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REINVENTING RITUAL

Ronald L. Grimes

NORTH AMERICA IS RIFE at present with invented rites, some of which one might want to regard as good examples of ritual creativity and some of which one might want to castigate as evidence of widespread cultural neurosis. There is a growing popular literature on these rites, and, implicitly, it calls into question some key scholarly assumptions about ritual. Virginia Hine refers to the phenomenon as "self-generated" ritual and "self-created" ceremony.[1] I refer to it as "ritualizing"[2] or, occasionally, "emerging ritual."[3] Whatever one calls it, there are many manifestations of it. For example, feminist accounts of self-consciously constructed ritual are multiplying rapidly.[4] Though much feminist ritual draws on traditional resources, much of it is the result of spontaneous improvisation and imaginative effort. There is a smaller but growing body of psychological literature on the development of ritual for purposes of family therapy and intergenerational transition-making.[5] Proponents work with families to construct rites that reveal, diagnose, or heal dysfunctional aspects of a family system. Another body of literature is ethnographic, and it includes numerous works that depict ritual in the context of colonialism and other culture-contact situations.[6] This kind of ritual arises as critical and creative response to radically altered social configurations. Ritual emerging under the pressures of intercultural conflict is necessarily self-conscious, because ritual construction often occurs within a few years, in a single lifetime rather than across generations or aeons. The ethnographic literature on ritual

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creativity also includes works by anthropologists themselves who imaginatively reconstruct and re-enact rites they have studied in the field.[7]

With almost no exceptions, scholarly theories of ritual do not take into account this emergent ritualizing. We scholars do not like to think of our theories and definitions as reflections of popular culture. And if we are convinced of the efficacy of ideas, we may even want to believe that our definitions and theories transcend all forms of culture, popular as well as elite. Theories are not supposed to reflect culture, rather they are supposed to account for it, or lay the grounds for its evaluating.

But theories and definitions change, usually in patterns consonant with changed cultural practices. One particularly striking contemporary example is the theory and definition of ritual. Since the mid-1960s the understanding of ritual (which includes not only its definition and theory but also its image and sense) has been undergoing a dramatic shift. One way to account for the shift is to treat it as a consequence of Victor Turner's theories, particularly his widely known and appropriated notions: liminality, communitas, ritual process, and social drama. Before Turner, ritual was static, structural, conservative. After Turner, it is imagined as flowing, processual, subversive. In effect he reinvented ritual.

There is considerable truth in this account, which attributes changed sensibility to changed theory, but the account is half-truth. The other half of the truth is that Turner's theorizing was itself goaded by much that we associate with the popular culture of the late 1960s: experimental theatre, popular psychology, feminism, hippies, festivals, travel, pilgrimages, entertainment, counterculture politics. The reinvention of ritual was already taking place in the culture and era in which Turner wrote.

Whether shifts in theory lead or follow cultural changes is a chicken-egg problem I have no desire to solve, but I do think it important to examine conceptions of ritual that have not caught up with the popular phenomena they should account for. Even Victor Turner's formal definition of ritual lagged behind his sense and theory of it.[8] If he had adhered to his own definition, he would have never noticed most of what he argued was distinctive about ritual.

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Despite Turner's effect on the North American sense of ritual, it is still rather typical of scholarly theories and definitions to maintain that ritual is collective rather than individual and traditional rather than invented. This view is held not just as true but as true by definition: an action will not be recognized as ritualistic unless it meets these two criteria, collectivity and traditionality. There are two corollaries. One is that ritual consciousness is pre-critical. A second is that ritual is meaningful and that meaning consists of the words or ideas to which ritual acts refer.

The view of ritual as traditional (rather than invented), collective (rather than individual), pre-critical (rather than self-conscious and reflective), and meaningful (i.e., referential), is so widespread and unquestioned as to make it virtually sacrosanct, hence the necessity of critique. No single theorist espouses all these criteria in a definition of ritual, but its several features are widely stated or implied.

Is Ritual Necessarily Traditional?

The rhetoric of ritualists (people who engage in ritual practices) has several strategies for denying the inventability of ritual. One, for example, is to claim, "It has always been done this way" or "Our grandparents did it this way" or simply "It is traditional." In effect this kind of statement is used to deflect explanation of ritual. It is a quasi-explanation that makes ritual a kind of, or consequence of, tradition.

Another strategy, which raises the ante considerably, is to claim for a rite the status of a sacrament instituted by some divine figure, often in the beginning or in the time before this time. This is the more radical form of denying the inventability of ritual. Both strategies put ritual considerably beyond the range of mere human creativity and thus beyond the reach of criticism.

The rhetoric of ritologists (people who study ritual) has parallels to that of the practitioners. For some, ritual and tradition are virtual synonyms, or if not that, then partners for life: ritual is the enactment of tradition, or, put more synchronically, the enactment of convention or custom. For instance, Stanley Tambiah defines ritual as

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> a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted of patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterized in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion), and redundancy (repetition).[9]

Although Tambiah does not use the word "tradition," he implies it in several terms: "culturally constructed," "formality," "conventionality," and perhaps even "stereotypy." Often implicit in the assumption that ritual is traditional, customary, or conventional is the denial that it is creative (or, if this is too romantic a notion, then, "invented").

