

©1982 Copyright by Performing Arts Journal Publications

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, or any information storage or retrieval system now known or to be invented, without permission in writing from the publishers, except by a reviewer who wishes to quote brief passages in connection with a review written for inclusion in a magazine, newspaper, or broadcast.

All rights reserved under the International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. For information, write to Performing Arts Journal Publications, 325 Spring Street, Room 318, New York, N.Y. 10013.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data
From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play
Library of Congress Catalog Card No.: 81-83751

ISBN: 0-933826-16-8

ISBN: 0-933826-17-6 (paper)

Printed in the United States of America

From Ritual to Theatre

The Human Seriousness of Play

Victor Turner

NOTICE

This material may be protected by
Copyright Law (Title 17 U.S. code)

Performing Arts Journal Publications
New York City

10013

- Legesse, Asmarom. *Gada: Three Approaches to the Study of African Society*. New York: Free Press, 1973.
- Moore, Sally Falk. *Law as Process*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978.
- Myerhoff, Barbara. *Life History among the Elderly: Performance, Visibility, and Remembering*. n.d.
- , and Moore, Sally Falk (eds.) *Secular Ritual*. Amsterdam: Royal van Gorcum, 1977.
- Pike, Kenneth L. *Language in Relation to a Unified Theory of the Structure of Human Behavior*. Glendale, California: Summer Institute of Linguistics, 1954.
- Rappaport, Roy. *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion*. Richmond, California: North American Books, 1979.
- Sapir, Edward. "Emergence of a Concept of Personality in a Study of Cultures." *Journal of Social Psychology*, 5, pp. 410-416, 1934.
- Spindler, George D. (ed.) *The Making of Psychological Anthropology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- Turner, Victor. *Schism and Continuity in an African Society: A Study of Ndembu Village Life*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957.
- , *The Forest of Symbols: Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1967.
- , *The Drums of Affliction: A Study of Religious Processes among the Ndembu of Zambia*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1968.
- , *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. Chicago: Aldine, 1969.
- , *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974.
- Vansina, Jan. *Kingdoms of the Savanna*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1966.
- White, Hayden. *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Victor Turner in From Ritual to Theatre
Human Services as a Play

Dramatic Ritual/Ritual Drama

Performative and Reflexive Anthropology

I've long thought that teaching and learning anthropology should be more fun than they often are. Perhaps we should not merely read and comment on ethnographies, but actually perform them. Alienated students spend many tedious hours in library carrels struggling with accounts of alien lives and even more alien anthropological theories about the ordering of those lives. Whereas anthropology should be about, in D.H. Lawrence's phrase, "man alive" and "woman alive," this living quality frequently fails to emerge from our pedagogics, perhaps, to cite Lawrence again, because our "analysis presupposes a corpse."

It is becoming increasingly recognized that the anthropological monograph is itself a rather rigid literary genre which grew out of the notion that in the human sciences reports must be modeled rather abjectly on those of the natural sciences. But such a genre has no privileged position, especially now that we realize that in social life cognitive, affective, and volitional elements are bound up with one another and are alike primarily seldom found in their pure form, often hybridized, and only comprehensible by the investigator as lived experience, *his/hers* as well as, and in relation to, *theirs*.

Even the best of ethnographic films fail to communicate much of what it

which get into, and apparently seem to foul up all coherent protocols, scripts, texts, whatsoever little hints of the abyss of subjunctivity, that break in and out like *Exu* and threaten the measured movement towards climax on cultural terms.

The social drama, then, I regard as the experiential matrix from which the many genres of cultural performance, beginning with redressive ritual and juridical procedures, and eventually including oral and literary narrative, have been generated. Breach, crisis, and reintegrative or divisive outcomes provide the content of such later genres, redressive procedures their form. As society complexifies, as the division of labor produces more and more specialized and professionalized modalities of sociocultural action, so do the modes of assigning meaning to social dramas multiply—but the drama remains to the last simple and ineradicable, a fact of everyone's social experience, and a significant node in the developmental cycle of all groups that aspire to continuance. The social drama remains humankind's thorny problem, its undying worm, its Achilles' heel—one can only use clichés for such an obvious and familiar pattern of sequentiality. At the same time it is our native way of manifesting ourselves to ourselves and of declaring where power and meaning lie and how they are distributed.

