

RITUAL THEORY, RITUAL PRACTICE

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encapsulation of the cultural principles that organize society.¹¹⁶ Some have seen the body as mediating the simple dialectical interaction of the individual and society; others have explored how the construction of cultural reality focuses on the body, which in turn experiences that construction as natural.¹¹⁷ Still others see the body as the "foremost of all metaphors" for a society's perception and organization of itself.¹¹⁸ Certainly a consensus of sorts has emerged granting the body a critical place in the social construction of reality.¹¹⁹

A second line of thinking about the body emerged in connection with a concern to undermine the framework of 'disembodied' objectivism that has constituted the dominant model used in the humanities and social sciences. After years of guerrilla activity against the dualities of mind-body, individual-society, and message-medium, this concern is now readily articulated in many fields. One hears of the "embodied" mind, the "socially embedded" or "socially constituted" person, not to mention the "media-massaged" message. The works of Richard Rorty in philosophy and of George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in linguistics, or Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari's critique of psychoanalysis and capitalism, are just a few influential examples of this movement.¹²⁰

Lakoff provides a particularly provocative formulation of this perspective, one with relevance for the issue of ritual action. Interspersed with a careful critique of traditional objectivism, Lakoff demonstrates how the concepts and conceptual categories that both comprise and organize knowledge are neither abstract in nature nor independent of the body. Instead, they are directly or indirectly "embodied."¹²¹ Similarly, Johnson has countered the claims of objectivism by exploring "the indispensable forms of imagination" that emerge from "bodily experience" and profoundly affect human reasoning.¹²²

Lakoff's argument, for example, presumes the anthropological analyses noted previously and opposes them in several important ways. He cites evidence illustrating how classification systems are culturally determined and, in particular, how traditional objectivism in Western philosophy itself constitutes just such a "folk classification system." However, Lakoff also finds that the body is not a *tabula rasa* upon which society can inscribe anything it wishes. Without attempting to distinguish between the social and biological

In the last ten years the 'body' has emerged as a major analytic focus in a number of disciplines. The reasons for this perspective may involve the development and interaction of several lines of thought: the rich tradition of anthropological studies of the body; the critique of traditional objectivism and its "mentalistic" or "mind-centered" notions of knowledge; and the impact of feminist and gender studies, which, in some circles, have inspired a new "erotics" of interpretative practice.¹¹¹

Anthropological exploration of the codes and classification systems of body symbolism has vividly illustrated how social categories shape the decoration, perceptions, and dispositions of the body. In contrast to the Darwinian argument that bodily expressions, particularly facial expressions, are genetically determined and therefore both natural and universal, a series of early studies by Durkheim, Mauss, and Robert Hertz demonstrated that bodily expressions are social and learned.¹¹² Although the debate on the biological or social origins of human behavior and classification was just getting under way at that time—and is far from over—this early stage of research identified the body as a social construction in the image of society and a microcosm of the universe.¹¹³

More recently, Douglas explored the social body as "a highly restricted medium of expression" and a key to the relationship of self, society, and cosmos.¹¹⁴ V. Turner pushed the primacy of the body further by arguing that it is the human organism itself, and not society, that is the *fons et origo* of all classification.¹¹⁵ Goffman, in turn, examined the molding of the body into a nearly mnemonic

experiences of the body, he describes a preconceptual structuring of experience, which in turn structures the conceptual categories with which human beings think.¹²³ In contrast therefore to Hertz, Mauss, Durkheim, and Douglas, for whom basic logical categories are social in nature and acquired in practice, Lakoff argues that they are fully rooted in the sociobiological body. The import of this approach, which echoes the thrust of V. Turner's argument, suggests both the primacy of the body over the abstraction 'society' and the irreducibility of the social body.

In a third tradition, feminist scholarship has pioneered the recognition of gender as a fundamental condition of experience and as an analytic category for specifically addressing the body's relation to language and identity, writing and power.¹²⁴ From the early work of Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, who explored the traditional identification of literary creativity with phallogocentric imagery, through the "gynocriticism" of Elaine Showalter, to the more radical work of Hélène Cixous, Julia Kristeva, and *l'écriture féminine*—feminist literary theory has challenged traditional methods to focus on "woman's lived experience" at the center of which is "the Body."¹²⁵

Within the ethos created by these three cross-fertilizing traditions, even relatively mainstream historians are now looking beyond the social construction of institutions to the construction of the 'social bodies' that mandate such institutions.¹²⁶ It appears we are now reappropriating the image of the body: no longer the mere physical instrument of the mind, it now denotes a more complex and irreducible phenomenon, namely, the social person.

