

15. PASSAGE AND PERSUASION

So what do we try to accomplish thru ritual?

What does ritual do?

One of the most goals of ritual most commonly claimed or assumed is to **create order and control**.

The world has its own inherent order, but also has great deal of mess, flux, chaos.

Entropy, things fall apart.

We struggle to keep things together

This is perhaps what symbolic forms and systems of all sorts do most generally: to assert that things make sense, there is some coherence and regularity.

We have certainly seen this with other symbolic forms, esp. symbolic classifications

Ritual seems to do this a lot. In effect, it is an esp. consistent and systematic attempt to impose order on universe

Whatever else ritual does, it usually imposes some kind of order

Simply by repetition and regularity.

Here there seems to be a link with private rituals, which are often attempts, driven by psychological compulsion, to impose order. Most clear with obsessive/compulsive.

Rituals also wrestle with the irregular and messy and disorderly: death, sickness, loss, destruction

But paradoxically, some rituals impose disorder. Turn everything upside down and backwards. Not necessarily contradictory. has been suggested that by giving disorder its due, keeping it within special boundaries, that ultimately imposing order.

Creating community

The other goal most often mentioned.

Building or maintaining or celebrating the unity and coherence of a group

Both local community and wider ones. Groups of any size.

Q. What examples from your own experience?

Often this is a goal or the primary goal even of rituals that ostensibly about other things
University graduations as much about the university community as about saying goodbye to graduates.

Among Kuna, ritual lasting about an hour for young girl who just had first menstruation: supposedly for her, but she is inside a little tiny teepee, they build an enclosure around her. Each man brings bundle of huge leaves to cover, do all together. As much about the unity of men as about girl.

For Durkheim, the solidarity of the social group was *the* big question

After the short essay on classification written with Mauss, D wrote immensely long *Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1912)

Found origin of religion in sense of awe and exaltation in social group in collective functions

Conjures image of horde dancing around, getting worked up, collective sense of group perhaps like rave or Pentacostalist church service
Durkheim had mixed message: on one hand, saw solidarity as *following from* group experience; but also wrote that groups had needs like body or machine; rituals helps maintain group.

He was followed by so-called functionalists, sociologists and British anthropologists, who emphasized the functional needs of group, ritual fulfilling function, rather than other way---less complex than D.

In some cases ritual may have goal of marking or enforcing the *boundaries* of group as much as its internal solidarity---who is in and who is out.

Even though the classic functionalists are long gone, much of thinking even today about ritual and community is overtly or implicitly functional---assumes that groups need the ritual to maintain themselves.

But there are dangers in such analysis.

One is tendency to assume that a ritual is for the whole community, that it serves needs of the whole group, universally beneficial

But ritual can be lopsided, benefit esp. one party: Kuna marriage ritual most enforces the rights and privileges of parents, not the son-in-law

Other danger is assumption that societies by themselves somehow create rituals and other things. But this is open question: often seems that individual actors, whether consciously or semi-consciously, recognize what ritual does, create or add to rituals, as my great-grandmother did.

Just because we don't know who author of a ritual or song or anything else was doesn't mean there wasn't an author.

Reinforcing values and expectations

Groups and whole societies depend on participants having shared values and mutual expectations of each other. We should avoid functionalist assumption that sharing is total, but there must be at least minimum agreement on basic points

We create or reinforce shared assumptions constantly in daily life, with uniforms, speech codes and many other ways to indicate who is who and what is what. Difficult in store if can't tell the salespeople from customers, or in mental hospital, if can't tell attendants from patients.

But also need to do recurrently in more dramatic ways

If it is an egalitarian society, will be many ways that everyone must understand and act in egalitarian ways. Marvelous non-ritual example: anthropologist Richard Lee, who worked with foragers in Kalahari Desert, so-called Bushmen. He gave them a huge steer as gift, they belittled it, because crucial in their band organization that no one get too powerful or too pushy.

Kuna pretty egalitarian, though not as much as "Bushmen". In the puberty rituals mentioned above, after they have built the enclosure for girl, all the younger men go out

of house to place where women have drinks, bring them and serve to senior men. But then senior men go out, bring back drinks and serve younger men. Fact that two groups serve each other underlines their (partial) equality.

Conversely, hierarchical societies spend a great deal of time reinforcing hierarchy. 'Don't forget there is a king, and it's me, dammit!'

But also underline more specific features of system. My family marriage ritual says no divorce. Kuna marriage ritual: your father-in-law is in charge.

Often not just mechanics of system but *values*: what is important, what are good and bad things, what is right way to act.

Prime example, in the military, dying for your country does not come automatically. There are ways to get conformity, esp. thru coercion. Flogging in British navy, etc. Lot more coercion and punishment in military than we imagine. Also drilling, repeat until automatic.

But what about officers? Usually can't flog officers, less drilling, but expect more: officers are ones who lead, ones who stand up and walk around during shelling, pretend they're not scared. Can't flog them into being leaders. So militaries use symbolic means to instill values in officers, esp. ritual. Notorious how much ritual involved, instill loyalty, initiative, honor, etc.

