CHAPTER 4

The Ritual Round


Shoes and the Empty Ritual

Ritual is sometimes described as 'empty', or meaningless, and there are people who make conscious efforts to pare it away. They may decide to have a simple wedding, 'without any fuss', or a small family funeral, with 'no flowers please'. Some Christian churches make a virtue out of simplicity of design, cast away the ecclesiastical robes, and even abandon their notion of an order of service on some specially open occasions. In each case, there is an expression of rejection of the more complicated forms which may be regarded as wasteful of time and resources, or unnecessary adornment of the event. In a way, it's like leaving the wrapping off a gift in the interest of saving trees . . . but let us look at ritual a little more closely.

We talked in Chapter 1 about the importance of understanding systems of classification in order to understand the way in which people in different societies divide up the world into categories, and in Chapter 2, about notions of pollution and taboo which may be associated with the places which fall between those categories. The places and situations which fall between categories, the interstitial places as they may be called, are also often associated with danger in any society, and a common response to this kind of danger is to institute some sort of ritual. By looking at ritual, then, we can again learn a lot about the system of classification held by a particular people.

To illustrate this idea, we can return briefly to the example of Japanese shoes. It is an inviolable custom in Japan to remove your shoes before entering someone's house, as was discussed earlier. The place in which you remove your shoes is usually a porch which separates the inside of the house from the outside world, and this space may be described as an interstitial place between those two worlds. The act of removing shoes thus emphasizes the importance of the distinction between them, and it is an act so firmly prescribed by society that in the Japanese case it may be regarded as having the force of a ritual act. In fact we find that further rituals very often accompany the removal or donning of shoes in that space.
These include greetings, with fixed words, depending on whether one is coming in or going out, and there is a response, again fixed, from anyone who is inside the house. The announcement of an arrival literally means 'now', the response is something like 'welcome'. The call on departure means 'I go and come back'. A visitor to the house calls out 'I make disturbance' as they enter, and 'I make rudeness' as they leave. Mothers with small children will call out these greetings as they go in and come out whether there is anyone inside or not, because the rituals of crossing the threshold of the household are part of the training they feel they need to give to their child.

Further elements may be added to the ritual, such as the changing of clothes on returning home, and many mothers insist that their children also wash their hands and gargle. Husbands returning home from work may well head straight for the bath as a regular feature of their arrival, and some will change from their city suits into Japanese garments. The ritual for greeting guests includes bowing, and in the country where I did my first fieldwork, this was an elaborate performance involving kneeling on the ground and bringing one's head almost into contact with the floor. The guests would return the compliment, so this exchange would take place after the person had climbed up onto the matted floor.

Definitions of Ritual

It may be objected at this point that some form of greeting is carried out anywhere on entering or leaving a house, and people may also adjust their bodily attire. Why then should this be regarded as ritual? Let us turn first, then, to examine what exactly is meant by the term ritual in anthropology. In fact, there are several definitions of 'ritual', some of which restrict its use to describing behaviour of a religious nature (see, for example, Lewis, 1980, pp. 6-38; de Coppet, 1992) but most anthropologists these days prefer to adopt a broader one which can include secular activities such as greetings. For example,

• Ritual is behaviour prescribed by society in which individuals have little choice about their actions.

To test a form of behaviour to see whether it might qualify to be called ritual or not, one could try to change it, or omit it, and see how others would react. As mentioned in the previous chapter, refusing to reply to a greeting could be seen as most offensive. Omitting to greet someone on entering their house
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would seem churlish at the very least. In Japan, a visitor is expected to utter the appropriate phrases, and a child who failed to wash would soon be hustled into the bathroom, though the husband might get away with the odd lapse so that perhaps his practice would better be termed a routine, or custom. With this definition, rules about gift exchange can also be included, as can secular special occasions such as birthday parties.

After all, a birthday party, especially for a child, would hardly qualify to be such if it lacked certain elements: balloons, cards, presents, the cake, candles, the singing of a special song, and possibly the playing of games as well. In some areas, there are further expectations, perhaps about the provision of small gifts to take home, the wrapping up and distribution of pieces of cake, and a small ceremony when the birthday presents are opened, one by one, to a series of 'oohs' and 'ahs' from the assembled company. A parent who put on a party without the appropriate paraphernalia would run the severe risk of disapproval on the part of their own offspring, and possibly voluble complaints from the young guests.

