

# The Obvious Aspects of Ritual

## I

This essay is not about the symbols of which human rituals are made, nor yet about the entities, ideas, or processes—physical, psychic, social, natural, or cosmic—that these symbols may represent. It is concerned with the obvious rather than the hidden aspects of ritual, those of its features that, being most apparent, lead us to identify events as instances of ritual.

Some difficulties beset presentation. For one thing, it is necessary to state the obvious—that which is immediately apparent and generally accepted—before discussing it, and it will be necessary, for the sake of clarity and continuity, to connect what I take to be non-obvious observations about the obvious with remarks that may themselves be obvious. Moreover, the argument is in part concerned with what seems to be logically necessary. When arguments are based upon logical necessity rather than empirical demonstration social scientists are inclined to take them to be trivial or tautologous. One of the points that I shall try to make, however, is that there is at the heart of ritual a relationship that has certain logically necessary entailments. Certain meanings and effects are intrinsic to the very structure of ritual, and ritual thus may impose, or seem to impose, logical necessity upon the vagrant affairs of the world. This may sound like a functional observation. In fact it is not, and it may be well to make clear at the outset that the argument developed in this

essay is formal- rather than final-causal in nature. Because I have discussed this distinction in some detail in "Ecology, Adaptation, and the Ills of Functionalism" (in this volume), it will suffice to note here that functional formulations, which are properly system-specific, account for "items" in respect of the contributions they make to the systems of which they are elements. Here, however, I shall not be concerned with specific contributions rituals make to the systems in which they occur but with entailments of the *ritual form* wherever it appears.

If an expedition into the obvious calls for justification, it may be suggested that in their eagerness to plumb ritual's dark symbolic or functional depths, to find in ritual more than meets the eye, anthropologists have, perhaps increasingly, tended to overlook ritual's surface, that which does meet the eye. Yet it is on its surfaces, in its form, that we may discern whatever may be peculiar to ritual. It is in its depths that ritual meets other symbolic forms—myth, poetry, graphic art, architecture. Indeed, it is in respect to its symbolic content that ritual is *least* distinctive. It is in respect to its symbolism that myth and ritual are "one and the same," to recall Leach's famous dictum of a quarter-century ago (1954: 13ff.), an identity more recently expressed by La Fontaine in the introduction to a volume of essays on the interpretation of ritual. "In this book ritual actions are seen as exemplifying in another medium the cultural values that find expression in . . . statements which we call beliefs and which are elaborated in narratives or myths" (1972: xvii).

It would be well to make clear that I am raising no objections whatsoever to symbolic analyses of rituals as a class or to functional and adaptive analyses of ritual as a class. Both surely may increase our understanding of the world. I am only asserting that to view ritual as simply a way to fulfill certain functions that may as well or better be fulfilled by other means, or as an alternative symbolic medium for expressing what may just as well—or perhaps better—be expressed in other ways is, obviously, to ignore that which is distinctive of ritual itself. Moreover, it becomes apparent through consideration of ritual's form that ritual is not simply an alternative way to express certain things, but that certain things can be expressed only in ritual. This is to reiterate that certain meanings and effects are intrinsic to the ritual form, which is further to suggest that ritual is without equivalents or even alternatives. This would account for its widespread occurrence and remarkable persistence. I do not wish to press this point and will only assert that that which can be expressed only in ritual is not trivial. It is, I think, crucial, and because of it I take ritual to be *the* basic social act. I will argue, in fact, that social contract, morality, the concept of the sacred, the notion of the divine, and even a paradigm of creation are intrinsic to ritual's structure.

It should be clear that the phrase "the structure of ritual" refers here

to relations among ritual's general features or components and not to relations among the symbols that may appear in rituals, for I have contrasted the depth of ritual with ritual's surfaces, those of its obvious, distinctive features that are immediately available to the senses. In contrast to its depths, in which mutually dependent symbols propitiate the obscure understanding of the faithful or await the exegesis of holy man or anthropologist, the surfaces of ritual are *not* symbolic, or at least not entirely so. Indeed, that ritual is not entirely symbolic seems to me to be one of its most interesting and important characteristics, for through ritual some of the embarrassments and difficulties of symbolic communication are overcome.

There is more to be said about the structure of ritual than that social contract and morality are intrinsic to it, and that it is not altogether symbolic, of course, and I shall proceed as follows: First, I must make explicit what I take to be ritual's obvious features. This will lead to a discussion of the two classes of message expressed in ritual and of the nonsymbolic way in which one of these classes may be transmitted. Next, the representation of analogical processes by digital signals will be noted, and then we shall approach what J. L. Austin (1962) would call the "performativeness" of ritual. This will lead to what I take to be distinctive of ritual, namely the social contract and morality intrinsic to its structure. The fact that rituals generally include physical acts as well as words will be considered, and I shall suggest that in including both word and act ritual may hold within itself a paradigm of creation. Some suggestions concerning liturgical orders will then be advanced, and it will be further suggested that the concept of the sacred may emerge from ritual's structure. Finally, the numinous emotions generated in some rituals will be discussed briefly, and some suggestions will be offered concerning possible grounds in ritual for the notion of the divine.

## II

I take ritual to be a form or structure, defining it as the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers. I shall be concerned to unpack the implications of this definition, noting first that no single feature of ritual is peculiar to it. It is in the conjunction of its features that it is unique. It is, nevertheless, convenient to consider its simple features at the beginning. The unique implications of their concatenation will emerge later.

First there is formality. Formality is an obvious aspect of all rituals: both observers and actors identify acts as ritual in part by their formality. Rituals tend to be stylized, repetitive, stereotyped, often but not always

decorous, and they also tend to occur at special places and at times fixed by the clock, calendar, or specified circumstances.

There are problems in distinguishing some events from others by the criterion of formality because events are not easily discriminated into those that are formal and those that are not. There is, as Roger Abrahams (1973) has pointed out, a continuum of behavioral formality from (a) the formal words and gestures that intersperse ordinary conversation and acts, through (b) that of the "everyday ceremoniousness" of greeting behavior and formal expressions of deference and demeanor, through (c) the rather invariant procedures of, say, the courtroom within which the variant substance of litigation is contained, and through which it is presented in orderly fashion, through, next, (d) such events as coronations, in which the invariant aspects of the event begin to predominate over the variant, to, finally, (e) highly invariant events, like those of certain religious liturgies in which almost all of the performance is specified, and opportunities for variation are both few and narrowly defined.

Two points are to be noted. First, invariance emerges out of, or is an aspect of, increasing formality. Second, it may be useful to make a distinction between *ritual*, the formal, stereotyped *aspect* of all events, and *rituals*, relatively invariant *events* dominated by formality. Be this as it may, there is little value in separating rituals from other events by imposing an arbitrary discontinuity upon the continuum of formality at any particular point. I will simply note that the phenomena with which this essay is largely concerned lie toward the more formal, less variant end of the continuum. We shall be mainly concerned with rituals sufficiently elaborate to include what may be called "liturgical orders," more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances repeated in specified contexts. The term "liturgical order" will, however, be extended here to include not only the fixed sequences of words and acts providing form to individual ritual events, but also, following Van Gennep (1909), to the fixed sequences of rituals that lead men around circles of seasons, along the straight paths that depart from birth and arrive at death, through the alterations of war and peace or along the dream tracks that cross Australian deserts.

While ritual is characterized by its formality, all that is formal, stereotyped, repetitive, or decorous is not ritual. Certain decorative art is similarly formal, and so are many buildings. It is of importance to recognize, although it seems banal, that performance as well as formality is necessary to ritual. Performance is the second *sine qua non* of ritual, for if there is no performance there is no ritual. This is not simply to say that a ritual is not a book or myth or television set, but to emphasize that



performance is not merely a way to express something, but is itself an aspect of that which it is expressing.

Of course, not all formal performance is ritual. Ordinary usage would not so have it, and there is no analytic advantage here in violating ordinary usage. For instance, although they bear some resemblance to each other, ritual and drama, at least in their polar forms, are best distinguished. For one thing, dramas have audiences, rituals have congregations. An audience watches a drama, a congregation participates in a ritual. This participation often if not always requires more than the entertainment of a certain attitude. Participation is frequently active, and is likely to require of the members of a congregation that they sing, dance, stand, kneel, or respond in litanies at particular times. For another thing, those who act in drama are "only acting," which is precisely to say that they are not acting in earnest, and it is perhaps significant that drama's synonym in English is "play." Ritual in contrast, is in earnest, even when it is playful, entertaining, blasphemous, humorous, or ludicrous.

To say that ritual is in earnest is not to say that the formal action of ritual is instrumental in any ordinary physical sense. Indeed, another of ritual's criterial attributes—at least one proposed by many people—is that it is not. There seem to be two main lines of thought concerning this.

The first, clearly enunciated by Leach long ago (1954: 12ff.), implies the distinction already made between ritual and rituals. Ritual in this view is the non-instrumental aspect or component of events that may also include an instrumental component, "technique." Ritual is that frill or decoration that communicates something about the performance or the performer.

The other general view, which initially appears to be more different from the first than it actually is, would hold that ritual not only communicates something but is taken by those performing it to be "doing something" as well. There would seem to be support for this position from some of the words designating ritual in various languages. The Greek "dromenon" means "thing done," "liturgy" comes from the Greek for "public work," the English term "service" connotes more than talk; the Tewa Indians (Ortiz 1969: 98ff.), as well as the Tikopians (Firth 1940) refer to some rituals as "spirit work." However, that which is done by ritual is not done by operating with matter and energy on matter and energy in accordance with the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology. The efficacy of ritual derives, to use a term that Fortes (1966) favors in a rather general way, from "the occult." The occult differs from "the patent" in that the patent can be known in the last resort by sensory experience, and it conforms to the regularities of material cause. The

occult cannot be so known and does not so conform. Goody (1961) similarly characterizes ritual as “a category of standardized behaviour (custom) in which the relationship between means and ends is not intrinsic.”

We have neither the time nor the need to examine in any detail either what anthropologists claim to be folk theories of the basis of occult efficacy, or what they claim to be the occult's foundation “in reality.” Suffice it to say that one large and heterogeneous set of analytic theories would derive the occult from the affective force and persuasiveness of ritual performance, and we may note in passing that some students would take some sort of systematic relationship to the emotions to be an aspect of virtually all ritual. Other analytic theories would see the occult to be founded upon certain characteristics of language, a view that accords with the widespread, almost universal belief in the magical power of words (Tambiah 1968). The two views are neither mutually exclusive nor exhaustive. The point that is of importance here is that if the efficacy of liturgical rituals rests in whole or in part upon words (both in native theory and in the theory of the anthropologist) then the distinction between ritual as communication and as efficacious action breaks down. This is not to claim that all rituals, even those for which efficacy is claimed, are deemed to possess occult efficacy, but simply to take efficacious ritual to be a subclass of the larger class, ritual, itself one of many modes of communication. Leach stated—or perhaps overstated—this or a similar point when he asserted that the distinction between communication behavior and behavior potent in terms of cultural convention is trivial (1966).

It may be objected that a view of ritual as communication comes up against the fact that many rituals are conducted in solitude. But the subjective experience of, say, private prayer, is one of communication. Moreover, given the extent to which in solitary rituals various parts of the psyche may be brought in touch with each other it is reasonable to take ritual to be auto-communicative as well as allo-communicative (Wallace 1966: 237ff.). Auto-communication is important even in public rituals. In fact, the transmitters of ritual messages are often, if not always, their most significant receivers.