In *The Ritual Process* and in these essays, I have discussed van Gennep's discovery of the processual form of the *rite de passage*, and will refer to it again shortly. Rites of passage, like social dramas, involve temporal processes and agonistic relations—novices or initiands are separated (sometimes real or symbolic force is used (from a previous social state or status, compelled to remain in seclusion during the liminal phase, submitted to ordeal by initiated seniors or elders, and re-aggregated to quotidian society in symbolic ways that often show that preritual ties have been irremediably broken and new relationships rendered compulsory. But, like other kinds of rituals, life-crisis rituals, the most transformative kind of rites of passage, already exhibit a marked degree of generalization—they are the fairly late product of social reflexivity. They confer on the actors, by nonverbal as well as verbal means, the experiential understanding that social life is a series of movements in space and time, a series of changes of activity, and a series of transitions in status for individuals. They also inscribe in them the knowledge that such movements, changes, and transitions are not merely marked but also effected by ritual. Ritual and juridical procedures represent germinative components of social drama, from which, I suggest, many performative and narrative modes of complex culture derive. Cultural performances may be viewed as "dialectical dancing partners" (to use Ronald Grimes's phrase) of the perennial social drama, to which they give meaning appropriate to the specificities of time, place, and culture. However, they have their own autonomy and momentum; one genre may generate another; with sufficient evidence in certain cultural traditions one might be able to reconstruct a reasonably ac-

curate genealogy of genres. (I use advisedly these terms derived from the Indo-European root *gan*, "to beget or produce," as metaphors for their ready cultural reproductiveness.) Or one genre might supplant or replace another as the historically or situationally dominant form "social metacommentary" (to use Geertz's illuminating term). New communicative techniques and media may make possible wholly unprecedented genres of cultural performance, making possible new modes of self-understanding. Once a genre has become prominent, however, it is likely to survive or be revived at some level of the sociocultural system, perhaps moving from the elite to the popular culture or vice-versa, gaining and losing audiences and support in the process. Nevertheless, all the genres have to circle, as it were, around the earth of the social drama, and some, like satellites, may exert tidal effects on its inner structure. Since ritual in the so-called "simpler" societies is so complex and many-layered it may not unfittingly be considered an important "source" of later (in cultural evolutionary terms), more specialized, performative genres. Often when ritual perishes as a dominant genre, it dies, a *multipara*, giving birth to ritualized progeny, including the many performative arts.

In earlier publications I defined "ritual" as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects"—a definition which owes much to those of Auguste Comte, Godfrey and Monica Wilson, and Ruth Benedict. I still find this formulation operationally useful despite Sir Edmund Leach, and other anthropologists of his ilk, who would eliminate the religious component and regard ritual as "stereotyped behavior which is potent in itself in terms of the cultural conventions of the actors, though not potent in a rational-technical sense," and which serves to communicate information about a culture's most cherished values. I find it useful, because I like to think of ritual essentially as *performance, enactment*, not primarily as rules or rubrics. The rules "frame" the ritual process, but the ritual process transcends its frame. A river needs banks or it will be a dangerous flood, but banks without a river epitomize aridity. The term "performance" is, of course, derived from Old English *parfournir*, literally "to furnish completely or thoroughly." To perform is thus to bring something about, to consummate something, or to "carry out" a play, order, or project. But in the "carrying out," I hold, something new may be generated. The performance transforms itself. True, as I said, the rules may "frame" the performance, but the "flow" of action and interaction within that frame may conduce to hitherto unprecedented insights and even generate new symbols and meanings, which may be incorporated into subsequent performances. Traditional framings may have to be reframed—new bottles made for new wine. It is here that I find the notion of orientation to preternatural and invisible beings and powers singularly apposite. For there is undoubtable transfor-