A more restricted definition of ritual, which several anthropologists have used and which may therefore be referred to, is:

prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers. (Turner, 1967, p. 19)

Even in the case of religious ritual, the rites themselves must be examined separately from belief which may be associated with them, however, since people may participate for entirely social reasons. A funeral, for example, is attended by those who were close to, or who wish to express their respect for the deceased. Such participants will mourn, wear black or some other sombre colour, and if appropriate, they will attend a religious service. This says nothing about the individual beliefs of the participants with respect to God or gods and the service they are attending. It may not even say very much about their feelings for the dead. Perhaps they are attending to express sympathy for the bereaved.

Similarly, in the case of a marriage, or a christening, the participants may have very different views among themselves about the religious nature of the event. As the social anthropologist, Edmund Leach (-1969), pointed out, a Church of England wedding tells us nothing of the bride or her beliefs, only about the social relations being established. In other words, we must separate personal beliefs from the social aspects of ritual behaviour. The latter is the domain of interest of the social anthropologist.
Rites of Passage

Much has been written on the subject of ritual, and there have been many theories about its interpretation, but there is one classic work which has stood the tests both of time and of further research. This is the study of Arnold van Gennep, first published in 1909, in French, and translated into English in a book called *Rites of Passage* (1960). Again, this writer refers to the people under discussion as 'primitive', and he talks mostly of people in small-scale society, but his theories have been shown to have applicability in any society in any part of the world. His notion of ritual is also closer to the second definition about religious behaviour, but it applies to ritual which fits the first in many cases as well.

These rites of passage are those which accompany the movement from what van Gennep describes as 'one cosmic or social world to another'. In the terms we have been using in this book, it involves a move from one social category to another, the passage of a person or persons in a society from one class to another. There are four main types of move:

1. the passage of people from one status to another, as on marriage or initiation to a new social or religious group;
2. passage from one place to another as in a change of address or territory;
3. passage from one situation to another, such as taking up a new job or school; and
4. the passage of time when the whole social group might move from one period to another, for example at New Year, or into the reign of a new king/queen or emperor.

If we think of occasions in our lives, and in those of people around us, when we might engage in some form of ritual, they are very often precisely the sort of passages which fit these descriptions. For example:

- Birth, marriage, death
- Christening, confirmation, a bar mitzvah
- A change of school, job or house
- Going away
- Coming back
- Birthdays, anniversaries, graduation
- Changes of the seasons, New Year

We ritualize these occasions in various ways, but some elements on which we draw are:
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- Dressing up
- Sending cards
- Giving presents
- Holding parties
- Making and consuming special food
- Making resolutions
- Ordeals

By examining reports of rites of passage from various parts of the world, van Gennep noticed that certain characteristic patterns recurred in the order of the ceremonies even from places much too far apart to have influenced one another. First of all, there would be rites of separation from the old class or category, and these, he argued, are very often characterized by a symbolic death. There would also be rites of incorporation into the new class or category, and these would be characterized by a symbolic rebirth. Most striking, however, was the fact that these sets of rites would almost always be separated by a transition period when the participants would belong to neither one nor the other.

These rites he named as follows:

- Rites of Separation or Preliminary Rites
- Rites of Transition or Liminal Rites
- Rites of Incorporation or Postliminal Rites

Not all of these rites would be equally developed in each ceremony, since they would be of differing importance depending on the nature of the ceremony — for example, one might expect funerals to have more developed rites of separation — but van Gennep argued that this general structure is characteristic of rites of passage everywhere. Moreover, if the liminal or transition period is a particularly long one, for example during betrothal or pregnancy, there might be a set of each of the three types of rite at each end of it. He also noted that other kinds of rites — perhaps for fertility at marriage, or protection at birth - may be superimposed on the rites of passage. Let us examine some examples of the types of rite of passage he proposes.