Although we may recognize that ritual, even efficacious ritual, is a mode of communication, we must also sympathize with the concern that Fortes expressed when he observed that “it is but a short step from the notion of ritual as communication to the non-existence of ritual *per se*” (1966). It is simply not enough to say that ritual is a mode of communication. But to say that ritual is a mode of communication is surely not to say that it is interchangeable with other modes of communication nor, necessarily, to denigrate its uniqueness. It is, rather, to accept an

expanded notion of communication, one that includes the achievement of effects through the transmission of information rather than through the application of matter and energy. Communication, this is to say, not only includes "saying," but certain sorts of "doing" as well, sorts of doing in which the efficacious principle is informative rather than powerful.

### III

There seem to be two broad classes of messages transmitted in ritual. First, whatever else may happen in some human rituals, in all rituals, both human and animal, the participants transmit information concerning their own current physical, psychic, or sometimes social states to themselves and to other participants. As Leach put it, ritual "serves to express the individual's status in the structural system in which he finds himself for the time being" (1954: 11). I shall, with some misgiving, follow Lyons (1970: 73) and refer to these transmissions as "indexical" transmissions, and to this information as "indexical."

In perhaps all animal rituals, and in some human rituals too, this is all there is. When one baboon presents his rump to another he is signaling submission; when the other mounts he signals dominance. The information content of the ritual is exhausted by the messages concerning their current states being transmitted by the participants. The ritual is only indexical.

But some human rituals are different, for in them the sum of the messages originating among and transmitted among the participants concerning their own contemporary states is not coextensive with the information content (using the term information in a broad sense) of the ritual. Additional messages, although transmitted by the participants, are not encoded by them. They are found by participants already encoded in the liturgy. Since these messages are more or less invariant obviously they cannot in themselves reflect the transmitter's contemporary state. For instance, the order of the Roman mass does not, in itself, express anything about the current states of those performing it. In recognition of the regularity, propriety, and apparent durability and immutability of these messages I shall refer to them as "canonical." Whereas that which is signified by the indexical is confined to the here and now, the referents of the canonical are not. They always make references to processes or entities, material or putative, outside the ritual, in words and acts that have, by definition, been spoken or performed before. Whereas the indexical is concerned with the immediate the canonical is concerned with the enduring. Indeed, its quality of perdurance is perhaps signified—its sense is surely conveyed—by the apparent invariance of the liturgy in which it is expressed.

Earlier I claimed that one of ritual's most salient characteristics is that it is not entirely symbolic. Since the term "symbol" is used in several ways in the literature it is important that I make clear that I am conforming to Peirce's (1960: 143ff.) tripartite classification of signs into *symbols*, *icons*, and *indices*. In this usage a symbol is merely "associated by law" or convention with that which it signifies. The word "dog" is a symbol designating a certain sort or class of creatures. Words are the fundamental, but not the only, symbols; for objects, marks, nonverbal sounds, gestures, movements may be assigned symbolic meaning by words. The virtues of symbolic communication are patent. With symbols discourse can escape from the here and now to dwell upon the past, future, distant, hypothetical, and imaginary, and with a complex symbolic system, such as a natural language, an unlimited variety of messages may be encoded through the orderly recombination of a small number of basic units. Although a few other species may make very limited use of symbols, symbolic communication is characteristic of the human species, and has made possible for men a way of life so different from that of other animals that some anthropologists would compare the emergence of the symbol in importance and novelty only to the emergence of life itself.

In contrast to symbols, *icons* by definition share sensible formal characteristics with that which they signify. A map is an icon of the area to which it corresponds, and many of what are called symbols in other usages are, in this terminology, iconic. A "phallic symbol," for instance, is an icon. In contrast to both symbols and icons, *indices* are, to use Peirce's phrase, "really affected by" that which they signify. A rash is an index of measles, a dark cloud of rain. An index is caused by, or is part of, that which it indicates; in the extreme case it is identical with it.

Canonical messages, which are concerned with things not present and often not even material, are, and *can only be*, founded upon symbols, although they can employ, secondarily, icons and may even make limited use of indices. On the other hand, information concerning the current state of the transmitter may transcend mere symbolic designation and be signified indexically. It is for this reason that I refer to such information as "indexical."

To say that indexical transmission may "transcend" "mere" symbolic transmission is to suggest that it may overcome a certain problem, to which I have called attention elsewhere (1969, 1971a, 1971b), that is intrinsic to the symbolic relationship. When a sign is only arbitrarily or conventionally related to the signified it is possible for it to occur in the absence of the signified and for it not to occur in the presence of the signified. Thus, the very freedom of sign from signified that permits discourse to transcend the here and now, if it does not actually make lying possible facilitates it enormously and may encourage it as well.



The indexical situation does offer some opportunities for deception (see "Sanctity and Lies in Evolution" in this volume), but such opportunities are multiplied by magnitudes by the symbol. The reliability of information becomes a problem for symbol-using man: if the communication system upon which a social order depends accommodates lies, how may the recipients of information be assured that the information transmitted to them is sufficiently reliable for them to act upon? In ritual this problem is in some degree overcome by eschewing the use of the symbol and transmitting information concerning the current states of the performers indexically.

I am not sure that all messages concerning the current states of the performers transmitted in ritual are indexical in Peirce's sense, hence my misgivings in using the term "indexical" to refer to them. That such signals are indexical is clear in some cases, however. For instance, when a Goodenough Islander (Young 1971) or a Siuai (Oliver 1955) transmits the message that he is a man of importance, influence, or prestige by giving away large numbers of yams and substantial numbers of pigs he is not simply claiming to be a big man. He is *displaying* the *fact* that he is. The amount that he gives away is an index of his "bigness" because it is "really affected by" that which it signifies—his influence, prestige, authority, or whatever.

It may be noted that in this example there has been an inversion of the more familiar qualities of the sign and the signified. We are more accustomed to the sign being insubstantial, and the signified substantial, as, for instance, in the relationship in which the word "dog" stands to the animal that it designates. It may be that in cases in which claims are made concerning states that are themselves without physical properties (e.g., prestige, worth, valor) the sign must be substantial if it is to be heeded. If the sign were insubstantial it would be mere words, vaporous, "hot air." Be this as it may, ritual signs are frequently substantial, a matter to which we shall return.

The indexicality of other cases is less patent but more interesting. Let us consider the Maring man who, by dancing at the festival of another group, signifies to his hosts that he will help them in warfare (Rappaport 1968).

There is surely no intrinsic or causal relationship between dancing and fighting, particularly between fighting in the *future* and dancing in the *present*. However, the *contemporary* state that the transmitter is signaling in this instance is a *conventional* state or act, namely one of promising or undertaking obligation. The conventional signal, dancing, is taken to be intrinsic to that conventional state, which is to say that to dance is to promise. The connection between dancing and promising is, of course, conventional. But promising is itself a convention and conventions can

only be signified conventionally. I am claiming, however, that the relation between two conventions, here dancing and promising, can be, and in this instance is, indexical because they are identical. Dancing at a *kaiko* and pledging support in future rounds of warfare are one and the same.

The case of the Maring dancer not only illustrates indexicality but also suggests indexicality's limitations. While it may be that to dance is to pledge support, to pledge support does not in itself honor that pledge. The undertaking of the pledge is in the present, and can be signaled indexically, but the fulfillment of the pledge is in the future, and that which does not yet exist cannot be signified indexically. What may make the hosts confident that their guests will honor in the future the pledges they are undertaking in the present is another matter relating to other aspects of the ritual. We shall return to this question later, noting now only that this confidence—such as it is—is contingent upon the association of the indexically transmitted pledge with the canonical messages borne by the liturgy.

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Two classes of information, then, are transmitted in ritual. All rituals, both animal and human, carry indexical information, information concerning the current states of the participants, often if not always transmitted indexically rather than symbolically. The second class, the canonical, is concerned with enduring aspects of nature, society, or cosmos, and is encoded in apparently invariant aspects of liturgical orders. The invariance of a liturgy may be an icon of the seeming changelessness of the canonical information that it incorporates, or even an index of its actual changelessness, but canonical information itself rests ultimately upon symbols.

While there is an indexical component in all rituals it might seem that in some rituals the significance of the indexical is so far outweighed by the canonical that it appears trivial, as, for instance, in the Mass. Consideration of this matter must be delayed until later but it may be well to assert—or reassert—now that in *all* liturgical rituals, and most clearly in all religious rituals, there is transmitted an indexical message that cannot be transmitted in any other way and, far from being trivial, it is one without which canonical messages are without force, or may even seem nonsensical.

To say, as it was said at the end of the last subsection, that some indexical messages are dependent for their acceptability on their association with the canonical, and to say that canonical messages are without force, or even sense, unless accompanied by certain indexical messages is to say that ritual is not merely a mode of communication in which two

sorts of information may be transmitted, but a very complex form in which the two sorts of information are dependent upon each other.

#### IV

Certain further aspects of indexical transmission itself should be discussed before we turn to the interrelation of the indexical and canonical. Consideration of these aspects of the indexical will, in fact, lead naturally to the canonical, but they can claim some interest in their own right.

Canonical messages, it has been emphasized, are carried by that which is invariant in the liturgy. In contrast, indexical transmission must rely upon whatever opportunities more or less invariant liturgy offers for variation. There are always some. First of all, there is, in the case of noncalendrical rituals, variation in occurrence, in whether or not to conduct the ritual at a particular time. Second, there is, for the individual, the matter of whether or not to participate in a ritual that is occurring. There is, at least theoretically, always the possibility of choice. This is a matter of great importance to which we shall return later. Third, there are many opportunities for variation in the content of ritual. I shall mention one kind of possibility very briefly before moving on to occurrence, about which I shall also be brief, since I have written about both content and occurrence elsewhere (1971a, 1971b), justifying their reiteration here on grounds of coherence.

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As far as contents are concerned, there are, among other things, usually possibilities in even the most invariant of liturgical orders for variations of a numerical sort, either cardinal or ordinal. For instance, among the Maring there is a well-specified procedure by which principal antagonists honor men from other groups who assisted them in their last round of warfare. At a public occasion at the end of their festival the principals call out the names of their allies, who come forward to receive both plaudits and salted pork. What is not specified by liturgy, but is of great importance to all concerned, is the order in which the names of the allies are called out. He who is called first is most honored. He who is called last may well feel dishonored.

Quantity is also important—this is obvious in events like Maring *kaiko* entertainments, during which hosts assess the size of future allied military detachments by the size of dancing contingents, and in potlatches and pig feasts messages concerning worthiness and prestige are communicated by numbers of pigs, pearlshells, blankets, coppers, and similar valuables.

Such rituals are obviously operating as public counting and ordering devices. But it is important to note that their operation includes more than simple counting or ordering. Incorporeal qualities that are in their nature only vaguely quantitative and certainly non-metrical, like honor and worth, are being given a form that is not only material, but clearly metrical, like numbers of pigs or coppers. In communication terms, qualities that would seem to vary analogically, like prestige, are not only being substantiated, but are being represented digitally.

The term "analogic" refers to entities and processes in which values can change through continuous imperceptible gradations—for instance temperature, distance, velocity, influence, maturation, mood, prestige, and worthiness. Signals, like other phenomena, may be analogic. Cries of pain, for instance, can proceed through continua of imperceptibly increasing intensity that may indicate the intensity of the suffering they signify. The term "digital," in contrast, refers to entities or processes whose values change not through continuous infinitesimal gradations but by discontinuous leaps.

Examples of discontinuous phenomena that lead themselves "naturally" to digital representation are the beating of the heart, and changes in the size of populations. Some objects include both digital and analogic elements. Thus, a thermostat contains both an analogic element, a thermometer, and a digital element, a switch that fluctuates back and forth between two discontinuous positions, "on and off." As there are analogic signals, so may there be digital signals employing discontinuous terms or scales, like numbers of pigs or blankets. There may sometimes be some loss of accuracy in the representation of analogic processes or entities digitally, but the advantage of digitalization is that it increases clarity. For instance, the representation of influence, prestige, or worth in numbers of discrete units, such as pigs, reduces the vagueness of a social and political situation by facilitating comparison. This reduction in vagueness is in part a function of substantiation, in part of digitalization. Thirty-two pigs thrown into a feasting competition are, simply and obviously, more than twenty-five. (To claim that digitalization increases clarity and facilitates comparison is not, of course, to claim that the clear is always to be preferred to the vague.)

