



Dionysus in 69, The Performance Group directed by Richard Schechner (1968).
Agave caresses Pentheus. Photo: Frederick Eberstadt, courtesy of Richard Schechner

Richard Schechner

The Future of Ritual

Abstract: In an attempt to define what "ritual" is, Schechner denotes in ritual actions, both human and animal, a similarity with those that emerge in the artistic performance field. The American scholar identifies elements such as violence and sexuality in rituals and characterizes the ritual itself as the dynamic capable of dealing with social crises that overturn culturally recognized systems and hierarchies. Furthermore, following Turner – and reviewing ethological and neurological points of view – Schechner recognizes ritual as having a creative property, which not only contains traditional cultural behaviors but is capable of generating new images, ideas and practices. This article has been published in several versions, undergoing several transformations: it appeared firstly as the inaugural essay of the Journal of Ritual Studies 1 (1), 1987, pp. 5-34; other fragments of it appear in Victor Turner's Last Adventure, an essay published both in Anthropologica 27 (1-2), 1985, pp. 190-206 and as introduction for Turner's book The Anthropology of Performance (1986). Another full version of this writing is published in the Schechner's volume which takes up the title of the article itself: The Future of Ritual: Writings on Culture and Performance (Routledge, London and New York 1993, pp. 228-265).

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Even to say it in one word, ritual, is asking for trouble. Ritual has been so variously defined – as concept, praxis, process, ideology, yearning, experience, function – that it means very little because it means too much.¹ In common use, ritual is identified with the sacred, another slippery word. But scholars have long discussed "secular ritual" (see Moore and Myerhoff 1977). Current opinion holds that the barriers between sacred and secular, like those between work and play, are both extremely porous and culture, specific. Rituals have been considered: 1) as part of the evolutionary development of animals; 2) as structures with formal qualities and definable relationships; 3) as symbolic systems of meaning; 4) as performative actions or processes; 5) as experiences. These categories overlap. It is also clear that rituals are not safe deposit vaults of accepted

1. The writings about ritual are voluminous. Ronald Grimes has done much excellent bibliographic work putting at least the writings in English into some kind of order; see his *Research in Ritual Studies* (Grimes 1985). Some of the texts that have influenced my thinking are: Armstrong 1981; d'Aquili, et al. 1979; Geertz 1973, 1980, 1983; Goffman 1967; Grimes 1982, 1990; Handelman 1977; Kapferer 1983; La Barre 1972; MacAloon 1984; Moore and Myerhoff 1977; Rappaport 1968, 1979; Staal 1979; Turner 1969, 1974, 1982, 1986; van Gennep 1960. Even this list is painfully partial. For references of a distinctly ethological kind, see footnote 3.



141

ideas but in many cases dynamic performative systems generating new materials and recombining traditional actions in new ways.

Whatever the future of ritual, its past is pedigreed. Ethologists, observing animals performing rituals, use the word without quotation marks.² Ethologically speaking, ritual is ordinary behavior transformed by means of condensation, exaggeration, repetition, and rhythm into specialized sequences of behavior serving specific functions usually having to do with mating, hierarchy, or territoriality. In animals, ritualized behavior is often set in "fixed action patterns" elicited automatically by certain kinds of stimuli. These patterns are augmented and highlighted by conspicuous body parts that have evolved over time for use in "ritual displays" – the moose's horns, the peacock's tail, the red rump of a baboon in estrus, the brilliant colors of any number of fish species. Other animals have the ability to dramatically change size or color. The evolution of ritual from an ethological perspective can be diagrammed as a tree (Figure 1). The further up the tree, the closer to human. Nonhuman primates such as chimpanzees and gorillas