Territorial Rites of Passage

Van Gennep's book is full of examples of rites of passage of different types, but most of these are set in small-scale societies which he argues imbue all such movements with ideas of a magico-religious variety. Since his book is still available and in print, let us turn here to examining some examples of
secular rites of passage which may be familiar to a wider range of readers.
The prototype for rites of passage is, according to van Gennep, a territorial
passage from one social space to another, a passage which he argues often
involves passing through a transitional area which belongs to neither side, a
kind of no-man's land in the middle.

Van Gennep discussed passages from one tribal area to another, or
between different inhabited regions, but his ideas also work in a consideration
of the bureaucratic rituals associated with making a passage from one nation
to another. First of all it is necessary to acquire a passport, sometimes quite a
complicated and time-consuming process. In the case of many countries, it is
also necessary to acquire a visa for entry. If the journey is to be of a
considerable duration, friends and relatives may hold a farewell party and
offer gifts and cards of well-wishes. The moment of parting, at the airport,
dock or station, will be marked with kisses, embraces and/or handshakes, and
the passenger will be exhorted to telephone on arrival.

In an airport, one is then forced to pass through a series of physical barriers
involving the showing of passports and visas, the checking of luggage through
security screens, and, until arrival at the point of destination, one is quite
literally in a zone of transition. If friends or relatives are waiting, the rituals of
departure are repeated in reverse on arrival, and despite the high probability
of immense fatigue and over-indulgence in food and drink, it would be
regarded as most unfriendly to refuse the welcoming rituals of hospitality.
The phone-call of arrival is a reassurance for those left behind that the zone
of transition is safely crossed, that the traveller has entered another social
world. It may be a world relatively dangerous and unknown, but at least it is a
world!

Van Gennep also discusses rites for crossing thresholds, and the Japanese
example given above would fit his theories perfectly. The zone of transition is
most clear at the entrance to a Japanese house, and it is often filled with
shoes, but there are parallel rites for entering a Jewish house, where the
Mezuzah must be touched, and churches and temples have some form of
ritual act as one moves from the profane to the sacred. This may involve the
removal of pollution, with a touch of holy water, it may involve a bow, a sign
of the cross, the removal or donning of shoes or headgear, or simply a
lowering of the voice. Again, the crossing of the threshold involves a passage
from one cosmic world to another.

These rites also represent a form of security for the world which is being
entered. In the case of countries, the checking of the passport is a way of
controlling immigration; in the case of the church, there is an opportunity to
remove the pollution of the mundane outside world. In any house or
community a stranger may represent a threat, and ritual is a way of
neutralizing the potential danger. Van Gennep describes society as 'similar to a house divided into rooms and corridors' (1960, p. 26) and territorial rites of passage associated with entering and moving about in a house may thus be seen as a model in spatial form of the rites which accompany moves from one section of society to another.

Pregnancy and Childbirth

The arrival of a completely new member of society is an occasion for ritual observance anywhere, and it also provides a threat to the mother who will give birth. In some societies women are regarded as polluting throughout their pregnancy and they must live in a special hut removed from the public sphere. They are thus removed physically from their normal lives to live in a 'liminal' part of their social world. They participate in rites of separation before they go, rites of transition while they are there, and only become incorporated back into society after the baby has been born. The baby, too, must be welcomed into society through rites of separation from the mother and rites of incorporation into the new social world it has joined.

Although there are few formal periods of separation for pregnant mothers in the cosmopolitan world, the English language does still contain the tell-tale word 'confinement' which refers back to a period when it was considered inappropriate for heavily pregnant women to be out in the world at large. Moreover, pregnant women in almost all societies do observe various restrictions on their usual behaviour, perhaps in variations to their culinary practices, as we saw in Chapter 2, or the avoidance of alcohol and smoking, as well as the careful control of drugs and remedies. Others who are aware of their condition will carry heavy objects for them, seek out titbits for them to consume, and generally offer special care during this transitory period. Women who suffer high blood pressure and other serious complications may be literally removed from society to hospital for the waiting period.

