



* On Concurrent Becoming *

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A Concept of Ritual Enactment as Inducing Mythic Participation in Concurrent Being/Becoming

To discuss ritualization in contemporary contexts is to risk having it defined as habitual, repetitive, unreflective, even compulsive behavior. Like the word ritual, the term ceremony also tends to be defined in reference to a sense of reiterative, proscribed activity. Yet both words are also used in descriptions of religious, spiritual, and mythical practices that can be, in some instances, understood as efforts to engage the more-than-ordinary dynamism of radically complex concurrency. Another way of characterizing these activities is as attempts to acknowledge and more directly experience the mystery of life, the universe, or being. This view suggests the actions of shamanic, mystical and ascetic practices from many different cultures in which persons seek to evade their more ordinary sense of being in efforts to experience one that transcends the reductivity of the ordinary. The word ritual derives from a Latin root for religious act or performance.

Ritual as Mythic Epistemic for Conscious Embodiment of Inclusive Knowing

In anthropological studies a need has been discerned to differentiate between socially directed enactments that reiterate established structures or ordinary assumptions and those that somehow transgress such known and established contextings for identity and reality. Subsequently, a significant contrast has been made between what are termed ritual enactments and ceremonial reiterations. This distinction holds that ritual enactments involve efforts to displace human consciousness from its more habitually contexted and socially structured references. Ceremonial actions, in contrast, are here identified with procedures and rites that serve primarily to reaffirm and enshrine status quo relations and hierarchies. The formalized inauguration of a president thusly appears as a ceremonial reiteration of the transference of established power from one individual to another as explicitly directed by social structures of laws and custom. The concept of

ritual action is more closely associated with efforts to bring persons into engagement with a sense of self and world, or cosmos, which is somehow 'beyond' what ordinary social attitudes represent. In the broadest terms, such efforts involve attempts to induce a status of knowing and understanding deriving from experience of radical or 'super normal' complexity and intensity in the relations between humans, things, and cosmos. Such a quality of relations is, from the view of ordinary consciousness, mysterious. Thus the references for ritual as this type of knowing and understanding are typically mythical in their metaphorically metamorphic manner of representation. In other words, these more-than-ordinary relations are figured in terms of, relatively speaking, super natural and 'other worldly' entities and phenomena.

Given the perspective of this contrast between notions of ritual and ceremonial contexts, it is evident that many socially directed rites involve both qualities. The structurally reiterative inauguration of a president often involves the invocation of a divine being ("God") as an extra-ordinary reference intended to impart a sense of special significance or 'higher than human authority' as a confirmation of the legitimacy of social order. In such an instance it is the reiteration of social order that is the primary concern of the ceremonial activity. In a more ritualistic context, social order is positioned secondarily to a 'broader' cosmological perspective on being that is, necessarily, 'anti-structural' relative to socially structured notions of reality. Such a subordination of more ordinary, socialized identity and reality requires some 'dislocation' of ordinary references for these. Though ritual actions are undertaken deliberately or consciously, the intention involved is not so much the affirmation of a socialized status, but an engagement with a super-social one that entails a conceptual or intellectual shift in knowing and understanding.

Part of this shift associated with ritualization involves some aspect of somatic or embodied enactment. These more gestural aspects of ritual range from silent meditation, altered breathing patterns, active imaginations, chanting, singing, and dancing, to fasting, scarification, endurance trials, and the transgressing of normal social rules for identity and behavior. Thus, in a variety of ways that include dramatic actions and even traumatic experience, the state of awareness in body and mind are shifted toward some other-than-ordinary condition. Whether focused upon 'quieting the mind' or activating normally repressed erotic energies, these enactments induce awareness and experience of some strangeness, otherness, alterity, or mystery about being. Magical invocation, ingestion of hallucinogenic plant compounds, and attention to spontaneously generated psychic images are also involved in such 'rites of relation to the extra-ordinary.'

These effects of ritualization can be understood embodied epistemic methods for 'knowing differently.' Some anthropological commentators describe them as 'bringing the margins to the center,' 'the tame into relationship with the wild,' or the human into

contact with the ‘more-than-human’ consciousness of the world. By way of such reversals or inversions of the normal relationship between human social order and ‘the rest of existence’ (“Nature”) individuals can experience a form of conscious, tangibly embodied participation in a more radically complex or pluralistic status. They can know and understand themselves in a more inclusive manner as a composite concurrency that is ‘neither this nor that’ yet also ‘both this and that.’ Thus ritual enactment, as contexted here represents a ‘mythical epistemic’ for inducing engagement with the radical complexity of concurrent being and becoming that facilitates a tangible or embodied status of inclusive knowing.

The most obvious contexts for such induction of shifts of knowing and understanding are found in the ritual enactments or pre-modern or archaic cultures. In these contexts ritual induction of engagement with the more-than-ordinary complexity of supra-socialized identity and reality involves, gestures, symbols, actions, and interpretations that are overtly mythical in the metaphorically metamorphic dynamism of their associations. One typical occasion for such induction in archaic cultures is initiation into adulthood for adolescents. The ritualized enactments and contexts involved in adolescent initiations tend to involve abrogation of social identity as a child, transition into a ‘limbo’ period of isolation from ordinary social life, encounters with mythical stories and figures embodied by human actors suggesting metamorphic being, and subsequently disoriented or altered states of consciousness that can involve physical and psychological stress.