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Whereas vagueness is reduced by the digitalization of some aspects of ritual's contents, ambiguity concerning the current state of the performers may be reduced or even eliminated by ritual's occurrence. Occurrence carries the digital to the extreme—or, rather, to one step away from the extreme. That is, it brings it to the binary, to the reduction of discrete units or states to two only. Any ritual included in the repertoire of a society can at any time only be occurring or not occurring. This



is to say that the occurrence of a noncalendrical ritual can transmit a significant binary, or "yes-no" (or "o/1" or "on-off") signal. But although occurrence transmits only a "yes-no" signal it may have been triggered by the achievement or violation of a particular state in some continuous (or "more-less") variable or even a complex state in a constellation of interrelated variables. For instance, a certain ritual performed by a Maring local group signifies its transition from spiritually sanctioned peacefulness to a potential belligerence that also enjoys spiritual support. The message concerning transition is entirely free of ambiguity: a group has either uprooted its *rumbim* plant or it has not. But *when* this ritual will occur depends upon a complex concatenation among the states of a large number of ecological, demographic, and social variables, including the rates of increase in the pig population, frequencies of human misfortune, the frequency and seriousness of arguments among co-residents, the number and health of a group's women, the ratio of taro to sweet potatoes in local gardens. The occurrence of the ritual, this is to say, summarizes a great mass of constantly fluctuating heterogeneous "more-less" information and transmits its summary as a simple binary signal which is in its nature unambiguous.

Reduction of the continuous and complex to the binary through ritual occurrence is also important in the transition of individuals from one state or condition to another. For instance a Tahitian lad decides sometime around the age of twelve to have himself supercised, thus making clear his transition from the status of child to that of *T'aure'area* (Levy 1973: 117ff., 368ff.). He thereby summarizes all of the obscure, continuous physical and psychic processes that in concert constitute his maturation, and transmits information concerning his decision as a simple yes-no signal.

There may appear to be a rather clumsy bit of sleight-of-hand in this abbreviated account. On the one hand I have claimed that the signal indicates a certain stage in the boy's maturational process, on the other that it represents a decision on his part to impose a change of status upon those processes. This duality is, I think, in the nature of the case. For one thing, the process of deciding to change status—a process that is terminated by the actual decision—is itself part of the complex maturational process. More important, the boy himself is the most significant receiver of the message he himself has transmitted by having himself supercised. He has, so to speak, signaled to himself that he has imposed a simple yes-no decision upon whatever ambivalence, fear, and doubt he may have been experiencing. There is nothing for him to do now but to bring his private processes into accord with the new public status that follows from his ritual act.

Two general points are to be made here. The first concerns distinction, the second the articulation of the unlike. It is obvious that the simple

“yes-no” of ritual occurrence, which separates the before from the after with absolute clarity, is admirably suited to impose upon the continua of nature distinctions that are much sharper than nature’s own. It may, that is, impose *unambiguous distinctions* upon *ambiguous differences* (see Wil- den 1972: 177). The binary characteristic of occurrence does not, of course, limit its application to single distinctions, for rituals are often arranged in series: the rites of passage stretching from birth to death, the festivals separating the years into seasons, those leading from war to husbandry and back again. Although we are mainly concerned in this section with the indexical content of ritual we also note here that the ability to make unambiguous distinctions, which is intrinsic to the occurrence of rituals, is not limited in its application to the indexical. Annual rounds of festivals surely distinguish the seasons from each other more clearly than the weather, and reference to them may order the lives of men more effectively than the growth of plants or changes in temperature. The clarity of ritual occurrence combined with its general formality and nonutility suit ritual ideally for service in what Bateson calls “context-marking” (1972: 289ff.) generally.

It is of considerable interest that ritual occurrence resembles digital computing machines with respect to its manner of operation as well as in its effects upon continuous processes. In an introductory textbook concerned with the logical design of digital circuits C. M. Reeves writes, “The successful operation of a real machine depends upon being able to separate the time intervals at which variables have their desired values from those in which they are changing. Logically, therefore, the passage of time is discrete where physically it is continuous” (1972: 7). Modern machines usually confine the time intervals in which the values of variables are changing to microseconds which, taken to be instantaneous, are ignored. In some rituals, similarly, the values of some variables are changed during the course of a ritual or series of rituals (Van Gennep 1909; Turner 1969). Between an act of separation and an act of re-aggregation there is a liminal period during which some aspect of the condition or state of some or all of the actors is transformed. As in the case of the digital machine, the time during which the values of variables are changing is out of ordinary time, as Eliade (1959) and others have observed. In contrast to the machine, in which the “time between times” is often virtually infinitesimal, the liminal or marginal periods demarcated ritually may last for hours, days, or even months or years. Moreover, we know that that which occurs during rituals and is instrumental in transforming some aspect of the actors’ states, is not always entirely discursive or digital. In the interstices of time, in the times out of time that lie between the before and after that rituals distinguish so clearly, there may be a time of continuous, highly affective performance in which

boundaries and distinctions are obliterated, rather than clarified. To emphasize, as I have in this section, ritual's digital aspects is not to deny its analogic aspects. At the end of this essay we shall return to the analogic heart held both safe and harmless within the digital brackets of ritual's occurrence.

The occurrence of rituals makes distinctions, but of course does not necessarily separate. While it may be that festivals distinguish the seasons one from another it is also the case that they join them into the circle of the year. The intervals between the rituals in protracted liturgical orders become, in part because they are set apart by rituals, not simply durations during which there has been more growth or the weather has grown warmer, but distinctive periods: childhood, manhood, spring, summer, autumn, war, peace. Bound together by the rituals distinguishing them, they form significant wholes: lives and histories, and the years that set lives into histories and histories into the cosmos.

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The occurrence of ritual not only articulates what it itself distinguishes, as the seasons by festival or sacrifice, or what it itself separates, as war from peace by ritual declaration. It also aids in the transduction of information between unlike systems. For instance, in the case of the uprooting of *rumbim* by Maring local groups, signifying, as we have noted, a passage from spiritually enforced peacefulness to potential belligerence, information concerning environmental, demographic, physical, and social variables is summarized and transmitted from a *local ecological system* into a *regional political system* (see Rappaport 1968). In the case of Tahitian supercision and other puberty rites, the ritual articulates an individual psychophysical system on the one hand and a social system on the other. Despite the fact that they share components, local ecological systems and regional political systems are "unlike," and the same may be said of individual psychophysical systems on the one hand and social systems on the other. Local ecological systems are "about" trophic exchanges, energy flows, soil depletion and replenishment. Regional political systems are "about" war, women, land, and the exchange of goods. Similarly, both psychophysical and social systems are characterized by continuous quantitative processes and continuous change in such variables as emotional, cognitive, and physical states on the one hand and changes in status, role, group affiliation, and economic status, among other things, on the other. Although they are related to each other and affect each other, and although any individual is a locus of both, psychophysical processes and social processes are quasi-autonomous with respect to each other. Neither is a direct function or outcome of the other, and information concerning the two sets is not altogether

commensurable. The same may be said of the relations between local ecological systems and regional political systems.

Since social and psychophysical processes are not altogether commensurable, nor are ecological and regional political processes, continuously fluctuating quantitative information concerning any of these systems is not directly meaningful in the system to which it is articulated. By "not directly meaningful" I mean that it cannot affect systematic nonrandom proportional changes in the other without first being interpreted or translated. The occurrence of ritual as a binary transducer summarizes this quantitative information into a simple statement that not only is nonambiguous but is meaningful in the system into which it is transmitted, e.g., "this boy is prepared to become, or has become, a man." It is significant that control transduction between unlike components of organic systems also relies heavily upon binary mechanisms because of the difficulty of translating continuous and often fluctuating quantitative information directly between incommensurable systems (Goldman 1960; Wilden 1972).

In some rituals local ecological systems may be articulated to regional political systems, and in many others social units of different magnitude or type may be brought together. It may be asserted, however, that in *all* rituals private psychophysical processes are articulated with public orders. This was clear in the case of the Tahitian youth. In having himself supercised the boy reaches out, so to speak, from his private processes—those of physical and psychic maturation—into a public liturgical order to grasp the category that he then imposes upon his private processes. It is no less so in the case of planting or uprooting *rumbim* among the Maring. In performing such a ritual each participant imposes upon his own private self a transformation of his public state: by uprooting *rumbim* he transforms himself from husbandman into warrior, by planting *rumbim* from warrior to husbandman.

## V

In discussing the liturgical variations that may carry indexical information we have approached the canonical, for it is from the canonical content of liturgy that are drawn the categories that give meaning to whatever indexical messages are transmitted. We come, this is to say, to the relationship of the indexical to the canonical. It is a complex relationship that I wish to address at first by returning, with a somewhat different emphasis, to an indexical message considered earlier.

By dancing at a *kaiko* a Maring man signals his pledge to help his hosts in warfare. Dancing signals a pledge because it is itself a pledging. As such, it was earlier argued, it indicates rather than merely symbolizes



the pledge with which it is “identified,” i.e., made identical. Now I wish to emphasize that “to pledge” is not merely to say something but to do something. A pledge is an act.

Ritual is full of conventional utterances which achieve conventional effects. “I name this ship the Queen Elizabeth.” “We declare war.” “I dub thee to knighthood.” “I swear to tell the truth.” “I promise to support you.” “We find the defendant guilty.” “I apologize.” In all of these instances, we would agree, the speaker is not simply saying something but doing something, and what he is doing—achieving a conventional effect through some sort of conventional procedure—cannot be done by the application of matter and energy to some object in accordance with the laws of physics, chemistry, or biology.

The importance of such utterances in the conduct of human affairs is so patent as to obviate any need for comment, but philosophers have, in the last two decades especially, given considerable attention to their peculiar characteristics. J. F. Austin (1962) has called them “performative utterances” and “illocutionary acts”; J. R. Searle (1969) includes them among what he calls “speech acts”; F. O’Doherty (1973a) refers to an important subclass as “factitive” acts or utterances; J. Skorupski (1976) uses the term “operative acts” for a class resembling them closely.

It is important to note that the efficacy of what I shall, following Austin’s earlier and simpler terminology, call “performatives” is not in the persuasive effect of these utterances upon others. If authorized persons declare peace in a proper manner peace is *declared*, whether or not the antagonists are persuaded to act accordingly. This is not to say that performative utterances may not be persuasive. They often have, to use Austin’s terms, “perlocutionary” as well as “illocutionary” force. But an action of some sort (beyond the obvious act of producing sounds, or even meaningful sounds) is completed in the performative gesture or utterance itself. Performatives of course differ in the scope of the action they complete. Thus, if I am authorized to do so and name this ship the Queen Elizabeth, this ship is so named, and that is really all there is to it. You may call it “Hortense” if you like, but its name happens to be Queen Elizabeth (Austin 1962: 99 *passim*). On the other hand, if I have danced at your *kaiko*, thereby promising to help you in warfare, that is not all there is to it, for it remains for me to fulfill my promise, and I may fail to do so. Following O’Doherty, we may say that the naming, which not only constitutes an action but actually brings into being the state of affairs with which it is concerned, is not simply performative, but “factitive” as well. Whereas many actions completed in ritual—dubbings, declarations of peace, marriages, purification—are factitive, it is obvious that *all* are not. Some—among them are those Austin called “commissives” (1962: 150ff.)—do not bring into being the states of affairs with which they

are concerned, but merely commit those performing them to do so sometime in the future.

