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**THE NATURE OF RITUAL AND THE PLACE OF RITUAL
IN HUMAN EVOLUTION**

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The Nature of Ritual and the Place of Ritual in Human Evolution.

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This essay aims at presenting a theory of the nature of human ritualised action which not only elaborates an anthropological general theory of culture, but also takes advantage of an evolutionary perspective on human existence. Thus the word 'ritual' itself will become central for this theory but it remains a difficult word. Surely it would be unwise to start a discourse of this kind by providing a neat formulation in order to define and clarify the word. Rather, it seems a better strategy to initiate the discussion in a very general fashion, and then, as we progress, make the range of observation increasingly narrow.

By many my concern would be regarded as part of what has come to be somewhat evasively known as 'symbolic anthropology.' However, the

anthropology of symbolism is not a field of enquiry which can be understood just as any chunk of the anthropological cake alongside with, say, economic anthropology or political anthropology. In fact, it cannot be delimited at all in an ordinary sense as symbolic expression is part and parcel of almost all human activities; if symbolic anthropology concerns the human use and construction of symbolic expression, then the study of these phenomena must be of interest to specialists in any systematic field of anthropology.

The study of symbolism in all its aspects is thus truly linked to the anthropological tradition of a holistic framework of enquiry. Perhaps this is something which implies a distressing vagueness for some readers. Still there is reason to claim that in this respect the holistic position is a vantage point to operate from in a time which is characterised by the anthropological discipline's disintegration into a number of subbranches, connecting with other social sciences rather than with whatever remains of the mother subject. It is my firm belief that the study of symbolism will be a most important instrument when we wish to provide the academic discipline of anthropology

with its future justification.

In this essay we will deal only with what we may call tentatively 'expressive acts,' and of such acts we will focus our interest on those which cannot in a straightforward way be accounted for in terms of rationality and logic. We are interested in such acts as we understand intuitively as ritual. Within the limitations of these pages we must confine ourselves to some basic questions with regard to the nature of such expression, but there is also the obvious implication that we regard what we say as helpful when we try to understand how societies are integrated, how they continue, and how they change.

Far-reaching claims of this order may seem of the impressive kind. Such things are easy to say. What is much more difficult is to formulate in a comprehensive way just how the symbolism of a society can provide the sort of knowledge that would answer such grand questions. How shall we get about in securing such insights by their distillation from the human use of symbols. Indeed, the questions asked are grand, and it must be confessed that we are only at the beginning of an ~~o~~quiry and a research process which only

recently have started to yield more convincing answers. But there are good hopes that our concern with the cultural integration of a society will lead to exciting new discoveries.

By and large, some fifty years of scholarly efforts have brought about a fairly confused picture of cultural relativism in the perspective of which each society, perhaps each social group, has developed its own symbolism which can be understood only from within. Only the members of the group or society can explicate in their own terms what goes on among the members.

It is true that for instance one school of 'phenomenologists' - who in their intellectual set-up bear very little resemblance to the phenomenology ordinarily associated with names like Heidegger and Schütz - have attempted to establish generalised typologies in order to describe analytically religious phenomena. What has been gained by way of this sorting are extensive catalogues intended to be used as instruments in evolutionistic or diffusionistic types of cultural interpretation. These types became the building stones for grand theories.

Beliefs became reiterated into objects and the occurrence of a belief could be marked by a dot on a map. The ultimate aim was always, so it seems, some sort of historical reconstruction (see e.g. van Baaren 1960, Hultkrantz 1953, 1957, van der Leeuw 1924, 1933, Otto 1917, Paulson 1958). The failure of this kind of enquiry has been obvious for a long time. The comparison of superficial phenomena which have been understood and delimited ethnocentrically could not lead anywhere outside of the framework of the catalogue. We do not need to elaborate this point here.