Not surprisingly, the emergence of a focus on the social body has entailed a close consideration of ritual. Indeed, any discussion of the social body presupposes some theory of how the human psychophysical entity is socialized and therein empowered as a cultural actor. Often a special appeal is made to ritual to 'model' this whole process of socialization as the transformation of nature into culture. It is in this style that Burridge eloquently described how the ritual structure of millenarian activities "recapitulates the process whereby an animal crossed the threshold to become man, and through which one sort of man becomes a new sort of man."¹²⁷

In a more complicated example, Foucault has correlated the various "rituals" of penal discipline with "economies of power" and

changing constructions of the human person.¹²⁸ For Foucault, the "body" emerged in the late seventeenth century as the arena in which more local social practices were linked to the larger scale organization of power. With examples that range from marking the body with torture to confessional routines and the control of space, Foucault has suggested how "rituals of power" work to forge a specific political "technology" of the body. As *the* medium of the play of power, he argued, the body came to be linked to a new political rationality specifically rooted in the technologies of "biopower."¹²⁹ This historical emergence of the body as a focus, moreover, would constitute a new level of analysis located between biology and the institutional vehicles of force, and giving rise to the human sciences themselves.¹³⁰

In a study of the Tshidi of South Africa, Jean Comaroff contrasts the ritual construction of personhood in precolonial ritual life with the very different form of personhood ritually constructed in post-colonial Zionist churches. Comaroff argues that social practices structure the body, thereby constructing "social beings" via the internalization of basic schemes and values. The socialized body in turn gives rise to dispositions that generate similarly, although not identically, structured and structuring practices. Thus, she argues, the body "mediates" all action: it is the medium for the internalization and reproduction of social values and for the simultaneous constitution of both the self and the world of social relations.¹³¹

Bourdieu's analysis of these dynamics has been, perhaps, the most dramatic. He argues that every social group "entrusts to bodily automatisms" those principles that are most basic to the organization and maintenance of that group. Bourdieu goes further than Douglas, who focused on ritual in terms of how the preservation of the group involves a drive to coordinate all levels of experience and expression by correlating the body with society and the cosmos.¹³² Bourdieu explores the mediation of the body via a "dialectic of objectification and embodiment" that makes it *the locus* for the coordination of all levels of bodily, social, and cosmological experience. This coordination is effected only in and through schemes that pass "from practice to practice" without becoming explicit either in personal consciousness or in social discourse.¹³³

Despite their differences, these studies constitute a general consensus that the distinctive strategies of ritual action play a major

role in the construction of the social body. Unfortunately, however, when discussing the ritual construction of the social body, Foucault, Comaroff, and Bourdieu all slide from a discussion of social practices into a discussion of ritual ones with little if any explication of the implied relation of ritual practices to social practices in general. They appear to mean that ritual practices either 'model' social ones in an extreme way or that ritual practices are particular problem-addressing techniques. Nonetheless, their work provides a useful basis for describing ritualization as strategic social activity and socialization. In the following sections I will rely heavily on their framework and terminology in working out the distinctive objectivity of ritualization as a strategic form of socialization.

The Ritualized Body Environment

The implicit dynamic and 'end' of ritualization—that which it does not see itself doing—can be said to be the production of a 'ritualized body.' A ritualized body is a body invested with a 'sense' of ritual. This sense of ritual exists as an implicit variety of schemes whose deployment works to produce sociocultural situations that the ritualized body can dominate in some way. This is a "practical mastery," to use Bourdieu's term, of strategic schemes for ritualization, and it appears as a social instinct for creating and manipulating contrasts. This 'sense' is not a matter of self-conscious knowledge of any explicit rules of ritual but is an implicit "cultivated disposition."¹³⁴

Ritualization produces this ritualized body through the interaction of the body with a structured and structuring environment. "It is in the dialectical relationship between the body and a space structured according to mythico-ritual oppositions," writes Bourdieu, "that one finds the form par excellence of the structural apprenticeship which leads to the em-bodying of the structures of the world, that is, the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world."¹³⁵ Hence, through a series of physical movements ritual practices spatially and temporally construct an environment organized according to schemes of privileged opposition. The construction of this environment and the activities within it simultaneously work to impress these schemes upon the bodies

of participants. This is a circular process that tends to be misconstrued, if it is perceived at all, as values and experiences impressed upon the person and community from sources of power and order beyond it. Through the orchestration in time of loose but strategically organized oppositions, in which a few oppositions quietly come to dominate others, the social body internalizes the principles of the environment being delineated. Inscribed within the social body, these principles enable the ritualized person to generate in turn strategic schemes that can appropriate or dominate other sociocultural situations.

The importance of the ritual environment has, of course, been elaborated before. Since Arnold Van Gennep correlated spatial or geographical progression with the ritual marking of cultural "passages," many others have developed the idea of "ritual space" in various ways.¹³⁶ Mircea Eliade, for example, found ritual inseparable from the delineation of a sacred place and the "regeneration" of time.¹³⁷ V. Turner specifically discussed the creation of "ritualized space."¹³⁸ Jonathan Z. Smith focused on the ritual dynamics of demarcating a "controlled environment"—to the point of suggesting the role of such places in generating the temporal realities of the ritual calendar itself.¹³⁹ Yet a focus on the acts themselves illuminates a critical circularity to the body's interaction with this environment: generating it, it is molded by it in turn. By virtue of this circularity, space and time are redefined through the physical movements of bodies projecting organizing schemes on the space—time environment on the one hand while reabsorbing these schemes as the nature of reality on the other. In this process such schemes become socially instinctive automatisms of the body and implicit strategies for shifting the power relationships among symbols.