These ‘other worldly encounters’ and experience of a status that is alien to ordinary social context conclude with rites of return to socially structured life. However, personal identity and social status are typically altered by these ritualized departures. The initiates are no longer who or what they were before undergoing the ritual process. Frequently individuals ‘return’ to social life ‘marked’ in some way that reminds them of their engagement with more-than-ordinary reality. Scarification, tattooing, genital circumcision, and other bodily modifications are involved in affirming the somatic element of ritual inductions of more-than-ordinary status.

Sociologically, such a departure from socialized identity thus appears to actually engender a change in socially defined status, as in marking a transit from child to adult. Psychologically, this transit can be understood as induced by experience of how phenomena can be known and interpreted. That shift is emphasized by a sense of loss of one’s formerly familiar references for social identity and the nature of reality enacted by the onset of a ritually induced mythical status. Both the ordinary social ordering of identity and any personally established one are typically challenged in these confrontations with mythical representations.

Psychologically, this activity can be understood as expressing unconscious psychic energies that appear fantastic, chaotic, and threatening because these are 'beyond' socially defined parameters for identity and reality. It is from such expression of repressed and denied psychic aspects of self-complexity that mythically dynamic ritualization appear to derive their transformative potency. However, 'uncontained' eruptions of such 'unsocialized' psychic energies are potentially dangerous to maintaining some continuity of personal identity. Thus ritualized initiations impose a bracketing upon them of departure from and eventual return to socially structured status.

Taken all together, such ritual inductions can provide a person with a dialectically diversified experience of the interplay of ordinarily singular and extra-ordinarily plural or concurrent statuses of being. The potency of these encounters derives from experience of mythical dynamism through enactment of radically interactive concurrent being and becoming. Some correlation to these effects of overt ritual induction can be discerned in the modern educational process in so far as it submits the 'mind of childhood' to a challenging confrontation with a scientific reality that is far different from ordinary appearances of 'how things are.' As known by scientific methods and theories, both the human body and larger world are strange and mysterious compared to the evidence of ordinary experience. However, experiential engagement with that contrast is seldom attempted.

From Ritual Inductions of Otherness on Holy Days to Holiday Excesses of the Ordinary

Ritual inductions of encounters with some extra-ordinary 'otherness' of self, world, and cosmos as practiced in traditional or pre-modern cultures tended to be associated with a notion of sacredness or some holiness of connection to a 'larger' framing of existence. Days designated on the annual calendar as times for ritual enactment were thus regarded as 'holy days.' These times were dedicated to 'sacred' rather than 'profane' concerns. The contemporary term holidays derives from this sense of 'holy days' that were once dedicated to seeking some mythical understanding of the radical complexity of being or existence. However, Westernized modernity has promulgated a rein of pragmatic functionalism that greatly obstructs efforts to have a valid experience of mythically dynamic complexity. It has become increasingly difficult to conceive, much less encounter, a more-than-mechanistic level of valid understanding. Overt ritual inductions that generate emotionally and conceptually potent experience of radically complex concurrent status have turned into entertainments supplied by commercialized social economies.

Thus the mysterious otherness of mythical representation has become subordinated to the consumable entertainment commodities of popular commercial culture. The impulse

toward relation with the mysterious of concurrent status is thereby manipulated to enhance pursuit of more ordinary appetites. Holidays are still something of a departure from ‘ordinary days’ in that many people do not have to work and thus have more ‘leisure time.’ But that ‘non-ordinary’ time tends to be occupied with quite ordinary, if more extreme, indulgences in entertainment and consumption, rather than challenging encounters with some extra-ordinary experiences of identity and reality. Nonetheless, both entertainments and many activities such as sports and even ‘partying’ suggest that humans have an irrepressible need for ‘altered states of consciousness,’ seeking these in the effects of athletic exertions, psychoactive drugs, and dramatically realized fantasies in movies, music, and video games.

There appears significant difference, however, in the effects of ritual practice that people experience as genuinely ‘reality altering’ and entertainments that are more indulgences of fantasy and ‘fun’ diversions from, but not valid alternatives to, the reductive ‘one and only’ reality of ordinary socialized life and understanding. Persons who experience some embodied mythical engagement with concurrent status tend to ‘return’ to ordinary contexts and identity as some how alien to it—as no longer ‘who they thought they were’ or ‘how society defines them.’ However, that effect appears to ‘wear off’ after some time back in socialize contexts for identity and require subsequent ritual inductions to ‘reactivate’ extra-ordinary knowing and understanding. Even so, it seems quite different than returning from a ‘tension relieving vacation’ or ‘temporarily distracting entertainment’ that has not altered one’s sense of how to live in the ordinary contexting.

Additional elaboration of these concepts in Chapters Two, Seven, and Eight of **Manifesting the Many in the One**

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