For a long time the onslaughts on all sorts of efforts at historical reconstruction made by functionalism and structuralism crushed that grand enterprise of diachronic enquiry. The evolution of mankind became a ridiculous arm-chair problem, submerged by a tide of new, fresh and exciting data collected systematically in the field, often under great hardships, by anthropologists concerned with 'real social life.' The concentration on fieldwork, and it may be supposed, the bewilderment which is part of the field experience, led away from ethnocentric

typologies and opened up perspectives of cultural relativism which aimed at looking at social processes from within the culture; 'understanding' came to replace 'explanation.'

This, indeed, is a very crude picture of the development of anthropological enquiry, but it remains a plausible suggestion that on the whole presentday anthropology in many universities and in many countries has come to honour the relativistic position. It is maintained that each society and each culture is unique and it is fallacious to make comparisons unless you take an interest in contrast.

There is something to be said for this. Obviously we cannot understand what we may gloss a 'soul' concept unless we make ourselves aware of the whole set of implications of that notion in the particular culture of concern. And such implications will be so tied up with the rest of that culture that it would be absolutely pointless to compare that 'soul' notion to anything which is outside of that culture. The only way to compare would be to juxtapose the 'wholes' - the total cultures (e.g. Geertz 1968). Only then it may be possible to arrive at some sort of conclusion as to

how they differ - but the enterprise is dependent on whether we have got hold of that postulated totality and every fieldworker knows that generally this is a rather distant and evasive goal.

By contrast I would like to place myself in a position from which I could venture a truly transcultural enquiry seeking the shared in the display of diversity and contrast. To do so is to place oneself within one of the anthropological traditions, albeit one which never became particularly important or consequential. I am thinking of the rationalist framework of thought which came to anthropology through Wilhelm von Humboldt and his pupil Adolf Bastian. Bastian's (1860) conviction that the diversity of cultures can be explained only in terms of a psychological unity of mankind. Bastian's claim is a position which has a certain modern ring. From a finite set of *Elementargedanken* is generated an infinite set of *Völkergedanken*. The syntactical apparatus which transports and transforms elements from a deep structure he found in ecological variables - *die geographischen Provinzen*. He also paid attention to the historical event. The notion of *Völkergedanken* corresponds to what later Germans

(and some Americans) would call *Weltanschauung*. Bastian's model of cultural competence may today seem unduly simple. Still it seems he was asking the right sorts of questions; for anthropology something may be gained from a return to the general proposition that there is a possibility in a transcultural enquiry. Again, it may be illuminating to compare Bastian's culture theory with the sort of enquiries which have been envisaged by one of the foremost Cartesians of our time:

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Are there other areas of human competence where one might hope to develop a fruitful theory, analogous to generative grammar? ... One might, for example, consider the problem of how a person comes to acquire a certain concept of three-dimensional space, or an implicit 'theory of human action,' in similar terms. Such a study would begin with the attempt to characterize the implicit theory that underlies actual performance and would then turn to the question of how this theory develops under the given conditions of time and access to data - that is, in what way the resulting system of beliefs is determined by the interplay of available data, 'heuristic procedures,' and the innate schematism that restricts and conditions the form of acquired system (Chomsky 1968: 64).

Now, if we wish to turn in this direction of enquiry, we must admit that we are but poorly equipped in the beginning. There are no generally accepted means by which we may have easy insights into the basic human process of symbolisation. What we will have to contend with is a working procedure in which we hypothesize and argue, thereby attempting to account for as much as there is on record in existing ethnographies. What we can gain from such efforts can be supported only by our success at refuting possible counter arguments. As long as we can defend our hypotheses we have platforms for the launching of new arguments and further hypotheses.

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We must remember though that sooner or later our platforms or our pyramid of platforms will have to be rebuilt as new knowledge is gained - or, it will

give in and collapse under the pressure of new and better arguments.