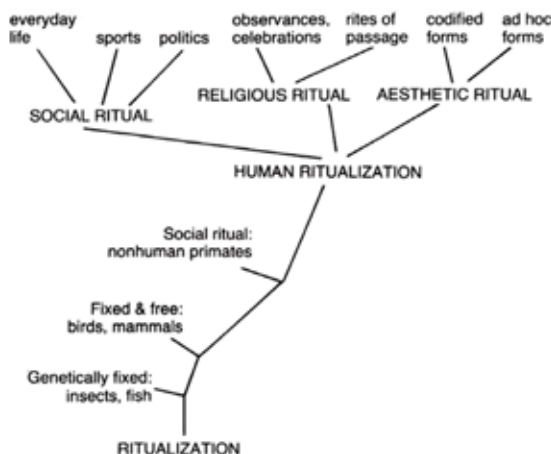


Figure1 The Ritual Tree

behave in some respects very much like humans. Some of their actions closely resemble human performance. Even if nonhuman primates cannot speak as humans do (lacking not only the muscular formations necessary for the articulation of speech but also a well enough developed brain) they can express and communicate feelings. Such expressive behavior, communicating and sharing feelings, might be closer to human ritual and its associated "behavior arts" (theater, dance, music, some kinds of painting) than anything rational or cognitive the "higher apes" are capable of.

But if there are homologies between animal behavior and human rituals and arts

2. The work by ethologists on ritual has been extensive. To begin with, see Darwin 1965; Eibl-Eibesfeldt 1970, 1979; Konner 1982; Lorenz 1959, 1961, 1965, 1967; Tinbergen 1965. For a critique of the way scientists – males mostly – have conducted their research with primates see Haraway 1989.

there are important differences also. The patterned "waggle dance" of bees may look like dancing to a human observer predisposed to see such an analogy, but the bees are not dancing in the same sense as a kathakali dancer or the performers in *A Chorus Line* are. For the bees everything is genetically determined. There is no learning or improvisation, no composition classes where new behaviors are invented and tested. Nor are there rehearsals where behaviors are revised, taking into account the particular individual "talent" of this or that bee. The most that can happen is the accidental occurrence of some advantageous genetic variation that will then be passed on. Nor can any bee make a mistake or lie or be resistant. A ballet dancer can choose one night simply not to go up on point though the choreography tells her to do so. She might lose her role, or even her job, but she won't be examined to determine what genetic mutation caused her to go flatfoot. Not so with the "dancing" bees. If they go wrong, or change their basic pattern of behavior, scientists will look into their screwed-up DNA. Human performance is paradoxical, a practiced fixity very hard to achieve because it is founded on contingency. What a weird delight it is for people to go up on point, or recite words written hundreds of years earlier, or perform choreographed ineptitude as clowns do. Even weirder for other people to pay good money (or its equivalent) to watch and savor such behavior. And what is true of ballet or Shakespeare or clowning is true also of the Mass, an initiation rite of Australian aborigines, a Hindu puja, or a World Cup soccer match.

[...] In both animals and humans rituals arise or are devised around disruptive, turbulent, and ambivalent interactions where faulty communication can lead to violent or even fatal encounters. Rituals, and the behavior arts associated with them, are overdetermined, full of redundancy, repetition, and exaggeration. This metamessage of "You get the message, don't you!?" (a question surrounded by emphasis) says that what a ritual communicates is very important yet problematic. The interactions that rituals surround, contain, and mediate almost always concern hierarchy, territory, and sexuality/mating (an interdependent quadruple). If these interactions are the "real events" rituals enfold, then what are the rituals themselves? They are ambivalent symbolic actions pointing at the real transactions even as they help people avoid too direct a confrontation with these events. Thus rituals are also bridges – reliable doings carrying people across dangerous waters. It is no accident that many rituals are "rites of passage".

