

RITUAL
THEORY

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trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1970), and *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, trans. A. M. Sheridan (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*, rev. ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); and Fabian.

14. For a discussion of critical theorizing, see Raymond Geuss, *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981); and Michael T. Taussig, *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1980).

15. To mention some of the more obvious titles in this vein, see Edmund Leach, *Rethinking Anthropology* (London: Athlone Press, 1961); Dell Hymes, ed., *Reinventing Anthropology* (New York: Random House, 1969); Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Miriam Levering, ed., *Rethinking Scripture* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989); and E. Thomas Lawson and Robert N. McCauley, *Rethinking Religion: Connecting Cognition and Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

16. The stage of application does not necessarily imply a holistic structure of understanding of the type that has been criticized as a matter of "totalizing" explanations reaching for "absolutism." See Fredric Jameson's discussion of totalization in theory and "master narratives" in *The Political Unconscious* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), pp. 27, 50ff; and in his introduction to Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, pp. ix-xi. These three features of a critical theory are based in part on Geuss, pp. 1-3, and Stegmüller, pp. 14-16.

17. Goody, "Against 'Ritual'," pp. 27, 29, 34-35.

18. Goody, "Against 'Ritual,'" p. 32.

19. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious*, p. 9.

I

THE PRACTICE OF RITUAL THEORY

Theories about ritual come fully embedded in larger discourses. Whether ritual is depicted as a universal phenomenon or merely an applied theoretical construct, the concept of ritual both exemplifies and supports the discourse within which it is elaborated.¹ In the past, scholars concerned with maintaining the objectivity of definitions of ritual—in the face of what they recognized to be powerful interpretive biases—have tended to warn us that the notion of ritual is a mere tool for analysis. As a tool, it must be kept from slipping out of the analyst's hand and into the objective data he or she is trying to interpret. Yet it has become increasingly obvious that a tighter hold on the term does not seem to prevent such "slippage" or maintain the clarity of the boundary between theory and data.² To understand this interpretive slippage as well as the variety of positions taken with regard to ritual, it is necessary to inquire into the larger discourses of which ritual is a part.

In the last quarter of a century scholars have discovered that theoretical categories are more than mere tools that can be wielded with control or carelessness. Thomas Kuhn's reappraisal of paradigms in scientific inquiry, for example, began to disclose how analytical categories serve more embracing models of the universe and of knowing.³ More recently, Michel Foucault's historical archeology of discontinuous discourses suggests that analytical tools do not simply slip from a state of objectivity to which they can be returned, but that the nature of objectivity itself rests on historical paradigms and strategies of human inquiry effective within a specific

milieu. Subsequent attempts to relegate knowledge have made even more apparent the dynamics involved in the production of particular bodies of knowledge based on particular relationships between subject and object.⁴ Thus, it is no longer so easy to argue that we can establish adequate categories merely by defining them as objective analytical tools. They will not stay neutral. Rather, they will conform to whatever subtle purposes the larger analysis serves. We have learned that such categories are merely the most visible of those pieces put into play within discourses whose boundaries, objectives, and rules retreat from our conscious grasp. To challenge the adequacy of our categories today, scholars must attempt to track the dynamics of the discourse in which they operate and the discursive logic by which they function.⁵

The notion of ritual first emerged as a formal term of analysis in the nineteenth century to identify what was believed to be a universal category of human experience. The term expressed, therefore, the beginnings of a major shift in the way European culture compared itself to other cultures and religions. Since then many other definitions of ritual have been developed linked to a wide variety of scholarly endeavors. Many myth-and-ritual theorists, for example, looked to ritual in order to describe 'religion'. Later social functionalists, in contrast, explored ritual actions and values in order to analyze 'society' and the nature of social phenomena. More recently symbolic anthropologists have found ritual to be fundamental to the dynamics of 'culture'. From W. Robertson Smith to Clifford Geertz, the notion of ritual has been meaningful precisely because it functioned as much more than a simple analytical tool. Rather, it has been integral to the mutual construction of both an object for and method of analysis.