When we approach the issue of the nature of ritual there are two paths we might follow - and both are completely legitimate and justified. One is the scrutiny of particular instances of ritual and their place within a particular society. The empirical investigation will provide empirically posed questions and their possible answers will not only tell us something about that particular society and the way it produces and handles ritual, but also something about ritual in a generalised way. The other approach is the generalist's broad scope starting in the grand questions of human nature and the nature of human culture. In this essay we will try the latter path and raise some basic questions which in their combination may lead to a hypothesis of ritual.

So we are confronted with the difficult task to present something which has at least a remote resemblance of a hypothesis of ritual. Where shall we start? The most impressive fact we have at hand is that ritual, definitely and empirically demonstrably, is a transcultural phenomenon; we do not know of any society which has not developed forms of behaviour we deem intuitively as ritual behaviour - activities which cannot be accounted for directly in terms of what is purposeful.

Furthermore, there may be some support for a hypothesis which claims that ritual is a communicative system which is phylogenetically older than, and separated from, language in that it is a system which may be judged as shared with other subhuman primates. There is the general observation that non-human primates communicate

with vocalisations and gestures, postures and displays. Human primates use vocalisations, gestures, postures and displays also, and when we see bizarre combinations of such behaviour in front of our anthropological eyes, we may well record what we see as ritual behaviour.

Still it is very important to bear in mind that human beings have another and much more effective and powerful way of communication in that they have access to language. Ritual (whatever it is) takes place in an environment of verbal behaviour.

Ritual may also be regarded as a system of communication dealing with specific themes; typically an actor involved in an instance of ritual cannot tell in words what he communicates in ritual. Ritual is somehow beyond verbal thinking. Language provides means for metacommunication

about ritual. Language may be employed in rituals in that vocalisations are elaborated into words and utterances. Ritual may be described, remembered, and stored in written form by the use of language. By employing language, as in myth, ritual conquers new realms of semantics, and may achieve some degree of propositional force. And here we link with the empirical investigation: the human mind is found to develop fantastic expressive constructions out of the base he seems to share with other subhuman primates.

Primatologists have shown some concern with the study of social communication in groups of non-human primates. Being close to the idiom of natural science (most are biologists after all), they generally value inductive procedures (Marler 1965, Altman 1967, but see also e.g. Hall 1967 and Ripley 1967 for different views). In this present

context we need not worry too much about the technicalities of this line of research; but there are some general features of primate societies and their signalling systems we may consider with some profit.

One basic question in this context concerns how individuals combine, and therefore we should give some further consideration to the existence of 'groups.' The group is common to many species of primates (although it is often referred to as 'troop' by primatologists). The group is a universal human phenomenon. It is apparent that group formation is an adaptive instrument of great importance. The social group occupies a range, shares knowledge of local foods, paths, and dangers, and offers opportunity for play, grooming, and close association. Young and females are protected and dominance gives an order to society. For some

species the reproductive success occurs only within the group (Washburn & Hamburg 1965a)

There is also one specific evolutionary reason behind the group formation of primates:

Why does the group exist? Why does the animal not live alone, if not all year at least for much of it? There are many reasons but the principal one is *learning*. The group is the locus of knowledge and experience far exceeding that of the individual member. It is in the group that experience is pooled and the generations linked. The adaptive function of prolonged biological youth is that it gives the animal time to learn. During this period, while the animal learns from other members of the group, it is protected by them. Slow development in isolation would simply mean disaster for the individual and extinction for the species (Washburn & Hamburg 1965b)¹

Human groups, like all primate groups, vary a great deal in size. Group size may be dependent on natural resources, but it seems as if ecology alone cannot account for size of membership. Bushman bands, for instance, are smaller generally than the

optimum allowed by the carrying capacity of their environment (Richard Lee, personal communication 1970). Again, demarcation of groups is not always clear cut , not even among subhuman species. There are among apes and monkeys always a great number of individuals who change their group belonging intermittently. Generally such animals seem to belong to the periphery of the troop; often they are subadults. Occasionally troops band together to form larger communities. For instance, there is a description of the hamadryas baboon as sleeping on rocky cliffs in large aggregations that may number more than 700. In the morning these aggregations divide into moderatley sized groups that superficially seem comparable to the stable groups in other species of baboons. But these groups divide in turn into 'one-male groups,' that is one male plus one or more females and their

young. It is the one-male group that is stable, and, although close to many other groups in the sleeping places, the one-male group does not mix with the others. This system is interpreted as meeting two special, local adaptive problems: the lack of safe sleeping places and the difficulty of finding food in the near desert (Kummer 1968).