I do not want to argue that ritual cannot be traditional, only that it is also invented and that it can be creative. Certainly, it may not *seem* that we who are not shamans or liturgists invent ritual, any more than it *seems* that we nonpoets invent language. It *seems* that we merely inherit and use both languages and rites. It may even seem this way to shamans and liturgists. But this seeming givenness is an illusion. Like the illusion that believes a clock's hands do not move, this illusion arises from too short a view of the process. A longer view would reveal a process beneath an apparently timeless, motionless structure.

Just as language is always being invented in the process of using it, so ritual is always in the process of being created as ritualists enact it. The history of any rite known to us always reveals it as changing, and these changes are typically congruent with others, which suggests that ritual is a fully historical, fully cultural process. As soon as one admits that ritual is fully historical and cultural, the door is open to admitting that it is constructed and on occasion, constructive. A major problem is that we have very few long-range historical accounts of rites, which gives the illusion of stasis and thus of eternality.[10]

However much one might be justified in debating whether the self-generated rites reported in feminist, psychological, and ethnographic literature are authentic, good, or successful, there is less room for debate about whether they are ritual. We must be wary of allowing descriptive definitions to function normatively. To say that an invented rite is ineffective is one thing; to say that it is not ritual at all is another.

In most cultures ritualizing is socially anomalous. It happens in the margins, on the thresholds; so it is stigmatized by liturgi-

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cal classicists and eulogized by ritual romantics. In either case it makes havoc of theories and definitions of ritual if we have built into them the notions of tradition, repetition, and collective participation.

If we admit the possibility that ritual can be invented, then ritualizing requires a revised understanding of tradition if we are to retain it as a feature of ritual. Tradition must be understood not merely as cultural inertia but also as a mode of active construction. The work that has most thoroughly examined the relation between tradition and ritual invention is the collection of essays, *The Invention of Tradition*.[11] In it Eric Hobsbawm says, "Inventing traditions . . . is essentially a process of formalization and ritualization characterized by reference to the past, if only by imposing repetition."[12] For Hobsbawm, invented tradition is any set of practices governed overtly or covertly by a set of rules and worked out symbolically or ritually in order to inculcate values and behavior by establishing continuity with the past.[13]

Hobsbawm's understanding of both ritual and tradition is conditioned by the kinds of ritual he and his associates choose as examples. All the instances are of civil or royal ceremony. Hobsbawm and company study the invention of Bastille Day in 1880, ceremonies of the Daughters of the American Revolution, May Day, the Olympic Games, royal weddings,[14] and other devices of decadent colonialism and emergent nationalism.

Hobsbawm distinguishes tradition from custom. Custom is loosely held and comparatively flexible.[15] Tradition, on the other hand, is rule-bound; it has the aura of invariance; it boasts "the sanction of perpetuity".[16] Custom is, for example, what British judges *do*. What judges do is not invariant (a society is lucky if it is even consistent). However, says Hobsbawm, what judges *wear* (wigs and robes) is invariant; this is tradition. In Hobsbawm's model ritual serves tradition rather than custom.

There are two problems with Hobsbawm's view of tradition. One is that he denies its flexible, adaptive aspects. The other is that he regards the invention of tradition only as a symptom or as an ideology-perpetuating tool of political establishments and revolutions.[17] There is little doubt that the mass-produced,

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state-sponsored traditions that he examines cover up the traces of their own inventedness, but there is doubt whether this is the only form that the invention of tradition can take. Furthermore, Hobsbawm seems to imply that invented rites are effective only if ritualists are self-deceived: traditions publicly known to have been invented are not effective. "Where the old ways are alive," he says, "traditions need to be neither revived nor invented."[18] In his view invented tradition is not so much creative as manipulative. Or if it is creative, it is so within very narrow limits. Traditions, like tastes and fashions, he suggests, can only be created after they have been discovered in popular culture. Unfortunately, Hobsbawm and associates say little about either the limits or dynamics of ritual creativity. If they were to do so, they would, I presume, have to deal with ritual "custom"; it is the stuff that is flexible and therefore alive.

Is Ritual Necessarily Collective?

Much contemporary ritualizing is focused on the body and is articulated using the rhetoric of the self. This focus and rhetoric give emergent ritual a distinctively individualistic ethos that sets it in opposition to the standard scholarly view of ritual as a group-oriented phenomenon that is essentially collective and necessarily social.

Often ritualizing individuals claim to tap the depths of the unconscious, and then they pit the results against the breadth of conventional social wisdom as represented in collective rites. One tactic of ritualized individualism is to mythologize the practices in Jungian, Eliadean, or, more recently, Turnerian terms. Accordingly, the zones of ritual creativity are named "the collective unconscious," "the mythic center," or "liminality." Deep, centered, or liminal ritualizing functions as an alternative to both the merely conventional and the traditional, and it allows individuals outside the confines of institutions or sometimes even groups to engage in ritual practice. Scholarship itself is appropriated and used mythically against scholars who would use it critically against emergent ritual.