In debates about the relationship of myths (or beliefs) and rites, ritual was used to elucidate the social existence and influence of religious ideas. The theories of Max Müller, Edward Tylor, Herbert Spencer, James Frazer, Rudolf Otto, William James, and E. O. James, among others, all stressed the primacy of religious ideas, born of pseudoscientific explanations or emotional experiences, as the basis of religion. Ritual, as exemplary religious behavior, was the necessary but secondary expression of these mental orientations.⁶ This understanding of ritual accompanied a primary focus

on religion, as having to do with the sacred, which is still seen in the work of phenomenologists of religion today.⁷

Fustel de Coulanges and Robertson Smith explored other nuances of ritual as a category of human experience, coming to see it as more basic than beliefs and integral to the social dimensions of religion.⁸ This perspective received its fullest formulation in Emile Durkheim's *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, where religion is analyzed as both beliefs and rites: rites could be defined only with regard to their object, whereas in beliefs "the special nature of this object" was expressed.⁹ Although Durkheim gave an analytic primacy to beliefs, ritual, in the guise of "cultus," played a dynamic and necessary role in social integration and consolidation. Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss, who demonstrated how ritual activities effectively sacralize things, people, or events, inverted earlier perspectives by tracing how religious phenomena and ideas derived from social activities.¹⁰ In the process, ritual was reinforced as both a central sociological concept and a universal category of social life.

In the development of the legacy of Mauss and the other *Annales* theoreticians, ritual's effect on social cohesion and equilibrium came to be interpreted in terms of other, seemingly more basic functions such as symbolization and social communication. This perspective coincides with the emergence of culture as a category of analysis. The analysis of culture, as opposed to society and religion per se, gave a particularly critical place to ritual. The prominence of ritual in the work of cultural anthropologists such as Victor Turner, Clifford Geertz, Edmund Leach, and Marshall Sahlins fueled the emergence of a focus on ritual itself in the cross-disciplinary endeavor of ritual studies.

The prominence of ritual in cultural theories has also occasioned some speculation. George Marcus and Michael Fisher note that description and analysis of ritual have been a popular device for organizing ethnographic texts. This is due, they reason, to ritual's public nature, whereby rituals are "analogous to culturally produced texts" that can be systematically read to endow "meaning upon experience."¹¹ This understanding appears to have promoted the study of ritual in a variety of areas in recent years, particularly in historical studies, communication the-

ory, theater studies, and social psychology—disciplines whose practitioners see them, or are beginning to see them, as primarily ‘interpretive’ endeavors. A recent consensus has emerged that ritual, aside from its role in illuminating religion, society, or culture, should be studied in itself and for itself.¹² The development of ritual studies as an independent and interdisciplinary area of scholarly research evinces, perhaps, the final result of the complex coexistence of ritual as an analytical tool and as a universal human experience—its universality is taken to ensure its usefulness and primacy as analytical concept.¹³

Although these theories have formulated the interrelationships of religion, society, and culture in a variety of ways, in each case ritual is seen as a definitive component of the various processes that are deemed to constitute religion, or society, or culture. Moreover, despite the variety of avowed methodological perspectives and ramifications, there is a surprising degree of consistency in the descriptions of ritual: ritual is a type of critical juncture wherein some pair of opposing social or cultural forces comes together. Examples include the ritual integration of belief and behavior, tradition and change, order and chaos, the individual and the group, subjectivity and objectivity, nature and culture, the real and the imaginative ideal. Whether it is defined in terms of features of ‘enthusiasm’ (fostering groupism) or ‘formalism’ (fostering the repetition of the traditional), ritual is consistently depicted as a mechanistically discrete and paradigmatic means of sociocultural integration, appropriation, or transformation. Given the variety of theoretical objectives and methods, such consistency is surprising and interesting.

The following chapters analyze this consistency in the theoretical depiction of ritual. I will show theoretical discourse on ritual to be highly structured by the differentiation and subsequent reintegration of two particular categories of human experience: thought and action. An exploration of the internal logic of this differentiation and reintegration of thought and action in ritual theory suggests that the recent role of ritual as a category in the study of culture has been inextricably linked to the construction of a specifically ‘cultural’ methodology, a theoretical approach that defines and addresses ‘cultural’ data. That is, the problems we face in analyzing ritual, as well as the impetus for engaging these particular problems,

have less to do with interpreting the raw data and more to do with the manner in which we theoretically constitute ritual as the object of a cultural method of interpretation. The implicit structure of ritual theory, while effective in identifying a distinctive phenomenon for cultural analysis, has imposed a powerful limit on our theoretical flexibility, our divisions of human experience, and our ability to perceive the logical relations inscribed within these divisions.

