RITUAL THEORY, RITUAL PRACTICE

Catherine Bell

FOREWORD BY DIANE JONTE-PACE

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"...I take ritual to be *the* basic social act." R. RAPPAPORT[1]

"Ritual is pure activity, without meaning or goal." F. STAAL[2]

This [interpretation] has allowed the scholarly fantasy that ritual is an affair of the *tremendum* rather than a quite ordinary mode of human social labor." J.Z. SMITH[3]

"Ritual [is] like a favoured instance of a game...."
C. LEVI-STRAUSS[4]

"In ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined... turn out to be the same world." C. GEERTZ[5]

"[There is] the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be understood." E. LEACH[6]

"The more intractable puzzles in comparative religion arise because human experience has been... wrongly divided."
M. DOUGLAS[7]

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Foreword: Notes on a Friendship

Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice, reissued here more than 17 years after its initial publication, changed the framework for understanding the nature and function of ritual. Catherine M. Bell's profound insight was that ritual, long understood as thoughtless action stripped of context, is more interestingly understood as strategy: a culturally strategic way of acting in the world. Ritual is a form of social activity. This argument is meticulously established and beautifully presented in the chapters that follow. Unfolding like a commanding lecture, *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* remains Catherine's greatest contribution to the study of religion.

This book, in many ways, constitutes one part of what Anthony Giddens would call the "front and back regions" of any scholarly life. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* presents the theories and observations that Catherine placed "front" and center for all to see. Explicit in her life but also embedded in this book, however, are other lessons. They linger in the "back region," so to speak, for someone to notice and point out.

These lessons are strikingly visible to me because, for thirty years Catherine Bell was a friend, a mentor, and an inspiration to me. I met her first at the University of Chicago in the late '70s when we were graduate students at the Divinity School. I was studying Freud, Rorschach, and religion; she was studying Chinese morality books. Hearing her present her research in Joseph Kitagawa's seminar, was an "aha experience" for me: "So that's how to do a seminar presentation!" I found myself taking notes on how she organized her material and presented her thesis. In 1985 Catherine joined the Religious Studies department at Santa Clara University where I had been teaching for a year, and that graduate school "aha experience" deepened into a close friendship. During our years as colleagues, I found myself continuing to take notes on Catherine's way of thinking, working, and living – her "practices" until her death in 2008.

Note 1: Don't be constrained by the present or the past.

Catherine had a remarkable ability to think beyond the frame of both current discourse and past practice. While many scholars recount the debates that have shaped their field and make a small contribution to move the discourse

forward, she transformed the way that scholars in our field think and write. She sketched out contemporary debates, traced historical lineages, and then took stunning conceptual leaps, rearranging pieces in entirely new, and thoroughly enlightening, ways. There's a fearlessness to her work. She speaks the truth, unconstrained by concerns about critical reactions – an important lesson for those whose schooling in tact and diplomacy can place limits on creative vision.

Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice illustrates well her fearless intellectual style and her sense of freedom from past constructions. The book received the award for the "Best First Book in the History of Religions" in 1994, and has redirected the thinking of the discipline. One cannot write on ritual today without citing her work. Her ability to perceive the current topography and see beyond the horizon inspires me still.

Note 2: Look for large patterns and ask big questions.

Catherine's practice of asking big questions and seeking large patterns is clearly visible in her work; it was evident in her course development and pedagogy as well. She structured every course around a compelling intellectual question that would both capture the interest of her students and tackle an unresolved problem in the discipline. Her students – all undergraduates – participated in creating scholarly trajectories, sorting through data, discerning patterns, and struggling to find answers. Whether teaching methodology in "Ways of Studying Religion," area studies in "Asian Religions," or advanced courses like "Magic, Science and Religion," "Time and the Millennium," or "Religion and Violence," she challenged and inspired her students to ask real questions, to understand the significance of those questions for the contemporary world, and to perceive the larger patterns emerging from texts and practices.

Always attentive to the patterns in how students learn, it was Catherine who first brought me a copy of Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of cognitive development: she had designed a series of assignments to guide students toward increasingly sophisticated thinking, challenging them to move from comparison to interpretation, and then to analysis and evaluation. She suggested that in the classroom "nothing stands alone" – every text must be carefully paired with another so that students can tease out contradictions and develop new syntheses. And she created guidelines on "how to read a book when you're not reading it for pleasure." Her instructions started with self awareness and self inquiry: "What are your questions?" Next, she instructed, one must ask about the author as "Other": "What is the author's intent?" Finally, she directed her students to inte-

grate self understanding and close reading of the text by "engaging in critical reflection and creative response." Her guidelines worked: her students were truly touched by the books they read with her. They produced remarkable work in her courses, and they carried newly developed critical and creative abilities into other courses, into graduate programs, and into life beyond the academy.