There is a sizeable literature on individualism and self-culture, the most penetrating example of which is *Habits of the Heart* by Robert Bellah and his associates.[19] Paul Vitz, who regards this phenomenon as "selfism" or "the cult of self-

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worship,"[20] castigates it as both bad science and bad faith. Christopher Lasch's *The Culture of Narcissism*[21] is the best seller that popularized the now widespread view of North Americans as narcissists. Virtually all of this literature is prescriptive and critical, and virtually none of it considers the ritual manifestations of individualism. Consequently, many students of ritual overlook or reject ritualizing on definitional grounds ("It is not really ritual") or moral and psychological grounds ("It is neurotic and narcissistic").

Theologically or anthropologically trained critics worry about the ethical and psychological liabilities of ritualizing, which they assume is narcissistic because it is said to serve that mythical entity, the self. But the self itself is a cultural construction, so one could just as easily argue that self-generated rites are a form of social expression. There is no such thing as an unsocialized individual, therefore no such thing as an asocial rite.

A major problem for theorists of ritual is how to conceive the relation between self and society. Too often individual and group are construed as mere static opposites when in reality they are dialectical pairs that presuppose and require one another. Theorists of ritual too often set ritual on the collective side of an individual/collective split, but we should reject the dualism this action presupposes, because taking seriously either term in the self/society pair always leads to the other term: bodies are enculturated and cultures are embodied. For this reason it is necessary to reject much that is assumed about ritual and the individual, for example, that private ritual is inherently neurotic or that all ritual is by definition collective. It is *necessarily* collective only in the sense that anything human is: nothing escapes socialization. Societies have their most persistent root in the human body itself, and the body is always—no matter how closeted or private—socially inscribed.

Theories that deny the possibility of individual ritual are too undialectical in their conception of the relation between self and society. Even Roy Wagner, who has most adequately theorized the inventability of cultural forms, flounders on this score. He describes the self/society dynamic as cyclical—one would assume, dialectical.[22] However, he characterizes the cycle as moving sequentially from everyday consciousness to

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ritual consciousness, a movement, in his view, from differentiating to collectivizing. For Wagner the everyday is individualistic, while ritual is collectivistic. His understanding of ritual is still unable to embrace the possibility of individual ritualizing. In contemporary North American ritualizing we find the opposite of the movement he describes. Here ritual for many of the makers of new rites is an expression of their individualism, and the everyday is an expression of their collective existence. So deciding whether ritual is the tool of collectivizing or of individualizing is not a matter of theory or definition but a matter of observation of actual behavior. No theory or definition of ritual ought to preclude the possibility of individualistic ritualizing, since we know that hunting cultures, for example, sometimes emphasized ritual individualism.[23]

I am not offering an apologetic for private ritual, but I am criticizing theories that make ritual by definition a form of group behavior. I am the first to admit that what Jung called "self culture" is dangerous. The temptations to ego-inflation, intercultural imperialism, and self-deception are high, especially if a self introjects the notion that it is *the* source of ritual. Certainly, both the notion and the experience of the self need considerable refinement, or ritualizing can, in fact, feed neurosis, but this danger does not obviate the validity of individual ritual.

Are Ritualists Necessarily Pre-critical?

Assuming that ritualists—at least when they are engaged in the act of performing rites—exist in an unself-conscious, precritical state of mind is widespread. Jack Goody, for instance, defines ritual as "a category of standardized behavior (custom) in which the relationship between the means and the end is not intrinsic."[24] Defining ritual as outside of means/end logic implies that it is irrational and therefore incapable of grounding critique. For romantics this absence of means/end reasoning would be a virtue, but for Goody and others it is not. In such views rituals are assumed to be in the body and therefore not in the mind. The new ritualizers as well as the old theorists of ritual sometimes lapse into this assumption that ritual is a way of embodiment, therefore a way of "getting out of the head." This way of speaking about the effect of ritual is probably a

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popularized version of the practice in Gestalt therapy that chides patients for speaking merely from their heads.

The implication that ritual is a pre-critical activity takes many forms. For instance, Hobsbawm's argument that ritual functions like ideology in its tranquilizing of criticism implies this attitude. Roy Wagner and Paul Connerton hold a similar view. Wagner believes self-consciousness about the invention of culture has a shattering effect. He says,

> Of course, a realization of this fact by the symbolizer would be deadly to his [or her] intention: to see the whole field at once, in all its implications, is to suffer a "relativization" of intention, to become aware of how gratuitous a part it plays in the activation of symbols. Thus the most compelling necessity of action under these circumstances is a restriction of vision . . . .[25]

Applied to ritual, this view would suggest that recognition of the inventedness of ritual is too critical an activity for ritualists to engage in. Self-consciousness would amount to a kind of unmasking that undermines motivation.[26] Wagner implies that it is possible for him, the scholar, to see ritual's inventedness, but not for the dancers themselves to see it. When ritual is relativized by being conceptualized as *in*vention rather than *con*vention, says Wagner, the result appears " 'forced,' 'commercialized,' 'too serious,' or 'sacrilegious.' "[27]

Wagner suggests that taking oneself too seriously as an inventor of culture[28] produces not invented but counterfeit culture, with guilt as the primary motivation to action.[29] Self-invention—though perhaps a necessity in some cultural contexts— is a flirtation with neurosis, and, he says, those who aspire to professional ritual creativity can be virtually assured of neurosis. So, although Wagner does not say that ritualists cannot be self-conscious and critical, he clearly implies that the consequences of doing so would be destructive to ritual.