1

Constructing Ritual

Theoretical descriptions of ritual generally regard it as action and thus automatically distinguish it from the conceptual aspects of religion, such as beliefs, symbols, and myths. In some cases added qualifications may soften the distinction, but rarely do such descriptions question this immediate differentiation or the usefulness of distinguishing what is thought from what is done. Likewise, beliefs, creeds, symbols, and myths emerge as forms of mental content or conceptual blueprints: they direct, inspire, or promote activity, but they themselves are not activities.¹⁴ Ritual, like action, will act out, express, or perform these conceptual orientations. Sometimes the push for typological clarity will drive such differentiations to the extreme. Ritual is then described as particularly *thoughtless* action—routinized, habitual, obsessive, or mimetic—and therefore the purely formal, secondary, and mere physical expression of logically prior ideas. Just as the differentiation of ritual and belief in terms of thought and action is usually taken for granted, so too is the priority this differentiation accords to thought. For example, Edward Shils argues that ritual and belief are intertwined and yet separable, since it is conceivable that one might accept beliefs but not the ritual activities associated with them. He concludes that logically, therefore, “beliefs could exist without rituals; rituals, however, could not exist without beliefs.”¹⁵ Claude Lévi-Strauss takes this logic much further when an initial distinction between ritual and myth eventuates in a distinction between living and thinking.¹⁶

Aside from this basic structural pattern in which ritual is differ-

entiated from mental categories as readily as action is differentiated from thought, there is a second structural pattern in theoretical discussions of ritual. This second pattern describes ritual as a type of functional or structural mechanism to reintegrate the thought-action dichotomy, which may appear in the guise of a distinction between belief and behavior or any number of other homologous pairs. Both of these structural patterns—the differentiation of ritual as action from thought and the portrayal of ritual as a mechanism for integrating thought and action—can be demonstrated in several representative approaches to ritual.

Durkheim argued that religion is composed of beliefs and rites: beliefs consist of representations of the sacred; rites are determined modes of action that can be characterized only in terms of the representations of the sacred that are their object. "Between these two classes of facts," he wrote, "there is all the difference which separates thought from action."¹⁷ Yet despite the secondary nature of ritual given in these initial definitions, Durkheim's important discussion of cult at the end of *The Elementary Forms* reintroduces ritual as the means by which collective beliefs and ideals are simultaneously generated, experienced, and affirmed as real by the community. Hence, ritual is the means by which individual perception and behavior are socially appropriated or conditioned.¹⁸ In Durkheim's model the ritual activity of cult constitutes the necessary interaction between the collective representations of social life (as a type of mental or metaphorical category) and individual experience and behavior (as a category of activity).¹⁹

These two patterns turn up also in another, loosely structural, model employed with great sophistication by Stanley Tambiah but more simplistically by many others. There ritual is provisionally distinguished as the synchronic, continuous, traditional, or ontological in opposition to the diachronic, changing, historical, or social. However, ritual is also subsequently portrayed as the arena in which such pairs of forces interact. It is the mediating process by which the synchronic comes to be reexpressed in terms of the diachronic and vice versa.²⁰

A third model, presented most fully in the early work of V. Turner, also portrays these two patterns. Turner initially described ritual as the affirmation of communal unity in contrast to the frictions, constraints, and competitiveness of social life and organiza-

tion.²¹ Rite affords a creative 'antistructure' that is distinguished from the rigid maintenance of social orders, hierarchies, and traditional forms. However, when subsequently portrayed as embodying aspects of both structure and antistructure, he describes rituals as those special, paradigmatic activities that mediate or orchestrate the necessary and opposing demands of both *communitas* and the formalized social order.