mative capacity in a well-performed ritual, implying an ingress of power into the initial situation; and "performing well" implies the co-involvement of the majority of its performers in a self-transcending flow of ritual events. The power may be drawn from the persons of the drama, but drawn from their human depths, not entirely from their cognitive, "indicative" hold on cultural skills. Even if a rubrical book exists prescribing the order and character of the performance of the rites, this should be seen as a source of channelings, rather than of dictates. The experience of subjective and intersubjective flow in ritual performance, whatever its sociobiological or personalogical concomitants may be, often convinces performers that the ritual situation is indeed informed with powers both transcendental and immanent. Moreover, most anthropological definitions of ritual, including my own earlier attempts, have failed to take into account van Gennep's discovery that rituals nearly always "accompany transitions from one situation to another and from one cosmic or social world to another" (*Les Rites de Passage*, p. 13). As is well known he divides these rituals into rites of separation, threshold rites, and rites of re-aggregation, for which he also employs the terms preliminal, liminal, and postliminal. The order in which the ritual events follow one another and must be performed, van Gennep points out, is a religious element of essential importance. To exist at all, writes Nicole Belmont about van Gennep's notion, "a ritual must first and foremost be inscribed in time and space, or rather reinscribed" if it follows a prior model given in myth (*Arnold Van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography*, 1979:64). In other words, performative sequencing is intrinsic and should be taken into account in any definition of ritual. Here I would query the formal structuralist implication that sequence is an illusion and all is but a permutation and combination of rules and vocabularies already laid down in the deep structures of mind and brain. There is a qualitative distinction between successive stages in social dramas and rites of passage which renders them irreversible—their sequence is no illusion—the unidirectional movement is transformative. I have written at some length about the "threshold" or liminal phase of ritual, and found it fruitful to extend the notion of liminality as metaphor to other domains of expressive cultural action than ritual. But liminality must be taken into account in any serious formulation of ritual as performance, for it is in connection with this phase that "emic" folk characterizations of ritual lay strongest stress on the transformative action of "invisible or supernatural beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects." Without taking liminality into account ritual becomes indistinguishable from "ceremony," "formality," or what Barbara Myerhoff and Sally Moore, in their Introduction to *Secular Ritual* (1977) indeed call "secular ritual." The liminal phase is the essential, anti-secular component in ritual *per se*, whether it be labeled "religious" or "magical." Ceremony indicates, ritual transforms, and transformation occurs most radically in the ritual "pupation" of

liminal seclusion—at least in life-crisis rituals. The public liminality of great seasonal feasts exhibits its fantasies and "transforms" (akin here to the linguistic sense of "transform," that is, [a] any of a set of rules for producing grammatical transformations of a kernel sentence; [b] a sentence produced by using such a role) to the eyes of all—and so does postmodern theatre—but that is a matter for a different paper.

I have also argued that ritual in its performative plenitude in tribal and many post-tribal cultures is a matrix from which several other genres of cultural performance, including most of those we tend to think of as "aesthetic" have been derived. It is a late modern Western myth, encouraged perhaps by depth psychologists, and, lately by ethnologists, that ritual has the rigid precision characteristics of the "ritualized" behavior of an obsessive neurotic, or a territory-marking animal or bird, and also encouraged by an early modern Puritan myth that ritual is "mere empty form without true religious content." It is true that rituals may become mere shells or husks at certain historical junctures, but this state of affairs belongs to the senescence or pathology of the ritual process, not to its "normal working." Living ritual may be better likened to artwork than neurosis. Ritual is, in its most typical cross-cultural expressions, a synchronization of many performative genres, and is often ordered by dramatic structure, a plot, frequently involving an act of sacrifice or self-sacrifice, which energizes and gives emotional coloring to the interdependent communicative codes which express in manifold ways the meaning inherent in the dramatic *leitmotiv*. In so far as it is "dramatic," ritual contains a distanced and generalized reduplication of the agonistic process of the social drama. Ritual, therefore, is not "threadbare" but "richly textured" by virtue of its varied interweavings of the productions of mind and senses. Participants in the major rituals of vital religions, whether tribal or post-tribal, may be passive and active in turn with regard to the ritual movement, which as van Gennep, and, more recently, Roland Delattre, have shown, draws on biological, climatic, and ecological rhythms, as well as on social rhythms, as models for the processual forms it sequentially employs in its episodic structure. All the senses of participants and performers may be engaged; they hear music and prayers, see visual symbols, taste consecrated foods, smell incense, and touch sacred persons and objects. They also have available the kinesthetic forms of dance and gesture, and perhaps cultural repertoires of facial expression, to bring them into significant performative rapport. Here I should mention in this connection Judith Lynne Hanna's useful book *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication* (1979) in which she attempts to construct a sociocultural theory of dance. In song, participants merge (and diverge) in other ordered and symbolic ways. Moreover, few rituals are so completely stereotyped that every word, every gesture, every scene is authoritatively prescribed. Most often, invariant phases and episodes are interdigitated with variable passages, in