While many liturgies are performative, while some sort of performative act is the main point of the performance, transforming war into peace, restoring purity to that which has been polluted, joining men and women in wedlock, performativeness is not confined to ritual. There is no advantage to be gained, for instance, in taking to be ritual the publican's utterance "The bar is closed." But when he says "the bar is closed" it is thereby closed, and we may as well go home. Performatives are not confined to ritual, but it may be suggested that there is a special relationship between ritual and performativeness.

First, the formal characteristics of ritual enhance the chances of success of the performatives they include. Like any other acts performatives can fail. If, for instance, I were to dub one of my junior colleagues knight of the garter he would not thereby become a knight of the garter, even if the conduct of the ritual were letter-perfect. Conversely, if Queen Elizabeth dubbed Princess Anne's horse to knighthood it probably wouldn't make him a knight. And if a befuddled cleric recited the service for the dead rather than the marriage liturgy it is doubtful if the couple standing before him would thereby be married or become objects of mourning (Austin 1962: *passim*). All of these instances of faulty performatives are of ritual performatives, and ritual performatives can fail, but the ludicrous nature of these instances suggests that they are less likely to fail than other performatives. The formality of liturgical orders helps to ensure that whatever performatives they may incorporate are performed by authorized people with respect to eligible persons or entities under proper circumstances in accordance with proper procedures. Moreover, the formality of ritual makes very clear and explicit what it is that is being done. For instance, if one Maring casually said to another whom he happened to be visiting, "I'll help you when next you go to war," it would not be clear whether this was to be taken as a vague statement of intent, as a prediction of what he would be likely to do, or as a promise, nor would it necessarily be clear what might be meant by "help." To dance this message in a ritual, however, makes it clear to all concerned that a pledge to help is undertaken, and that that help entails fighting. Ritual, this is to say, not only ensures the correctness of the performative enactment; it also makes the performatives it carries explicit, and it generally makes them weighty as well. If a message is communicated by participation in ritual it is in its nature not vague. Moreover, there is no point in mobilizing the formality, decorum, and solemnity of ritual to communicate messages that are of no importance or gravity. Promises are often communicated in ritual, but vague statements of intent seldom if ever are.

I shall only mention two other closely related reasons for considering the performativeness of ritual here. First, the association of the sacred or occult (I do not take them to be synonymous) with performatives in magical and religious rituals may hide their conventional nature from the actors, and this obviously may enhance their chances of success. To take the state of affairs established by a king's enthronement to derive from the sacramental virtue of crown and chrism is perhaps more effective with respect to the maintenance of the order of which the king is a part than would be the recognition of enthronement as a naked performative. Second, as Ruth Finnigan (1969: 550) has suggested, albeit rather unspecifically, the "truth lying behind" assumptions concerning what is often called "the magical power of words" may be related to their illocutionary force or performativeness. It may be proposed, rather more specifically, that the magical power of some of the words and acts forming part of liturgies derives from the factitive relationship between them and the conventional states of affairs with which they are concerned. Magical power may be attributed to yet other words by extension of the principle of factitiveness beyond the domain of the conventional in which it is effective into the domain of the physical, in which it is not. But it behooves us to be wary about stipulating the limits of what may in fact be effected by ritual acts. The efficacy of factitiveness may, after all, be augmented by the perlocutionary force of the acts in which the factitiveness inheres, and no one yet knows how far into physical processes perlocutionary force may penetrate. It does seem safe to say, however, that the efficacy of ritual may extend beyond the purely conventional and into the organic, for people do occasionally die of witchcraft or ensorcellement, and they are sometimes healed by faith. The magical efficacy of words may rest upon their perlocutionary force or persuasiveness as well as upon their factitiveness.

## VI

Perhaps the most important reason for considering the performativeness of rituals is, paradoxically, that certain rituals are not themselves obviously performative but may make performatives possible.

There seems to be more to some or even all liturgies than the performatives they incorporate, and some liturgies may not seem to include performatives in any simple sense at all. Many religious rituals do not seem to be directed toward achieving simple conventional effects through conventional procedures. Although simple performativeness is not criterial of ritual, something like it, but of higher order, is. We approach here the conjunction of formality and performance that was emphasized

in the introduction. We come, this is to say, to what is implicit in the act of performing a liturgical order.

The term "liturgical order," we may be reminded here, refers both to the more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances that comprise single rituals, and to the sequences of rituals and make up ritual cycles and series. "Order" is an especially appropriate term because these series of events constitute orders in several senses beyond the obvious one of sequence. They are also orders in the sense of organization, form, or regularity (synonymous with the meaning of "order" in such phrases as "the social order"). As such they constitute order, or maintain orderliness, in contrast to disorder, entropy, or chaos. They are, further, orders in that they are in some sense imperatives or directives.

Liturgical orders, it was asserted in the first section, must be performed. Without performance there is no ritual, no liturgical order. There are still extant in books outlines of liturgies performed in Ur and Luxor, but they are dead, for they are no longer given voice by men's breaths nor energy by their bodies. A liturgical order is an ordering of *acts* or *utterances*, and as such it is enlivened, realized, or established *only when* those acts are performed and those utterances voiced. We shall return to this shortly. The point to be made here is that this relationship of the act of performance to that which is being performed—that it brings it into being—cannot help but specify as well the relationship of the performer to that which he is performing. He is not merely transmitting messages he finds encoded in the liturgy. He is participating in—becoming part of—the order to which his own body and breath give life.

Since to perform a liturgical order, which is by definition a relatively *invariant* sequence of acts and utterances *encoded by someone other* than the performer himself, is to *conform* to it, authority or directive is *intrinsic* to liturgical order. However, the account just offered suggests something more intimate, and perhaps even more binding than whatever is connoted by terms like "authority" and "conformity." The notion of communication implies, minimally, transmitters, receivers, messages, and channels through which messages are carried from transmitters to receivers. Sometimes, moreover, as in the case of canonical messages, the senders or encoders of messages are separate from the transmitters. We earlier noted a peculiarity of ritual communication, namely that in ritual the transmitters and receivers are often one and the same. At least the transmitter is always among the receivers. Now we have noted another of ritual's peculiarities. In ritual the transmitter-receiver becomes fused with the message he is transmitting and receiving. In conforming to that which his performance brings into being, and which comes alive in its performance, he becomes indistinguishable from it, a part of it, for the time being. Since this is the case, for a performer to reject the canonical



message encoded in a liturgical order that is being realized by his performance as he is participating in it seems to me to be a contradiction in terms, and thus impossible. This is to say that *by performing a liturgical order the performer accepts, and indicates to himself and to others that he accepts, whatever is encoded in the canons of the liturgical order in which he is participating*. This message of acceptance is the indexical message that is intrinsic to all liturgical performances, the indexical message without which liturgical orders and the canonical messages they encode are nonexistent or vacuous. It is not a trivial message because men are not bound to acceptance by their genotypes. They are often free not to participate in rituals if they do not care to, and refusal to participate is always a possibility, at least logically, conceivable by potential actors. Participation always rests in some degree upon choice.

We see here, incidentally, how myth and ritual differ in an important way: ritual specifies the relationship of the performer to what he is performing while myth does not. A myth can be recounted as an entertainment by a bard, as an edifying lesson for his children by a father, or as a set of oppositions by a structuralist, although it may be recited as doctrine by a priest to a novice. To recite a myth is not necessarily to accept it, and a myth survives as well on the printed page as it does on the tongues of living men.

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We are led here back to the matter of performatives and to the assertion that while all ritual may not be performative, rituals make performatives possible. Austin (1962: 26ff.) listed six conditions that must be fulfilled if performatives are to come off. These include such obvious stipulations as that they be performed by proper persons under proper circumstances. Now his first and most basic condition is that for conventional states of affairs to be achieved there must *exist accepted* conventional procedures for achieving them. They cannot be achieved without such conventions. If young men are to be transformed into knights there must be a procedure for doing so, and this procedure must be acceptable to the relevant public. The acceptance of a procedure for dubbing knights also obviously presupposes the existence of an accepted convention of knight-hood. This stipulation is not vacuous, for it can be violated. For instance, it is unlikely that in the contemporary United States a slap of the glove across the cheek would ever result in a duel. The conventions of honor, of which this ritual action was a part, are no longer accepted. They no longer exist except in memory or history.

Although Austin stipulated as requisite to the effectiveness of performatives that the relevant conventions exist and be accepted, he gave no attention to the matter of how this prerequisite is fulfilled. I am arguing here that it is fulfilled by ritual. The performance of ritual

establishes the existence of conventions and accepts them simultaneously and inextricably. Ritual performance is not in itself merely, nor even necessarily, factitive. It is not always performative in a simple way, merely bringing into being conventional states of affairs through conventional actions. It is, rather, *meta*-performative and *meta*-factitive, for it *establishes*, that is, it stipulates and accepts, the conventions in respect to which conventional states of affairs are defined and realized. The canons accepted in their performance may, of course, represent conventional understandings concerning nature and the cosmos, or social and moral rules as well as simple performatives, but in any case the performance of a liturgical order realizes or establishes the conventions that the liturgical order embodies. It may be suggested that as the reality lying behind notions of the magical power of words is simple performativeness mystified, so may the reality lying behind the creative power of The Word—the Eternal Word—be meta-performativeness mystified—the establishment of conventions through participation in invariant liturgical orders.

## VII

The assertion that acceptance is intrinsic to performance is on the face of it either dubious or indubitable, and therefore requires some comment and clarification.

First, to say that the performer accepts the authority of a liturgical order in performing it is not to say that he is necessarily doing anything very grave. The gravity of the act of acceptance is contingent upon whatever the liturgical order represents. This, of course, varies.

Second, and more important, "acceptance" is not synonymous with belief. Belief I take to be some sort of inward state knowable subjectively if at all. Acceptance, in contrast, is not a private state but a *public act*, visible to both the witnesses and the performer himself. This is to reiterate in a different way a point made in section III, namely that participation in ritual marks a boundary, so to speak, between public and private processes. Liturgical orders are public, and participation in them constitutes a public acceptance of a public order, regardless of the private state of belief. Acceptance is, thus, a fundamental social act and it forms a basis for public orders, which unknowable and volatile belief or conviction cannot.

Acceptance not only is not belief. It does not even imply belief. The private processes of individuals may often be persuaded by their ritual participation to come into conformity with their public acts, but this is not always the case. This suggests that while participation in liturgical performance may be highly visible, it is not very profound, for it neither indicates nor does it necessarily produce an inward state conforming

to it directly. But for this very reason it is in some sense very profound, for it makes it possible for the performer to transcend his own doubt by accepting in defiance of it. Acceptance in this sense has much in common with some theological notions of faith (O'Doherty 1973b: 8ff.; Tillich 1957: 16ff.). Nevertheless, it must be recognized that when the public and the private are so loosely related, a range of what Austin (1962: 95ff.) called "infelicities"—insincerities and the like—become possible, and they include possibilities for deceit. But the alternative to the possibility of deceit might well be the certainty of non-order or disorder if public order were required to depend upon the continuing acquiescence of the private processes of those subject to it—upon their belief, sincerity, good will, conviction, for these surely must fluctuate continuously. While it is perhaps obvious it is worth reiterating that insincerity and the possibility of deceit are intrinsic to the very acts that make social life possible for organisms that relate to each other in accordance with voluntarily accepted convention rather than in ways more narrowly defined by their genotypes. Our argument here suggests, however, that although liturgical performance does not eliminate infelicities, it does in some degree offset or ameliorate their effects by rendering them irrelevant. It is the visible, explicit, public act of acceptance, and not the invisible, ambiguous, private sentiment that is socially and morally binding.