Both animal and human ritual actions are very close to theater. In theater, too, behavior is rearranged, condensed, exaggerated, and made rhythmic. Theater employs colorful costumes and masks as well as face and body painting every bit as impressive as a peacocks tail or a moose's antlers. In theater, perilous journeys and deadly conflicts are acted through. Even farces and comedies barely hide their violent subtexts. The violence of ritual, like that of theater, is simultaneously present and absent, displayed and deferred. The ritual actions are displayed even as the "real events" are deferred. Two wolves fight and at a certain point one animal gets the better of the other. The vanquished wolf suddenly offers his throat to his opponent but the winning wolf does not – cannot – slash the jugular. Surrender defers death. After the ceremony of offering the throat, the winner allows the loser to slink away. Or in Jewish circumcision an eight day old boy's penis is cut, his foreskin violently taken, as a direct and permanent bodily

proof of God's special arrangement with the Jews: the deferral granted to Abraham who was willing, on God's word, to sacrifice his son Isaac for whom, at the last minute, a lamb was substituted. Or, following the same theme, when the Christian priest elevates the Eucharistic bread and wine, the grain and liquor are masks for flesh and blood, the real human body, God's lamb and first son, sacrificed on the Cross (God was not as lucky as Abraham). As the way to celebrate Christ's redemptive *sparagmos*, communicants are offered a cannibal feast once removed.

Violence, sexuality, and theater converge in the two main Western traditions, the Greek and the Hebraic Christian. These traditions combine Middle Eastern, northern European, and Eurasian elements – fertility rites, human and animal sacrifice, sun worship, and shamanism. Even a cursory look at Christian iconography and painting as it developed through the Middle Ages into the Renaissance reveals the orgasmic, not to say orgiastic, qualities of martyrdom as imagined and depicted. This display of violence against the body is not limited to bygone epochs. Violence against the body is a strong theme in contemporary art and popular culture. Chris Burden specialized in assaulting his own body, even going so far as to have himself shot; Stelarc exhibits his body suspended by hooks and cords. The violence of certain kinds of rock and roll is well known. American football, boxing, and especially professional wrestling celebrate a highly theatricalized violence. Special automobile shows called "demolition derbies" feature high speed car crashes and "monster trucks" whose specialty is crushing other vehicles beneath their gargantuan wheels. With the exception of wrestling, these events – as distinct from the extraordinarily graphic scenes of violence in the movies (often in slow motion in order to emphasize the spectacularity and bloody detail of the violence) – are not simulated. A close look at these violent displays cannot but disclose their erotic content.

[...] What of all this violence, examples of which could be multiplied many times over from different cultures around the world? It is not part of "real life". The first time or "original" violence of real life is anything but redemptive. Humans need to "make something out" of the violence of real life, if at first only by repetition. The rebroadcasting of events like the assassination of John F. Kennedy or the explosion of the Challenger space shuttle are kinds of low-level ritualizing, an attempt to absorb and transform the violence of the event itself into something redemptive. When official real-life violence approaches the absolute, as at Auschwitz Birkenau, the memorials and museums meant to commemorate seem almost to parody. [...]

But human ritual [...] might be said to short circuit thinking, providing ready-made answers to deal with crisis. Individual and collective anxieties are relieved by rituals whose qualities of repetition, rhythmicity, exaggeration, condensation, and simplification stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins directly into the bloodstream yielding ritual's second benefit, a relief from pain, a surfeit of pleasure. In saying that religion was the opium of the people, Marx may have been right biochemically speaking. But ritual is also creative because, as Turner showed, the ritual process opens up a time/space of antistructural playfulness. And whereas in animals the non-cognitive is dominant, in humans there is always a dialectical tension between the cognitive and the affective.

René Girard in his *Violence and the Sacred* [...] believes (and I agree) that ritual

sublimates violence: "The function of ritual is to 'purify' violence; that is to 'trick' violence into spending itself on victims whose death will provoke no reprisals" (Girard 1977, 36). All this sounds very much like theater – especially a theater whose function is cathartic, or at least a theater that "redirects" violent and erotic energies. Cathartic or not, theater always manufactures substitutes, specializing in multiplying alternatives. Is it accidental that so many of these alternatives combine the violent with the erotic?