Similarly, human groups appear, as it were, on many analytical levels, and what is a 'group' cannot be defined outside of a particular context. Groups may be temporary and they may be continuous. The continuous social group functions as an adaptive mechanism. In turn, social adaptation has several functions, but learning is vitally important in each. Thus, continuous social groups are continuous agglomerations of individuals who are carriers, transmitters and innovators of shared specific knowledge. Different

provinces of knowledge demarcate social groups; this means that continuous social groups can be understood contextually solely in that they are manifest only where and when specific knowledge is translated into social acts in processes of social interaction.

This position advocates caution. We should be most careful in weighing our evidence before we accept an hierarchical thinking in the analysis of groups. At least no *a priori* definition of social groups as hierarchical can be accepted. Lineage, clan, phratry, and moiety, for instance, represent different schemata, and the evident circumstance that the latter groups include more individuals than the former, should not immediately and mechanically lead to the conclusion that comprehensiveness is a hierarchical scale (Cf. Strathern 1972, Aijmer 1975).

In this context we must dwell briefly on the topic of kinship. Several subhuman primates recognise kinship bonds.² We do not know of any more detailed study of kinship systems of apes and monkeys, but it seems to us as a prerequisite for any kinship system is some notion of time and thereby causality. I take it, as did Kant, that time is something given as an innate scheme. The individual's ability to recognize time relations between objects is certainly linked to the existence of biological clocks and certain physiological features.³

What is important in our concern with human societies is that kinship may be looked upon as a way of talking about time; tracing links to fathers, mothers, mother's brothers, granduncles, and so on, is to communicate about time. Thus notions of time are essential embeddings in any kinship

system. For the semantics of a particular empirical kinship system a notion of history must be subsumed. Intuitively regarded, a history is a possible universe with a past, a present, and a future. In fact, kinship relations are among the very few which can link syntagmatically one particular person to other men since long dead, or not yet born.

But kinship is also a way of talking about space, or rather, is a device of the cultural code in which time and space are joined into one 'many-fold.' People in space are joined through time, and *vice versa*. The 'truth-value' or 'satisfaction' of a kinship statement seems to be related both to the person asserting the statement and his space-time position.

There are, of course, a great number of different relationships which serve to unite people into

syntagmatic chains in space ('networks') but few of the emerging communities of people will survive one generation just because such relationships are not tagged to symbols of time notions. One aspect of time is that there are objects outside the kinship system which refer equally to the person of the present, to the person of the past, and to the person of the future. A kinship system seems therefore to need at least one external constant, or 'anchor,' to mark the continuity, or rather, the history of the system.⁴ Thus kinship is an extremely important instrument for the maintenance of a continuous social group, the members of which wish to express this continuity.

I hold it that all social continuous groups are also culturally defined in that continuity is recognized and expressed in terms of some sort of expressive

'vocabulary.' Kinship is one such device but is generally supplemented by other means. Continuity implies concerns with reproduction and recruitment, maintenance through consumption, and diminution in terms of loss of membership. These features are functionally interwoven in a group's adaptation to its environment. Again, there is concern with protection from predatory activities in the environment, and the group is an adaptive mechanism for protection. Some superincumbent order must be imposed on the members if the agglomerat is to meet the problems which emerge from the existence of other groups and other species. Continuous groups have systems of dominance and attention paying. It is in these concerns for continuity we will have to look for the roots of ritual.