To say, then, that a liturgical order is in its nature authoritative, or that the canons it encodes are accepted in its performance, is not to say that the performer will "believe" the cosmic order it may project or approve of the rules or norms it may incorporate. It is not even to claim that he will abide by these rules or norms. We all know that a man may participate in a liturgy in which commandments against adultery and thieving are pronounced, then pilfer from the poor box on his way out of church, or depart from communion to tryst with his neighbor's wife. But such behavior does not render his acceptance meaningless or empty. It is an entailment of liturgical performances to establish conventional understandings, rules, and norms in accordance with which everyday behavior is supposed to proceed, not to control that behavior directly. Participation in a ritual in which a prohibition against adultery is enunciated by, among others, himself may not prevent a man from committing adultery, but it does establish for him the prohibition of adultery as a rule that he himself has accepted as he enlivened it. Whether or not he abides by the rule he has obligated himself to do so. If he does not he has violated an obligation that *he himself* has avowed. The assertion here is similar to that of the philosopher John Searle, who has argued that:

When one enters an institutional activity by invoking the rules of that institution one necessarily commits oneself in such and such ways, regardless of

whether one approves or disapproves of the institution. In the case of linguistic institutions like promising and accepting the serious utterance of words commits one in ways which are determined by the meaning of the words. In certain first person utterances the utterance is the undertaking of an obligation. [1969: 189]

Searle later notes that the notion of obligation is closely related to those of accepting, recognizing, acknowledging. This suggests that there is no obligation without acceptance, and perhaps that morality begins with acceptance. While the acceptance of conventional undertakings, rules, and procedures is possible outside of ritual, the formal and public nature of liturgical performance makes it very clear that an act of acceptance is taking place, that the acceptance is serious, and what it is that is being accepted. In Austin's terms (1962: *passim*) it is "explicitly performative." But much more is implicit in ritual acceptance than simply making clear and weighty what is being done and in respect to what it is being done. Moreover, that the obligations clearly and explicitly accepted in liturgical performance are nullified neither by disbelief nor violation has a significance transcending the problems of insincerity and deceitfulness.

It may be that some conventions, particularly those of a more or less neutral sort, such as linguistic conventions, can emerge out of ordinary usage and be maintained by ordinary usage in sufficient stability to allow meaningful and orderly social interaction. In such cases "the norm is identical with the statistical average" (Leach 1972: 320). Variation with respect to some conventions can be comfortably tolerated and usage may be allowed to establish, maintain, or change them. But statistical averages arising out of usage are not able to establish conventional understandings, rules, or proceedings, concerning some aspects of social life. For instance, ordinary usage might have difficulty concerning the establishment of conventional understandings about things without material or behavioral referents and therefore without any ordinary usage—conventions concerning gods and the like. It may also have difficulty establishing conventions concerning aspects of social life that are not only arbitrary, but highly charged emotionally, or that are dangerous, or require coordination—those concerning, for instance, sex, leadership, service to the social group. Behavioral variations may be less tolerable with respect to these matters than with respect to linguistic usage, and variation or uncertainty as to the precise nature of the convention, a somewhat different matter, may be even less tolerable than variations in the behavior it presumably directs. Ordinary usage *always* varies, and in ordinary usage rules and conventions are frequently violated. Leach was generally correct but did not put the matter strongly enough when he suggested that "if anarchy is to be avoided, the individuals who make up a society must



from time to time be reminded of the underlying order that is supposed to guide their social activities. Ritual performances have this function for the group as a whole; they momentarily make explicit what is otherwise fiction" (1954: 16). Although usage may not be faithful to it, that which is represented in liturgy is not a fiction, and the performance does more than *remind* individuals of an underlying order. It *establishes* that order. Usage erodes order and it is therefore necessary to establish at least some conventions in a way that protects them from dissolution in the variations of ordinary usage and from overthrow by the violations in which usage abounds. Liturgy preserves the conventions it encodes inviolate in the face of the vagaries of usage, and in this respect it may be without functional equivalents. Conventions promulgated by decree and maintained by force may also be insulated from dissolution in usage. But the acceptance by those whom they aim to subordinate is not intrinsic to decrees. It may also be suggested in passing that the conditions permitting some men to establish conventions by issuing directives to which other men must conform may be relatively recent, for they may rest upon differential control of strategic resources, and there was probably little opportunity for such differentiation to develop before the appearance of plant and animal cultivation ten thousand or so years ago. Moreover, even after social stratification based upon resource control became well developed, authorities continued—as some still do—to stand upon their sanctity, and sanctity itself may emerge out of ritual. We shall return to this later, noting here that the performance of ritual does not require superordinate human authorities, and must have antedated forms for promulgating conventions that do. It is plausible to suggest, therefore, that ritual, in the very structure of which authority and acquiescence are implicit, was the primordial means by which men, divested of genetically determined order, established the conventions by which they order themselves.

In sum, ritual is unique in at once establishing conventions, that is to say enunciating and accepting them, and in insulating them from usage. In both enunciating conventions and accepting them, it contains within itself not simply a symbolic representation of social contract, but a consummation of social contract. As such, ritual, which also establishes a boundary between private and public processes, thereby insulating public orders from private vagaries (and vice versa)\* is *the* basic social act.

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\* Ervin Goffman, in "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor" (1956) and later works, has argued that the rituals of deference and demeanor protect the psyche from lacerations that would inevitably result from naked encounters.

## VIII

To say that ritual is the basic social act must be to say that it is in some sense moral, for the social subsumes the moral. Not all rituals are explicitly moral, but it is worth making explicit that morality, like social contract, is implicit in ritual's very structure.

Moral dicta may, of course, form part of the canon that a liturgy carries, and we have already noted that it is also implied by obligation, which some philosophers, at least, would take to be entailed by the acceptance intrinsic to performance. Failure to abide by the terms of an obligation that one has accepted is generally, perhaps even universally, categorized as immoral, unethical, or wrong. It might even be argued that the violation of obligation is the fundamental immoral act. This is not our concern here, however, and morality is intrinsic to ritual's structure in a yet more subtle way. While not confined to them, the matter may be illustrated most clearly by reference to specifically factitive rituals like ordinations, dubbings, and peace declarations. It is of the essence to contrast such performative acts or utterances with ordinary descriptive statements. Austin initially tried to say that performatives are neither true nor false (1970-233ff.) whereas statements are. Later he found this not always to be the case. However, they do differ from statements in a related way which he did not note but which does have to do with truth, and with the foundations of morality.

The adequacy of a descriptive statement is assessed by the degree to which it conforms to the state of affairs that it purports to describe. If it is in sufficient conformity we say that it is true, accurate, or correct. If it is not we say that it is false, erroneous, inaccurate, lying. The state of affairs is the criterion by which the statement is assessed. The relationship of performatives—particularly factitives and commissives—to the states of affairs with which they are concerned is *exactly* the inverse. If, for instance, a man is properly dubbed to knighthood and then proceeds to violate all of the canons of chivalry, or if peace is declared in a properly conducted ritual but soon after one of the parties to the declaration attacks the other, we would not say that the dubbing or the peace declaration were faulty, but that the states of affairs were faulty. *We judge the state of affairs by the degree to which it conforms to the stipulations of the performative ritual.* Thus, liturgical orders provide criteria in terms of which events—usage and history—may be judged. As such, liturgical orders are *intrinsically* correct or moral. Morality is inherent in the *structure* of liturgical performance *prior* to whatever its canons assert about morality itself or about whatever in particular is moral. This morality is not limited to the structure of simple factitive and commissive rituals, which seek to establish particular conventional states of affairs,

but is intrinsic as well to rituals that seek to establish conventional orders. It is of interest here that ancient Persians and Indians referred to states of affairs that departed from the proper order, which was established liturgically, by a term, *anrta*, that also seems to have meant "lie" (Duchesne-Guillemin 1966: 26ff.; Brown 1972: 252ff.).

## IX

That virtually all rituals include acts as well as words, and often objects and substances as well, suggests that not all messages are communicated equally well by all media. We touched upon this question earlier in noting that the indexical messages transmitted by the distribution of objects—pigs, pearlshells, blankets, and copper plaques—in competitive feasting could not have been transmitted as well—or even at all—by words, and physical acts may also have distinct communicative virtues. Formal postures and gestures may communicate something more, or communicate it better, than do the corresponding words. For instance, to kneel subordination, it is plausible to suggest, is not simply to state subordination, but to display it, and how may information concerning some state of a transmitter better be signaled than by displaying that state itself? We have returned here to the indexical status of messages concerning the state of transmitters, adding to our earlier discussion the suggestion that although words may serve as indices and may even be necessary to stipulate the indexicality of physical acts (dancing would not be promising unless it were sometime so stipulated in words), physical acts carry indexical messages more convincingly than does language. "Actions," as the saying goes, "speak louder than words," even when the actions are ritual actions—or perhaps especially when they are ritual actions, for the acceptance of a particular order is intrinsic to a ritual act. Liturgy's acts may also speak more clearly than words. The very limitations of display may enhance its clarity. The subtlety of ordinary language is such that it can suggest, connote, hint at, or imply such delicately graded degrees of, say, subordination, respect, or contempt that it can shroud all social relations in ambiguity, vagueness, and uncertainty. But one kneels or one does not, and we may recall here the clarity that is intrinsic to binary signals.

It may be objected, however, that the language of liturgy is not ordinary language, but stylized and invariant. As one kneels or one does not, so one does or does not recite a ritual formula, and so ritual words as well as acts can—and undoubtedly do—transmit indexical messages. Acts, however, have a related virtue not possessed by either words or the objects and substances that rituals may employ. Earlier I suggested that in ritual transmitter, receiver, and canonical message are fused in the

participant, but nothing was said about what it is that constitutes the participant. Given the possibility or even probability of discontinuity or even conflict between public and private processes this is not a trivial question. Indeed, it is highly problematic.

I would now propose that the use of the body defines the self of the performer for himself and for others. In kneeling, for instance, he is not merely sending a message to the effect that he submits in ephemeral words that flutter away from his mouth. He identifies his inseparable, indispensable, and enduring body with his subordination. The subordinated self is neither a creature of insubstantial words from which he may separate himself without loss of blood, nor some insubstantial essence or soul that cannot be located in space or confined in time. It is his visible, present, living substance that he "puts on the line," that "stands up (or kneels down) to be counted." As "saying" may be "doing," "doing" may also be an especially powerful—or substantial—way of "saying."

As ritual acts and objects have special communication qualities so, of course, do words have others, as Tambiah (1968) has argued. Whereas acts and substances represent substantially that which is of the here and now, the words of liturgy can connect the here and now to the past, or even to the beginning of time, and to the future, or even to time's end. In their very invariance the words of liturgy implicitly assimilate the current event into an ancient or ageless category of events, something that speechless gesture, mortal substance, or expendable objects alone cannot. Because of their symbolic quality, this is to say, invariant words easily escape from the here and now and thus can represent felicitously the canonical, which is never confined to the here and now. Objects like the cross can have symbolic value, it is true, and thus make reference to that which is present in neither time nor space, but such objects must be assigned symbolic value by words, and words are ultimately necessary to representations of the canonical.

The informative virtues of the physical and verbal aspects of liturgy thus seem to complement or even complete each other. But terms like "complement" or even "complete" do not express adequately the intimacy of the relationship between liturgical words and acts. By drawing himself into a posture to which canonical words give symbolic value, the performer incarnates a symbol. He gives substance to the symbol as that symbol gives him form. The canonical and the indexical come together in the *substance* of the *formal* posture or gesture.

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In including within itself both word and substance, ritual may contain within itself a paradigm of creation. Many myths of creation, as Bateson (1972: xxiii ff.) has recently emphasized, do not take creation to be,



simply, or even at all, the production of matter *ex nihilo*, but of giving form to inchoate matter already in existence. Creation, this is to say, is conceived as the informing of substance and the substantiation of form, a union of form and substance. Form—the ordering principle or agent—is often explicitly associated with word. The Mamandabari men, who appear in the myths of the Walbiri people of Central Australia, emerge from the yet featureless earth. First, they give themselves being by singing their own names, and then they walk across the land singing its places and species into being (Meggitt 1965). The Wawilak sisters of the Murngin people of Arnhem Land also created places and species by naming them (Warner 1937: 150ff.). In Genesis the world was formed out of waste by the utterances of God, and earth was transformed into man by the breath of God. Breath and word are surely connected. The second Adam was, of course, the Word become Flesh.