Each of these examples employs the two structural patterns described previously: ritual is first differentiated as a discrete object of analysis by means of various dichotomies that are loosely analogous to thought and action; then ritual is subsequently elaborated as the very means by which these dichotomous categories, neither of which could exist without the other, are reintegrated. These two structural patterns are rarely explicit and the first, in particular, in which ritual is differentiated from conceptual categories, is routinely taken for granted. However, the relationship that develops *between* these two patterns when they are simultaneously operative in a theoretical description of ritual is even less acknowledged and much more powerful. In effect, the dichotomy that isolates ritual on the one hand and the dichotomy that is mediated by ritual on the other become loosely homologized with each other. Essentially, as I will demonstrate, the underlying dichotomy between thought and action continues to push for a loose systemization of several levels of homologized dichotomies, including the relations between the ritual observer and the ritual actor. It is this invisible process of 'homologization', driven by the implicit presence of an opposition between conceptual and behavioral categories, that begins to construct a persuasive and apparently logical body of discourse.

Dichotomies and Dialectics

Jameson analyzes a type of logical structure within linguistic theory that is similar to the two patterns sketched out earlier for ritual theory.²² The structured argument that he isolates provides a useful contrast to the one I am recovering here. Jameson points to a logical structure in which an initial differentiation, originally proposed to enable the theorist to concentrate on just one of the differentiated terms, surfaces again and again within subsequent analysis of that

term. Specifically addressing Ferdinand Saussure's system of linguistics, Jameson shows that an initial distinction between structure and history (synchrony and diachrony) enables Saussure to focus upon and systematically elucidate one aspect of language, the synchronic or structural aspect. However, Saussure never resolved or transcended the dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony but reproduced it even in the final terms of his system.²³ How did such a replication occur?

In reaction against historicism in linguistics, Jameson explains, Saussure attempted to talk about the nonhistorical aspects of language. On a primary level, he distinguished between diachrony and synchrony, thereby providing himself a clear focus on the synchronic side of linguistics as opposed to the other side, where, he argued, everyone else was working. On a second level, and therefore within the synchronic system itself, Saussure also distinguished between *langue* and *parole* in order to further differentiate synchronic language from speech. He therein had his first internal replication of the original opposition. On yet a third level, Saussure took *langue* as a system and within it distinguished two ways in which signs are related, the syntagmatic and the associative (or paradigmatic), replicating his original dichotomy for a second time within the system as a whole.²⁴ The original differentiation between diachrony and synchrony was applied, through various pairs of categories, to three levels of analysis. In other words, the continual application of the dichotomy between synchrony and diachrony systematically generated successive and homologous levels of analysis.

At this point, Jameson suggests that it becomes quite "problematical to what degree the object of study is the thought pattern of the linguist himself, rather than that of the language." Moreover, this is also the point at which the originality of Saussure's initial distinction becomes a constraint on the whole system he has generated from it. Saussure's "initial repudiation of history," remarks Jameson, "which at the very outset resulted in an inability to absorb change into the system as anything but a meaningless and contingent datum, is now reproduced, at the very heart of the system itself, as an inability to deal with syntax as such."²⁵

Theoretical discourse on ritual displays a similar logical structure: a distinction between belief and rite, made as readily as the heuristic distinction between thought and action, clears the way to focus on

ritual alone. This is the first structural pattern noted previously. Ritual, however, becomes in turn a new starting point at which to differentiate once again between conceptual and behavioral components. This is the second structural pattern described earlier. However, ritual theory goes on to do something that Saussure, in the rigor of his focus and logic, according to Jameson, failed to do, namely, provide a stage of synthetic integration. Differentiated from belief in the first structural pattern, ritual becomes a second point at which to distinguish thought and action. Yet at this second stage ritual is seen as synthetic, as the very mechanism or medium through which thought and action are integrated. The elaboration of ritual as a mechanism for the fusion of opposing categories simultaneously serves both to differentiate and unite a set of terms. That is, the second structural pattern in ritual theory, in which ritual mediates thought and action, posits a dialectical relation between the differentiated entities instead of replicating an unmediated dichotomy. Ritual emerges as the means for a provisional synthesis of some form of the original opposition.

