

S/A 4074: Ritual and Ceremony

Lecture 9: Functionalist Approaches to Ritual 2

- * Today we move on to consider the work of Roy Rappaport
- * Rappaport sees ritual as a form of structure consisting of:
 - more or less invariant acts and utterances
 - not encoded by the performers
 - existing in a collection of features
- * Key features of ritual include:
 - formality
 - performance
 - being done in earnest
 - communication: indexical vs. canonical transmission
 - it is not entirely symbolic (symbols vs. icons and indices)
 - canonical content provide categories of meaning to whatever indexical messages are transmitted
- * Performatives:
 - simultaneously saying and doing (“performatives”)
 - special relationship between formal ritual and performativeness
 - performativeness enhances chances of success
 - conjunction of formality and performance
 - liturgical orders must be performed to be lived
- * Liturgical orders:
 - conforming to relatively invariant sequence/implicit authority

- transmitters and receivers of communication are the same, becoming fused with the message
- performance indicates acceptance of order to self and others
- ritual specifies the relationship of the performer to the order; myth does not
- rituals make performatives possible: their conditions are rooted in ritual
- performing rituals = public acceptance of order regardless of private, subjective beliefs. They establish conventional understandings, rules and norms by which everyday behavior is supposed to proceed
- ritual establishes, enunciates and accepts conventions: the social contract and basic social act

* Ritual is both social and moral:

- morality is often part of the ritual canon
- unlike descriptives, ritual is not true or false: it provides criteria against which events may be judged
- morality is thus inherent in the structure of liturgical performance prior to what its canons assert about morality

* It is necessary to consider ritual acts as well as words, and often objects and substances as well:

- actions speak louder than words
- the body defines self for him/herself and others
- words connect the present to the past/future

* Role of the sacred:

- sanctity=the quality of unquestionableness imputed by a congregation to postulates that are neither verifiable or falsifiable
- ritual contains no information in this respect as it speaks to certainties

- to participate in ritual is to visibly accept this by participation in an invariant order that participants did not encode
- sanctity flows from ultimate sacred postulates to material terms related to the operation of society
- language, the notion of the divine and social roles founded upon them are mutually constitutive and established by the invariance of liturgy

* The sacred and the Holy:

- the sacred is only one aspect of a larger phenomenon: the Holy
- this also includes the “numinous,” the ineffable, nondiscursive and emotional aspect of religious experience (similar to “effervescence” or “communitas”)
- as the sacred may emerge out of the invariance of liturgical orders, so may the numinous be invoked by ritual’s union
- personally experiencing the numinous in rituals may also serve to support the social order
- this may help shore up otherwise shaky public acceptance of ritual (and social order) by mitigating subjective doubts

* Ultimately: the unfalsifiable supported by the undeniable yields the unquestionable, which transforms the dubious, the arbitrary and the conventional into the correct, the necessary and the natural order.