The belief that ritual is a pre-critical activity is often linked to the fact that ritual is embodied and to a view of the human body as a non-cognitive entity. The most astute theorist of the relations between memory, embodiment, and ritual is Paul Connerton. In *How Societies Remember*[30] he tries to formulate a theory of memory that utilizes Hobsbawm's view of tradition-inventing and takes seriously both ritual and the body. At first, Connerton seems more promising than Hobsbawm. Part of his

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strategy is to distinguish "incorporating practices" from "inscribing practices."[31] Incorporating practices are performative—smiling and hand-shaking, for example. Inscribing practices are textual, for instance, depositing information in print, computers, tapes, files, and other sorts of knowledge traps.[32] For Connerton general bodily practices such as decorum and habit and specific commemorative practices, rites, for example, are instances of incorporating practices that enable societies to remember.

Connerton attacks the cognitive imperialism of linguistic models when used on bodily practices.[33] And in applying performance theory to ceremonies, he explicitly rejects symbolic or semantic interpretations of ritual.[34] In his view commemorative ceremonies are "acts of transfer"[35] that depend on "habit-memory," as distinct from personal and cognitive memory.[36] Embodied memories are those that enable performers to reproduce a certain kind of performance. Like typing or riding a bicycle, performing rites depends on embodied knowledge, which is tacit and does not depend for its effectiveness on ritualists' ability to do an exegesis of it .

Although I accept Connerton's central claim that ritual embodiment is a primary means through which societies remember and thus create tradition, I reject his understanding of the body and of ritual. Rites do not "transfer" either memories or knowledge. Neither knowledge nor memory is a quantity deposited somewhere, for example, in texts or computers. The container/contained metaphor[37] is contrary to his own theory of incorporating practices. The theory requires a performative model in which rites improvise and thus reinvent. Unfortunately, Connerton lapses back into inscription language, the very model he criticizes. In his epistemology the body is a "sedimentation" of the past, and memory is the "transmission" of the past. For him performance is the way such transmission occurs. Unfortunately, he ignores the transformative activities of both body and memory.

The view of ritual that emerges from Connerton is much like Hobsbawm's, if not actually borrowed from Hobsbawm. Connerton says,

> Newly invented rites spring up and are instantly formalized . . . . That is why invented rites, involving sets of recorded rules and

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> procedures, as in modern coronation rites, are marked out by their inflexibility. By virtue of their procedural inflexibility they are held to represent, as nowhere else, the idea of the unchanging for a society of institutionalized innovation. Their intention is reassurance and their mood is nostalgic.[38]

The kinds of invented rites Connerton studies—coronations, for example—determine his conclusions. I would have no problem with his argument if he recognized that his is a view appropriate only to certain kinds of invented rites, in certain kinds of societies, during certain historical periods. But he ignores processes of tacit ritual revision and adaptation that mark some traditional societies, as well as the ad hoc (rather than rule-bound) ritual inventiveness in self-conscious subcultures in our own society. The problem his view presents for theorizing about ritual is that it assumes invented rites are necessarily specious. Unlike Connerton I do not know of any *un*invented traditions.

Connerton says,

> Both commemorative ceremonies and bodily practices contain a measure of insurance against the process of cumulative questioning entailed in all discursive practices. This is the source of their importance and persistence as mnemonic systems. Every group, then, will entrust to bodily automatisms the values and categories which they are most anxious to conserve. They will know how well the past can be kept in mind by a habitual memory sedimented in the body.[39]

This is an interesting idea—that groups hide important memories from the great searchlight of critical consciousness by stashing memories in the body. But it is one Connerton assumes, not one he demonstrates. For him the body is a kind of repository—a bank or library—that works on the basis of "automatisms" (a bank with an automated teller, one supposes). Connerton does not look for evidence that the ritualizing body can be either cognitive or critical; he simply assumes cultures use bodies to house a collection of treasures, thus protecting them from being raided by critical questions. He might, for instance, have considered Hopi women, who have a fall ceremony in which they mock the sacred winter ceremonies controlled by Hopi men. He might have considered Pueblo clowns, who regularly perform their critiques in the midst of the most solemnly sacral rites.