Adapting Bourdieu's discussion of practice, we can speak of the natural logic of ritual, a logic embodied in the physical movements of the body and thereby lodged beyond the grasp of consciousness and articulation.¹⁴⁰ The principles underlying this logic can be made explicit only with great difficulty; they are rarely in themselves the objects of scrutiny or contention. And yet, suggests Bourdieu, nothing less than a whole cosmology is instilled with the words "Stand up straight!"¹⁴¹ Rappaport makes a similar point in describing how the act of kneeling does not so much communicate a message about subordination as it generates a body identified with

subordination.¹⁴² In other words, the molding of the body within a highly structured environment does not simply express inner states. Rather, it primarily acts to restructure bodies in the very doing of the acts themselves. Hence, required kneeling does not merely *communicate* subordination to the kneeler. For all intents and purposes, kneeling produces a subordinated kneeler in and through the act itself. On another level of the strategies of ritualization, such an act may in fact set up a bifurcation between the external show of subordination and an internal act of resistance. These more complex dimensions are explored in Part III. For now, what we see in ritualization is not the mere display of subjective states or corporate values. Rather, we see an act of production—the production of a ritualized agent able to wield physically a scheme of subordination or insubordination.

The situational features of ritualization are not exhausted, however, by this consideration of the centrality of the ritual body within a structured environment. The body is always conditioned by and responsive to a specific context. John Blacking underscores this point when he argues that “it is from a specific historical and ethical context that the individual derives the expressive possibilities of his body.”¹⁴³ Hence, ritualization, as the production of a ritualized agent via the interaction of a body within a structured and structuring environment, always takes place within a larger and very immediate sociocultural situation. Yet just as ritualization is never merely the expression of a subjective state, neither is it merely a spatiotemporal reflection of this larger situation or more encompassing social structures. The relationship between any instance of ritualization and its immediate social and historical situation is, as noted earlier, “not one of reflected content but of a play of forms.”¹⁴⁴ Indeed, ritualization is the strategic manipulation of ‘context’ in the very act of reproducing it. The distinct strategy of ritualization in manipulating its situation will be broken down further in the following chapters. The point to make here is that ritualization cannot be understood apart from the immediate situation, which is being reproduced in a misrecognized and transformed way through the production of ritualized agents.

The opposite view, emphasizing the inherent autonomy of ritual activity and its independence vis-à-vis its context, tends to be adopted by those trying to assess the more complex ritual traditions

such as the Catholic mass or the Vedic fire sacrifice. They see ritual as a matter of the exact performance of actions mandated by the authority of history and the sacred. Rappaport, for example, finds that “liturgical orders,” by which he means codified ritual traditions such as found in the Christian mass or the Jewish sabbath, do *not* reflect the social-political-ecological relations of their immediate context.¹⁴⁵ Yet if we take seriously the idea that even the exact repetition of an age-old ritual precedent is a *strategic* act with which to define the present, then no ritual style is autonomous. We need tools with which to analyze the particular play of forms of a style that purports to be autonomous.

Ritual Oppositions and Hierarchies

The main strategies of ritualization noted thus far—the generation of a privileged opposition between ritualized and other activities and the production of ritualized agents through the generation of a structured environment experienced as molding the bodies acting within it—appear to involve certain basic dynamics. I will focus on three operations: first, the physical construction of schemes of binary oppositions; second, the orchestrated hierarchization of these schemes whereby some schemes come to dominate or nuance others; and third, the generation of a loosely integrated whole in which each element ‘defers’ to another in an endlessly circular chain of reference. In this semantic universe, every sign is an implicit set of contrasts and every contrast invokes another. Yet despite the continued juxtaposition of nearly equivalent oppositions, the contrasts are orchestrated so that some come to appropriate, reinterpret, or qualify others. On the one hand, the semantic system evoked is a closed and endlessly self-deferring circular system; on the other hand, the hierarchical orchestration of the contrasts and deferrals generates the sense of a universal totality, a unified and authoritative coherence informing the whole scheme of things.

Returning briefly to the example of the traditional Catholic eucharistic meal, whole sets of oppositions emerge to dominate other sets. The scheme of a central or ‘centered’ community versus a dispersed population is generated as people congregate together, coming from different directions and situations to assemble at a

specific place and time. When they are gathered, this scheme is overlaid with a higher versus lower opposition in which a raised altar and elevated host, the lifting and lowering voices and eyes, as well as sequences of standing and kneeling, and so on, all generate a contrast between a higher reality (spiritual) and a lower one (mundane). However, this scheme is overlaid in turn by an inner versus outer one when the higher reality is internalized through the food shared by participants. Ultimately, the inner-outer scheme comes to dominate the oppositions of higher-lower and centered-dispersed, generating an experience of a higher spiritual authority as an internalized reality.¹⁴⁶

The importance of oppositions and contrasts in ritual has been apparent since Durkheim's study of ritual's relation to the demarcation of the sacred from the profane. Likewise, a small but critical twist of perspective has suggested that ritual is less concerned to define and proclaim sacrality than it is to assert the contrast between sacred and profane. As J. Z. Smith notes, "Ritual is, above all, an assertion of difference."¹⁴⁷ G. Bateson came to the same conclusion in his early study of the *naven* ceremonies of the Iatmul of New Guinea. He saw these ceremonies as asserting difference, and he coined the term "schismogenesis" to denote the differentiations effected in ritual, where they are also balanced by other processes of integration.¹⁴⁸ Lévi-Strauss also argued for a "unifying" function in ritual that is nevertheless effected through the obsessive ritual process of making countless minute distinctions he termed "parceling."¹⁴⁹

