

# A Ritual Seminar Transcribed

Richard Schechner

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Teaching ritual is incredibly difficult because the subject is so vast with no general agreement on the basics, including what ritual is, how it works, what it feels like to perform a ritual or participate in one, and what its functions are. On the one hand, ritual is allied with the “sacred,” another difficult concept to define. On the other, evolutionary biologists find human ritual rooted in animal behavior. Which came first, the activity or the meanings attached to the activity? There is agreement that rituals are repetitive, rhythmic actions. But so is factory work and obsessive behavior—which have also been called ritual or “ritual-like” (whatever that means). There are the public rituals of the state and church; the social rituals of families, clubs, professions, and identity groups; and the more or less private rituals of small groups, couples, and individuals. It is not easy to specify what these share or to distinguish among them. Many acts are upgraded to ritual status because ritual is a positive value word, linking an activity to the sacred, another positive value word. But rituals can also be negative or bad, if they are associated with groups such as the Nazis, devil worshippers, and other pariahs.

Given this tumble of possibilities and contradictions, by necessity I teach “aspects” of ritual; or “problems” in relation to ritual; or offer a “survey of some ritual performances.” I name my course “Ritual, Play, and Performance” because many qualities of ritual are also qualities of play both practically and theoretically; and because performance is my approach not only to ritual but to every subject I teach. That being said, “Ritual, Play, and Performance” is different each time I teach it—though there are some abiding themes and readings. The syllabus for “Ritual, Play, and Performance” as I taught it in the summer of 2004 at the School for Criticism and Theory, Cornell University, is the appendix to this article. I am sharing this redaction of the course because it was at Cornell that I invited students to whirl in order for them to experience “light trance.” That class’s whirling is one key example in my exploration of six related themes: ritual experience; ritual formality; animal ritual; performing rituals; belief; ritual and theatre.

## Ritual Experience

The night of 20 July 2004 I guided 14 Ph.D. students and assistant professors into light trances by instructing them on how to whirl Mevlevi (dervish) style. In a semi-darkened rehearsal room at Cornell University’s Schwartz Center for the Performing Arts, we spun to the flute and drum music beloved by the thirteenth-century Sufi sage, Jalal al-Din Rumi, himself once a professor—until 1244, when at the age of 37 he encountered the itinerant mystic Shemseddin Mehmet of Tabriz, who spun Rumi’s life into another orbit.

Only one person in the class had spun before. For about an hour, the students let centrifugal force lift their arms while they kept their right palms up, their left palms down. According to Sufi teaching, this is a conduit for guiding energy from above through the body to the earth, like lightning. After whirling, we sat in a circle on the floor and talked.

The next morning I got an email from a participant:

I felt distilled by the experiential dimensions of tonight's whirling dance and trance discussions. There is an invigorating spark and then a connection of stillness that I will always cherish. I am intrigued by the combination of velocity, vortex and centeredness that encapsulates the dance. How mystical and yet totally demystifying all at once! Many many thanks.

This man kept spinning after everyone else stopped, even after the music ended. In the darkened silence of the room the rest of us listened to his bare feet lightly drumming on the floor. I extinguished the candles that were the only illumination and in darkness found him, slowly drew his arms to his side, embraced him, stood quietly with him, and then led him to the side. Without warning, I switched on the room lights. The sudden brightness was cruel. Most people guarded their eyes.

The next class we not only discussed the whirling but watched the Mead and Bateson film, *Trance and Dance in Bali* (1939), as well as clips from Maya Deren's *Divine Horsemen* (1947-51). Earlier, we saw Peter Adair's *Holy Ghost People* (1967). More people shared their experiences of the whirling—and connected these to the experiences of those depicted in the films. We saw that certain bodily behaviors that characterized trance—bodily stiffness, trembling, “divinely inspired” utterances, loss of memory concerning exactly “what happened”—occurred across a wide range of cultures. So wide that diffusion of cultural traits did not seem to answer the question of why the similarities. We also shared interior experiences. Some people felt “swept away” by the music and movement, others felt “good” or “warm.” I spoke about “brain tuning,” when the activity of the two frontal lobes are in synchrony—and the “oceanic” feeling such synchrony evokes.