Saussure generated his linguistic system by positing an initial distinction, the successive and systematic replication of which rendered the distinction an ahistorical, nondialectical, or pure opposition.²⁶ Most ritual theory avoids this by incorporating the notion of dialectic or synthesis: ritual is a dialectical means for the provisional convergence of those opposed forces whose interaction is seen to constitute culture in some form.

The three representative theories of ritual briefly described clearly present ritual as just such a medium of integration or synthesis for opposing sociocultural forces. These are not isolated examples. There is a strong impetus within theoretical studies of religion and culture for this type of dialectic. This impetus can be seen, for example, in contemporary evaluations of Durkheim's theory of ritual. Some argue that his notion of ritual contains a dialectical mediation of the social and the individual; others argue that its fundamental weakness is precisely that his notion of ritual lacks such a dialectic. E. E. Evans-Pritchard has pinpointed Durkheim's theory of ritual as the central but "most obscure" and "unconvincing" part of his notion of society and religion.²⁷ Nancy Munn, on the other hand, has found it to be of "signal importance" for ritual studies today.²⁸ She argues that Durkheim developed a model

of "social (ritual) symbolism as the switch point between the external moral constraints and groupings of the socio-political order, and the internal feelings and imaginative concepts of the individual actor."²⁹ Although it is precisely the nature of this switch point that Evans-Pritchard finds obscure, Munn is clearly attempting to find rooted in Durkheim a dialectical relationship between two irreducible entities, the individual's subjective state and the communal order, a dialectic mediated therefore by the collective representations generated and appropriated in the cult.

Sahlins has also looked for a synthetic reintegration of thought and action, self and society within Durkheim's theory and not found it. He argues that Durkheim's collective representations fail to mediate at all. Rather, as idealized representations of social values and structures, they merely act upon subjective states to mold them. For Sahlins, Durkheim's collective representations are unable to mediate or rearticulate individual experience within social categories; all they can do is simply appropriate and organize it into a "metalanguage."³⁰ In a somewhat similar argument, Lévi-Strauss suggested that Durkheim lacked an "adequate" notion of a symbol and symbolic action.³¹ That is, in contrast to how symbols function, Durkheim's collective representations are mere signs, idealizations of the forms of social morphology that have become independent of these forms, and thus act solely to subordinate and structure individual perception and experience.³²

Ultimately, Sahlins and Lévi-Strauss find Durkheim's theory of cult and ritual action less than complete for two reasons: first, it does not generate a level of cultural analysis as such; and second, it does not overcome the fundamental duality that resurfaced for Durkheim even in his portrayal of human nature itself. "This is the objective foundation of the idea of the soul: Those representations whose flow constitutes our interior life are of two different species which are irreducible one into another. Some concern themselves with the external and material world; others, with an ideal world to which we attribute a moral superiority over the first." For Durkheim, therefore, "we are really made up of two beings facing in different and almost contrary directions, one of whom exercises a real pre-eminence over the other. Such is the profound meaning of the antithesis which all men have more or less clearly conceived

between the body and the soul, the material and the spiritual beings who coexist within us."³³

Whether Durkheim provides a complete notion of ritual or not, we can see in his work and in the arguments of those reading him a tendency to isolate two types of sociocultural processes or entities and then to seek in ritual theory a model of their necessary reintegration. Indeed, given any initial avowal or assumption of such differentiated processes, a theoretician would have to come up with some phenomenon structured to mediate them if it did not already exist. Hence, I am suggesting that descriptions of how rituals work have been constructed according to a logic rooted in the dynamics of theoretical speculation and the unconscious manipulation of the thought-action dichotomy is intrinsic to this construction.

Saussure could not see how his initial distinctions radically limited the descriptive power of his system. Likewise, we do not see how such dichotomies as continuity and change, individual experience and social forms, and beliefs and behavior invoke an assumption about thought and action that runs particularly deep in the intellectual traditions of Western culture. We do not see that we are wielding a particularly powerful analytical tool, nor do we see how our unconscious manipulation of it is driven not only by the need to resolve the dichotomy it establishes, but also simultaneously to affirm *and* resolve the more fundamental opposition it poses—the opposition between the theoretician and the object of theoretical discourse. In other words, we do not see how such dichotomies contribute to the relational definition of a knower, a known, and a particular type of knowledge.