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One place to look for evidence that people perform their rites with some measure of critical awareness, not necessarily with self-deception, is in the rites themselves, rather than in what people say about those rites. Even though Connerton rightly recognizes the bodily foundation of social memory, his view of the body is that it is a habituated, mindless object; he implies that it is essentially passive and stupid. He fails to comprehend the creative, cognitive, critical functions of the ritualizing body.[40] The human body is not only object, but subject. It has its own way of questioning, arguing, asserting, thinking—its own form of wisdom. The body is cognitive, not stupid; and conversely, the mind is embodied.[41]

In my view ritualizing is not incompatible with criticism,[42] nor is a sense of mystery incompatible with iconoclasm, provided self-critical actions are embedded in rites themselves, and provided the timing of criticism is carefully chosen. Criticism itself can take the form of an action, a gesture. It need not take the form of an intellectual operation separate from ritual performance, an operation that forces it to stand apart as literary criticism sometimes does from literature or as religious criticism (i.e., theology) sometimes does from liturgy. We are used to thinking of ritual and criticism, if not as opposites, then as an unhappily married pair. We worry that criticism may destroy mystery, or mystery befog criticism. But it is quite possible to develop forms of critique that do not depend on the ideology of objectivism with its penchant for distancing, or on dividing up social roles into critics on the one hand, and ritualists on the other.

In the Ritual Studies Lab which I direct, where we experiment with ritual in a highly self-conscious environment, two sorts of criticism transpire: acted out critique and verbal, expository critique. Whatever we enact seriously we later invert and thus criticize. Whatever is revelatory is later fictive, and vice-versa. The effect is much like that of Hopi Kachina initiation: enchantment is held in constructive tension with disenchantment—an important skill in a society highly susceptible to romantic mystification, on the one hand, and cynical disenchantment, on the other. Much depends on the timing of criticism. If we separate the formal critique and analysis of an event from the experience of it by an hour or week, most par-

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ticipants eventually learn to hold two attitudes simultaneously: reverence and iconoclasm.

Cultural processes, including ritual, are human constructions, and awareness of this fact does not automatically imply the death of them. Religious studies and anthropology have tended to identify as religious those elements of culture that its participants are least able to criticize. To some practitioners, as well as to some scholars, religious culture (ritual, for example) is a given—its sources out of reach and its authority beyond question. However, improvisation and revision are essential parts of many, if not most, ritual traditions, not just the ritual experiments and ad hoc rites I have mentioned. An adequate theory of ritual should take into account the revision, improvisation, and invention of cultural forms. All such processes imply that ritualists are not uncritical of what they perform.

Although we may think that self-consciousness in ritual performance and construction is something new, arriving in North America in the 1970s, reflexivity is not new nor confined to this continent. Reflexivity is to a culture what self-consciousness is to an individual. When a society enacts itself in ritual, it is able to see itself mirrored. Far from tranquilizing critique or immobilizing performance, such reflexivity, especially heightened in festive and initiatory rites, can serve as a strong motive for criticism and as a stimulus for enhanced performance.

Counterculture ritualizing, for instance, that of feminists, is sometimes torn between a sense of the importance of ritual and a self-consciousness about the contrivance of enactment. But it is not *necessarily* the case that either self-awareness or consciousness of invention means the death of ritual, any more than breaking symbols or demythologizing myths prevents their reappropriation in an attitude of second naiveté. Sam Gill has illustrated how ritual disenchantment can, in fact, enhance ritual performance and tradition.[43]

Roy Wagner distinguishes between cultural change that only amounts to an alteration of imagery and change that alters the line between the given (what Wagner refers to as "innate") and the invented.[44] The latter is a fundamental shift of sensibility. At present we are, I believe, in the midst of such a fundamental change in our attitude toward ritual. Gestures once regarded as innate and scenarios once treated as sacrosanct are now un-

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derstood as cultural constructions.[45] But I do not believe that the death of supposedly primordial actions or revealed rites spells the death of ritual practice any more than doubt necessarily destroys faith. Reflexivity, the awareness of performance by one who is performing, does not have to precipitate the demise of ritual; it can become part of the work of ritual. It may even be that ritual is a primary cultural means whereby participants learn to comprehend and criticize the constructedness of what are taken to be cultural facts.

The claim that people cannot live with ritual criticism or with the knowledge that rites are invented is exaggerated and not based on much field observation. Clerics, shamans, and scholars disenchant ritual all the time. Calling attention to the symbolic nature of the realities negotiated by ritual is one of the primary functions of ritual leaders. People's capacity to incorporate critical self-consciousness depends mostly on their having experienced rites that weave criticism, self-parody, and humor into the fabric of the ritual system itself.

One of the most powerful presentations of critical, self-conscious, but nevertheless effective, ritualizing is by Barbara Myerhoff in her ethnographic classic *Number Our Days*.[46] Regarding a made-up rite for senior citizens, the Graduation-Siyum, she writes,

> All rituals are paradoxical and dangerous enterprises, the traditional and improvised, the sacred and secular. Paradoxical because rituals are conspicuously artificial and theatrical, yet designed to suggest the inevitability and absolute truth of their messages. Dangerous because, when we are not convinced by a ritual we may become aware of ourselves as having made them up, thence on to the paralyzing realization that we have made up all our truths; [that] our ceremonies, our most precious conceptions and convictions—all are mere invention, not inevitable understandings about the world at all but the results of mortals' imaginings.[47]

Like Wagner, Myerhoff seems to imply that an awareness of invention and a recognition of the role of imagination is devastating for ritualists, yet she documents ritual activities that illustrate the contrary. She herself participates in made-up rites, aware of their constructedness and taking them seriously at the same time.[48] The assumption by scholars that second nativeté is possible for themselves but not for ritualists is astonishingly

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ethnocentric. Second naiveté is as possible in performing ritual as it is in appropriating ancient myth, and it is as possible among ordinary participants as among scholarly participant-observers.