which, both at the verbal and nonverbal levels, improvisation may not be merely permitted but required. Like the black and white keys of a piano, like the *Yin* and *Yang* interplay in Chinese religious cosmology and Taoist ritual, constancy and mutability make up, in their contrariety, a total instrument for the expression of human meaning, joyous, sorrowful, and both at once, "woven fine," in William Blake's words. Ritual, in fact, far from being merely formal, or formulaic, is a symphony in more than music. It can be—and often is—a symphony or synaesthetic ensemble of expressive cultural genres, or, a synergy of varied symbolic operations, an opus which unlike "opera" (also a multiplicity of genres as Wagner repeatedly emphasized) escapes opera's theatricality, though never life's inexpressible social drama, by virtue of the seriousness of its ultimate concerns. The "flat" view of ritual must go. So also must the notion, beloved until recently by functionalist anthropologists, that ritual could be best understood as a set of mechanism for promoting a gross group solidarity, as, in fact, a "sort of all-purpose social glue," as Robin Horton characterized this position, and that its symbols were merely "reflections or expressions of components of social structure." Ritual, in its full performative flow, is not only many-leveled, "laminated," but also capable, under conditions of societal change, of creative modification on all or any of its levels. Since it is tacitly held to communicate the deepest values of the group regularly performing it, it has a "paradigmatic" function, in both of the senses argued for by Clifford Geertz. As a "model for" ritual can anticipate, even generate change; as a "model of," it may inscribe order in the minds, hearts, and wills of participants.

Ritual, in other words, is not only complex and many-layered; it has an *abyss* in it, and indeed, is an effort to make meaningful the dialectical relation of what the Silesian mystic Jakob Boehme, following Meister Eckhart, called "Ground" and "Underground," "Byss and Abyss" (= the Greek *a-bussos*, ἄβυσσος, from a—"without," and the Ionic variant of the Attic *buthos*, βυθός, meaning "bottom," or, better, [finite] "depth," especially "of the sea." So "byss" is deep but "abyss" is beyond all depth.) Many definitions of ritual contain the notion of *depth*, but few of *infinite* depth. In the terminology I favor, such definitions are concerned with finite structural depth, not with infinite "antistructural" depth. A homelier analogy, drawn from linguistics, would be to say that the passage form of ritual, as elicited by van Gennep, postulates a unidirectional move from the "indicative" mood of cultural process, through culture's "subjunctive" mood back to the "indicative" mood, though this recovered mood has now been tempered, even transformed, by immersion in subjunctivity; this process roughly corresponds with his preliminary, liminal, and postliminal phases. In preliminary rites of separation the initiand is moved from the indicative quotidian social structure into the subjunctive antistructure of the liminal process and is then returned, transformed by liminal experiences, by the