Creation, then, in some myths at least, is conceived as the primordial union of two primitive and irreducible categories, form and substance, and in ritual there seems to be a reunion of this primordial union. What better way to represent form than by the invariant words of a liturgical order, or substance than by drawing the body into a ritual posture or using some object or substance sacramentally? A similar theory concerning the sacraments was first propounded by William of Auxerre in the thirteenth century. “The sensible act or thing used in a sacrament was likened to formless matter, being indeterminate in use and adaptable to many purposes; it was determined to a spiritual significance by the use of words, which then played the part of the metaphysical *forma essentialis*” (Lacey 1918: 907). But as substance is formless without word, so form alone could not exist in this world of matter and energy independent of substance. Consequently, all Catholic sacraments require their proper *materia* as well as their proper invocation, and so do those of the Orthodox church. It should be noted that when William of Auxerre sought to account for the fact that the sacraments included both word and matter the term “sacrament” was used much more generally than it has been since the Council of Trent, which stipulated just seven sacraments “properly so-called.” His proposal, that is, was advanced as a more or less general theory of Catholic ritual.

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To observe that ritual in including both verbal and physical components may in some sense represent—re-present—a primordial union of form and substance does not account for why it is that men should take this union to be problematic, much less for why form should so often be associated with words. The distinction does not arise directly from experience, for, after all, no one has ever experienced either matterless form or

formless matter. Nature is precisely as full of one as of the other. And yet, although no one has experienced chaos, everyone has experienced what he takes to be disorder. Moreover, although the natural world is full of form, the forms of the conventions pressing upon humans are not obviously given by the forms of nature. It is conventional, not natural form, that is problematic. If the distinction between form and substance is to be made at all the association of form with words may be obvious, for conventional forms must ultimately be specified in words. This is to say that conventional forms are, in a sense, naturally associated with words.

Bateson (1972: xxv) has cautiously suggested that the distinction between form and substance may be implicit in the subject-predicate relationship in ordinary language. Almost all subjects can be predicated in a number of ways and almost all predicates can apply to a number of subjects. The subject-predicate relationship forces upon the mind alternatives, including alternative orders and disorders, and in making them conceivable it makes at least some of them possible. The very characteristics of language that provide the basis for man's astounding adaptive flexibility also give birth to confusion, and threaten with chaos and babel the orders that groups of men do establish. Thus, if there are going to be any words at all it may be necessary to establish *The Word*. The Word is implicit in the invariant words of liturgical orders, of course, and in cosmogonic myths Word is established by the assertion that *it* has established the natural world. In the primordial union of form and substance expressed in myth and of which ritual may be a representation, the natural order is apparently formed by, and thus absorbed into, a conventional order. But the point of the exercise is not so much, I think, to make nature conventional as the reverse. By accounting for the palpable world of trees and beasts and places the conventional is transformed into the apparently natural and, in becoming natural partakes of the regularity, necessity, and solidity of natural objects and processes that apparently present themselves directly to the senses. To conventionalize the natural is at the same time to naturalize the conventional. In the ritual union of form and substance there is a reunion of convention with the nature from which words have alienated, but never freed it.

## X

Word and words are components of language, and liturgical orders like language have regular structures that may be in some respects analogous to grammars. Both ritual and language are modes of communication, and it is not surprising that some anthropologists should take ritual to be a kind of language. This identification or analogy can be illuminating but,

as those who propose it themselves hasten to point out (e.g., Leach 1966), it is very rough, for liturgy and language differ in interesting ways, some of which it is well to make explicit here.

One important difference is implied in the opposition of Word to words. All natural languages consist of words and sets of rules for combining them into meaningful utterances. While these rules restrict how things may be said they do not themselves restrict what things may be said, and it is possible in any language to say whatever there is vocabulary available to say. In contrast, to the degree that a liturgical order is invariant there are obviously restrictions being placed upon what it can communicate. In the extreme case what it can communicate is reduced to unity. Both language and liturgy may make use of the same words, often with the same designata, but the ways in which they may be related to each other semantically in the utterances of ordinary language are not formally specified in language, whereas they are in liturgy. As Maurice Bloch (1973) has put it, "the features of juncture" are fixed in liturgy, but open in language. Therefore, ordinary language easily accommodates argument, nuance, gradation, and modification, but liturgical language does not. A liturgy does not argue, but it may assert. The flexibility of ordinary discourse is such that it can be responsive to the ever-changing present, and when a speaker's utterances do not take account of changes in what is being said to him we take it to be a sign of pathology: he is obtuse, fanatical, insane or possibly deaf. The rigidity of liturgical discourse, in contrast, is such that it can represent whatever is conceived to be never-changing, and changes in it may be taken to be pathological: erroneous, unorthodox, inefficacious, unhallowed, heretical, or blasphemous. In short, natural languages are open *codes*; liturgies, although they must use the words of language, are more or less constricting *orders*. It may be suggested that the very act of confining words that may also appear in the free and loose usage of ordinary discourse to the places assigned to them in liturgy emphasizes that liturgies are restrictive orders standing against the possibility of unrestricted disorder.

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While some words may have places in both ordinary and liturgical language, there are important differences between liturgical signs, even when they are words, and the words of ordinary discourse. As Victor Turner (1967, 1973) especially has emphasized, liturgical symbols are likely to be "multivocalic," that is, they have a number of significata and, as both he and Joseph Campbell (1959: *passim*) have argued, these significata are likely to have a bipolar distribution. "At one pole of meaning . . . significata tend to refer to the moral and social orders . . . at the other, the sensory . . . , are concentrated references . . . that may be

expected to stimulate desires and feelings" (Turner 1973: 1100), particularly references to organic structures, substances, and processes. It is perhaps important in this regard that liturgical signs are often substantial, and at once iconic and indexical as well as symbolic. In contrast, the words of ordinary language also do frequently have more than one meaning but an important difference distinguishes the way in which they usually signify from symbolization in ritual. In everyday discourse the context usually tells us to which of a word's several significata it presently refers. If it fails to eliminate all but one of the possibilities we say that the utterance is ambiguous, and under most circumstances take ambiguity to be a fault. Ordinary discursive language is linear: one meaning follows another.

In contrast, the signification of liturgy has a simultaneous dimension. A ritual sign may refer to all of its significata at once, and it does not derive its meanings from each of them separately so much as it derives its meaning from the *union* of these several significata. This is to say that that which is noise in ordinary language is meaning in liturgy. Of course the meaning that may derive from a concatenation of significata among which might well be included organic and psychic, as well as social, environmental, and spiritual references, may finally be so abstract, complex, and emotionally charged as to be ineffable.

Paul Tillich long ago distinguished what he called symbols (by which he meant liturgical signs particularly) from other elements of communication in noting that they "participate in that to which they point" (1957). A vague notion of identification if not indexicality may be implicit in this suggestion. Beattie implied the iconicity, or something like it, of liturgical components in arguing that the relationship between what *he* (in agreement with many others) called symbols and their significata is not merely arbitrary. They are joined by an "underlying rationale" or appropriateness: the serpent biting its tail symbolizes eternity, the large-headed and inscrutable owl wisdom, whiteness purity and virtue (1964: 69ff.). Firth follows a usage that has considerable currency when he says that symbols have "a complex series of associations, often of an emotional kind, and [are] difficult (some would say impossible) to describe in terms other than partial representation" (1973: 75). These and other understandings of the symbol and symbolization obviously differ radically from the concept of symbols as, simply, signs only conventionally related to that which they signify.

John Skorupski (1976: 119ff.) has recently pointed out that designators are of two types, those that name or denote, and those that represent. Thus "Fido" names or denotes Fido, it does not represent him; on the other hand, a serpent biting its tail represents eternity—it does not name or denote it; equally whiteness represents purity rather than



naming or denoting it. The term “symbol” has been used to refer to both denotative and representational designators, and since the distinction between denotation and representation has seldom been made explicit some confusion has been engendered.

Skorupski would reserve “symbol” for representational designators, excluding from its coverage those that simply denote or name. His justification for this usage lies in the importance of representations in ritual action:

Thus the symbol substitutes for the thing symbolised. We are sometimes said to think in words—certainly we communicate with each other in words. *In* words *about* things. . . . The symbol is itself made the object of thought. It stands for, or *re-presents*, the thing symbolised. In other words, it makes it present to the senses, and is treated for the purposes of symbolic action as being what is symbolised. On this picture the logic of a symbolic action is clear: it represents or enacts an action, event or state of affairs in which the thing represented by the symbol plays a part analogous to that which the symbol plays in the symbolic action itself. [1976: 123]

This account suggests additional grounds for the substantial nature of liturgical signs. It accords comfortably with both the contagious and sympathetic principles of “magical” efficacy, and it is also compatible with a performative theory of ritual efficacy.

Skorupski’s distinction between denotative and representational designators is important and useful but it seems to me that nothing is to be gained and something is to be lost by reserving “symbol” for representational designators exclusively. More important, to call signs that represent “symbols” and those that denote by another term may be to distinguish them too radically. On the other hand, to distinguish in a rough way between representational symbols and denotative symbols is to recognize their similarities as well as their differences. It also encourages recognition of certain aspects of the relationship of representation to denotation. First, representation is contingent upon denotation. The Worm Ourobours could not represent eternity until denotative words had pointed to eternity; similarly, white could not represent purity or virtue until a number of denotative operations had taken place. Second, representational symbols may be fused out of associations of simpler significations, including denotative symbols, in liturgical performance. That is, in the liturgical sign, which is multivocalic and bipolar, which may be at once iconic, indexical, and denotative, and which is embodied in something substantial—a cross, a flag, a posture—there seems to be union of a concatenated mass of simple significations into a single but complex representation. Once such a representation is brought into being it may be “treated . . . as *being* what is symbolised.” When that which is symbolized is abstract or ineffable but the symbol itself is substantial

it is the symbol that provides reality to the symbolized. Moreover, it is easier to operate upon substantial representations than insubstantial significations. The distinction between denotation and representation is not absolute, and in liturgies denotations, joined with icons and indices, are transformed into representations. We may recall here Bateson's observation (1972: 183) that "in the dim area where art, magic and religion overlap" there is sometimes "an attempt to deny the difference between map and territory" characteristic of denotative symbols and to return to a more innocent mode of communication.

Two related points follow from the complexity of liturgical representation. First, although it is well-known that among some people liturgical orders are important in the regulation of social, political, or ecological relations, liturgical orders cannot be said to "reflect," "interpret," or "represent" them in any simple way. They are not simply social or psychic orders played out and mystified in public symbols. As we all know, some liturgies make no reference to existing social arrangements or if they do, at one and the same time, even in the self-same symbol, they may refer both to putative entities transcending the existing social orders and to the private processes of individuals. In their wholeness (a wholeness implicit in the term "order" as organization) liturgical orders are not simply representations of the social, physical, psychic, or imagined. They represent, that is, re-present, themselves (see Babcock-Abrahams 1973).

We note here another way in which liturgical representations differ from ordinary language. The distinctions of language cut the world into bits—into categories, classes, oppositions, and contrasts. It is in the nature of language to search out all differences and to turn them into distinctions which then provide bases for boundaries and barriers. It is, on the other hand, in the nature of liturgical orders to unite, or reunite, the psychic, social, natural, and cosmic orders which language and the exigencies of life pull apart. It is of importance in this regard that representations in ritual are often multi-modal, employing at one and the same time words, music, noise, odors, objects, and substances.