Note 3: Transform the personal into the professional.

Catherine was a master at understanding how individual questions or problems could be addressed through structural changes. Her legacy in this regard is visible within a number of lasting structures at Santa Clara. Experiencing a need for greater community among women she created a still-thriving Women's Faculty Group. Perceiving a need for mentoring of junior faculty she urged the creation of a now flourishing Faculty Development Program. Struggling within a hierarchical administrative structure, she led a movement to transform university governance and decision-making into a system that garnered a 1998 Ralph S. Brown Award for Shared Governance from the American Association of University Professors. She consistently used her own experience as a spark to ignite creative thinking and build community.

Catherine left behind an unfinished manuscript, *Believing and the Practice of Religion,* in which she wrote, "An investigation of a topic should begin with an exploration of why that topic warrants one's interest in the first place.... An investigator should understand why the topic constitutes a 'problem' – at least for her." She beautifully captures this shift from personal to professional: "Once I was a believer, thoughtfully and intimately committed, and then I was no longer one, with a different set of thoughts and emotions. While I was able to 'explain' my believing and my not-believing in the popular Freudian patois of the day, I wanted to assemble a fuller picture of what had happened and explore whether what was true for me might be useful for understanding others."

And she proposed a new way of speaking about belief, a more self conscious and critically reflexive analysis of the category of belief, aiming to change "where our confidence lies" when using the "language of belief." Her goal: to create a conversation about "how we think of ourselves...and how we think about what we are doing with our inherited interpretive categories." Catherine's unfinished manuscript will be available to scholars through the archives of Santa Clara University's library.

Note 4: Find pleasure in creativity.

Catherine's creativity transcended her academic and scholarly contributions. Her luminous spirit is vividly present in writings both playful and profound drafted for more limited audiences. At the turn of the millennium, she wrote a "Millennial Masque," a play in Shakespearean verse for a group of friends and colleagues to perform on New Year's Eve. She was to play "The Scholar"; I was to read the part of "Madame Butterfly" wearing a red silk kimono she had purchased in Japan. Her husband had the role of Cardinal Ex Corde; my husband was commissioned to be the musician for the performance. Other colleagues were assigned such roles as: "The Grim Reaper," "The Keeper of the Clocks," and the "Orphic Chorus."

The "Masque" was never performed. Tragically, Catherine spent the first night of the new millennium in the emergency room with the first symptoms of the multiple sclerosis that would shadow the last decade of her life. The "Millennial Masque" captures her spirit beautifully: it's literary, playful, and profound. It's about life, death, and love; beginnings and endings; and the desire for change. As if she anticipated her own life story, time and the millennium serve as metaphors for the presence of death in the midst of life:

The time is upon us for a millennial shift
To mark the moment we offer this gift
If it be more beginning or end
I cannot presume to suggest or pretend
But whether welcomed or welcomed not
Tis a moment of time not soon forgot…
Time is what binds us and tears us apart
But for every ending we can attempt a new start.

Writing in May 2009, just a year after her death, I am only too aware that these notes on a friendship fail to capture the luminous reality of Catherine's presence and practice. But I am immensely grateful to have had three decades – an extended "moment of time not soon forgot" - to take notes on the practice of a generous mentor, an inspiring colleague, and a dear friend. And I am honored to be a participant in the reissuing of this volume, an embodiment, in some sense, of Catherine's words: "for every ending we can attempt a new start."

Diane Jonte-Pace, Santa Clara University

Bell, Catherine, 1999. "A Millennial Masque: Wherein the Arbitrariness of Time Reveals the Illusiveness of All Human Expectations." Unpublished manuscript.

- No date. *Believing and the Practice of Religion*. Unpublished manuscript. Giddens, Anthony. *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984.

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Preface

This book is the result of a longstanding curiousity about ritual and our notions of ritual. The problems and issues engaged here were first formulated for a dissertation chapter, but since then they have continued to intrude on several very different projects. I could no longer resist the temptation to follow through on a few key ideas and see what might emerge, although I knew that as a book on ritual, the project would display one obvious idiosyncrasy: rather than contributing to the conceptual integrity and scope of the notion of ritual, this book is designed to be something of a lightning rod for the dilemmas of theory, analysis, and practice. The concept of ritual is not destroyed in the process, but I hope this study succeeds in shaking it up a little.