In practice, however, ritual contrasts are rarely as balanced as these theories suggest. Binary oppositions almost always involve asymmetrical relations of dominance and subordination by which they generate hierarchically organized relationships. Hertz, V. Turner, and Bourdieu have all traced the asymmetrical oppositions that create dominance, hierarchy, and integration among a system of associations. Hertz was the first to describe how the deceptively straightforward oppositions of the body, such as right and left, promoted and rationalized the dominance of the right hand and its analogy in countless homologous contrasts. His insights have been extended by the work of Terence Turner in particular, who argues that formulations of binary oppositions are an elementary means

of expressing unity and totality through an implicit hierarchy.¹⁵⁰ Expanding Louis Dumont's work on how the hierarchical caste system of India is rooted in an opposition of purity and pollution, T. Turner concludes that the ritual process of differentiation is simultaneously a process of generating a hierarchical form of unity.¹⁵¹ Bourdieu likewise describes hierarchization as a strategy of "integration in and through division."¹⁵²

Hertz, V. Turner, and Bourdieu have also remarked upon the manner in which one set of oppositions comes to be related to another set: right-left is analogized to inside-outside or good-evil, while male-female is linked to right-left, front-back, and so on. These relationships both generate and presuppose complex chains of associations and taxonomic relations.¹⁵³ Leach and Tambiah explored a similar 'logic' in their appeal to the operations of 'metaphor' and 'metonymy,' which establish relationships between such spheres of reference as one's stomach and one's house or pregnancy and gardening.¹⁵⁴ In addition, Brian K. Smith's discussion of correlation and resemblance in Vedic ritual presents yet another logic by which the transfer of taxonomic schemes defines relationships among every element of the rite and the cosmos.¹⁵⁵

Bourdieu, in particular, delineates a type of "practical logic" in ritual activities that involves three fundamental operations: (1) positing an initial opposition based upon a fundamental dichotomy; (2) applying different symbolic schemes to a single object or practice (e.g., a girl undergoing initiation will engage in a series of activities organized around such schemes as opening-closing or swelling-shrinking); and (3) applying a single symbolic scheme to different logical universes (e.g., as a world in its own right, a native house may be considered to have male and female parts, but in the context of the whole world outside the house, it will be considered female). Through these operations whole systems of ritual symbols and actions can be generated by means of a small number of oppositions (male-female, within-without) or reduced to a few pairs that appear fundamental—and they all prove to be based on the movements and postures of the body.¹⁵⁶ In addition to the many forms that the basic opposition may take, certain forms tend to act as "switchers" to establish relationships between various homologized activities. For example, 'inside-outside' will come between, and

serve to link, 'behind-in front' with 'female fertility-male virility.' Thus, for Bourdieu, the practical logic of ritual is simultaneously logical and biological—or, as Lakoff would argue, "embodied."¹⁵⁷

This ritual logic is a minimalist logic that generates a 'sense' of logical systematicity while simultaneously facilitating subtle shifts in the ability of some symbols to dominate others. Most important, however, it is by means of these operations that ordinary physical movements generate homologies and hierarchies among diverse levels and areas of experience, setting up relations among symbols, values, and social categories. Homologous oppositions (light-dark, good-evil, male-female) can organize taxonomic sets (the set of light, good, and male, or the set of dark, evil, and female) simply by the juxtaposition of activities that use these oppositions. In actual practice only a few elements from a 'set' need be invoked to imply a whole series of relationships and implications. Such homologized spheres are orchestrated (or confused, or collapsed) so as to produce an experience of their basic identity or coherence.¹⁵⁸ This experience of coherence, however, simultaneously facilitates the emergence of some symbolic terms in a dominant relation to others. The sense of the general identity of the whole naturalizes such hegemony. This is the heart of the not-seeing, the oversight, of ritualization.

In sum, ritualization not only involves the setting up of oppositions, but through the privileging built into such an exercise it generates hierarchical schemes to produce a loose sense of totality and systematicity. In this way, ritual dynamics afford an experience of 'order' as well as the 'fit' between this taxonomic order and the real world of experience.

Internal-External Strategies of Ritualization

The organization of oppositions into hierarchical schemes does not imply the ritual resolution of these oppositions. The type of reintegration effected by hierarchization is based on maintaining and multiplying oppositions. Poststructural linguistics provides some help in seeing how this works. Derrida's critique of structuralism, for example, gave a very different interpretation to the dynamics of binary opposition. Instead of a series of atemporal structural oppositions in which meaning is produced either through the mutual

definition of two terms or through their mediation by a third term, Derrida describes a process of *différance*. This is a process of "free play" in which the drawing of distinctions endlessly defers signification, meaning, and reference from the present signifier to a potentially infinite number of signifiers. Not only is 'meaning' never arrived at; it is never present in any sense at all.¹⁵⁹ However, in such a system of endless deferral of reference, meaning may never be given but is always implied.

The open-ended "transcoding" or "rhetoric" of endless *différance* laid out by Derrida is basically at odds with the notion of a fundamental contradiction and the ensuing dialectic that comprise a Marxist style of analysis. Of course a contrast between rhetoric and dialectic dates back to the tensions in ancient Athens between the rhetoric of the Greek Sophists and the dialectic of the Socratic dialogues.¹⁶⁰ More recently, however, such critics of the dialectic as Friedrich Nietzsche and Foucault have attempted to redress its dominance in history and undermine its claims to embody logical reasoning, to reveal meaning, and to ground knowledge. Foucault's critique of the Hegelian dialectic, for example, explicitly challenges how it has served to "organize the play of affirmations and negations, establish the legitimacy of resemblances within representation, and guarantee the objectivity and operation of concepts."¹⁶¹ Ultimately, a Derridean and rhetorical notion of *différance* would lead an analysis of ritualization in a direction quite different from one that relies on a fundamental conflict and a dialectic of resolution.