Geertz and the Window of Ritual

To clarify the relationship between dichotomies and dialectics within the structure of ritual theory, a fuller example is needed to demonstrate how a coherent discourse on ritual is generated. The work of Geertz provides an excellent extended illustration for this purpose. Geertz has been a major influence in the study of religion and ritual, as well as a navigator for many through the shoals and reefs of various methodological issues. This is due in part to the

symmetry of his terminology, its appeal to common sense, and his richly anecdotal ethnographies in which texture and nuance appear to defy ethnographic reductionism.

Geertz maintains that the thrust of his theoretical approach is the explanation of "meaning" in cultural phenomena.³⁴ With this focus he wishes to go beyond the functional or mechanistic analyses of human activity that he correlates with the reductionism of subordinating either the social to the cultural or vice versa.³⁵ Basic to this project is a distinction between "ethos" and "worldview." Ethos designates the moral and aesthetic aspects of a culture—a people's "underlying attitude toward themselves and their world."³⁶ Elsewhere Geertz describes ethos in terms of "dispositions," defined not as activity but as the likelihood of activity taking place under certain circumstances. Such dispositions are, in turn, further differentiated into two kinds: moods and motivations.³⁷ Worldview, on the other hand, indicates for Geertz the "cognitive, existential aspects" of a culture, a people's sense of the really real, their most comprehensive idea of a general order of existence.³⁸ Understood in this way, these two terms clearly lend themselves to a polarization in which ethos is to worldview as action is to thought.

At times Geertz explicitly correlates religious ritual with ethos and religious belief with worldview, thus invoking the first structural pattern in which ritual is taken for activity in contrast to belief as thought.³⁹ At other times he presents ethos and worldview as synthesized, fused, or stored in symbols that are arranged in various systems, patterns, or control mechanisms such as ritual, art, religion, language, and myth.⁴⁰ However, these systems do not only store a synthesis of ethos and worldview; they are also seen to effect it. Geertz argues with regard to ritual that "any religious ritual no matter how apparently automatic or conventional . . . involves this symbolic fusion of ethos and worldview."⁴¹ Here the second structural pattern appears in which ritual involves the integration of thought and action categories.

The dialectical nature of this fusion of ethos and worldview is made clear in Geertz's related discussion of symbolic systems, such as religion, which involve both "models for" and "models of" reality. These systems are "culture patterns." That is, they "give meaning . . . [or] objective form, to social and psychological reality both by shaping themselves to it and by shaping it to themselves."⁴² With

regard to ritual per se, Geertz suggests that "it is in some sort of ceremonial form—even if that form be hardly more than the recitation of a myth, the consultation of an oracle, or the decoration of a grave—that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another." He goes on: "In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turns out to be the same world."⁴³

Here the simplest ritual activities are seen to "fuse" a people's conceptions of order and their dispositions (moods and motivations) for action. For Geertz, this opposition of conceptions and dispositions, or the world as imagined and the world as lived, constitutes cultural life per se. Moreover, our perception and analysis of their opposition and resolution constitute a theoretical explanation of 'meaning' in culture. Indeed, failure to grasp the interaction of these two fundamentally differentiated categories—conceptions and dispositions—is tantamount to the reductionism that Geertz specifically decries, the reductionism of the social to the cultural or the cultural to the social.⁴⁴ Thus, the dichotomous nature of conceptions of order (worldview) and dispositions for action (ethos) is fundamental to Geertz's approach, as is their resolution in such symbolic systems as ritual. The temporary resolution of a dichotomy is cast as the central dynamic of cultural life.