Several very different scholars of religion and ritual have influenced my particular formulation of the "problem" of ritual. Durkheim was the first such influence since I was exposed to the full sweep of his *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* very early in my education. In defining religion as a formal object of theoretical and comparative analysis, Durkheim laid out categories that I could use to locate my own experience of religion in the schools and churches of pre–Vatican II Catholicism. Nonetheless, these categories did not always fit, and I have argued with Durkheim in my head ever since. In the end, it is with Durkheim's pragmatic formulation of religion as a matter of primary beliefs and secondary rites that the battle is joined and my analysis of ritual begins. I have enjoyed the prospect of a subsequent and complementary study giving full attention to the problem of 'belief'.

The pedagogy and essays of Jonathan Z. Smith have been a second influence. Many years ago, his argumentative assertion that "ritual is *work!*" raised innumerable questions for me about the construction and use of categories in the study of religion.[8] The element of surprise in his statement came, of course, from the emphasis on ritual as labor in contrast to the tendency to see ritual in terms of symbolic or idealized expression. Aside from provocative connections to Marxist theories of labor, his inversion ultimately suggested that the more common perspective was supported by an unexamined logic, which made it seem immediately convincing and right. I began to trace how the categories and rhetoric mobilized in standard approaches to ritual functioned to substantiate larger entities such as religion, society, or culture. Since then the "dismantling" of concepts like ritual and other deconstructive impulses has become more fashionable.

Another set of issues crystallized for me around the recent emergence of ritual studies as an independent and interdisciplinary field of study. As both an observer and participant at many conference panels I have been intrigued with the swelling of interest in ritual. The development of ritual studies as a distinct focus is clearly due in great part to the vision and efforts of a few individuals, particularly Ronald Grimes. His sense of intellectual purpose and wide-ranging inquiry has effectively encouraged a dialogue among quite different types of scholars. Yet the emergence and appeal of ritual studies must also be rooted in other forces operative within academic life. In the course of various formal discussions of ritual, I became curious about the intellectual and practical imperatives that would foster the construction of a category, such as 'ritual', in such a way as to organize and legitimize an independent discourse, expertise, and scholarly identity. I wondered if ritual studies as such could survive a major reorganization of the notion of ritual.

Writing this book has answered some but not all of the questions I brought to the project. In the end I have been content to make two main arguments about ritual activity. First, after tracing some of the connections that can make a discourse on ritual seem so compelling and useful to studies of cultural activity, I contend that few if any of the current theories of ritual avoid a rather predetermined circularity. This circularity functions to constitute ritual as an object of analysis in such a way as to mandate a particular

method, expertise, and way of knowing. Perhaps a similar conclusion could be reached about many other topics of study, but ritual is an interesting case study of these practices for several reasons. Most simply, ritual is so readily cast as action in opposition to thought and theory that the structuring effect of assumptions about thought and action can be traced with great clarity. Moreover, ritual studies, as a recent mode of discourse, has claimed an odd exemption from the general critique that scholarship distorts and exploits, tending to see itself, by virtue of its interest in ritual performances per se, as somehow able to transcend the politics of those who study and those who are studied.

My second argument attempts to break free of the circularity that has structured thinking about acting by undermining the very category of ritual itself. I abandon the focus on ritual as a set of special practices in favor of a focus on some of the more common strategies of "ritualization," initially defined as a way of acting that differentiates some acts from others. To approach ritual within the framework of practical activity raises, I suggest, potentially more fruitful questions about the origins, purposes, and efficacy of "ritualized actions" than are accessible through current models.

My critical appraisal of the theoretical literature on ritual and the subsequent sketch of an alternative direction of inquiry attempt to address an impasse in ritual theory not unrecognized by others. It is probable that my alternative framework does not fully succeed in breaking free of the structures that have shaped thinking about ritual. Yet I suspect that even this failure will illuminate something basic about the constraints that are intrinsic to scholarly discourse on ritual and to the more general strategies by which we define and structure an authoritative interpretation. In any case, for reasons spelled out in the chapters that follow, I am not interested in presenting a systematic critique of all work on ritual or a new theory of ritual in general. Neither am I concerned to make any pronouncements on the intrinsic value of studying ritual per se. Rather, I am launching an analytical exploration of the social existence of the concept of ritual, the values ascribed to it, and the ramifications of these perspectives for scholarship.