Derrida has proposed a "grammatology," or science of signification, whereby signification rests upon the play of differences among related elements. It is clear that ritualization also involves a play of differences. The body produces an environment structured according to a series of privileged oppositions, which in turn is seen to mold and produce a ritualized agent. However, the interaction of body and environment involves a deferral of signification that is not completed or resolved even in the emergence of the ritualized agent. On the contrary, the process of signification is deferred beyond the rite itself, as it must be, into the world at large. Through the production of series of oppositions and the orchestration of these series into dominant and latent schemes, ritualization does not resolve a social contradiction. Rather it catches up into itself

all the experienced and conventional conflicts and oppositions of social life, juxtaposing and homologizing them into a loose and provisional systematicity. These contraries receive nuances or signification (as male and female will receive the nuancing of right and left) and they defer signification (as female and male nuance the opposition of lowly and mighty). In practice this rhetorical displacement wraps around beyond anyone's ability to follow it fully as the oppositions gradually produce a hierarchical cooptation—as when male-female, deferring to right-left, is then taken up into strong-weak, outward-inward, body-soul. A 'structure' can be said to exist only by freezing or denying this temporal orchestration. Moreover, this orchestrated deferral of signification never yields a definitive answer, a final meaning, or a single act—there is no point of arrival but a constant invocation of new terms to continue the validation and coherence of the older terms. This process yields the sense of a loosely knit and loosely coherent totality, the full potential of which is never fully grasped and thus never fully subject to challenge or denial. One is never confronted with 'the meaning' to accept or reject; one is always led into a redundant, circular, and rhetorical universe of values and terms whose significance keeps flowing into other values and terms.

Yet ritualization does not embrace the lived tensions and values of social life as just one set of terms among others in its taxonomic elaborations. Rather, as the very drawing of a privileged opposition—which differentiates by opposing and unites by dominating—ritualization subjects these tensions, terms, and social bodies to a change in status, or problematic. People do not take a social problem to ritual for a solution. People generate a ritualized environment that acts to shift the very status and nature of the problem into terms that are endlessly retranslated in strings of deferred schemes. The multiplication and orchestration of such schemes do not produce a resolution; rather, they afford a translation of immediate concerns into the dominant terms of the ritual. The orchestration of schemes implies a resolution without ever defining one.

What we might call the 'external strategy' of ritualization, the very drawing of a privileged distinction between its activities and others, parallels what can be called its 'internal strategy,' the generation of schemes of opposition, hierarchization, and deferral by which the body has impressed upon it the schemes that effect the

distinctive privileging and differentiation of ritualizing acts themselves. This manner of producing a ritualized agent, as I will argue next, can be seen to be the basic and distinctive strategy of so-called ritual behavior.

Ritual Mastery

The specific strategies of ritualization come together in the production of a ritualized social body, a body with the ability to deploy in the wider social context the schemes internalized in the ritualized environment. The ritualized social body, therefore, is one that comes to possess, to various degrees, a cultural 'sense of ritual.' It is necessary to explore the practical workings of this sense of ritual in order to come to any conclusions about the distinctiveness of ritualization as practice.

Bourdieu speaks of "practical mastery" to indicate the systems of classifying schemes that act as instruments for ordering the world that "every successfully socialized agent" possesses.¹⁶² These schemes of practical mastery are acquired through the interaction of the body with a structured environment. They come to be embedded in the very perceptions and dispositions of the body and hence are known only in practice as the way things are done.¹⁶³ I use the term 'ritual mastery' to designate a practical mastery of the schemes of ritualization as an embodied knowing, as the sense of ritual seen in its exercise. Aside from the issue of institutionally recognized ritual experts, which will be considered in the next chapter, ritual mastery can be distinguished from Bourdieu's practical mastery only provisionally, since a cultural sense of ritual cannot be isolated from the other senses of the socialized person. This said, ritual mastery remains a useful term for this analysis in several ways. Most simply, it is a corrective to the habit of thinking about ritual as an existing entity of some sort. Ritual mastery implies that ritual can exist only in the specific cultural schemes and strategies for ritualization (i.e., for the production of 'ritualized' practices) embodied and accepted by persons of specific cultural communities. Ritual mastery also indicates something of the 'work' of ritualization, specifically, the production of a ritualized social agent in whose body lies the schemes by which to shift the organization or significance of many

other culturally possible situations. The term should convey an inherently circular phenomenon: the purpose of ritualization is to ritualize persons, who deploy schemes of ritualization in order to dominate (shift or nuance) other, nonritualized situations to render them more coherent with the values of the ritualizing schemes and capable of molding perceptions. Ritualization and ritual mastery are not only circular; they are also an exercise in the endless deferral of meaning *and* purpose. The effectiveness of exercising ritual mastery as strategic practice lies precisely in this circularity and deferral. The following sections attempt to explore several dimensions of this circularity and deferral.