Is Ritual Necessarily Meaningful?

The phenomenon of ritualizing not only implies revisions of our understanding of tradition, collectivity, and critical self-consciousness but also of meaning. Conceptions of meaning are closely linked to symbol theory. Three widespread assumptions about ritual are (1) that its building blocks are symbols, (2) that symbols are the carriers of meaning, (3) that the meaning of a symbol is that to which it refers, and (4) that ritualists "believe in" these meanings.

If one asks ritualists what their rites and symbols mean, one quickly finds that there is little connection between how much people can articulate about a symbol's referents and how meaningful it is to them. The usual social-scientific way of handling this conceptual dilemma is to resort to function. Thus, a ritual becomes meaningful by virtue of what it does socially, not just by virtue of what it refers to. Turner, for example, makes "operational" (i.e., functional) a category of meaning alongside "exegetical" (or referential) meaning.[49]

I do not deny that ritual symbols either refer or do, but the problem with both semantic and functional theories is that either they set us looking outside of ritual for the meaning of ritual or they lead us to believe that meaning is a kind of referentiality.[50] One of the most insightful theorists for helping articulate questions about conventional theories of ritual meaning is Dan Sperber. In *Rethinking Symbolism* he suggests that the search for symbolic meanings in ritual is fundamentally wrongheaded, because it makes us think ritual is a set of coded messages.[51] But inevitably when we decode them, they seem banal—counterfeit inventions, to use Wagner's term. The expectation that rites have meaning in a semiotic, or referential, sense is an expectation of *our* culture, says Sperber.[52] Thus, it may be ethnocentric to try applying it elsewhere.

He argues that what ritualists offer as interpretations of symbols are usually as opaque as the symbols themselves, and that they are not really interpretations at all but further acts of sym-

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bolizing. Interpreting, or doing exegesis of, ritual symbols amounts to the reinvention or recreation of them in another form;[53] it is not an explanation of their meaning. In short, meaning does not consist of "indigenous exegesis" (Turner's term) or what members of multinational Western religious traditions like to call "theology." It is not a matter of explicating referents.

Sperber makes a provocative claim: that smells are symbols *par excellence*.[54] Symbols work like smells, he suggests. They evoke rather than refer. Olfaction is our least rationalized sense; its way of meaning is tied more immediately to primary bodily responses than those rooted in other senses. The smells of freshly baked bread or of burning flesh reach the guts (i.e., the cerebral cortex) directly; they evoke, in the one case hunger, in the other revulsion.

Sperber claims that, "when Westerners speak in a vague way of meaning, they are really talking about evocation."[55] Smells, he argues, are difficult to recall (we usually resort to visual symbols instead), but they are extraordinarily powerful in the area of recognition and evocation.[56] We can recognize a smell arising from an old drawer even though we cannot recall where we originally encountered such a smell. Then, as if by magic, here comes a whole set of memories from the distant past; we did not know we had them. Ritual symbols, understood according to this Sperberian, olfactory logic, focalize attention and evoke memory; they do not leave us with religious ideas or political statements that constitute their meaning.

In Sperber's view evocation is the re-collecting of some initially unfulfilled condition, in other words, a defect, a break. Sperber thinks the defect is conceptual. And here I begin my departure from him. I think this is only one among several possibilities. His understanding is more exclusively cognitive than mine.

In any case, symbols in this view are part of a system of implicit knowledge,[57] and ritual is an improvisation, reconstruction, or anticipation based on that knowledge.[58] It is not merely a repetition of it. Sperber says,

> The cyclical movement of cultural symbolism might seem absurd if it were not precisely for the constructive character of remembering. Indeed, it is not a question here of the endless quest for

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> an impossible solution, but rather of a repeated work of re-organization of the encyclopedic memory. Each new evocation brings about a different reconstruction of old representations, weaves new links among them, integrates into the field of symbolism new information brought to it by daily life: the same rituals are enacted, but with new actors; the same myths are told, but in a changing universe, and to individuals whose social position, whose relationships with others, and whose experience have changed.[59]

Sperber's argument implies that ritual, by virtue of its olfactory-like symbolization, is not just occasionally creative, as in the case of experimental ritual, but regularly so. Ritualists do not merely discover the meaning of symbols but, by improvising with them ritually, invent "a relevance and a place in memory for them despite the failure in this respect of the conceptual categories of meaning.[60]

Like Sperber I believe that the most interesting cultural knowledge is tacit, which is to say, preconscious, implicit, and embodied. When knowledge becomes explicit, he says,[61] it can be learned by rote, but when it is tacit, it cannot; it must be reconstructed, improvised, or reinvented in each new enactment.

