to grape harvesting. I have highlighted how these adaptations draw upon relational and existential insights into what I have coined as ‘lived ecologies’ that are also ‘lived religions.’ To study these lived approaches, I have suggested considering in-depth empirical research, as well as a grounded coding procedure. These methods were key for both providing access and drawing attention to regional contextual factors, as well as to the biodynamic professional milieu and its normative stakes.

I have also emphasized how Swiss vigneronns use holistic and spiritual language to describe and position themselves in a professional milieu. Interestingly, this spiritual language describes and refers to modes of relation in regard to others—be they humans and non-humans. My informants spoke about how they faced potential social stigmas for engaging in biodynamics, as it is often linked by detractors to cults, superstition, or parascience. I have nonetheless shown that vigneronns also maintain a pragmatic approach, contrasting the cosmological insights initially provided by anthroposophy, when negotiating interrelations with fellow winemakers and employees. In describing these social stigmas, informants expressed how they reflexively mapped and marked boundaries between what counted as ‘religious,’ ‘spiritual,’ and ‘secular,’ as well as what was ‘sustainable’ and what was not. As I have elaborated, when it comes to spirituality considered as an “emerging cultural category” and its relational features,⁶¹ my informants hold complex views of their own alternative practices and how they position themselves as *more* or *less* ‘spiritual’ than other vigneronns.

Studying the lived experiences of biodynamic wine-crafters through the polysemic and contextual uses of ‘spirituality’ does not permit us to define this category as an analytical one. Indeed, what gets to be socially qualified as spiritual is expressed variously in regard to contextual, political, and linguistic settings. Indeed, this article has illustrated how the adaptation and insertion of spiritual references in the workplace is best conceived as an ongoing process of spiritualization, as holistic and alternative approaches to harvesting provide important pragmatic and symbolic resources for the daily conduct of vigneronns’ professional activities. Based on my field observations, I propose to focus on the performative aspects of this ‘cultural category’ in shaping, delineating, and negotiating new forms of interaction among a social milieu, as well as elaborating new postures upon the non-humans such as vine plants and local biotopes.

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