rites of reaggregation to social structural participation in the indicative mood. The subjunctive, according to Webster's Dictionary, is always concerned with "wish, desire, possibility, or hypothesis"; it is a world of "as if," ranging from scientific hypothesis to festive fantasy. It is "if it were so," not "it is so." The indicative prevails in the world of what in the West we call "actual fact," though this definition can range from a close scientific inquiry into how a situation, event, or agent produces an effect or result, to a lay person's description of the characteristics of ordinary good sense or sound practical judgment. Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff, in their introduction to *Secular Ritual*, did not use this pair of terms, "subjunctive" and "indicative," but, rather, saw social process as moving "between the formed and the indeterminate" (p. 17). They are, however, mostly discussing "ceremony" or "secular ritual," not ritual *pur sang*. I agree with them, as I said earlier, that "all collective ceremony can be interpreted as a cultural statement about cultural order as against a cultural void" (p. 16), and that "ceremony is a declaration against indeterminacy. Through form and formality it celebrates man-made meaning, the culturally determinate: the regulated, the named, and the explained. It banishes from consideration the basic questions raised by the made-upness of culture, its malleability and alterability . . . [every ceremony] seeks to state that the cosmos and social world, or some particular small part of them are orderly and explicable and for the moment fixed. A ceremony can allude to such propositions and demonstrate them at the same time . . . Ritual [*sic*, really "ceremony"] is a declaration of form *against* [Moore and Myerhoff's emphasis] indeterminacy, therefore indeterminacy is always present in the background of any analysis of ritual" (pp. 16-17). Roy Rappaport in his book, *Ecology, Meaning, and Religion* (1979:206), adopts a similar standpoint when he writes: "Liturgical orders [whose "sequential dimension," he says, is ritual] bind together disparate entities and processes, and it is the binding together, rather than what is bound together that is peculiar to them. Liturgical orders are meta-orders, or orders of orders . . . they mend ever again worlds forever breaking apart under the blows of usage and the slashing distinctions of language."

While I consider these to be admirably lucid statements about ceremony, which, for me, constitutes an impressive institutionalized performance of indicative, normatively structured social reality, and is also both a model and a model for social states and statuses, I do not think such formulation can be applied with equal cogency to ritual. For ritual, as I have said, does not portray a dualistic, almost Manichean, struggle between order and void, cosmos and chaos, formed and indeterminate, with the former always triumphing in the end. Rather is it a transformative self-immolation of order as presently constituted, even sometimes a voluntary *sparagmos* or self-dismemberment of order, in the subjunctive depths of liminality. One thinks of Eliade's studies of the "shaman's journey" where the initiand

broken into pieces then put together again as a being bridging visible and invisible worlds. Only in this way, through destruction and reconstruction, that is, transformation, may an authentic reordering come about. Actuality takes the sacrificial plunge into possibility and emerges as a different kind of actuality. We are not here in the presence of two like but opposed forces as in Manichean myth; rather there is a qualitative incongruence between the contraries engaged, though Jung's daring metaphor of the incestuous marriage of the conscious ego with the unconscious seen as an archetypal mother, poses that relationship in terms of paradoxical kinship and affinity. Subjunctivity is fittingly the mother of indicativity, since any actualization is only one among a myriad possibilities of being, some of which may be actualized in space-time somewhere or somewhen else. The "hard saying" "except ye become as a little child" assumes new meaning. Unless the fixing and ordering processes of the adult, *sociostructural* domain, are liminally abandoned and the initiand submits to being broken down to a generalized *prima materia*, a lump of human clay, he cannot be transformed, reshaped to encounter new experiences.