Seeing and Not Seeing

According to our Althusserian model, ritual practices are produced with an intent to order, rectify, or transform a particular situation. Ritualized agents would see these purposes. They would not see what they actually do in ritually ordering, rectifying, or transforming the situation. Foucault implies a similar principle when he notes that people know what they do and they know why they do what they do, but they do not know what what they are doing does.¹⁶⁴ For Althusser, this constitutes the intrinsic "blindness" of practice. For our purposes, it is a strategic 'misrecognition' of the relationship of one's ends and means.

The 'blindness' or 'misrecognition' discussed here should be differentiated from a longstanding tendency toward mystification in the study of ritual in either of two senses: mystifying the phenomenon of ritual or seeing mystification as essential to what ritual does. Whereas theological perspectives tend toward the former, social scientific perspectives tend toward the latter. Marxists combine both by ascribing to ritual an inherent fuzziness that makes it suitable for ideological mystification.¹⁶⁵ Even Rappaport's ecological rationalism succumbs to mystification in some concluding remarks about the study of ritual: "We are confronted, finally, with a remarkable spectacle. The unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary, and the conventional into the correct, the necessary, and

the natural. This structure is, I would suggest, the foundation upon which the human way of life stands, and it is realized in ritual."¹⁶⁶

One might conclude that many theories of ritual argue for the importance of what ritual does by making it as broadly encompassing, important, and mysterious as possible. Nonetheless, with some consistency, ambiguity has also been systematically identified as an important aspect of ritual.¹⁶⁷ Lewis, for example, argues that ritual may emphasize the ambiguity or incoherence of symbols in order to invite speculation or a perception of "a mystery that seems to come within grasp."¹⁶⁸ Valerio Valeri suggests that ritual is much more ambiguous and poetic than linguistic communication since its "grammar" stresses paradigmatic over syntagmatic relations.¹⁶⁹ David Jordan and Fernandez independently explored the ways in which ritual symbols are inherently ambiguous, thereby affording the diverse and nonfalsifiable interpretations they find necessary to the maintenance of community.¹⁷⁰

These examples suggest that some type of ambiguity or blindness in ritualization is linked to its distinctive efficacy. To pursue this issue more systematically, the Althusserian model would have us pose two questions: first, what does ritualization see and, in seeing it, what does it not see; second, what is the relationship between its seeing and its not-seeing—that is, what is the object-unity of ritualization as practice?

What does ritualization see? It is a way of acting that sees itself as *responding* to a place, event, force, problem, or tradition. It tends to see itself as the natural or appropriate thing to do in the circumstances. Ritualization does not see how it actively creates place, force, event, and tradition, how it redefines or generates the circumstances to which it is responding. It does not see how its own actions reorder and reinterpret the circumstances so as to afford the sense of a fit among the main spheres of experience—body, community, and cosmos.

Ritualization sees its end, the rectification of a problematic. It does not see what it does in the process of realizing this end, its transformation of the problematic itself. And yet what ritualization does is actually quite simple: it temporally structures a space-time environment through a series of physical movements (using schemes described earlier), thereby producing an arena which, by its molding

of the actors, both validates and extends the schemes they are internalizing. Indeed, in seeing itself as responding to an environment, ritualization interprets its own schemes as impressed upon the actors from a more authoritative source, usually from well beyond the immediate human community itself. Hence, through an orchestration in time of loosely and effectively homologized oppositions in which some gradually come to dominate others, the social body reproduces itself in the image of the symbolically schematized environment that has been simultaneously established.

As Burridge describes it, ritualization sees the goal of a new person. It does not see how it produces that person—how it projects an environment that, reembodyed, produces a renewed person freshly armed with schemes of strategic reclassification. The complex and multifarious details of ritual, most of which must be done just so, are seen as appropriate demands or legitimate tradition. They are not seen as arbitrary producers of distinctions. Ritualization sees the qualities of the new person who should emerge; it does not see the schemes of privileged opposition, hierarchization, and circular deferment by which ritualized agents produce ritualized agents empowered or disempowered by strategic schemes of practice. Ritualization sees the evocation of a consensus on values, symbols, and behavior that is the end of ritualization. It does not see the way in which the hegemonic social order is appropriated as a redemptive process and reproduced individually through communal participation in the physical orchestration of a variety of taxonomic schemes.¹⁷¹

Ritual and Language

Interpretation of the seeing and not-seeing of ritualization is closely linked to interpretation of the communicative function of ritual—an issue around which some controversy has accumulated. When viewed as a form of practice, chosen for its strategic qualities, it becomes more readily apparent that rites take place specifically in lieu of explicit logical speculation.¹⁷² Ritual practices never define anything except in terms of the expedient relationships that ritualization itself establishes among things, thereby manipulating the meaning of things by manipulating their relationships.¹⁷³ For Lévi-

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Strauss among others, what is distinctive about ritual is not what it says or symbolizes, but that first and foremost it *does things*: ritual is always a matter of “the performance of gestures and the manipulation of objects.”¹⁷⁴ Hence, ritualization is simultaneously the avoidance of explicit speech and narrative.

Two issues are involved and often collapsed in any consideration of ritual and language: first, the ritual use of language; and second, the comparison of ritual as a language to verbal or textual languages, in the sense that its activities parallel the communicative functions of the latter.