At the same time, I went out of my way to demystify the experience. I pointed out that with the Sufi mystics years of study and practice accompany the whirling. Our class was not going there. We were starting with the sheer physical activity—a behaviorist approach, and registering the effects of the action. The mystics went much further than we could go. At the same time, there appeared at least to some in the class a ladder of possibilities. Even if we were only on the first rung, that was an accomplishment. “What’s special,” I said, “is that starting the climb up this ladder is nothing special. Anyone who can walk can do it.” I also pointed out that there are many varieties of trance inducing rituals. That’s why I showed the films of trancing in Bali, Haiti, and West Virginia. I find that experiencing and demystifying trance is an excellent way for students to experience ritual without needing to accept or even know the cultural or ideological context of the actions they are performing. The actions are autonomous. They

work with or without cultural knowledge. It is possible to adapt and invent rituals. I realize that many are aghast at this. But I am getting ahead of myself.

### **Ritual Formality**

Of course, rituals come in all sizes and kinds, from those linking humans to superhuman powers (possession trance, prayer, exorcism, and the like) to the everyday rituals of greeting, socializing, cleansing, and eating to the rituals of the state, professions, clubs, and affinity groups. There are birth, puberty, courtship, marriage, death, and afterlife rituals. All of life—from the most mundane to the most special—is saturated with and marked by ritual. But what is ritual? It can be defined, as Roy Rappaport does, in a strictly formal way:

I take ritual to be a form or structure, defining it as the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not encoded by the performers. ("Obvious" 175)

Rappaport is not (here) concerned with meaning, function, metaphor, symbol or anything other than a fixed progression of "acts and utterances." Frits Staal famously put it even more radically when he declared that rituals were "meaningless":

A widespread but erroneous assumption about ritual is that it consists in symbolic activities which refer to something else. It is characteristic of a ritual performance, however, that it is self-contained and self-absorbed. The performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks.... There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when they are engaged in performing ritual.... Ritual, then, is primarily activity. It is an activity governed by explicit rules. The important thing is what you do, not what you think, believe or say. (2-3)

Staal was discussing the performance of Agnicayana, a Vedic ritual of Kerala, India. But he generalizes from this instance. I do not want to (presently) argue with Rappaport or Staal. I want only to point out that their formalist position can easily be translated into the whirling experience I offered my School for Criticism and Theory students.

At the SCT, I was interested in how the sheer action of whirling affected the students. This was based on an assumption that "ritual experience" is grounded in certain biological constants. For example, specific actions such as whirling according to known rules, generate predictable changes in EEG rates and in brain chemistry, the release of endorphins, particularly. The EEG indicates that a certain kind of experience is felt; the endorphins make people feel "oceanic," or "good"—lightly naturally opiated. This kind of feeling of well-being can be associated with any number of ideological/religious/political (or whatever)

cultural constructs.<sup>1</sup> These findings fit neatly with the ethological view that ritual is a specific genre of behavior that evolved over time rather than an ideology or set of beliefs, sacred or any other.

### Animal Ritual

From the ethological perspective, rituals are actions designed to improve communication during encounters that could be trouble: hierarchy, mating, feeding, and turf. Where is each animal in the ranking? Who mates with whom? How is food found, hunted, and distributed? Who controls the territory and determines its boundaries? These are the basic questions of (at least) primate life. The answers—which are gendered—are much too complex to be discussed in any detail here. Suffice it to say that a complex language of ritual actions enhances communications and allows for both individuals to get what they need and for the group to function as a group. There are ritual displays of power, sexual prowess, and availability; rituals integral to gathering food, hunting, and sharing; rituals associated with defining/marking a band's boundaries and patrolling its territory. Sometimes pariah animals are driven from the group and its territory; or murdered. Many of these rituals are strikingly similar to what happens among humans.