In Japan, many women bind themselves up in a special corset during pregnancy, and the first donning of this garment may be accompanied by a party which makes official the announcement of the impending arrival. The celebration is held on a day of the dog, according to the Chinese calendar, because dogs are said to give birth relatively easily and it is hoped that this birth will be likewise. Women also often return to the homes of their own parents in order to give birth and they may stay away from their marital home for up to a month afterwards. Their return is celebrated with a visit to the local shrine to present the baby to the local protective deity, and a party will also be held to incorporate mother and child back into the community.
In most societies there is some form of celebration following a birth. Among Christians, the christening is a formal naming ceremony in the church as well as a presentation of the child to God, and the Church of England used to have a ceremony for mothers known as 'churching' which incorporated them back into normal life. During the christening service the baby is taken from its mother by the minister, who holds it throughout the most crucial part of the ceremony, and it may be handed back to a godparent as well. Elsewhere, there is a rite of separation of the baby from its mother associated with the cutting of the cord, and the cord itself may be buried in a special place with some significance for the future.

In some societies in South America, the father of a baby goes through a series of rites parallel to those undergone by the mother as a way of expressing and confirming his paternity. This practice, known as couvade, may involve a simulated pattern of suffering as well as a period of seclusion. This practice could be compared to the way fathers in the UK, as elsewhere, attend and participate in ante-natal classes with their pregnant partners so that they may assist at the birth of their children. These classes sometimes demand quite serious commitment on the part of the fathers, who must carry out the breathing and relaxation exercises along with the mothers. The provision of paternity leave in some countries recognizes the important role fathers are recently expected to take in the birth of their children, and the ritualization of this practice may be seen in Britain now in the way a mother whose husband cannot be present is encouraged to take in a 'birthing partner' instead.

A role has been created here which has little to do with the 'safe' delivery of the baby in a purely medical sense. Rather it was created to provide psychological support for the mother in a highly intimate situation which had become almost entirely impersonal. Before hospitals were deemed the appropriate place for childbirth, other women would usually surround and help a woman giving birth, and although a specialist might have been called in, it was for close kin to provide more familiar backup. The recently created role for the father reflects the importance and isolation of the nuclear family unit as well as a breakdown in the sexual division of labour which separated men from the care of their young.

Initiation Rites

During childhood, rites may be held in different societies to mark various stages of development which are regarded as important. These may include regular events such as birthdays, or accomplishments such as the first outing, first food, first haircut, first teeth (or loss of same), first day at school, and so forth. In some societies physical changes are made such as circumcision or
ear-piercing. The periods which are marked reflect the local system of classification of life into stages and some societies are divided into age sets where groups of children born within a particular period move through the stages together. Others move through on an individual basis. In either case, there will be rituals to mark the passages from one stage to another.

Social recognition of the physical changes of puberty provide widespread examples of clearly defined rites of passage which ritually turn children into adults, and these again involve a substantial period of separation and/or special treatment. Among African tribes such as the Masai of the Kenya-Tanzania borders, and the Ndembu of Zambia, for example, young men are turned out to fend for themselves in 'the bush', and they may be regarded as dead for the duration. Special rites precede and follow their absence, and their physical appearance will reflect their stage in the process. The Masai allow their hair to grow long and unkempt in the bush, but shave completely on their return, painting their bare heads with shining ochre to mark their rebirth into society. The Ndembu have female puberty rituals which take place when a girl's breasts begin to form. They are confined to the village, but the girl is wrapped up in a blanket and lain under a tree where she must remain motionless for the whole of a very often hot and clammy day while others perform ritual activities around her (see Chapter 5 for further detail).

This kind of ordeal is characteristic of many initiation rituals, which may again involve mutilations of the body of one sort or another. The proximity of these events to the flowering of sexual maturity may focus attention on the genitals in the practice of circumcision again, or even clitoridectomy. In some societies, incisions in the face will leave permanent scarring indicating membership of a particular tribe or lineage. Undergoing the ordeal associated with these practises is supposed to demonstrate the readiness of the child for adulthood, and the permanent markings left behind will illustrate their new status once and for all.