At first it may sound as if Sperber, like Wagner, Hobsbawm, and Connerton, is suggesting that ritual consciousness is uncritical because it is embodied and that the body is noncognitive. But he is not. Tacit knowledge is still knowledge. The knowledge in a surgeon's or artist's hands is no less knowledge because it is embodied, and it is no less critical because its criticism takes the form of action rather than verbal articulation.

If ritual meaning is anything like what I have implied by appropriating some of Sperber's views of symbols, then belief is not quite the right word for what one does as a ritualist. Would we want to speak about believing a smell, as we might speak of believing a statement? Does the surgeon "believe in" her hands, or the artist, his? I think not. We must give up the linguistic analogies that have formed the basis for much theorizing about ritual. But then what? If ritual is not message or communication, we will have to become more articulate about it as play, performance, and practice. But that is another essay.

To conclude, I have argued that contemporary invented rites are precipitating a corresponding conceptual reinvention of rit-

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ual. Whereas previously we may have insisted that ritual is *necessarily* traditional, collective, precritical, and meaningful, we now have to say, " 'Taint necessarily so." The result of sustained ritualizing and revised theory of ritual to account for it is likely to be the bleeding of genres—the fuzzing of boundary lines that separate ritual from art, theater, politics, and therapy—but this bleeding of boundaries may not be a loss. It may represent instead ritual's reconnection with some of its vital sources and tributaries.

NOTES

1. Virginia Hine, "Self-Generated Ritual: Trend or Fad?" *Worship* 55.1(1981):404-419. See also her "Self-Created Ceremonies of Passage," in *Betwixt & Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, ed. Louise Carus Mahdi and others (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987) 304-26.
2. To avoid endless terminological wrangling I have previously taken the tack of using the term "ritualizing" (*Beginnings in Ritual Studies* [Washington, DC: University Press of America, 1982] 53 ff.) to denote emergent or newly constructed ritual. Ritualizing is the activity of incubating ritual; it is the act of constructing ritual either self-consciously and deliberately or incrementally and editorially, as it were. The gerund form ("ritualizing") is a reminder that I am highlighting the processual phase in the life history of a rite.
3. Ronald L. Grimes, "Emerging Ritual," *Proceedings of the North American Academy of Liturgy*. Plenary session lecture. St. Louis, MO. (January 2-5, 1990) 15-31.
4. See, for example, Barbara G. Walker, *Women's Rituals: A Sourcebook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990); Renee Beck and Sydney Barbara Metrick, *The Art of Ritual: A Guide to Creating and Performing Your Own Rituals for Growth and Change* (Berkeley, CA: Celestial Arts, 1990); Zsuzanna Budapest, *The Holy Book of Women's Mysteries* (Berkeley, CA: Wingbow, 1989); Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women-Church: Theology and Practice* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1985); Marjorie Procter-Smith, *In Her Own Rite: Constructing Feminist Liturgical Tradition* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1990); and Hallie Iglehart, *Womanspirit: A Guide to Women's Wisdom* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983).
5. See Evan Imber-Black and others, *Rituals in Families and Family Therapy* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988) and Steven Foster and Meredith Little, "The Vision Quest: Passing from Childhood to Adulthood," in *Betwixt & Between: Patterns of Masculine and Feminine Initiation*, edited by Louise Carus Mahdi and others (La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1987) 79-110.
6. See, for instance, James Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1982); Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the Spirit: African and Afro-American Art and Philosophy* (NY: Vintage, 1983); and Ellen Badone, *The Appointed Hour: Death, Worldview and Social Change in Brittany* (Berkeley, CA: California UP, 1989).