It has been argued that in ritual words themselves are deeds that accomplish things. This position was pioneered by men like Frazer and Malinowski, who understood most ritual as magic because it assumed an identity between the word and the thing. More recently, Tambiah argued that the notion of ritual language as magical in a causal sense can be retired without losing the importance of words to ritual activity. From his perspective, the distinctive communications of ritual language are not some secondary dimension to the work of ritual but are central to what ritual is.¹⁷⁵

Tambiah shares with many other ritual theorists a concern to show how ritual communication is not just an alternative way of expressing something but the expression of things that cannot be expressed in any other way.¹⁷⁶ Yet this shared concern has led theorists to widely dissimilar conclusions: that ritual is less ambiguous (i.e., more precise and effective) than ordinary language; that ritual is more ambiguous than ordinary language; and that the development of sophisticated verbal communication actually obliterates the vestigial need for ritual communication.¹⁷⁷

Some have attempted to show that ritual communicates by ‘modeling’: strictly speaking, it does not send messages but creates situations.¹⁷⁸ For Valeri, these situations supply the opportunity to infer and master the codes underlying the ostensible activity of the rite. It is a matter of programmed learning that involves the perception and reproduction of concepts or principles.¹⁷⁹ For Tambiah, however, the situations modeled in ritual act either like “signals,” which evoke certain responses, or like “signs,” which can explain other activities in the same way that

a blueprint can explain a house or the building of a house.¹⁸⁰ Other formulations have ritual communicate by affording experiences in which underlying cultural premises are verified and cultural dispositions are reinforced.

Not only has there been criticism of the effort to analyze ritual as a *language* per se; there has also been criticism of the attempt to analyze ritual as communicative in any sense at all.¹⁸¹ Bourdieu, who is particularly insistent on this last point, avoids every semblance of literary or verbal analysis. He eschews, for example, all use of the terms metaphor, metonymy, and analogy in describing the operations of ritual practice. Practice qua practice, he insists, remains on the "hither side of discourse," and that is precisely the key to how it does what it does.¹⁸² Even those rites that are just a practical *mimesis* of the natural process to be facilitated are not at all like metaphor or analogy simply because they are not nearly as explicit. Ritual practice as such is always much fuzzier, avoiding the distinctive change in state that occurs when things are brought to the level of explicit discourse.¹⁸³ Relatively recent evidence for the existence of nonpositional schemes and the manner in which they work to generate a social form of consensual meaning may provide more support for Bourdieu's position.¹⁸⁴

Certainly ritualization makes ample use of words in prayers, vows, recitations, speeches, songs, and the like. Sometimes the words are considered by those involved to be *the* most critical elements. Rappaport notes that for thirteenth-century William of Auxerre, it is the words themselves in the ritual of the Christian mass that turn physical matter into the sacrament of the body of Christ.¹⁸⁵ Evidence indicates, however, that this is a historically defined phenomenon: the words of consecration were formally elevated to this critical position in the Roman rite standardized by the Council of Trent in 1570 and, significantly, in conjunction with the formulation of the doctrine of transubstantiation and the enhanced sacramental power of the ordained priest. In the eucharistic meals of the early Church, on the other hand, the words were of little significance. The emphasis within those rites was on the doing of certain actions, specifically those thought to have been done before by Christ himself.¹⁸⁶

Even the briefest contrast of these two historical rites, regarded

by the Roman church as one and the same liturgical tradition, reveals how strategic the use of language can be. Whereas the use of language or a particular mode of speaking does not appear to be intrinsically necessary to ritual as such, the opposite does hold—namely, that ritualization readily affects the way language is used and the significance it is accorded.¹⁸⁷

Propositions and formulations occur in many rituals and they may even be the most critical moment, as in the Roman rite's words of transubstantiation or "I do" when one is sworn to tell the truth in a court of law. Verbal formulations with the same performative force can be found even in cultures reputed to be less "logocentric." Yet these formulations themselves do not open a discourse within the rite about what the ritual is doing. They are, in the full sense intended by Austin, performative in their particular context; they are not explicit narrative discourse.¹⁸⁸

The deconstructive enterprises of Derrida and DeMan have explored nonpropositional meanings and the rhetorical role of metaphorical images in structuring texts. Derrida, as we have seen, points to the endless deferral of meaning both within the text and within the act of interpreting, or transcoding, the text. DeMan, however, calls attention to how deconstruction of the metaphors and tropes structuring the text and thick description of their deferral of signification does not, in the end, begin to grasp the ways in which the text continues to resist reduction to these devices. Said has given this "resistance" a name, calling it "the practical worldliness of the text." He describes this worldliness as a dimension of textuality beyond the free play of grammarology. The practical worldliness of the text is not simply the sociohistorical context of the work or any type of irreducible essence within the work. The practical worldliness of a text is its own practice of the strategies of social action inherent in texts and textualization. Echoing Derrida, Said argues that the text specifically hides how it, in the form of a text, participates in a network of power: "A text is not a text unless it hides from the first corner, from the first glance, the law of its composition and the rules of its game."¹⁸⁹ Again, these laws and rules are not some inaccessible secret within the text but accompany the text as a strategic form of cultural signification and practice.

This example of the resistant text is useful in attempting to ex-

plicate the strategies of ritualization. These strategies will inevitably elude full articulation simply by virtue of the fact that full articulation is not a medium that can grasp them. That is to say, within the medium of formally explicit discourse, there is nothing there to grasp, just a variety of culturally instinctive and flexible schemes with which to avoid and undermine everything but the ritual acts themselves.