Preliminary versions of certain sections of this book appeared elsewhere. Sections of Part I appeared in "Discourse and Dichotomies: The Structure of Ritual Theory," *Religion* 17, no. 2 (1987):

95–118. Some of the material in Part II concerning ritual change and the Christian liturgical tradition was presented in "Ritual, Change and Changing Rituals," *Worship* 63, no. 1 (1989): 31–41. Ideas on the ritual body and power (discussed in Parts II and III) were first formulated for the second of two conferences on ritual sponsored by the Department of Religious Studies at the University of California at Santa Barbara. The paper I presented there was subsequently published as "The Ritual Body and the Dynamics of Ritual Power," *The Journal of Ritual Studies* 4, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 299–313. Two papers presented in 1987 and 1988 to the Group on Ritual Studies of the American Academy of Religion gave me the opportunity to lay various arguments out before a very responsive set of colleagues. I am grateful for the encouragement extended by those involved in these projects.

Several people have directly affected this book, but none more than Steven Gelber, who patiently read the manuscript at each juncture, always improving the prose and the sense. I would also like to thank Richard Gardner and Ronald Grimes for their careful reading, critical feedback, and encouragement. Santa Clara University and the National Endowment for the Humanities provided some of the time and resources needed to complete this project.

Santa Clara, Calif. C. B.
May 1991

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Introduction

In the last twenty years a number of diverse fields have found ritual to be an important focus for new forms of cultural analysis. Besides anthropologists, sociologists, and historians of religion, there are sociobiologists, philosophers, and intellectual historians who have turned to ritual as a "window" on the cultural dynamics by which people make and remake their worlds. The result has been a relatively broad and interdisciplinary conversation known as "ritual studies." Certainly the notion of ritual has been central to research in religion and society since the late nineteenth century, and few other single terms have been more fundamental in defining the issues basic to culture, society, and religion. Now, however, ritual has become a topic of interest in its own right, not merely a tool for understanding more embracing social phenomena. Indeed, ritual has simultaneously become an object, a method, and even something of a style of scholarship on the American academic scene.

Given both the history and scope of the appeal to ritual as a category of experience and analysis, the term is overdue for an extended critical rethinking. Jack Goody first addressed the state of ritual theory in a definitive study published nearly thirty years ago. Yet when he last addressed it in 1976, he expressed a dramatic loss of confidence in the formal category of ritual.[9] Aside from his comments, there has been no sustained analysis of the term that evaluates its role in our thinking on religion, society, and culture.[10] Nor has there been any concomitant assessment of the underlying problems engaged by the term 'ritual' and the structure this category imposes on theoretical discourse.

This book undertakes such an analysis in two ways: first, through a critical reading of how the notion of ritual has been used in the study of religion, society, and culture; and second, through an attempt to carve out an approach to ritual activities that is less encumbered by assumptions about thinking and acting and more disclosing of the strategies by which ritualized activities do what they do. I do not provide a comprehensive history of the term, a review of the most famous ethnographic examples, or a revised theory of ritual—useful though these projects might be. The purpose of this book is both more ambitious and more pragmatic—to reassess what we have been doing with the category of ritual, why we have ended up where we are, and how we might formulate an analytic direction better able to grasp how such activities compare to other forms of social action.

The sections that follow concentrate on a broad but selective set of influential theories about ritual. My discussion remains focused on an explicitly theoretical level of reflection about ritual rather than one more linked to ethnographic data. While many theories come embedded in particular ethnographic studies, none confine themselves to interpreting just the rites of a particular group. They all generalize in order to discuss ritual action per se. Since I am concerned with the most basic assumptions and tendencies in thinking about ritual activities, the analyses that follow also remain rather abstract. My starting point is not some objective instance of ritual activity that I attempt to interpret, such as Vedic ritual or the garden magic of the Trobriand Islanders. Rather, my starting point is an exploration of what makes us identify some acts as ritual, what such a category does for the production and organization of knowledge about other cultures, and how we might assess the assumptions that create and constrain the notion of ritual. Truly thick ethnographic descriptions of particular rites rarely succumb to the systematic division of human experience evidenced in theoretical studies. When they do, it is frequently due to the influence of categories developed to empower theoretical discourse. The divergence between theoretical formulations and descriptive studies is germane to the issues raised here, but a fuller treatment is regrettably beyond the scope of this book.[11]

In addition to analyzing the category of ritual and proposing another framework within which to assess ritual activity, this book

has a third level of concern. In arguing how categories of ritual practice have been used to define objects and methods of theoretical practice, I raise questions about the dynamics of theoretical practice as such. By dismantling ritual as a theoretical construct, it is possible to uncover some of the more hidden but decisive practices by which a body of theoretical knowledge is generated and theoretical activity is differentiated from other forms of social activity. As part of its exploration of ritual, therefore, this book initiates a foray beyond the customary confines of ritual theory to suggest some of the strategies basic to other forms of practice and the social relationships these practices support.