The "sacrificial crisis," as Girard sees it, is the dissolution of distinctions within a society – from the erasure of the reciprocal rights/responsibilities of parents to/from their children, to the elision of all hierarchy. Incest and regicide are radical attacks on differentiation. Girard, a dyed-in-the-wool advocate of differentiation, says: "Wherever differences are lacking, violence threatens" (Girard 1977, 57). The enactment of ritual death – whether the victim is actually or theatrically killed – restores distinctions by emphasizing the difference between the victim and the rest of society:

The surrogate victim plays the same role on the collective level as the objects the shamans claim to extract from their patients play on the individual level-objects that are then identified as the cause of the illness (Girard 1977, 83).

In theater the substitutions are more complex than in shamanism. In theater the actor is a substitute for a surrogate. The actor who plays Oedipus or Lear or Willie Loman is not that "character" who itself is not a "real person." There may be no "real person" at all behind the scenes, but only the play of embodied representations:

[victim] → character → actor: audience ← [society].

At the place where the actor meets the audience, that is, in the theater place, society faces the sacrificial victim twice-removed. The individuals who comprise an audience "leave" society and "go to" the theater where they play the role of society, responding more as a group than as discrete individuals. The actor performs the character behind whom is the victim. The actor's performance is a representation of a representation. But in a ritual like the Eucharist, a layer of representation is stripped away from the actor's side. There is no character. The priest, an actor on behalf of Christ, faces the congregation which, like the theater audience, represents society, in this case the society of Christians (of the same denomination).

[victim]→actor: congregations←[society]

Still there is no direct meeting between society and victim. The priest performing the Eucharist "elevates" Christ while the congregants "stand for" the Christians they are. In some rituals, an animal takes the place of a human victim. And in other rituals a person faces the representatives of society directly and an actual sacrifice takes place:

victim: celebrants←[society]

This is very rarely the sacrifice of a human life. It may be a cutting or scarring or burning, etc.; or the exchange of rings, the giving of a thread, an immersion, or some other irrevocable act. Is it proper to use the term "victim" to describe a person who is not only not harmed but often celebrated? In these cases is there even the shadow of a sacrificial victim? Take the exchange of wedding rings. Certainly there is a suggestion of bondage. The gold ring is a master's gift marking and enclosing she (or he) who wears it. Before the custom of the double ring ceremony, it was the bride who was "given" to the husband and she alone who wore the ring. And the failure to live up to the arrangement of submission still does, in some cases, lead to violence and death. Or what can the burning candles on a birthday cake blown out by the celebrant signify if not the brevity of life and the temporary reprieve granted to one whom death will someday claim?

There are ways other than Girard's to explain the widespread association of violence, sexuality, ritual, and theater. In *Totem and Taboo* (originally published in 1913) Freud proposed an analogy between the thought of animists, neurotics, children, and artists.

It is easy to perceive the motives which lead men to practice magic: they are human wishes. All we need to suppose is that primitive man had an immense belief in the power of his wishes (Freud 1962, 83).

[...] Freud notes one mode of "civilized thought" that remains unreconstructed.

In only a single field of our civilization has the omnipotence of thoughts been retained, and that is in the field of art. Only in art does it still happen that a man who is consumed by desires performs something resembling the accomplishment of those desires and that what he does in play produces emotional effects – thanks to artistic illusion – just as though it were something real. People speak with justice of the "magic of art" and compare artists to magicians. But the comparison is perhaps more significant than it claims to be. There can be no doubt that art did not begin as art for art's sake. It worked originally in the service of impulses which are for the most part extinct today. And among them we may suspect the presence of many magical purposes (Freud 1962, 90).

Extinct impulses? Looking at Freud through a contemporary lens means throwing out the notion that some humans are more "primitive" – or "aboriginal" – than others.

[...] What we have is a diversity of cultures none of which is closer to the "beginning of human history" than any other. Each culture embodies its own system of organizing experience.