Redemptive Hegemony and Misrecognition

The relationship between the seeing and the not-seeing of ritual mastery constitutes the particular object-unity of ritualization as a strategic mode of practice. A more familiar example, drawn from theoretical practice, may act as a useful introduction to the notion of an object-unity to ritual practices. Certainly the principles of practice addressed earlier in this chapter can readily be seen to function in the practice of theory as well as ritual. For example, Chapter 1 began by focusing on the strategy of a privileged opposition between thought and action as well as the misrecognition that enables a discourse to identify object, method, and experts as one interdependent and interlegitimizing whole. In the relationship between what theoretical practice sees itself doing and what it does not see (the object-unity of theoretical discourse), one finds the production of systematic and seemingly independent bodies of knowledge. These bodies of knowledge act simultaneously to secure a particular form of authority, a particular autonomous reality for study, and some degree of free competition for access to mastery of theoretical practice. Theorists see the goal of knowledge and the work of research; they do not see the production of a discourse with its objects, subjects, and methods. Nor, as many have described, do they see how this discourse manipulates its own context of power relations. Through appeals to the objectivity attending independent fields of study, such a discourse wins a dominant position by virtue of contrasting itself with more overtly political or coercive practices.

Ritual mastery, like the culturally defined mastery of theoretical practice, reveals a specific object-unity characteristic of ritualization as a particular mode of practice. Specifically, its relationship of

seeing to not-seeing is the production of agents embodying a sense of ritual constituted by and expressed in particular schemes of ritualization. These schemes act as instruments for knowing and appropriating the world. The deployment of these schemes both structures experience of the world and molds dispositions that are effective in the world so experienced. These structured and structuring experiences of the world appear to guarantee the reality and value of their underlying schemes by means of the sense of fit or coherence between the instincts of the socialized body and the environment in which it acts. And yet ritualization does not simply act, unseeing, to bring the social body, the community, and the largest image of reality into some reassuring configuration of coherent continuity. More fundamentally, it also appropriates this coherence in terms of the interests of persons or groups. The coherence is rendered and experienced as redemptive for those empowered by the schemes of the ritual.

The distinctive strategies of practices of ritualization—their object-unity, *aporia*, blindness and insight, mastery and misrecognition—must lie beyond the reach of a logical theoretical articulation. The frustration of theorists attempting to grasp the principle of this efficacy is evident in Maurice Bloch's exasperated wail: "How does ritual actually do what we say it does?"¹⁹⁰ Bloch pushes this question, pointing out, for example, that despite the dominance and endurance of Durkheim's analysis of ritual there is still no explanation of *how* ritual makes collective representations come to appear as external to the individual.¹⁹¹ He similarly critiques Geertz's description of the poetics of power in the Balinese *negara*, arguing that Geertz never really explains *why* the ritual has the power with which he credits it.¹⁹² Bloch himself contributes two valuable answers, "formalization" in one context and the interrelationship of local and central rites in another context.¹⁹³ His answers point to important strategies of ritualization but not to their distinctive object-unity. Nor does Bloch's rather functional question ("How does ritual do what we say it does?") adequately allow for the nature of practice. We might better ask, How is it that *ritual* activities are seen or judged to be the appropriate thing to do? This second question gets closer to the dynamics of the 'sense of ritual' and the choice of ritualization strategies over other ways of acting in a given situation.

Nonetheless, using the approach to ritual gradually developed in this chapter, Bloch's question can be answered in part. Ritual does what it does through the privileged differentiations and deferred resolutions by which the ritualized body structures an environment, an environment that in turn impresses its highly nuanced structure on the bodies of those involved in the rite. Strategies, signification, and the experience of meaningfulness are found in the endless circularity of the references mobilized, during the course of which some differentiations come to dominate others. Ritual mastery is the ability—not equally shared, desired, or recognized—to (1) take and remake schemes from the shared culture that can strategically nuance, privilege, or transform, (2) deploy them in the formulation of a privileged ritual experience, which in turn (3) impresses them in a new form upon agents able to deploy them in a variety of circumstances beyond the circumference of the rite itself.

In response to the revised question asked above, it can be said that ritualization is perceived to be the most effective type of action to take in two overlapping circumstances: first, when the relationships of power being negotiated are based not on direct claims but on indirect claims of power conferred; and second, when the hegemonic order being experienced must be rendered socially redemptive in order to be personally redemptive. For example, ritualization is the way to construct power relations when the power is claimed to be from God, not from military might or economic superiority; it is also the way for people to experience a vision of a community order that is personally empowering.

To complete this description of ritualization as a cultural sixth 'sense' for the production of schemes that afford the forging of an experience of redemptive hegemony, it is necessary to explore not the actual contexts of ritualization—that would be a matter of specific cultural communities in history—but at least a more accurate if abstract scope for ritualization, namely, the context of historical traditions and spatiotemporal ritual systems. Few practices of ritualization are effective outside such contexts. While indispensable as context for any act of ritualization, such traditions and systems of ritualized practices are secondary in an analytical sense, since they are themselves constituted by the further play of the strategies of ritualization already discussed. Nonetheless, most

ritual activity not only plays off contrasts with nonritualized behavior; it also plays off other forms and instances of ritual activity. Thus, the "ritualized ritual" that Douglas sees as defining tradition is a strategic systemization of ritual schemes to afford a privileged differentiation of whole institutions and bodies of activities.¹⁹⁴