Education of some sort is also often involved, and youths may be taken for the first time into the men's hut to be shown ritual objects, or taught tribal lore to be kept secret from the women and children. Likewise, girls may be taught certain esoteric elements of female life. In many societies, these young initiates are regarded as immune to social sanctions for the period of transition, and they may engage in all sorts of outrageous anti-social behaviour. Even if they are not in the bush, they may live for a period in a special house where they can experiment with adult activities and practice various social aberrations while they are in the intermediate stage between two categories.

Something of the same tolerance is accorded to university students in many societies, in Britain especially during the institution known as 'rag week'. In
the last few years in Britain, there has also been an extraordinary amount of apparent tolerance for a practice known as 'joy-riding', during which youths sometimes as young as 12 years of age steal expensive cars and drive them wildly around the countryside before abandoning them. The owner reports the theft to the police, who usually locate the vehicle within a few days, but even if the culprits are caught they are often let off with little more than a warning. They are too young to charge, and have few resources to pay for the damage they cause, so society seems to tolerate the practice.

Whether this represents a stage of transition between childhood and adulthood is a matter open to debate, but if the youths are not seen as responsible for their own behaviour, and their parents are not held responsible for them, then it seems that they must fall between these categories of childhood and adulthood in the legal system at least. In the more acceptable version of education, these youths may not be doing particularly well, and they may be living at home, but they are gaining the skills of theft and manipulation of powerful motor cars at an extremely early age, and they are exposing themselves to the risks and ordeals that other societies institutionalize for their youngsters.

The recent popularity of voluntarily piercing various parts of the body in countries such as Britain, Australia and the United States, is interesting in that these societies now have few clear ritual occasions to mark the transition from childhood to adulthood. The bar mitzvah is an exception to this general rule, and it is taken seriously, but the former twenty-first birthday, or 'coming of age', is practised rather sporadically, now confused in Britain, at least, with the eighteenth birthday since legal changes brought more rights, and neither has clear rules of procedure. There is a sense of special occasion, and woe betide the parent who fails to do anything unusual on both occasions, but they are difficult ages at which to please. It may be that the people engaging in 'piercing' or possibly tattooing themselves are actually trying to express their independence from the parental fold by inventing a small ordeal.

Other forms of initiation to secret societies or esoteric bodies such as priesthood, as well as the enthronement ceremonies for a king or emperor, follow the same principles as initiation to adulthood. There are rites of separation of the principals from their previous lives, periods of transition involving education and training, and rites of incorporation representing a rebirth into their new roles. In some societies the period of interregnum between one ruler and his or her successor allows anti-social behaviour for the whole people, and steps are sometimes taken to keep the death of a king secret until the arrangements are ready for a quick succession to cut down on the disorder.
Marriage Rites

Marriage is a most important transition in most societies and it may coincide with the attainment of adulthood so that the rites associated with the wedding come at the end of the period of separation associated with the initiation into adulthood. In other societies there will be a long period of betrothal which may be regarded as a period of transition with rites at the beginning and end. In any case, in most societies this is a passage well marked with rites of separation, transition and incorporation, although the details may differ.

In Mexico, for example, a party held for girls who have become engaged is called the despedida de soltera, or seeing off the state of being single. Friends of approximately the same age gather to drink and eat together, and they dress up and act out some of the events which will follow for the bride, an occasion usually of considerable laughter and frivolity. The 'shower' for girls in the USA serves a similar role. These rites separate the bride from her previous life in preparation for the new state to come. The version for the bridegroom is also commonly an all male occasion known as a stag party, where serious drinking seems to be the order of the day.

In the country in Japan, where I did my own fieldwork, there were several rites of separation before the bride left her village to marry into a house elsewhere. A party would be held for her age-mates, both boys and girls this time, and there would be a display of the betrothal gifts she had received and the clothes and furniture she would take with her. Friends and neighbours would call round to see them, bringing gifts of money to send her on her way. On the morning of the wedding, there would be a farewell breakfast with the closest relatives, who would then travel together to the ceremony, and the bride would say a formal prayer of departure to the ancestors in the household Buddhist altar. After she had left, her rice bowl would be broken, just as if she had died to the house.