Crediting Freud with extraordinary insight, how can it be restated to suit today's view of things? Perhaps we should say that certain systems are more porous in relation to the unconscious than other systems. But the ways in which this porosity is encouraged or repressed, guarded, regulated, and used, differ vastly not only from culture to culture but within every culture, and even within each individual. Children, crazies, and

"technicians of the sacred" each encounter and filter differently what Anton Ehrenzweig calls "primary process" (Ehrenzweig 1970).

[...] Becoming an artist, even in the West, is not unlike learning to be a shaman. The techniques and ambivalent social status of artist and shaman approximate each other. In modern Western cultures it might be said that the impulses from which art is made – the experiences of the artist (the shaman's "call," the artist's "raw material") – originate in difficult confrontations between daily life and the unconscious. In many cultures such impulses are said to originate with gods, ancestors, demons, ghosts, etc. I believe these represent relatively unmediated material streaming into consciousness, Ehrenzweig's "primary process." The impulses manifest themselves in dreams, visions, obsessive thoughts, trance possession, speaking in tongues, and half hidden, feared yet irresistible violent and erotic wishes. Sometimes these impulses and their manifestations make the recipient feel ecstatic, happy beyond the power of description, and sometimes the recipient is terrified.

[...] But that which terrifies the neurotic the artist seeks to play out publicly. Or, as is frequently the case, the artist neurotic (or shaman-neurotic) is compelled to explore the very process that terrifies her/him. It is fashionable today to say that artists are healthy while neurotics are sick – that ten years of art are equivalent to a psychoanalytic cure (Sartre 1963, 544). Maybe. But from an operational perspective, art and neurosis are closely linked because both behaviors are generated by a porous and shifting boundary between the unconscious and the conscious. And what art manipulates on an individual basis, ritual does collectively. Ritual gives violence its place at the table of human needs. As Kafka noted:

Leopards break into the temple and drink to the dregs what is in the sacrificial pitchers; this is repeated over and over again; finally it can be calculated in advance, and it becomes part of the ceremony (Kafka 1954, 40).

Humans need to perform rituals. Where is this need located? Eugene d'Aquili *et al.* place it in the brain (d'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979). [...]

D'Aquili *et al.* propose what they call a "cognitive imperative." A human being "automatically, almost reflexly, confronts an unknown stimulus by the question "What is it?" Affective responses such as fear, happiness, or sadness and motor responses are clearly secondary to the immediate cognitive response" (d'Aquili, Laughlin and McManus 1979, 168). If their thesis is true, then humans work from the top down, from the present to the past (evolutionarily speaking). Furthermore, narrativity – the need to construct a plausible story – is not only hard wired into the brain but dominant. This contradicts what I said earlier – that ritual short-circuits thought.

The contradiction can be resolved by supposing that ritualizing – the performance of ritual – is not a simple, one step, one way operation. My own experience from running many performance workshops during the past twenty-five years, is that rhythmic activities – especially if movement and sound-making are carefully coordinated and maintained for long periods of time – invariably lead to feelings of "identical opposites": omnipotence/vulnerability, tranquility/readiness for the most demanding physical

action. In other words, the narrative-cognitive stimulus works from the cerebral cortex down while the movement sonic stimulus works from the lower brain up. Performing a ritual, or a ritualized theater piece or exercise, is both narrative (cognitive) and affective. These work together to form the experience of ritualizing. If d'Aquili et al. are right, the affective states aroused by ritual are necessarily nested within a narrative frame. But from within – the experience of a person performing – the narrative frame dissolves, the action is just "done," not thought about.

Barbara Lex, another of d'Aquili's associates, proposes that trance, and other supremely affective states of flow, result from the extreme stimulation of both the ergotropic and trophotropic systems of the brain.³ [...]