Among animals, according to ethologists,<sup>2</sup> ritualization involves transforming and transposing behavior common in non-ritual contexts into unambiguous behavior with high communication value that reduces the risk of deadly

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<sup>1</sup> See Kawai, Norie and others: "For the first time, we have measured the plasma concentrations of several neuroactive substances: catecholamines, their metabolites, and neuropeptides, from subjects involved in ritual dramas under natural conditions. The results of the present study indicate that possession trances are associated with a significant increase in plasma concentrations of catecholamines and opioid peptides.... The results of the present study suggest that catecholamines and opioid peptides in the CNS are involved in possession trances including markedly altered states of consciousness, memory, pain sensation, and behaviors. The present study represents a strong foundation for further characterization of the neuronal mechanisms underlying possession trances" (3419, 3423). And Ohashia and others: "The entire observation period of Subject 1, who became possessed, was categorized into two states: normal state (NS) and trance state (TS).... A positive correlation has been shown between the occipital alpha-EEG and the regional cerebral blood flow in the deep brain structure, including the thalamus. Therefore, we need to consider the possibility that a possession trance may be associated with a change of activity in deep-lying structures, including the thalamus" (437, 444).

<sup>2</sup> There is a large literature on nonhuman rituals and on the relationship between nonhuman and human behavior—see especially Eibl-Eibesfeldt; Cranach et al; Konner; Lorenz; and Wilson. Expectedly, the ethological approach has been controversial. It categorically rejects the notion that rituals "began" with or dealing with the "sacred." The ethological approach assumes that rituals arise around encounters that are risky and dangerous. Humans are the only animals who try to deal with death conceptually and symbolically; and in this regard, have imagined an afterlife and non-natural worlds or realms populated by gods, demons, and other beings.

encounters. For example, a nibbling dog is very clearly signaling affection, the very opposite of the biting the nibble denotes. It's as if the dog is saying, "I am nibbling to show you that I could bite you but the fact that I am not biting you means that I like you." As Gregory Bateson put it, "these actions in which we now engage do not denote what those actions for which they stand would denote" (Bial 122). Whether these kinds of action are ritual or play, as Bateson contends, is really a matter of interpretation. The realms of play and ritual more than complement each other, they overlap (see Handelman). I make this point strongly in my Ritual, Play, and Performance course.

Eibl-Eibesfeldt specifies nine changes in behavior that occur during ritualization:

1. The behavior changes function.
2. The ritualized movement becomes independent of its original motivation and develops its own motivating mechanisms.
3. Movements are exaggerated and rhythmic.
4. Movements frequently freeze into postures.
5. Thresholds for expressing the behavior is lowered.
6. Several movements are compressed into stereotyped, simpler movements.
7. Behavior as signal becomes unambiguous.
8. The spatial orientation of the behavior changes from its ordinary occurrence.
9. Conspicuous body parts—horns, plumes, enlarged claws, fins, etc.—and bright colors develop over evolutionary time (adapted from *Ethology* 100-01).

These qualities are found in human rituals also. Of course, humans have not developed conspicuous body parts, but our species is adept at costume, adornment, and makeup.

In my teaching, I try to open rather than close discussion regarding the relationship between human and nonhuman animal rituals and play. Sometimes we go to the zoo, notebooks and camcorders in hand, and try to note animal rituals. We then show the video and compare notes—connecting zoo ritual behavior with human ritual behavior. But we also discuss rituals from a Gennep-Turner point of view: rites of passage, social dramas, liminality, and so on. In all these instances—animal and human—I emphasize how rituals are designed to communicate. Communicate between individuals, among groups, and across ontological lines: life/death, human/nonhuman (gods, demons, etc.). Increasing the clarity of communication is very important when dealing with "trouble," whether that trouble is actual or potential, coming from conspecifics or other beings, within or across realms of (actual or believed in) existence.