The intellectual framework for 'doing theory' has shifted dramatically in the last twenty years. The premises and boundaries of the theoretical enterprise have undergone a wave of challenges, a periodic but no less traumatic experience, leaving us to wonder how and what we can know. This series of challenges has generated an open debate on the social and political ramifications of particular forms of knowing.[12] Some consensus has emerged from this debate that critical analysis of a theoretical perspective must look not only to the logic of the set of ideas under scrutiny, but also to the history of their construction.[13] In addition, a critical analysis must also incorporate a reflexive awareness of the conditions under which it operates to constitute meaningful interpretation.[14] In this era of theoretical practice, therefore, we are "rethinking" entire conceptual constructions handed down within our fields of inquiry.[15] Any thorough process of rethinking these basic concepts appears to involve three closely related operations: first, a deconstruction of the historical definitions of the problem or issue and a delineation of the circumstances under which the problem has been *a problem for us;* second, the proposal of an interpretive perspective on the issue that enables our cultural categories seriously to engage and be engaged by the material addressed; and third, an extension of this perspective to real applications and examples in order to explore relationships among hitherto unrelated issues.[16]

In rethinking ritual these operations form three stages of the argument that spans the following sections. The first stage discloses the construction of ritual as an object of analysis and thereby reveals the problems for us that have been embodied in the term and discourse on it. The second stage formulates an interpretation of this

problem that reflexively provides an analysis of its own conditions as an interpretation. And the third stage, by applying this interpretation to a field of interrelated issues, attempts to generate an open but coherent framework for seeing new relationships among traditional issues, without losing sight of the contingent and determined nature of this framework.

More specifically, the chapters in Part I take up the initial task of a critical theory of ritual by addressing the construction of the category itself and the role this construction has played in organizing a broad discourse on religion, society, and culture. Despite the differences among historians of religion, sociologists, and anthropologists, their theories of ritual all similarly function to resolve the complex problems posed by an initial bifurcation of thought and action. Indeed, theoretical discourse about ritual is organized as a coherent whole by virtue of a logic based on the opposition of thought and action. This argument suggests that, historically, the whole issue of ritual arose as a discrete phenomenon to the eyes of social observers in that period in which 'reason' and the scientific pursuit of knowledge were defining a particular hegemony in Western intellectual life.

Given such a sociohistorical and logical-practical context for the term "ritual" as a category of experience and of analysis, a question arises: Can there be any argument for continuing to ascribe validity to the term? Goody, as noted earlier, sees no further usefulness in a "global construct" like ritual and has seriously called for its retirement in favor of a revitalizing "paradigm shift."[17] Although it is interesting to imagine a paradigm shift, any number of problems beset the attempt to jettison an older category, whether it be to impose a new one or simply to clear the field. There is hardly a consensus, first of all, about the inadequacy of the term ritual. It is still being used widely both by the general public and by many academic disciplines less immediately concerned with the problems that attend it. In fact, the popularity of the term and the topic, evidenced in ritual studies, reflects the very success scholars have had in securing the retirement of older and more obviously problematic terms. That is, ritual has replaced terms such as 'liturgy' versus 'magic', which were used to distinguish high religion from primitive superstition or *our* ritual from *theirs*. To try to discard the term ritual just when scholars have been successful in popular-

izing its use would imply a desire for esoteric categories accessible only to the cognoscenti.