Liturgical orders bind together disparate entities and processes, and it is this binding together rather than what is bound together that is peculiar to them. Liturgical orders are meta-orders, or orders of orders, and if we were to characterize in a phrase their relationship to what lies outside of them we might say that they mend ever again worlds forever breaking apart under the blows of usage and the slashing distinctions of language.

## XI

There is, of course, considerable range in the canonical content of liturgical representations. Not all liturgies give equal weight to all possible classes. The Mass, for instance, seems to be largely taken up with cosmic and spiritual references and it also includes profound body symbolism, but other rituals give more prominent place to representations, either mystified, implicit or explicit, of aspects of contemporary social life. Rules concerning social behavior are enunciated in some, and others incorporate conventional procedures for achieving conventional effects—transforming princes into kings, war into peace, dances into commitments. Sometimes a full range of messages are encoded in a single ritual. Among the Maring of New Guinea, for example, the ritual that establishes truces in accordance with conventional procedures also establishes deceased ancestors as sentient and powerful beings. In contrast, the Mass and Jewish sabbath services hardly refer to the existing social order. They do, however, establish the existence of cosmic entities upon which other rituals more directly concerned with social particulars are contingent. If a king is to be crowned in the name of God in a coronation ritual, or if men are to swear in the name of God in a courtroom, it is necessary for the existence of that God to have already been established. This may be done, in fact is perhaps best done, in rituals removed from crownings or courtrooms.

We have seen in previous sections that liturgical orders have both sequential and simultaneous dimensions. As acts and utterances follow each other, so meanings which are chordlike in their signification follow each other. Now we see that liturgy also has a hierarchal dimension which may be manifested either in single rituals or in related rituals, some contingent upon others. There are surely important differences in the hierarchical development of liturgical orders, and it may be that such differences correspond to differences among societies in the degree to which they are stratified or ranked. It is generally if not always the case, however, that the “ultimate” or “absolute” components of liturgical orders are the cosmic or spiritual entities to which they make references, while the contingent elements are their social referents and the liturgical performances associated with them. There could be no divine kingship without divinity; coronations in Catholic countries are contingent upon the Mass, which establishes as a social fact the divinity of the God in whose name, or through whose grace, men are transformed into kings. The hierarchy of contingency seems, obviously, to be a hierarchy of authority and efficacy as well. Moreover, since the sacred, which I have not yet defined, is generally understood to have its purest expression in representations of spiritual or cosmic entities in the ultimate or absolute

components of liturgical orders, liturgy's hierarchical dimension orders relations of sanctity as well as of authority, efficacy, and contingency. Indeed, these aspects of liturgy's hierarchical structure are virtually indistinguishable.

I have spoken of liturgical orders as "more or less" invariant, meaning to recognize by this language not only the sloppiness intrinsic to practice but also that some aspects of liturgy are more variable than others. It is of importance that as a rule the spiritual aspects of liturgy—both significata and representations—are less variable and more durable than those concerned with contemporary social arrangements. The liturgy of the Mass has persisted for close to two millennia, during which it has changed but slowly. The creeds recited in the Mass are in their present form very ancient. In contrast, certain contingent rituals concerned with social effects, such as homage and fealty, have virtually dropped out of use altogether. Although other aspects of their liturgies vary considerably, possibly reflecting differences in their social conditions and historical circumstances, the rituals of the Ashkenazic Jews of northern Europe, the Sephardic of the Mediterranean, the Falacha of Ethiopia (Leslau 1951: 124), the Beni of India (Stritzower 1971: 14), and the Karaites of the Crimea (Idelson 1932: 310) all retain the dedication of faith called the *Shema* in a central position. It is important to note that the self-same spiritual representations are likely to be the most invariant of ritual's elements not only in the sense of most enduring but also in the sense that they are those expressed with greatest punctilio. Relations of relative invariance, ideally at least, correspond to the hierarchical ordering of contingency, authority, efficacy, and sanctity.

## XII

Invariance, as I stated at the beginning, is characteristic of all rituals, both human and nonhuman, and it may be that both the sacred and the supernatural arose out of the union of words with the invariance of the speechless rituals of the beasts from whom we are descended. Be this as it may, both the sacred and the supernatural are, I believe, implied by liturgy's invariance. Before developing this point more must be said about the sacred.

Elsewhere (1971a, 1971b) I have argued that we take liturgies to be religious if they include postulates of a certain sort. The *Shema*, "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," is an example. So is "Deceased Ancestors persist as sentient Beings," which is implicit in the rituals in which Maring men pledge their military support to their hosts. Such sentences have peculiar qualities. Having no material reference they are neither verifiable nor falsifiable, and yet they are regarded as



unquestionable. I take *sanctity to be the quality of unquestionableness imputed by a congregation to postulates in their nature neither verifiable nor falsifiable*. This is to say that sanctity is ultimately a quality of discourse and not of the objects with which that discourse is concerned. It is of interest in this regard, however, that the objects with which sacred discourse is concerned are often themselves elements of discourse: instances of the Creative Word. The distinction between sacred discourse and the objects of sacred discourse may thus be masked or, to put it differently, sacred discourse and its objects may be conflated.

Let us turn now to the relationship of sanctity to invariance. It was Anthony F. C. Wallace (1966: 234) who first pointed out that in terms of information theory ritual is a peculiar form of communication. Information is formally defined as that which reduces uncertainty, the minimal unit being the "bit," the amount of information required to eliminate the uncertainty between two equally likely alternatives. It is, roughly, the answer to a yes-no question. We touched upon this matter in discussing indexical messages, all of which, because they depend upon the possibility of variation, do contain information in the technical sense. But, Wallace observed, to the extent that a liturgy is invariant it contains no information because it eliminates no uncertainty. He further argued, however, that meaning and information are not the same thing, and that the meaning of this informationlessness is *certainty*. To put this a little differently, that which is stated in the invariant canon is thereby represented as certain because invariance implies certainty. Certainty and unquestionableness are closely related, and *one* of the grounds of the unquestionableness of these postulates which we may call "ultimately sacred," is the certainty of their expression. It is not, however, the only ground.

Certainty is a property of information or messages. It is one thing to say that a message is certain and another to say that it goes unquestioned. Whether or not a statement will be challenged does not rest only or finally upon the properties of the statement itself, but upon the disposition toward it of the persons to whom it is presented. We have already seen, however, that to participate in a ritual is to accept that which it encodes. This acceptance is entailed by participation in an invariant order that the participants themselves did not encode. Liturgical invariance, at the same time that it invests what it encodes with certainty, secures the acceptance of its performers.

This account distinguishes the sacred from the divine or supernatural, but it may be that the invariance of sacred utterances may imply the objects of these utterances. Bloch's recent (1973) arguments suggest that the notion of the supernatural as well as the idea of the sacred may emerge out of the invariance of liturgical performance. The words

spoken by a performer are not his words. They are extraordinary and often immemorial words, and as such they imply extraordinary speakers who first uttered them in antiquity, or perhaps beyond antiquity, at the beginning of time. Gods and spirits as well as social contract and morality may be intrinsic to the structure of liturgical order.

While sanctity has its apparent source in ultimate sacred postulates which, being expressions concerning Gods and the like, are typically without material significata, it flows to other sentences which do include material terms and which are directly concerned with the operation of society: "Henry is by Grace of God King." "It is more blessed to give than to receive." "Thou shalt not bear false witness." "I swear in the name of God to tell the truth." Thus it is that association with ultimate sacred propositions certifies the correctness and naturalness of conventions, the legitimacy of authorities, the truthfulness of testimony and the reliability of commissives. To return to a question raised much earlier: that Maring men will honor the pledges to give military support that they undertake and display by dancing is certified by association with an ultimate sacred postulate.

It is important to observe here that the greater invariance of the sacred or spiritual than the social components of liturgical orders provides them with a certainty beyond the certainties of social orders currently existing. As the social content of canon is more or less enduring, providing an order within which the states represented in indexical messages may fluctuate, so the even less variable, more enduring references to gods and spirits provide an apparently eternal meta-order within which social orders themselves may be transformed. The adaptive implications of the greater invariance of the nonmaterial than the material are important, but are discussed elsewhere (see the essay "Adaptive Structure and its Disorders" in this volume). Here I would like to suggest that although the concept of the sacred and the notion of the divine would be literally unthinkable without language it may also be that language and social orders founded upon language could not have emerged without the support of sanctity. Earlier we noted one of the problems inherent in language—its extraordinary talent for deceit, and later another—the innate ability of language users to comprehend the arbitrary nature of the conventions to which they are subordinated and their ability, also intrinsic to language, to conceive of alternatives. Lie and alternative, inherent in language, it is interesting to note, are taken by Buber (1952) to be the ground of all evil. At the very least they pose problems to any society whose structure is founded upon language, which is to say all human societies. I have therefore argued that if there are to be words at all it is necessary to establish *The Word*, and that *The Word* is established by the invariance of liturgy. It may be at least suggested, furthermore,

that it emerged phylogenetically as some expressions drawn from the burgeoning language of earlier hominids were absorbed into, and subordinated to, the invariance of already existing nonverbal rituals which seem to be common in the animal world.

We may now note that liturgy ameliorates some of the problems intrinsic to symbolic communication, particularly lying, by moving in two opposite directions. On the one hand, as we observed in an early section of this paper, it eschews symbolization in favor of indexicality in at least some of its representations of the here and now. On the other hand it sanctifies references to that which is not confined in the here and now. Like the lies to which they are a partial antidote, ultimate sacred postulates are made possible by denotative symbols, for denotative symbols free signs from that which they signify.

To summarize, truthfulness, reliability, correctness, naturalness, and legitimacy are vested in conventions and conventional acts by their association with ultimate sacred postulates. The notions of truthfulness, reliability, correctness, naturalness, and legitimacy are closely related to that of unquestionableness, which I have identified with the sacred. Unquestionableness in turn is closely related to certainty and acceptance, certainty and acceptance to invariance. The invariance of ritual, which antedates the development of language, is the foundation of convention, for through it conventions are not only enunciated, accepted, invested with morality, and naturalized, but also sanctified. Indeed, the concept of the sacred itself emerges out of liturgical invariance.

### XIII

Yet, as important as liturgical invariance may be, surely language and the human way of life must be founded upon more than a trick in information theory. So far I have spoken only of the sacred, which is in language and which faces language and the public orders built upon language. But the sacred is only one component or aspect of a more inclusive phenomenon which I call the Holy. The other aspect of the Holy, which, following Rudolph Otto (1923), may be called the "numinous," is its nondiscursive, ineffable, or emotional aspect—what is called "religious experience" (James 1903) in the broadest sense. We know that this, as well as the sacred, is invoked in at least some rituals. "Communitas" (Turner 1969) or "effervescence" (Durkheim 1961 [1915]) is one of its manifestations. Scholars differ with respect to the nature of religious experience. Some would apply the term to any emotional state taken by the individual to be a response to what is construed to be a divine object. Others, like Rudolph Otto (1923), would take it to be a general undifferentiated "ur-emotion" encompassing love, fear, dependence, fascina-

tion, unworthiness, majesty, connection. Witnesses agree that it is powerful, indescribable, and utterly convincing.

I do not mean to make too much of this, but Erikson (1966) suggests that the numinous emotion has its ontogenetic basis in the relationship of the preverbal infant to its mother. The child's experience of its mother has characteristics similar to those that Otto attributes to the worshiper's experience of his God: she is mysterious, tremendous, overpowering, loving, and frightening. It is learning to trust her upon whom he depends utterly that makes subsequent language learning and, for that matter, continuing socialization possible. This trust is learned in what Erikson calls "daily rituals of nurturance and greeting" (1966), stereotyped interactions between mother and child taking place dependably at regular intervals, or at times specified by the child's needs. Through the course of ontogeny the numinous emotions initially associated with mother are displaced to other objects. Of importance here is the bipolar reference of ritual symbols noted by Turner (1973) and Campbell (1959: 461ff.). At one and the same time they point to cosmic and social conceptions on the one hand and psychic and physiological experience on the other. Through the mediation of such representations the conceptual is given the power of the experiential and the experiential the guidance of the conceptual. Again, we note a relationship here between conceptual form and experiential substance.