So far this analysis of Geertz has simply invoked the two structural patterns discussed earlier. However, Geertz also reveals a third pattern and the further implications of his model of ritual. He goes on to explain that cultural performances such as religious ritual are "not only the point at which the dispositional and conceptual aspects of religious life converge *for the believer*, but also the point at which the interaction between them can be most readily examined *by the detached observer*."⁴⁵

What does he mean by this? Since ritual enacts, performs, or objectifies religious beliefs (action gives expression to thought) and in so doing actually fuses the conceptual and the dispositional aspects of religious symbols (ritual integrates thought and action), Geertz must be concluding that ritual offers a special vantage point for the theorist to observe these processes. Why and how, we might ask, does ritual work to facilitate the theorist's project? The answer

is left implicitly in Geertz's text. To answer explicitly, we need to retrace the homologizations that silently push his argument forward.

Outsiders, states Geertz, will see in ritual only the mere presentation of a particular religious perspective which they may appreciate aesthetically or analyze scientifically.⁴⁶ Neither response, he implies, penetrates to the real meaning and dynamics of such a cultural phenomenon. For participants, on the other hand, rites are "enactments, materializations, realizations" of a particular religious perspective, "not only models of what they believe, but also models for the believing of it."⁴⁷ Thus, the outsider has only conceptual categories with which he or she approaches the ritual activity. Participants, in contrast, actually experience in the rite the integration of their own conceptual framework and dispositional imperatives. In this argument, Geertz is setting up a third structural pattern and a third permutation of the thought-action dichotomy. That is, ritual participants act, whereas those observing them think. In ritual activity, conceptions and dispositions are fused for the participants, which yields meaning. Meaning for the outside theorist comes differently: insofar as he or she can perceive in ritual the true basis of its meaningfulness for the ritual actors—that is, its fusion of conceptual and dispositional categories—then the theorist can go beyond mere thoughts about activity to grasp the meaningfulness of the ritual. By recognizing the ritual mechanism of meaningfulness for participants, the theorist in turn can grasp its meaningfulness as a cultural phenomenon. Ritual activity can then become meaningful to the theorist. Thus, a cultural focus on ritual activity renders the rite a veritable window on the most important processes of cultural life.⁴⁸

Slipping in by virtue of its homologization with the other two structural patterns, the third one organizes the argument in such a way that the theoretical explanation of 'meaning' is itself a fusion of thought and action—the theorist's thought (conceptual categories) and the activity of the ritual participants (which is also a fusion of conceptions and dispositions in its own right). Herein lies the implicit structural homology: the fusion of thought and action described within ritual is homologized to a fusion of the theoretical project and its object, ritual activity. Both generate meaning—the first for the ritual actor and the second for the theorist.

Another example of an argument for a particular relationship between the project of the outside observer and the project of the ritual is laid out by Theodore Jennings.⁴⁹ Jennings describes ritual as, first of all, a display to an observer (god, theorist, etc.) or observers (the community itself) and, second, as an epistemological project. Both of these dimensions of ritual act as a "point of contact" between the rite and the attempt by outside observers to grasp a "theoretical-critical understanding of it."⁵⁰ We need not castigate our pursuit of the meaning of ritual as "voyeurism or whoring," Jennings asserts, since our cognitive concerns are simply an "extension" of those of the ritual we are "invited" to watch.⁵¹

All the delicate assumptions of Jennings's approach find their inevitable contrast in Stephen Greenblatt's account of the epistemological project of the amateur ethnographer Captain John G. Bourke. Bourke "witnessed among the Zuni Indians extreme and simultaneous violations of the codes governing food and waste, and hence experienced extreme disgust." His reaction, Greenblatt speculates, was "not simply an occupational hazard; after all, it is the ethnographer's nausea that gives him his particular discursive field." The parameters of Bourke's lengthy 1891 opus, *Scatologic Rites of All Nations*, were defined, asserts Greenblatt, "precisely by the rising of his gorge." "It would be absurd," he continues, "to conclude that a similar, if better disguised, revulsion lies at the constitutive moment of all ethnography, but one may easily find other and more respectable instances than the work of Captain Bourke, in which aversion serves to transform behavior and material substances into the objects of representation and interpretation."⁵²

Greenblatt suggests that Bourke instinctively depended on his revulsion to define his epistemological project and the 'otherness' it both required and established. Geertz and Jennings, in contrast, would have us depend on the essential congruity or likeness of doing ritual and generating theoretical interpretations of ritual to establish both our difference from and access to the "other."