Ritual's liminal phase, then, approximates to the "subjunctive mood" of sociocultural action. It is, quintessentially, a time and place lodged between all times and spaces defined and governed in any specific biocultural ecosystem (A. Vayda, J. Bennett, and the like) by the rules of law, politics and religion, and by economic necessity. Here the cognitive schemata that give sense and order to everyday life no longer apply, but are, as it were, suspended—in ritual symbolism perhaps even shown as destroyed or dissolved. Gods and goddesses of destruction are adored primarily because they personify an essential phase in an irreversible transformative process. All further growth requires the immolation of that which was fundamental to an earlier stage—"lest one good custom should corrupt the world." Clearly, the liminal space-time "pod" created by ritual action, or today by certain kinds of reflexively ritualized theatre, is potentially perilous. For it may be opened up to energies of the biopsychical human constitution normally channeled by socialization into status-role activities, to employ the unwieldy jargon of the social sciences. Nevertheless, the danger of the liminal phase conceded, and respected by hedging it around by ritual interdictions and taboos, it is also held in most cultures to be regenerative, as I mentioned earlier. For in liminality what is mundanely bound in sociostructural form may be unbound and rebound. Of course, if a society is in hairline-precarious subsistence balance with its environment, we are unlikely to find in its liminal zones very much in the way of experimentation—here one does not fool around with the tried and tested. But when a "biocultural ecosystem," to use Vayda's terms, produce significant surpluses, even if these are merely the seasonal boons of a naturally well-endowed environment, the liminality of its major rituals may well generate cultural surpluses too. One thinks of the Kwakiutl and other Northwest

Amerindian peoples with their complex iconographies and formerly rich hunting and gathering resources. New meanings and symbols may be introduced—or new ways of portraying or embellishing old models for living, and so of renewing interest in them. Ritual liminality, therefore, contains the potentiality for cultural innovation, as well as the means of effecting structural transformations within a relatively stable sociocultural system. For many transformations are, of course, within the limits of social structure, and have to do with its internal adjustments and external adaptations to environmental changes. Cognitive structuralism can cope best with such relatively cyclical and repetitive societies.

In tribal and agrarian cultures, even relatively complex ones, the innovative potential of ritual liminality seems to have been circumscribed, even dormant, or pressed into the service of maintaining the existing social order. Even so, room for "play," Huizinga's *ludic*, abounds in many kinds of tribal rituals, even in funerary rituals. There is a play of *symbol-vehicles*, leading to the construction of bizarre masks and costumes from elements of mundane life now conjoined in fantastic ways. There is a play of *meanings*, involving the reversal of hierarchical orderings of values and social statuses. There is a play with *words* resulting in the generation of secret initiatory languages, as well as joyful or serious punning. Even the dramatic scenarios which give many rituals their processual armature may be presented as comedic rather than serious or tragic. Riddling and joking may take place, even in the liminal seclusion of initiatory lodges. Recent studies of Pueblo ritual clowns recall to us how widespread the clown role is in tribal and archaic religious culture. Liminality is peculiarly conducive to play, where it is not restricted to games and jokes, but extends to the introduction of new forms of symbolic action, such as word-games or original masks.

But whatever happened to liminality, as societies increased in scale and complexity, particularly Western industrial societies? With deliminalization seems to have gone the powerful *play* component. Other religions of the Book, too, have tended regularly to stress the solemn at the expense of the festive. Religiously connected fairs, fiestas and carnivals do continue to exist, of course, but not as intrinsic parts of liturgical systems. The great Oriental religions—Hinduism, Taoism, Tantric Buddhism, Shintoism, however, still recognize in many public performances that human ritual can be both earnest *and* playful. Eros may sport with Thanatos, not as a grisly Danse Macabre, but to symbolize a complete human reality and a Nature full of oddities.

It would seem that with industrialization, urbanization, spreading literacy, labor migration, specialization, professionalization, bureaucracy, the division of the leisure sphere from the work sphere by the firm's clock, the former integrity of the orchestrated religious *gestalt* that once constituted ritual has burst open and many specialized performative genres have been

born from the death of that mighty *opus deorum hominumque*. These genres of industrial leisure would include theatre, ballet, opera, film, the novel, printed poetry, the art exhibition, classical music, rock music, carnivals, processions, folk drama, major sports events and dozens more. Disintegration has been accompanied by secularization. Traditional religions, their rituals denuded of much of their former symbolic wealth and meaning, hence their transformative capacity, persist in the leisure sphere, but have not adapted well to modernity. Modernity means the exaltation of the indicative mood—but in what Ihab Hassan has called the “postmodern turn,” we may be seeing a re-turn to subjunctivity and a rediscovery of cultural transformative modes, particularly in some forms of theatre. Dismembering may be a prelude to re-membering. Re-membering is not merely the restoration of some past intact, but setting it in living relationship to the present.