Or, as Turner put it:

The rhythmic activity of ritual, aided by sonic, visual, photic, and other kinds of "driving," may lead in time to simultaneous maximal stimulation of both systems, causing ritual participants to experience what the authors [d'Aquili *et al.*] call "positive, ineffable affect." They also use Freud's term "oceanic experience," as well as "yogic ecstasy," also the Christian term *unio mystica*, an experience of the union of those cognitively discriminated opposites typically generated by binary, digital left-hemispherical ratiocination. I suppose one might also use the Zen term *satori* (the integrating flash), and one could add the Quakers' "inner light," Thomas Merton's "transcendental consciousness," and the yogic *samadhi* (Turner 1983, 230).

People seek experiences that provide a "rebound" or "spillover," simultaneously exciting both left and right hemispheres of the forebrain (see Fischer 1971; Turner 1983; Schechner 1988).

The ethological and neurological theories answer some questions but what they don't explain are the creative and playful aspects of ritual. Direct investigation of these aspects has been undertaken by some anthropologists and artists.

[...] the biology of the brain as modeled by neuroanatomist Paul MacLean. The human brain, MacLean theorized, is really three-in-one, a "triune brain" evolutionarily speaking, consisting of a "recent" frontal cortex, the seat of thought, a subcortical or "old mammalian" brain, the seat of emotions¹ and the oldest part of the brain the "reptilian." According to Turner's reading of MacLean, the reptilian brain is:

the brain stem, an upward growth of the spinal cord and the most primitive part of the brain, which we share with all vertebrate creatures and which has remained remarkably unchanged throughout the myriads of years of evolution... What MacLean did was to show that. ...the reptilian brain, whether in reptiles, birds, or mammals, is not only concerned with control of movement, but also

3. Flow as defined by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi is "the merging of action and awareness. A person in flow has no dualistic perspective: he is aware of his actions but not the awareness itself. [...] The steps for experiencing flow [...] involve the [...] process of delimiting reality, controlling some aspect of it, and responding to the feedback with a concentration that excludes anything else as irrelevant." (Csikszentmihalyi 1975, 38, 53-54).

with the storage and control of what is called "instinctive behavior" – the fixed action patterns and innate releasing mechanisms so often written about by the ethologists, the genetically preprogrammed perceptualmotor sequences such as emotional displays, territorial defense behaviors, and nest building (Turner 1983, 226).

Turner felt that human ritual was founded in the "reptilian brain" and he saw in MacLean's model of the triune brain a possible unifying theory:

How does [MacLean's model] fit with Freud's model of the id, ego, and superego, with Carl Jung's model of the collective unconscious and archetypes, with neo-Darwinian theories of selection, and especially with cross-cultural anthropological studies and historical studies in comparative religion? ... To what extent is it true that human feelings, hopes, and fears of what is most sacred are a necessary ingredient in generating decisions and motivating their implementation?... If ritualization, as discussed by [Julian] Huxley, [Konrad] Lorenz, and other ethologists, has a biogenetic foundation, while meaning has a neocortical learned base, does this mean that creative processes, those which generate new cultural knowledge, might result from a coadaptation, perhaps in the ritual process itself, of genetic and cultural information? We also can ask whether the neocortex is the seat of programs largely structured by the culture through the transmission of linguistic and other symbol systems to modify the expression of genetic programs. How far, we might add, do these higher symbols, including those of religion and ritual, derive their meaning and force for action from their association with earlier established neural levels of animal ritualization? (Turner 1983, 228).

Whether or not MacLean's key unlocks the mysteries of the brain thereby disclosing the biogenetic sources of ritual (and the odds are against it, the triune brain hypothesis is no longer accepted by most brain neurologists), the idea shows how strong the desire is to connect the ethological and neurological, the "scientific," with the imagery of "old" cultures. There is a wish for validation and mutual confirmation. Ritual is given several faces – that of the very "oldest" behavior rooted in what the "reptiles" do; that of "old cultures" who intuit what Western scientists such as d'Aquili, Lex, and MacLean find in their research; that of a repository of "higher symbols" and religion. Activating what Turner theorizes, [Felicita D.] Goodman [founder of the Cuyamungue Institute, New Mexico] and Grotowski say they have found (or synthesized or invented) precise practices – rituals – drawn from or invented to be like the wisdoms of old cultures, wisdoms that answer the needs of "modern people." At the end of his life, Turner believed the patterns underlying these wisdoms were genetically based.