Earlier it was suggested that there is some

support for a hypothesis which claims that ritual is a communicative system which is phylogenetically older than and separated from language in that it is a system which is shared by other primates. At the present time we must presumably contend ourselves with a demonstration of the plausibility of this hypothesis. Straightforward proofs are probably beyond what can be achieved. The suggestion includes the proposition that ritual as a general primate system of communication is concerned with a number of fixed and specific themes. The hypothesis raises a number of difficult questions and the difficulty can be traced to the circumstance that we know so little about culture and 'proto-culture' (Tsumori 1967), and probably not so much about language as we sometimes think we do. Today it is perhaps less clear that language

is the clear demarcator of humanity we have been accustomed to think and believe, as the symbolic capacities of subhuman primates are now being discovered and explored (Gardener & Gardener 1969, Premack 1970). It has even been suggested (Miller 1972) that the development of speech among early hominids was a condition for the rapid development of the human brain to its present dimensions and structure.

Again, a large part of the communicative means which have been developed by subhuman primates are forms of learnt behaviour. Such 'proto-cultural' phenomena are of great importance among many species. In most higher animals, in addition to their hereditary transmission of information by genes, there is an important socially transmitted information pertaining to special localities - for instance those where breeding, feeding, or

wintering take place. There is no critical demarcation between this kind of tradition and the more elaborate body of learning that constitutes a large part of human culture: the one expands to produce the other. But both demand an underlying gene-determined ability to learn, and an impuls to obey, the dictates of the code of a tradition (Wynne-Edwards 1972).

Subhuman primates as well as men communicate about certain fixed themes using acoustical-visual-olfactory signals which are learnt in enculturation processes linked to innate schemes for learning. My hypothesis is that the phenomenon we call ritual in human societies is just this sort of communication, obsolete as it were, for the presence of the far more powerful use of language;⁵ however, it will immediately be confronted with some serious difficulties.

These difficulties are largely due to the circumstance that we know precious little about primate communication. So far most attention has been given to gestures and vocalisations. The latter have been recorded on spectographs, analysed, catalogued, and sometimes given some sort of semantic content - the latter derived from their apparent function within the group (Marler 1965, J. Bastian 1965, Altman 1967). Generally it is reported that primate communication serves adaptive functions by way of creating cohesion in a troop, by spacing different troops, by making foraging for food more efficient and by upholding dominance structures which serve to protect the troop. The themes of cohesion, spacing, consumption and dominance are the same as those handled by human rituals; but there are additional themes in human societies, like life cycle changes,

themes which are difficult to compare to subhuman features, simply because they do not exist or they have not been recorded.

It may be noted though that there are also some strange performances among some subhuman primates which cannot be accounted for in terms of purpose and adaptation. Well known examples of this are the so called 'rain dance' among the Gombe River chimpanzees (van Lawick Goodall 1974:62sq) and the chest beating ceremonies among the mountain gorillas of the Congo (Schaller 1963).

We may be on somewhat safer ground when some other kinds of 'irrational' behaviour are considered. Subhuman primates seem to show an interest in phenomena like birth and death, although it is extremely difficult to interpret reports in this direction in any systematic fashion. My impression is that there may be more on record than have been

made available in publications, but as primatologists are most often in search for what is purposeful, such communication acts as bear on birth and and death have been for them on the irrelevant side

A few examples may be mentioned here. Chimpanzees seem to give birth in seclusion and 'introduce' their infants shortly afterwards to the troop. The infant is met with an enormous interest by the troop members, an interest which also gives rise to curious dominance displays of adult males (Van Lawick Goodall 1974: 48sq). Marked interest in a newborn is reported for other species as well (E.g. Rosenblum & Kaufman 1967).