Erikson's ontogenetic suggestion has phylogenetic implications. If ontogeny has a phylogeny and if the mother-child relationship among humans is but a variant of the primate or even mammalian pattern, it may be that the basis of the numinous is archaic, antedating humanity, and it may further be that religion came into being when the emerging, discursive, conventional sacred was lashed to the primordial, non-discursive, mammalian emotional processes that in their later form we call "numinous."

Be the ontogenetic and phylogenetic bases of numinous experience as they may, such experience is often invoked in ritual. In an earlier section I emphasized the digital aspects of liturgical orders, but noted that the binary nature of ritual occurrence, that makes it possible for rituals to distinguish before from after with perfect clarity, obliterates neither ritual's analogic virtues nor its affective power. Between the before and the after marked by the occurrence of ritual, there is a "liminal period" (Van Gennep 1909). To recall Reeves remarks about digital machines, it is a time when variables, in ritual the states of performers, do not have their unambiguous before or after values, but are, rather, changing. It is a time out of ordinary time and is marked as such by the prominent place given to representations that connect the moment to the eternal, and thereby disconnect it from the everyday and ordinary.



In some rituals the contrast with the everyday is radical and the canons of reality which guide everyday behavior seem inappropriate and are discarded. During such ritually marked times out of time, emotions—often very strong and persuasive—are generated, and these emotions may obliterate the boundary that liturgical performance itself establishes between public acts and private states. In the fervor of religious emotion the private states of the performers sometimes come into accord with their public performances. As William James put it, their acceptance is “enthusiastic.” The performer “runs out to accept the divine decrees” (1903: 289). Bateson (1972), following Huxley, agrees with James in referring to such states of psychic reunion by the term “grace.”

This self-unification must be encouraged, in some cases at least, by performing an invariant liturgy, but conformity to such an order is not simply to unite or reunite alienated or warring parts of the self. It is to participate in—that is, to become part of—something larger than what is ordinarily experienced as the self. It is of interest that the experience of which I speak need not be, indeed, is perhaps not often, individual. In the union or reunion of their private and public selves the performers may achieve a corporate state of *communitas* (Turner 1969), an “effervescent” state (Durkheim 1961) in which the sense of individual self that ordinary consciousness imposes upon men becomes less sharp, or is even lost in the sense of participation in the larger whole that the performance makes palpable. It is, perhaps, important in this regard that the coordination of persons in ritual performances is often much tighter than usual (Radcliffe-Brown 1964: chapter 2). Indeed, the levels of coherence (see “Ecology, Adaptation, and the Ills of Functionalism” or “Adaptive Structure and Its Disorders” for discussions of coherence) often achieved in ritual is more typical of organisms than of social groups. It is important that unison is a common feature of ritual, and it may be made comprehensive by engaging several sense modalities and modes of expression simultaneously.

In sum, I earlier argued that liturgy’s invariance gives rise to the sacred, meaning by the term “sacred” to designate only the discursive aspect of a more encompassing category which may be called the Holy. The sacred, the ultimate constituents of which are in language, is that aspect of the Holy which faces language, reason, the public order, and their problems. But the Holy also has a nondiscursive, affective and experiential aspect which we may, following Otto, call “the numinous.” As the sacred may emerge out of the invariance of liturgical orders, so may the numinous be invoked by ritual’s unison.

The canons of liturgy, in which are encoded both postulates concerning that which is ultimately sacred and sentences concerning temporal social orders may, then, receive in the rituals in which they are enunciated the support of numinous emotions. Numinous *communitas*, perhaps substantiated in acts of unison, may add a dimension—or a magnitude—to the orderliness of the sacred canonical. But unison is not all that is to be found at ritual's heart, nor is the relationship between canonical order and numinous emotion always complementary.

At the heart of some rituals there is not always heightened order but hilarity, confusion, aggression, and chaos, expressed in clowning, transvestism, attacks upon initiates, self-mortification, sexual license, blasphemy, and otherwise indecorous actions. Such behavior may challenge, tacitly or explicitly, the very canons that ordain it, and Abrahams (1973) suggests that the "vitality" of ritual springs from the confrontations of order and disorder for which it provides an arena. This is to say that liturgical orders may include not only canons of order but their antitheses as well. As Abrahams puts it "there is a simultaneous proclamation of the order of the world as seen by the group and its (almost) absolute denial (1973: 15).

The orders of liturgy do generally manage to contain, and even to sublimate, the emotions that they themselves generate, and they surely may be vitalized or invigorated by confrontations with their anti-orders. But these confrontations may be more than invigorating. They may be limiting and corrective as well. The denials of order in ritual are seldom if ever absolute, and while they may be denials of this world's order, liturgical orders are usually concerned with more than the order of the world of here and now. They also proclaim an order that transcends time, an ultimate or absolute order of which the temporal order is merely a contingent part. It is the temporal, and not the ultimate, aspects of order that are most open to challenge, and that are most likely to be challenged by what appears to be anti-order. And it is the temporal and contingent nature of conventions that is exposed by ridiculing and violating them. In being exposed for what they are, they are prevented from themselves becoming ultimate. The king who is ordained by God is told—and so is everyone else—that he is no more than a man when he is demeaned in the name of God. Liturgy's challenges to the temporal are in the service of the ultimate, for they keep the conventions of time and place in their places by demonstrating that they are not ultimately sacred, but only sanctified by the ultimately sacred. They are also thereby in the service of evolution, for they make it easier to discard temporal conventions when times and places change.

XIV

The union in ritual of the numinous, a product of emotion, with the sacred, a product of language, suggests possible grounds for the notion of the divine going somewhat beyond Bloch's ingenious but perhaps too simple suggestion. Because the notion of the divine is a human universal we must search for its ground in a universal experience or condition.

I would hesitantly suggest that the notion of the divine has at least four features. First, while divine objects may be incarnated, the quality of the divine itself is not material in any ordinary sense. Second, the divine exists, or, rather, has being. It is not deemed to be, simply, a law, like the laws of thermodynamics, or an abstraction, like truth, but a being, like Zeus. Third, it is powerful, or efficacious. It has the ability to cause effects. Finally, it is something like alive. It possesses something like vitality. To use Rudolph Otto's term, it is "urgent."

I would hesitantly suggest that the first three of these qualities are supplied by fundamental linguistic processes as they are expressed in ritual's utterances, the last by the emotions generated in ritual.

First, the existence of the nonmaterial is made conceptually possible by the symbolic relationship between sign and signified. Whereas concept is intrinsic to the symbolic relationship, material reference is not intrinsic to concept. If the sign is not bound to the signified there is nothing to hold the signified to materiality at all, and it can easily escape into the abstract, imaginary, or otherwise purely conceptual.

The existence of the conceptual may be made conceivable by the fundamental linguistic process of predication. To say that "X is an aspect of Y" is to endow Y with the attribute X. The copula "is" in this sentence has, simply, a logical function, which is to invest Y with X, but this logical function has an existential implication. Moreover, this implication may be unavoidable. To say that "X is an aspect of Y" might be to say, or to *seem* to say, that both X and Y in some sense exist. Yet the existence entailed by predication may be no more than conceptual existence, like the way in which honor or the axioms of geometry exist. But Gods are beings. The problem is, then, to transform the conceptual—that which exists merely as concept—into that which seems to have being.

The conception of the nonmaterial as efficacious, i.e., as capable of causing effects, may contribute to such a transformation, for humans generally realize that effects are not directly caused by concepts alone (any more than, let us say, houses are built by plans alone). The efficacy of the nonmaterial, this is to say, implies the being of the nonmaterial. The notion of the efficacy of divine beings, in turn, might well be founded upon the performativeness and meta-performativeness of lan-

guage as expressed in ritual. The very invariance of ritual proposes, as Bloch has suggested, an agent to whom the efficacy of performativeness intrinsic to ritual's language can be attributed.

Divine beings by the account so far offered remain nothing more than inductions from mystified performativeness. This, however, seems neither satisfactory nor correct, for we know that people are often convinced of the existence of divine beings in the absence of effects from which they could induce, however correctly or incorrectly, such beliefs.

We must consider not only the capacities of the propositions and performatives that language may present to the worshiper but also the worshiper's experience of those utterances and acts, and the relationship between their qualities and his experience. A mediating or connecting term may be noted. At least in languages in which it is an independent lexical element, and perhaps in all language, the verb "to be" may give rise to the notion of being independent of instances of being. It is of interest in this respect that the most sacred name of God in Hebrew, the tetragrammaton, is said to be a form of the verb "to be" (Brandon 1970: 655). Tillich (1957, etc.) refers to God as "The Ground-of-All-Being" and "Being-Itself." It is of further interest here that the profoundly altered states of consciousness characteristic of religious experience are sometimes described as states of "pure being," the word for trance in Java is "being" (Geertz 1965: 32), and Bushmen refer to the states they achieve in trance dancing as "really being" (Katz 1974).

The predication of that which is represented in an ultimate sacred proposition may become conflated in ritual with the numinous state of "pure being" of the performer. Numinous experiences, even those that are much less intense than may be suggested by references to Javanese and Bushman trance, are widely described as ones in which the presence of the divine being is "experienced." Sometimes, indeed, with loss of distinction, the worshiper senses that he is participating in, or becoming one with, the divine being. I would suggest that divine objects, which are represented by ultimate sacred postulates, are predicated as living, or even supplied the predicate of being, by the numinous experiences of worshipers. The vitality that the worshiper feels in the divine object is his own projected upon what he takes to be other or "encompassing." Ritual, then, is possibly the furnace within which the image of God is forged out of the power of language and of emotion.

## XV

Earlier I spoke of the acceptance of convention entailed by participation in liturgy. I insisted that ritual acceptance is a public act and that it is not necessarily associated with an inward state conforming to it. Acceptance



does not entail belief but, I proposed, it is sufficient to establish the obligations upon which human societies stand. I would now suggest that formal acceptance in the absence of something more profound may be fragile and that the numinous, when it is experienced, supports acceptance with conviction or belief. Those who have reached those profound states called mystical report a loss of distinction, an experience of unification with what they take to be the divine object and perhaps the cosmos. The experience, they say, is ultimately meaningful, but being devoid of distinction is devoid of reference. It points to nothing but itself. Ultimate meaning is not referential but is, rather, a state of being or even of pure, seemingly unpredicated being. I cannot discuss the validity of the illuminations vouchsafed in those states in which meaning and being become one, but will only note that to say such meaning is convincing is inadequate, for, being directly experienced, it simply *is*. As such it is undeniable, and so, indeed, may be numinous experiences falling short of the mystical.

It is of interest that sacred propositions and numinous experiences are the inverse of each other. Ultimate sacred postulates are discursive but their significata are not material. Numinous experiences are immediately material (they are actual physical and psychic states) but they are not discursive. Ultimate sacred postulates are unfalsifiable; numinous experiences are undeniable. In ritual's union ultimate sacred propositions thus seem to partake of the immediately known and undeniable quality of the numinous. That this is logically unsound should not trouble us for, although it may make problems for logicians, it does not trouble the faithful. In the union of the sacred and the numinous the most abstract and distant of conceptions are bound to the most immediate and substantial of experiences. 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. At the heart of ritual—its “atom,” so to speak—is the relationship of performers to their own performances of invariant sequences of acts and utterances which they did not encode. Virtually everything I have argued is implied or entailed by that form.

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