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7. See, for example, Victor W. Turner, "Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama: Performative and Reflexive Anthropology," *The Kenyon Review*, new series, 1.3 (1979):80-93.
8. Ritual, he says, is "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers" (*The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* [Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1967] 19). For a critique of this definition see Ronald Grimes, "Victor Turner's Definition, Theory, and Sense of Ritual," in *Victor Turner and the Construction of Cultural Criticism: Between Literature and Anthropology*, ed. Kathleen M. Ashley (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1990) 141-46.
9. Stanley Tambiah, "A Performative Approach to Ritual," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 65:119.
10. Exemplary historical accounts of rites include Mark C. Carnes, *Secret Ritual and Manhood in Victorian America* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1989) and James Watson, "The Structure of Chinese Funerary Rites: Elementary Forms, Ritual Sequence, and the Primacy of Performance," in *Death Ritual in Late Imperial and Modern China* (Berkeley: U California P, 1988) 3-19.
11. Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger, eds. 1983. *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1983).
12. Hobsbawm 4.
13. Hobsbawm 1.
14. David Cannadine, one of the authors in *The Invention of Tradition*, calls these weddings "essays in television ritual" ("The British Monarchy, c. 1820-1977," in Hobsbawm 159).
15. See also Terrance Ranger, "The Invention of Tradition in Colonial Africa," in Hobsbawm 247.
16. Hobsbawm 2.
17. Hobsbawm 12.
18. Hobsbawm 8.
19. Robert Bellah and others, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (Berkeley, CA: U California P, 1985).
20. Paul C. Vitz, *Psychology as Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1977).
21. Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: Warner, 1979).
22. Roy Wagner, *The Invention of Culture*, revised and expanded edition (Chicago: U Chicago P, 1981) 122.
23. See, e.g., Ake Hultkrantz, *Native Religions of North America.* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987) 14, and Guy H. Cooper, "Individualism and Integration in Navajo Religion," in *Religion in Native North America*, ed. Christopher Vecsey (Moscow, ID: U Idaho P, 1990) 67-78.
24. Jack Goody, "Religion and Ritual: The Definitional Problem," *British Journal of Sociology* 12.2 (1961):142-64.
25. Wagner 44.
26. Wagner 55.
27. Wagner 56-57. I have no doubt that this is sometimes— perhaps, often—the case. The first few years of the life of the Ritual Studies Lab, about which I have written elsewhere (*Ritual Criticism*, chapter 5), were plagued by the problem of self-consciousness and a persistent sense of the artificiality of trying to learn and teach skills essential to the construction of rites.

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28. Wagner (2) wryly defines an anthropologist as someone who uses the word "culture" with hope, or even with faith. Anthropological understanding, he says, is "the metaphorization of life into culture" (28). Anthropology, he muses, is a Western "culture cult," parallel to cargo cults (31). The mysterious, magical, invisible, all-determinative cargo called culture only becomes visible when there is culture shock. Wagner argues that, subjected to experiences beyond one's own interpersonal competence, anthropologists objectify the discrepancy as an entity called culture (9). Culture is invented as a construct to account for the shock of difference. This construct accounts both for "their" otherness and "our" self-consciousness. Our self-consciousness leads to cultural relativism (3), the view that our values, rites, and symbols are not given but invented.
29. Wagner 82.
30. Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1989).
31. Connerton 72-73.
32. Connerton (4) bemoans the fact that this type of memory has been given preferential treatment for two millennia of hermeneutic inquiry, hence texts rather than the human body remain the determinative example in many views of social memory.
33. Connerton 94, 96, 100. Connerton seems unwittingly to compromise his critique of linguistic imperialism when he asks what it is that is remembered in commemorative ceremonies, and answers, ". . . A community is reminded of its identity as represented by and told in a master narrative" (70). In effect, this statement implies that a ritual performance is dependent on a primary narrative, a linguistic text, specifically a "collective autobiography" [his term].
34. Connerton 70. However, he appropriates the definition of ritual used by Lukes: Ritual is "rule-governed activity of a symbolic character which draws the attention of its participants to objects of thought and feeling which they hold to be of special significance" (44).
35. Connerton 40.
36. See Connerton 22, 35.
37. For more on the container/contained metaphor see George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: Chicago UP, 1980) 29 ff.
38. Connerton 64.
39. Connerton 102.
40. On the cognitive dimensions of ritual see Theodore W. Jennings, Jr., "On Ritual Knowledge," *Journal of Religion* 62.2 (1982):111-27.
41. Connerton's view of memory parallels his view of the body. Memory for him is like a funnel or filter. The filter metaphor is useful; it reminds us of memory's selectivity. But like all metaphors it obscures other important truths. Memory is also like a muscle: it grows stronger as exercised; it moves the body into action; it is a source of action, not merely the recipient of it.
42. See my *Ritual Criticism* (Columbia, SC: U South Carolina P, 1990).
43. Sam Gill, *Native American Religious Action: A Performance Approach to Religion* (Columbia, SC: U South Carolina P, 1987) 58 ff. See also Sam Gill, "Hopi Kachina Cult Initiation: The Shocking Beginning to the Hopi's Religious Life, *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, Supplement, 45.2 (1977): 447-64.
44. Wagner 105.

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45. Americans, Wagner suggests (57), conventionally treat the "innate" as made up, but they also complain about the contrived and made up qualities of things. Thus, one might suppose, they search more intensely for what is natural or "deep." Knowledge that rites are invented rather than given or innate does not necessarily make people more willing to embrace ritual change.
46. Barbara Myerhoff, *Number Our Days* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1978).
47. Myerhoff 86.
48. See the films, "Number Our Days" and "In Her Own Time."
49. Victor Turner, *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1967) 51.
50. A similar critique is developed by Frits Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen* 33.1(1979):33-64, 185-224. For a critique of Staal and further reflection of Sperber's thesis see Hans H. Penner, "Language, Ritual and Meaning," *Numen* 32.1 (1985):1-16.
51. Dan Sperber, *Rethinking Symbolism*, trans. Alice L. Morton (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1975).
52. Sperger 83.
53. Sperber 50.
54. Sperber 118.
55. Sperber 148.
56. Sperber 117.
57. Sperber x.
58. Sperber xi.
59. Sperber 145.
60. Sperber 113.
61. Sperber x.

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