But there is another dimension, too, very different from the notion that rituals are serious business dealing with trouble (hierarchy and power, mating, territory) or negotiating the passage from one life stage to another. This other dimension is the aesthetic-pleasurable. One culturally universal quality of rituals is how they bring out the best in people, aesthetically speaking. Music, masks,

visual arts, dancing, singing, dramas. Ritual making is also often the occasion for pleasure taking: festivals, carnivals, feasting, lovemaking, drinking, and the like. If seriousness, even blood sacrifice (real or symbolically depicted), is one face of ritual, beauty and pleasure is another face. In my classes, we discuss how these two apparently contradictory tendencies interact. These are not incidental or epiphenomenal, but at the very core of what rituals are. The ritual performances of medieval and early renaissance Europe provide one set of rich examples, while today's Trinidad Carnival and its offshoots offer another (see Enders; Riggio).

But what about the rituals of everyday life? These are highly ritualized (see Goffman). Most are not bridges over troubled waters, nor are they especially artistic—though some, like the Japanese tea ceremony, ritualize and aestheticize everyday activities. In fact, making art often involves the nine processes Eibl-Eibesfeldt identified as characteristic of the ritual process. But here I am referring to actions such as greetings (waves, hand shakes), applause after a performance, singing the national anthem at a public event, the way a table is set for dinner, each person's "morning ritual" of toilet and ablution, and myriads of other routines. These do not transport individuals from one social or ontological status to another (though they do often mark a transition from one mode of public or private being to another); they do not release endorphins or change one's brain waves. So why are they called rituals? First, although the modes of existence they link are not momentous life stages, they are instances of disjunction in need of bridging. A greeting or a farewell temporarily binds or breaks a relationship; applause marks the end of the performance and signals a return to another kind of social life; the set table promises a sharing of food, an event almost always more significant than mere nutrition. The singing of the national anthem places the singers within a defined polity, while the singing of "Take Me Out to the Ballgame" puts one within a smaller, but very important time-out-of-time polity. Morning rituals transport a person from the interior and intimate life of sleep and dreaming to the more exteriorized daily social life. And so on: probably every so-called "ordinary" ritual is a playing in the minor key of some more momentous act. Second, these kinds of expected acts are codes signaling the participants' agreement to partake of normative social solidarity, enacting/communicating shared values (whether or not these values are felt by all participating individuals).

These daily rituals occur along a continuum from the voluntary to the coerced. Completely voluntary activities are not likely to be rituals, though micro rituals—fleeting gestures and utterances, eyebrow flashing and unconscious smiles—are considered by some behavioral scientists as being both ritualized and involuntary: an intriguing paradox that what is "set" and "automated" at the micro level is voluntary when embedded in larger sequences of behavior. Then there are the cases where a person volunteers to perform a ritual in the interest of group solidarity. This was the case of my Cornell class. Each of them agreed to whirl—but once they made this agreement, they were obligated to whirl, not to hop, skip, or jump; even more, to whirl in a prescribed way. Only if the students whirled in this manner, with each aware that the others were doing the same, would the full effect of whirling occur. There is encoded in ritual acts at least a hint of coercion, a script that "must" be followed. This coercion expressed as ritual behavior is integral to military, juridical, medical, and sacer-

dotal power. The rituals of ordinary social convention are less manifestly coercive but still compelling. On a strictly personal level, obsessive actions, repetitive and often exaggerated, displaced from their ordinary occurrences (Lady Macbeth washing her hands) appear to be rituals: they “must” be done, though quite frequently the performer does not know why. And then there is the pathological, the rocking of the autistic, the tics of the Tourette’s sufferer. These are rituals in appearance only, rituals by association. It may not be quite so easy because there is a sliding scale from “healthy” to “pathological,” with the polar categories open to ongoing redefinition.

### Performing Ritual

In teaching ritual, there is a whole other dimension that I am particularly interested in: the performing arts and ritual. This relationship is a two-way street. Art can “originate” in ritual, but ritual can also originate in art (see “From Ritual to Theatre and Back” in my book *Performance Theory*). Also I point out that the workshop to rehearsal to public performance sequence is in itself a ritual process. Often I ask the class to read about the invented rituals of Anna Halprin (see *Moving Toward Life*). Or I invite students to invent and perform a new ritual. If a new ritual is performed, or in regard to Halprin’s work, we discuss how much is comprised of known actions—that the “newness” is more a rearrangement than a true invention. Again questions arise concerning whether or not this kind of acting gets people closer to the experience of another or whether it further alienates them.