However, there are signs that those nations and cultures which came late to the industrial table, such as Japan, India, the Middle Eastern nations, and much of South and Central America, have succeeded, at least in part, in avoiding the dismemberment of important ritual types, and they have incorporated into their ritual performances many of the issues and problems of modern urban living and succeeded in giving them religious meaning. When industrial development came to much of the Third World it had to confront powerfully consolidated structures of ritual performative genres. In the West similar institutions had been gradually eroded from within, from the revival of learning to the Industrial Revolution. Here the indicative mood triumphed, and subjunctivity was relegated to a reduced domain where admittedly it shone brighter in the arts than in religion.

Religion, like art, *lives* in so far as it is performed, i.e., in so far as its rituals are “going concerns.” If you wish to spay or geld religion, first remove its rituals, its generative and regenerative processes. For religion is not a cognitive system, a set of dogmas, alone, it is meaningful experience and experienced meaning. In ritual one *lives through* events, or through the alchemy of its framings and symbolings, *relives* semiogenetic events, the deeds and words of prophets and saints, or if these are absent, myths and sacred epics.

If, then, we regard narrative as an “emic” Western genre or meta-genre of expressive culture, it has to be seen as one of the cultural grandchildren or great-grandchildren of “tribal” ritual or juridical process. But if we regard narrative, “etically,” as the supreme instrument for binding the “values” and “goals,” in Dilthey’s sense of these terms, which motivate human conduct, particularly when men and women become actors in social drama, into situational structures of “meaning,” then we must concede it to be a universal cultural activity, embedded in the very center of the social drama, itself another cross-cultural and trans-temporal unit of social process. “Narrate” is from the Latin *narrare*, “to tell,” which is akin to the

Latin *gnarus*, “knowing, acquainted with, expert in,” both derivative from the Indo-European root, *GNA*, to “know,” whence the vast family of words deriving from the Latin *cognoscere*, including “cognition” itself, and “noun” and “pronoun,” the Greek *gignōskein*, whence *gnosis*, and the Old English past participle *gecnawan*, whence the Modern English, “know.” Narrative is, it would seem, rather an appropriate term for a reflexive activity which seeks to “know” (even in its ritual aspect, to have *gnōsis* about) antecedent events, and about the meaning of those events. *Drama* itself is, of course, derived from the Greek *dran*, “to do, or act,” hence narrative is knowledge (and/or *gnosis*) emerging from action, i.e., experiential knowledge. The redressive phase of social drama frames an endeavor to re-articulate a social group broken by sectional or self-serving interests; in like manner, the narrative component in ritual and legal action attempts to re-articulate opposing values and goals in a meaningful structure, the plot of which makes cultural sense. Where historical life itself fails to make cultural sense in terms that formerly held good, narrative and cultural drama may have the task of *poiesis*, that is, of remaking cultural sense, even when they seem to be dismantling ancient edifices of meaning, that can no longer redress our modern “dramas of living”—now ever more on a global and species-threatening scale.

References

- Belmont, Nicole. *Arnold Van Gennep: The Creator of French Ethnography*. Trans. by Derek Colman. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1979.
- Bercovitch, Sacvan. *The American Jeremiad*. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1970.
- Gennep, Arnold van. *The Rites of Passage*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960. First published 1908.
- Grathoff, R. *The Structure of Social Inconsistencies: A Contribution to a Unified Theory of Play, Games and Social Action*. The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1970.
- Handelman, Don. “Is Naven Ludic?” *Social Analysis* (published in Adelaide, Australia), no. 1, 1979.
- Hanna, Judith Lynne. *To Dance is Human: A Theory of Nonverbal Communication*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1979.
- Heusch, Luc de. *Le roi ure ou l'origine de l'Etat*. Paris: Gallimard, 1972.
- Hodges, H.A. *The Philosophy of Wilhelm Dilthey*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967.