[...] Turner's speculations at the end of his life closely paralleled Grotowski's work. Grotowski begins with "objective" elements-tempo, iconography, movement patterns, sounds. The research is not historical, not how the Sanskrit "om" and English "Amen"

(a transliteration of the Hebrew "Awmain") may be versions of the same ur mantra; but that the open "uh" sound followed by a "hummed" closure is a sequence found in a number of cultures because it expresses brain structure. [...]

Like Grotowski, Turner searched for ritual's creative powers (Turner 1969, 1983, 1986). He wanted to show how ritual was not just a conservator of evolutionary and cultural behavior, but a generator of new images, new ideas, and new practices. [...] As Turner himself notes, there is a contradiction between his theories of playful liminality and the ethological-neurological propositions. To ethologists and neurologists ritual is central both to behavior and to brain structure/function. But Turner locates ritual "betwixt-and-between," in cultural creases and margins, making it more like play than anything else. The ritual process is liminal-liminoid, unauthorized, antistructural, subjunctive ("if"), and subversive. The contradiction also expresses the difference between Turner's social perspective and the ethologist's-neurologist's biological one. This difference is a version of an old, insoluble argument between determinists and those who assert that humans are free to make their own destinies.

It would be foolish to dismiss out of hand the practice and thought of two such visionaries as Grotowski and Turner – especially where their work converges. [...] Much as I admire Turner, I am uncomfortable with this attempt to relocate and thereby resolve the "problems" of ritual in the workings of evolution or, more specifically, of what he called "the most sensitive and eloquent instrument of Gaea the Earth-spirit-the cerebral organ" (Turner 1983, 243). I am uncomfortable with Grotowski's Performer and with wisdom that exists before or behind genres, in the "original" times, in the "old cultures". These anthologies of cultures; or the wish for globalism; strike me as premature because they are unavoidably expressions of Western hegemony, attempts to cull and harvest the world's cultures. Maybe later in history, if there is more equality of power, more actual multiculturalism, but not now.

[...] Turner went far beyond van Gennep when he said that the artworks and leisure activities of industrial and postindustrial societies were like the rituals of tribal, agrarian, and traditional societies. He called the arts and leisure activities "liminoid." Liminal rites are obligatory while liminoid activities are voluntary. Workshops of experimental theater and dance – including Grotowski's and Goodman's – are liminoid laboratories of psychophysical initiation. Some of the transformations accomplished by workshops are temporary, used to make specific performances and that's all. But sometimes workshops effect permanent transformations. An aesthetic ritual initiation can be as consequential and permanent as anything wrought on an aborigine. The "parashamans" of experimental theater and dance, Grotowski among them, intend aesthetics to yield initiatory permanence (see Grimes 1982, 255-66).

Parashamanism turns orthodox ritual on its head. Ethological procedures are mimicked, neurological responses elicited – but in the service of ideas and visions of society that are anything but conservative. In nonhuman animals ritual is a way of increasing signal clarity in order to mediate crisis. It is often this among humans too – but it is also something else: a means of conserving and transmitting traditional cultural knowledge and individual patterns of behavior. Turner knew this, but he

did not emphasize it. He focused instead on how the ritual process is a machine for introducing new behaviors or undermining established systems. This led him away from traditional or liminal rituals toward investigating the way artists work, the techniques of the parashamans, and to his own theatrical work in "performing ethnography" (Turner and Turner 1982).

It is precisely when this creative and/or subversive function of ritual dominates, spills over its usually well-defined boundaries, that art separates from – and sometimes opposes – religion. [...]

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The Birth Ritual, Dionysus in 69, The Performance Group directed by Richard Schechner (1969).
Photo: Max Waldman, courtesy of Richard Schechner