Then, sometimes, I ask the class to use Victor and Edith Turner’s “Performing Ethnography” as a guide to staging one or two rituals from “other” cultures. The Turners did not always look to distant places for the rituals they had their students perform. At the University of Virginia in Charlottesville the Turners staged the Hamatsa ritual dance of the Kwakiutl and the Barok ritual of Papua-New Guinea. But, also, the Turners also staged rituals much closer to their home:

One of our Virginia graduate students, Pamela Frese, who has been studying marriage (culturally, structurally, and in terms of social dynamics) in the Charlottesville area...elected to cast the entire anthropology department as participants in a simulated or fabricated contemporary Central Virginian wedding.... A Department of Religious Studies graduate student was cast as the minister. Both faculty and students were involved.... The “wedding” took place in the large basement of our house at Charlottesville—the “kiva” some called it. After-wards, there was a “reception”: upstairs with a receiving line, real champagne, and festive foods. At subsequent sessions students were asked to describe...their impressions (“Performing” 134-35).

I have on occasion done similar things. Once I invited McKim Marriott to perform a complex Hindu ritual in a dance studio at NYU’s Tisch School of the Arts. This took several hours of preparation followed by several more hours of per-

formance. The discussion began after the performance and continued into the next class, led by me after Marriott had returned to Chicago. There is no substitute for experience; and if people can't go to the field, bring the field home insofar as you can.

The Turners in their article on performing ethnography offer some wise, if perhaps impossibly utopian, advice:

Rituals, like law cases, should not be abstracted from the frameworks of the ongoing social process in which they were originally embedded. They have their source and *raison d'être* in the ceaseless flow of social life, and in the social dramas within which communities seek to contain that life.... If we attempt to perform ethnography, let us not begin with such apparently "exotic" and "bizarre" cultural phenomena as rituals and myths. Such an emphasis may only encourage prejudice, since it stresses the "otherness of the other." Let us focus first on what all people share, the social drama form, from which emerge all types of cultural performance, which, in their turn, subtly stylize the contours of social interaction in everyday life. In practice, this means setting apart a substantial block of time to familiarize students with the culture and social system of the group whose dramas they will enact. Such instruction should be interwoven with what Richard Schechner might call "the rehearsal process." The resultant instructional form could be a kind of synthesis between an anthropological seminar and a postmodern theatrical workshop.... At least one session should be allocated to a close review of all aspects of the performance seen in retrospect. This should include subjective statements by the actors, the director, the dramaturg, and members of the audience if an audience was thought necessary. Much of the emphasis will be found to be on cultural differences, and the difficulties and delights of playing roles generated by cultures often far different from our own. In these occasions of intercultural reflexivity, we can begin to grasp something of the contribution each and every human culture can make to the general pool of manifested knowledge of our common human condition. It is in dramatics and dynamics most of all that we learn to coexperience the lives of our conspecifics... (47-48).

## Belief

I am an atheist. I am also a Jew and an initiated Hindu. What is my position in relation to religious rituals and the belief systems they encode? Frequently, I ask students to attend religious services and celebrations as participant observers. We have made fieldtrips to pentecostal churches in Brooklyn and Harlem, a Ganesh temple in Queens, Purim in Brooklyn. One year, my ritual, play, and performance class prepared and celebrated a seder in my home—folding into the service, which itself takes the form of a lesson, even more levels of explanation and instruction. During one fieldtrip to the Institutional Church of God in Brooklyn, a student—Jewish by birth and upbringing—was possessed by the Holy Spirit and declared herself reborn in Christ. She was anointed and car-



ried into the Bishop's chambers behind the pulpit. After 30 minutes or so, I met with the Bishop and the young woman. I urged them to wait a few days to see if she still felt the same way before following up on her revelatory experience. I explained that although I did not want to interfere in her spiritual life or the church's call, I was also "in parentis locus" for this undergraduate student. Ultimately, after several trips back and forth to Brooklyn, she decided not to join the church as a member. But her life was touched by the experience. I do not know the long-term outcome of that Sunday morning in church on Adelphi Street.