Again, chimpanzees appear concerned with death, they seem to realize somehow a notion of discontinuity in 'irrational' behaviour (Van Lawick Goodall 1974: 210-20, Teleki 1973). After all, the

discovery of death may not be one of those great events which could mark the emergence of a truly human mind as contrasted with a 'subhuman mind.' With these points in mind we can again turn to the phenomenon of human ritual. Human ritual is neither intended, nor ideationally understood. The messages of ritual are neither formulated consciously by the actor, nor understood in reflexive thought by himself, by an audience, or any receiver person. That is, the actor may well seem to have some sort of latent cultural knowledge pertaining to his ritual performance, but he cannot account for this in terms of linguistic thinking and articulation (Aijmer 1987) Similarly the target receiver cannot decode linguistically the cultural contents of an ongoing ritual activity. In an ordinary sense of the word, ritual cannot be regarded as inter-mind

communication. Ritual has a transmission capacity but this has little to do with cognitively based communication of linguistically informed messages. Rather, the thesis of the essay is that ritual connects with a general primate non-verbal communication system.

There are of course a number of anthropological theories concerning ritual and religion. Some regard ritual as something self-evident and perhaps beyond enquiry (Radcliffe-Brown, Malinowski), others as a manifestation of religion which in turn is something god-given (Schmidt). There are also theories which say that ritual and religion are things which are man-made and therefore can be entirely socially explained. Marxist theory would here be the most prominent contributor to this kind of anthropological thinking.

Modern developments in Marxist social theory have laid claims to an explanatory ability to demonstrate how religion and ritual behaviour support traditional authority in a society. This line of argument has been brilliantly advocated through the years by for instance Maurice Bloch (1974, 1986) whose argument starts from certain observations concerning the effect various rules of restriction have upon language in the formation of formalised discourse. The more restrictions that apply, in terms of syntax, vocabulary, intonation and so on, the less capacity has that formalised language to carry propositions about the world; therefore it becomes less meaningful. Instead, formalised language takes on what is called 'illocutionary force' - in this Bloch borrows a term from Austinian speech act theory.

Impoverished language of this sort drifts into

chanting and singing, words become like things, they are substituted by objects, and in this process formalised language will in the end collapse into ritual. The messages this mode of communication can produce have no meaning in that they do not relate to an ever-changing world. Instead they are pregnant with illocutionary force which builds an ideology, a frozen order which does not exist outside itself. By attacking form the semantic structures going with language and the linguistic mode of communication are made to lose truth value. The result is a kind of communication of a content of illusions that deceive. By accepting certain forms and expressions in language games characterised by rigid rules of restriction, the speakers also accept *a priori* what is being said. Ritual, in terms of this and similar theories, is an extreme form of

highly restricted language games.

While many of these observations concerning formalisation are convincing and should be maintained within any theory of ritual, their value might be increased if we (as Marx did with Hegel) turn the argument upside down in a bold move. Thereby the existence of ritual would be allowed to reflect a main prelinguistic step in the evolution of human communication; the same argument would also suggest why ritual has been maintained in the affairs of man as a seemingly irrational search for information about the world. It will be recalled that we started this essay by maintaining that ritual and language are basically disconnected. It must be stressed that the nature of non-speech semantics is different from that of speech, culture and language being two different codes. Culture contains imperative categories

which language does not, in the sense that grammar does not prescribe what is appropriate to say. Language is propositional, it carries arguments and is logical in a classical sense. Culture supports a life orientation and employs modal logic (cf. Aijmer 1987).

There is no reason to assume that a cultural tradition is a homogeneous phenomenon in the sense that customs and conventions could be expected to form one logical fit-in for a society. Rather, our present knowledge points in the direction that a tradition embraces a number of modalities, each with given presuppositions. The boundaries of a social group and the defining characteristics of membership of the group are things that may change from situation to situation and, furthermore, constitute a number of 'confusing' or 'contradictory' statements within

one single situation. A group is simultaneously many different sorts of communities each belonging to a distinct modality of the cultural tradition, but appearing at the same time on the inspectable level of social performance and social gatherings. An instance of marriage may be quite complex and encompass a number of possible marriages, each consummated in different symbolic forms. Generally the cultural modalities harboured in a society do not drift apart - at least not in the short term perspective. All cultural traditions seem to develop conversion mechanisms (a meta system) allowing for some sort of secondary integration. Ritual seems to be a major device of symbolic representations for such meta systems.