Famous example, Samurai in Japan, code of Bushido

Rites of passage.

One of most important approaches to ritual developed by Flemish scholar (ostracized by Durkheim's group), Arnold Van Gennep

Hit on v basic idea, that many rituals changed an individual or group's social state, transition between one role or state and another

He used metaphor of spatial movement to discuss social movement: compared to rituals that move in space, thru threshold

Rites de passage (1909)

It was one of those very basic ideas that seems incredibly obvious once one has it
But no one had said it before. Wasn't obvious until he made it so.

Tremendous variety of rituals in all societies that fit this mold:

Q. What are examples from our society?

At every stage of life: birth, puberty, marriage, death. For every group, every important state like religious maturity.

V-G said 2 basic functions of ritual were to separate one from previous state and to incorporate into new one

Slightly confusingly, he also used those words to label stages in ritual: first separation stage, then incorporation stage. It is intuitively obvious that need to detach from previous state first, then move to new state.

Though in fact in some rituals it gets mixed up, may be doing functions in the same stage
Idea of transition as a middle stage in ritual, though that is also what whole rite does
Perfect example of importance of not getting bogged down in terminology

Later a scholar named Junod structured a whole ethnography of a S. African group in terms of rites of passage and progression thru life stages

We have an article from Victor Turner that elaborates one aspect of rites of passage
Turner was very prominent symbolic anthropologist.

Studied African group Ndembu, series of very influential articles, esp. on rituals of kinship.

T Concerned with the middle, transitional stage and function.

Back to term liminal. Comes from limen or threshold: spatial metaphor again

T saying such rituals typical of simple societies, trying to avoid saying tribal or primitive

Q. How is T's idea of liminality (p.97) diff from Douglas's? For D, much more threatening, unsettling, polluting. Liminal anomalous animal.

Q. How does T explain this difference? Says D's liminality consist of ambiguous or contradictory states, defectively defined or ordered, while liminality he studying matter of openness, freedom from structure, positive

May be real difference or may be rationalization for what he wants to do

Also D's liminality is at one moment or permanent, "synchronic" T's is thru time, "diachronic"

Q. So according to T, how is transition, liminality symbolized? Filth, dirt. Gestation, being new born. Neither male nor female. Absence of anything, no possessions.

Q. What does T mean by sacra? How are neophytes introduced to sacra?

Q. How are cultural principles are presented? Distorted, exaggerated, mixed-up

Q. What kinds of social relations does he find typical among those initiated? Equality among neophytes. Complete obedience to initiator, absolute, but only because he represents whole. (Shows room for subjectivity: T intellectually counters idea of hierarchy; another person studying might see that hierarchy as crucial).

Q. Do you think T thinks liminal period a good thing? Why? What is his attitude towards structure and its lack, towards roles and categories? He sees structures inevitable, but dissolving them as cool. Marked by era in which T was writing, ferment of period, belief in creativity of breaking structures.

T later carried elaboration of ideas further (see list of supplementary readings). Said there was a state he called *comunitas* characteristic of liminal period. Super-cool, creative period, structures dissolved.

Even claimed there were whole periods and movements in society that liminal. Really pushing idea. was very influential, though in retrospect some of it seems forced.

He studied religious pilgrimage as extended liminality

He wrote lots on classic Christian pilgrimage to Jerusalem, claimed that hierarchy neutralized, even during medieval period. A student in our program, Bill Zajac, wrote thesis on topic, said hierarchy strong during pilgrimage
Dangers of idealization.

Performance and persuasion

Another insight related to rites of passage

British philosopher, J. L. Austin, pointed out that we assume language is about naming things or referring to things, but actually much about doing things with language

Identified class of speech acts in which doing is saying:

I pronounce you man and wife---if words said by right person , really does marry them.

I name this ship the Flying Cloud.

You are no longer my child: I disinherit you and renounce all ties.

Rites de passage are perfect example of performative act: you were a student, now a graduate; you were ordinary person, now member of fraternity / member of secret society / religiously complete.

You were child, now an adult.

Underlines just how much of the social order is ultimately arbitrary, matter of social agreement or social compulsion. There is no inherent logical reason why four-legged canines should be called dog/hund/chien/perro/etc. Simply the way it is. Much of culture and social life is ultimately arbitrary.

But also, ironically, highlights the part that is *not* performative, where doing is *not* saying.

Much of what ritual does is to persuade or try to persuade

Where agreement is not automatic.

'I am now the king, and you better obey (even if I just killed the old king and usurped the throne).' Maybe also: being ruled by a king is the only possible/good form of government---whatever you do, don't think about republics.

May even be nonsensical things, ideas contradicted by experience or otherwise hard to accept: Dying for your country is a very good thing. Bad things that happen in the world are part of God's plan for us.

Clear that ritual has its work cut out for it.