At the somatic and aesthetic level, I enjoy enacting rituals—of faiths and groups I grew up knowing and of ones I have experienced first as an adult. I do not feel like a hypocrite while participating in a synagogue service, a puja, a Holy Communion, or a Buddhist meditation. When I finish writing this on Yom Kippur 2005, I will drive from Manhattan to New Jersey and attend the "neelah" or final service of the day at the synagogue my great grandfather founded and was the first rabbi of. But I know that when I recite prayers that I learned before I knew how to read, I will not be in the same relation to those prayers and other "sacred" performances I have and may continue to participate in as many others co-present with me.

I identify with these religious rituals culturally and historically. That is, when I celebrate the Passover Seder, I am claiming my portion and place in Jewish tradition. When I sing bhajans or accept prasad in a Hindu temple, I am putting myself into another tradition and accepting, for the time being, its practices. When I take the Communion wafer on my tongue, I am "practicing" Roman Catholicism. Insofar as the actions are autonomous, I am what I do. Insofar as belief is necessary to make the actions efficacious, I am "playing." But I do not "believe" in the gods of Judaism, Hinduism, or Catholicism. Well, actually, that's not quite it. While participating I am overtaken by my own actions. Often I am overcome with deep feelings, sometimes to tears. I interpret this emotion as a kind of regretful longing for the faith of my early childhood. Or it may be that rituals "work," whether they take the form of religious observances or rhythmic cheering at a Mets game. As Frits Staal noted: "It is characteristic of a ritual performance...that it is self-contained and self-absorbed. The performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks" (3).

My ritual tasks at synagogue, church, or temple are not complex, but at certain moments I am entirely absorbed in the doing of them. The feelings I experience at these times are more than a theatrical "as if" yet different from something entirely believed-in. I am in a liminal emotional state, and also performing a Brechtian "alienation effect." I am doing and watching myself doing; in the action and standing to the side of the action. I encourage my students to find a similar "place" from which to experience and observe simultaneously. And I remind them of the instructions given to bharatanatyam dancers: Make the mudras with your hands and watch your hands as they form the mudras. You are dancing with yourself and for yourself, for the audience and for the deity. The actions I perform "in ritual" are subscribed to for the duration of the ritual performance: I did not invent these actions, but in doing them, I am reinventing them. The doing of the actions draws me deeply into the actions without asking

that I comprehend (at the moment of doing) what those actions signify. Or maybe I am simply the messenger: the rituals communicate in their own code, whether or not I understand the code. Staal is right when he says that, sometimes at least, while performing a ritual, we are in flow, merged with the action entirely. Flow is not unique to ritual.<sup>3</sup> But the repetition and deep familiarity of a ritual, combined with the full sensory engagement—song, movement or dance, incense or other odor, tasting, utterance, participating in a group activity—help one surrender the I-self and merge with the Us-self, what Martin Buber called the Ich-Du. I do not hide from my students my contradictory “stance” in relation to the rituals I practice and we study together. Quite the contrary, it is this double consciousness that I try to teach them.

### Ritual and Theatre

I am a “theatre person” who has worked for more than 45 years as a director—the one who oversees the workshop and rehearsal process, guides the actors and designers, interacts with the playwright, and interprets or even modifies the text. Sometimes I write plays or adapt older texts. My experience has taught me that theatre and ritual are very close to each other, involving processes of displacement, transformation, exaggeration, repetition, and rhythmicity (see my books *Between Theater and Anthropology* and *Performance Theory*). The idea of the affinity of ritual and theatre is nothing new, dating back at least to Durkheim.