Such housecleaning could also undermine any thorough exploration of how and why the term has become problematic. It is far from clear that a quickly summoned paradigm shift could solve either our immediate problems or the more buried ones they rest upon. Many attempts to produce a paradigm shift end up simply repackaging older problems in new jargon. Rather than eventually find that the disgraced presuppositions of the abandoned term have resurfaced in a newly deployed set of categories, it seems more responsible to hold on to our battered terminology, just as we hold on to the artifacts of our own personal histories no matter how difficult they might become. They ensure that we do not forget where we come from. They curb our pretenses. We may decide to tailor our terms with annotations or hyphenations, but it would be ill-advised to pretend to abandon what has been so well internalized. A real revolution will not be accomplished by a mere change of terms, nor will it be held off by modifying older ones. I *do* intend to modify the term ritual to function as something other than a "global construct" or "a key to culture."[18] Yet my close reliance upon current and preceding scholarship ensures continuity with the commonsense notion of ritual while making explicit some of the assumptions and perspectives built into it. Given the analysis of discourse on ritual presented in Part I, it becomes apparent that rethinking ritual will yield less rather than more—less generality, less universality, and perhaps less of the trappings of persuasive, explanative power. This 'less-ness' may ultimately be more effective in spurring a shift of paradigms than the introduction of newly designed terms.

Part II, which takes on the second task of critical theorizing, proposes that so-called ritual activities be removed from their isolated position as special paradigmatic acts and restored to the context of social activity in general. Some attempts to see ritual as social praxis are analyzed, as are the stubborn difficulties encountered by 'practice theory' in its attempt to transcend only the most obvious forms of the thought–action dichotomy. In response, I propose a focus on 'ritualization' as a strategic *way* of acting and then turn to explore how and why this way of acting differentiates itself from other practices. When analyzed as ritualization, acting

ritually emerges as a particular cultural strategy of differentiation linked to particular social effects and rooted in a distinctive interplay of a socialized body and the environment it structures. The confusions that accompany attempts to distinguish clearly between rite and non-rite—those perennial obstacles to neat definitions and classification—are revealed to be highly significant for understanding what ritualization does.

Part III addresses the large body of theories that discuss ritual as a form of social control. In so doing it attempts to fulfill the third task of a critical theory by applying an interpretation of ritualization as a culturally strategic way of acting to several classic issues within the traditional study of ritual, namely, belief, ideology, legitimation, and power. The main argument suggests that ritualization is a strategy for the construction of a limited and limiting power relationship. This is not a relationship in which one social group has absolute control over another, but one that simultaneously involves both consent and resistance, misunderstanding and appropriation. In exploring how ritualized ways of acting negotiate authority, self, and society, I attempt to delineate something of the social dynamics by which all activity reproduces and manipulates its own contextual ground.

As a particular reading of much of what has been written on ritual, this book is neither an objective nor a systematic review designed to evaluate each contribution in its own context and on its own merits. On the contrary, I have read to discover the cracks, instabilities, and manipulated themes in order to undo the process by which the notion of ritual has been constructed and to illuminate dynamics basic to how we think about the actions of others. At the risk of making the reading more difficult than it needs to be, I have tried to quote or paraphrase terms and descriptions as much as possible, since much of my argument rests on the subtle ways in which language is used.

Fredric Jameson introduced a recent study by calling attention to its "organizational fiction," the textual ploy that implies the existence of a problem the study will resolve.[19] The problem of ritual is, of course, just such an organizational fiction. This book is organized around a problem it first constructs and then solves—the problem of how the notion of ritual orders a body of theoretical discourse. I must first convince you that there is a problem and that

the nature of it is such that you will find the proposed solution suitable. This is a strategy of scholarly production, aspects of which are common to other forms of socially effective action. It is my hope that this book, by virtue of its arguments about ritual theory *as well as* its own performance as a piece of theoretical practice (with all its schemes, feints, and blind spots), will contribute to a discussion of the activities of understanding.

Notes

Epigraphs

1. Roy A. Rappaport, *Ecology, Meaning and Religion* (Richmond, Calif.: North Atlantic Books, 1979), p. 174. Emphasis in the original.
2. Frits Staal, "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," *Numen* 26, no. 1 (1975): 9.
3. Jonathan Z. Smith, "The Domestication of Sacrifice," in *Violent Origins,* ed. Robert G. Hamerton-Kelly (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), p. 198.
4. Claude Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* trans. George Weidenfeld and Nicolson Ltd. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1966), p. 30.
5. Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), p. 112.
6. Edmund R. Leach, "Ritual," in *The International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences,* vol. 13, ed. David L. Sills (New York: Macmillan, 1968), p. 526.
7. Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger* (New York: Praeger, 1960), p. 28.

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8. On ritual as work, see Victor Turner, "Variations on a Theme of Liminality," in *Secular Ritual,* ed. Sally F. Moore and Barbara G. Myerhoff (Amsterdam: Van Gorcum, 1977), pp. 39–41. Rappaport also talks of rituals as "public work" and "spirit work" (p. 177).