I pointed out that ritual is not a simple linear arrangement of acts, but a cluster of events in a

duration of time. The meaning of rituals cannot simply be decoded as linear, sentence-like messages. Their meaning can be revealed only by the way of an understanding of the kind of mental operations which constitute the ritual activity. Rituals find their truth value in possible universes.

But how then could Bloch's argument be turned upside down? Ritual expression exists in an 'intellectual ecology' which is largely characterised by fast and effective linguistic communication. Language is, in a sense, always harassing culture in that it offers precision and accomodation to changing circumstances, which culture cannot afford. Ritual is very much part of culture, but it does intermittently employ vocalisations and other forms of sound symbolism - chant, song, music. In ritual people imitate birds'

cries, they cry and sing and shout, they beat drums and gongs – and they introduce expressive periods of silence. It could be proposed that, given the general linguistic habit of putting sounds together, it is not too far-fetched to assume that people as ritual actors who in their action produce sounds, also start putting sounds together, although these sounds are in no way words or otherwise have a status equal to words.

But once a clustering of sound has begun, clusters which of necessity must be strings if uttered by one single person, these sound clusters may become somewhat word-like – nonsense words and expressions of onomatopoeia. Sound strings of some length and complexity may become slightly sentence-like. Our speculation is that in this way spells will emerge and nonsense incantations take shape under a certain linguistic influence. All the

same, such sound sequences have no linguistic interpretation at all.

However, some spells may be more sentence-like than others, the component sound parts taking on the form of recognizable words. Once this path has been taken there is no real limit to what ritual may achieve in the linguistic field. Ritual expands into longer pseudo-sentences - we get prayers and invocations, and even rudimentary bits of narration. When such elaboration goes on and greater areas of linguistic articulation are conquered, myth will emerge. Myth, then, may be viewed as ritual transported into the verbal sphere of life, where it may further develop into fiction and drama.

In this essay we have pointed to the transcultural character of ritual and it was also pointed to the possibility that the phenomenon we label ritual is

shared by subhuman primates, also carriers of some sort of culture (sometimes styled 'protoculture'). We have tried to find some support for the thought that ritual is a pre-language communication system concerned with rather constant themes, which still survives in human societies. We drew attention to the importance of communicative groups as continuous groups and suggested that criteria of group identity must be understood pragmatically. Kinship was mentioned as one of the most important devices for a group to express its continuity. It is in this basic notion of continuity we should search for the roots of ritual. Ritual communicates about continuity, its content steeped into the matrices of reproduction, consumption, diminuation, protection and dominance.

With some hesitation, then, we propose to sum up

our hypothesis of ritual thus: *Ritual is non-linguistic communication within and between continuous social groups referring to their continuity and set apart from non-speech generally by presupposing sets of possible universes, each characterized by the absence of such restraints as affect everyday social life.*

NOTES

1) It has been suggested that 'sociability' in animals generally has a population control effect (Wynne-Edwards 1959, 1962, 1972). But it has also been said that this particular aspect is less important in human society where traditions have replaced much of the innate schematism which regulate the number of individuals in a specific area.

2) So for instance Rhesus monkeys (Koford 1963, Sade 1965, 1967), Japanese macaques (Kawai 1958, Kawamura 1958, Tsumori 1967), Pigtail monkeys (Rowell 1972:149), and chimpanzees (van Lawick-Goodall 1974). A useful general account is that of Simonds 1974:151-168).

3) For a radically different view, see Leach 1958.

4) The comprehensional meaning of that external constant must be deemed another important embedding in the semantics of the kinship

system of a group.

5) Ethologists use the words 'ritual' and 'ritualisation' in a different sense referring to the process of improving the signals used in communication.

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