The Russian actor and director Konstantin Stanislavsky taught that the words spoken and gestures enacted in a performance convey only some of what’s going on. Equally if not more important is what Stanislavsky called the “subtext,” the train of thought, motivation, and desire running beneath the surface. The subtext is what the characters are “really thinking and feeling” no matter what they say or do. Sometimes the subtext is in harmony with the words and gestures but often it is not. A character may say “I love you” as she kisses her husband, but actually mean “I am angry at you.” Even more commonly, the subtext departs entirely from what is written and done. For example, a character says, “Pass the butter, please” and the other character does so. A few words and a simple action. But these can embody a myriad of subtexts, conveyed by tone and gesture, enacted with great subtlety but no less certainly. An exercise for actors is to give them a text and assign a completely different subtext. For example, one actor says, “Pass the butter” while conveying “I desire you.” The other actor passes the butter showing in that gesture, “Yes, I know you desire me and I want you, too.” The actor’s job is to speak the lines and perform the actions in an ordinary way, but also to communicate the subtext to the other character and to the audience.

And here is a crucial difference between theatre and ritual. In theatre, the subtext rules; while in ritual the text rules. Even empty or hollow rituals, if prop-

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<sup>3</sup> Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi has authored a library on flow from theoretical as well as experiential perspectives. See the various entries for Csikszentmihalyi in the bibliography, including his collaborations with Isabella Selega Csikszentmihalyi and with Susan A. Jackson.

erly performed, “work,” that is, accomplish what they are intended to do. Just because the bride wishes she weren’t marrying does not undo what the ceremony and the signing of papers accomplish. Smiling and buoyant, blushing and shy, or angry and morose makes no difference with regard to efficacy. Ritual performers may wish they were in the theatre where, when the play is over, they can step out of their roles and show that everything that happened onstage was make believe. But no such luck, or danger. Ritual is very close to theatre, but also exquisitely different. Ritual’s actions are not make believe; they are “make belief”: “invariant sequences of acts and utterances not encoded by the performers” enacted by “performers totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks.” The outcome is binding.

## Appendix

RITUAL, PLAY, & PERFORMANCE  
 SCT, SUMMER 2004  
 21 June – 28 July  
 CORNELL UNIVERSITY  
 RICHARD SCHECHNER

Ritual, play, and performance are overlapping spheres of theory, practice, and experience. "Performance" encompasses a very broad range of events, activities, and behaviors. These range from behaviors common to many animals to the singular expressions of human artists and ritualists. The underlying grounds of performance are ritual and play. During the Seminar, we will investigate ritual and play from a variety of perspectives: ethological, anthropological, historical, intercultural, and theoretical. If the participants are willing, we may do some practical work such as trance dancing and field observations of playing. In the brief weeks of our encounter, we can only discuss some of what's there. And, as seminar leader, I welcome suggestions from the participants concerning particular topics for discussion.

As many of the readings as possible will be available online on Blackboard as WORD attachments or as Adobe Reader files. All of the texts will also be collected into a seminar reader available for purchase on arrival. Additional/suggested readings designed to aid in further research will be put on reserve at the library.

### *Ethosphere*

21 June

#### Animal play & ritual

Burghardt, Gordon M. 1984  
 "On the Origins of Play" in *Play in Animals and Humans*, ed. Peter K. Smith. New York: Basil Blackwell.  
 5-41. BF717 .P576

Eibl-Eibesfeldt, Iraneus 1979  
 "Ritual and ritualization from a biological perspective"  
 in *Human Ethology*, eds. M. von Cranach, K. Foppa, W. Lepenies, and D. Ploog. Cambridge: Cambridge UP.  
 3-55. BF671 .W45

**23 June****Humans are special**

Carlson, Marvin 2003

"The Performance of Culture" in *Performance A Critical Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition. London: Routledge. 11-30.  
NX504.C35

Schechner, Richard 2002. **This book for purchase.**

"Ritual" and "Play" in *Performance Studies: An Introduction*. London: Routledge. 45-109.  
PN2041.A57 S34

***Sociosphere*****28 June****Classical Play Theories**

Caillois, Roger 2001

*Man, Play, and Games*. Urbana: U of Illinois P.  
3-35. GN454 .C3413

Huizinga, Johannes 1955

*Homo Ludens* Boston: Beacon Press. 1-27  
CB151 .H813

Critical summaries & assessments of each theorist by seminar participants.

**30 June****Victor Turner's theories**

From *The Ritual Process* 1968, Chicago: Aldine. 94-165.  
GN473 .T82

From *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* 1974, Ithaca: Cornell  
UP. 23-59. GN451 .T87

From *On the Edge of the Bush* 1985, Tucson: U of  
Arizona P. 291-301. GN452.5 .T86

**5 July****Secular ritual/personal ritual**

Moore, Sally F. and Barbara Myerhoff 1977  
 “Secular Ritual: Forms and Meanings” in *Secular Ritual*,  
 eds. Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff. 3-24. GN473 .S43

Myerhoff, Barbara 1977  
 “We Don’t Wrap Herring in a Printed Page” in *Secular  
 Ritual*, eds. Sally Moore and Barbara Myerhoff. Amsterdam:  
 Van Gorcum. 199-224. GN473 .S43

***Amphibolous Playing*****7 July****Maya-lila & Other Possibilities of Play**

Schechner, Richard 1993  
 “Playing” in *The Future of Ritual*. London: Routledge.  
 24-44. PN2039 .S38

Sutton-Smith, Brian 1997  
 “Play and Ambiguity” in *The Ambiguity of Play*. Cambridge:  
 Harvard UP. 1-17. BF717 .S93

Assignment: Perform a “dark play” event/ act before the  
 next meeting of the seminar.

**12 July****Dark play**

Sharing dark play stories & experiences—old and very recent

***Psychosphere*****14 July****Freud on Play and Ritual**

Seminar reports on Freud’s notions of play & ritual

**19 July****Bateson and Winnicott**

Bateson, Gregory 2000

"A Theory of Play and Fantasy" in *Steps to an Ecology of the Mind*. Chicago: U of Chicago P. 177-93. GN6 .B3

Winnicott, D. W. 1980

From *Playing and Reality*. London: Tavistock Publications. 1-25, 38-52, 95-110. BF717 .W47

***Praxisphere*****21 July****Trance**

Belo, Jane 1976

"Trance Experience in Bali" in ed. Richard Schechner and Mady Schuman, *Ritual, Play, and Performance*. New York: Seabury Press. 150-61. PN2049 .R5

Siegel, Marsha 1991

"Liminality in Balinese Dance," *TDR* 35, 4: 84-91.

**26 July**

**Trance workshop: This May Take Special Scheduling and a Special Place. Nighttime, for a long time, say 5 hours.**

Lex, Barbara 1979

"The Neurobiology of Ritual Trance" in D'Aquili, Eugene G. and Charles D. Laughlin, Jr. *The Spectrum of Ritual*. 117-51. GN473 .D36

Goodman, Felicitas 1990

"A Trance Dance with Masks," *TDR* 34, 1: 102-114.

When we determine a time and place, come dressed to dance. That is, loose plain clothes, shorts, no jewelry, no nothing. As close to naked as you feel comfortable with.

**28 July**

**Inventing ritual**

Halprin, Anna 1995. **This book for purchase.**

5-24, 65-69, 184-87, 226-53 in *Moving Toward Life*.

Hanover & London: Wesleyan UP. GV1785.H267 A3



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### Useful Readings

For an overview of my approach, see chapter 3, "Ritual" in my book, *Performance Studies—An Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition (London and New York: Routledge, 2006) and my *The Future of Ritual* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993). My views are informed by the theories of Victor Turner. Aside from his *The Ritual Process* (Chicago: Aldine, 1969) and *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1974) see *From Ritual to Theatre* (New York: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982) and *The Anthropology of Performance* (New York, PAJ Publications, 1986).