The bride in Japan wears a white garment under her colourful wedding kimono and this is said to represent a clean slate for her new life. In this way she resembles a corpse, as she dies to her old house, and a baby, to be born again into the new one. After the ceremony itself, the bride goes through a series of rites of incorporation into the new house and community, greeting her new ancestors, visiting the new local shrine, and being introduced to the new neighbours. According to Walter Edwards, in a book about modern Japanese weddings, the bride and groom are ritually separated from the rest of the party for the sharing of cups of sake, the crux of the marriage itself:

In ethnographic accounts of prewar and early postwar home weddings ... the exchange is described variously as taking place in a separate room; as occurring
behind a screen; and as being attended only by the *nakodo* [go-between] or someone to pour the *sa le*. In the contemporary Shinto ceremony the physical isolation is less extreme, but it is there nonetheless. Together with the nakodo, the bride and groom sit in the center of the shrine room, apart from the rest of the group. (1989, pp. 107-8)

In many parts of the world it is customary for the bride and groom to go away for a honeymoon after their wedding and this practice can be seen as a rite of transition for the couple as a new unit. This time they will be formally separated from the crowd of family and friends who have come to wish them well, and various rites may be practised as they leave. Throwing of confetti is one example, tying boots to their car another. Some people go much further, and my own brother was kidnapped by his old friends, who tied his hands and feet together and hailed a passing van to drive him away around the streets of Glasgow. Again, this is a period of liminality when few rules apply. Later the couple will be properly married, and treated as such. In the meantime, there would seem to be no end of fun to be had.

In recent years, there has been a noticeable breakdown in the institution of marriage in several countries. Many couples live together now without undergoing any formalities at all, and may split up just as easily if things do not work out. Even those who do marry seem to find themselves as likely to be divorced after a few years as to be still married, so the whole exercise seems rather hollow. Marriage is by no means disappearing, however, and people seem still to be happy to spend vast sums of money on their weddings. According to one of my students, a 'hand-binding ceremony' has also recently been instituted for a short-term union, and various rites of divorce are discussed from time to time in the media.

**Funerals**

Rites of separation are highly developed at a funeral, but there is again a period of transition, both for the deceased on his or her way to the afterlife, and for those who remain behind to come to terms with their loss. At Christian funerals, the custom of throwing a little earth into the grave is a way of saying farewell, as is the practice in Japan of adding a pinch of incense to the burning pile. In Roman Catholic and Afro-Caribbean communities, the custom of holding a wake allows a more elaborate venue for the final farewells, and elsewhere there is open house for the bereaved to receive the condolences of their friends and relatives.

During the period of mourning people may alter their lifestyles a little, refraining from celebrations and jollification perhaps, and making regular
visits to the grave of the loved one. In Japan, a notice is pasted to the door which not only identifies the house as one in mourning but also makes explicit the idea of pollution associated with the period in question. During this time, no meat is to be eaten, and there is a special diet for the bereaved. Various rites are held to mark stages in the progress of the soul, and these coincide with gatherings to thank those who helped at the funeral, and generally to redefine the social relations of the members of the family left behind. In some countries, a widow will continue to wear black for the rest of her life, but in most cases there is a means of incorporating the living back into normal life.

Festivals and the Passage of Time

Finally, there are in most societies rituals regularly to mark the passage of time. These reflect the classification of time in the way that the rituals associated with territorial passage reflect the classification of space into homes, villages, countries and so forth. As with the rites of passage through life, these events regularize in a social form natural cycles, though this time of the earth and moon, rather than the human body. Thus, the year is divided in various ways depending on the local climate, though provision is usually made for a festival to mark the harvest, at least in agricultural communities, and in countries with a severe winter there might be a rite to herald the arrival of spring.

In the summer, in Europe, the year is clearly broken with holidays, and this ritual break in the normal routines of life is especially marked in countries such as France and Italy where there is a long and serious period of play which is virtually compulsory in its effective interruption of the ordinary. In France, the motorways are cleared of lorries and roadworks, and it seems as though the entire population heads south to the sea and the sunshine. Certainly it is difficult to get anything done in government buildings, or, indeed, any number of other city offices.

The pattern of breaking work with play is of course repeated weekly in many parts of the world, but this is a system of classification originally based on the Biblical story of the creation of the world. Elsewhere the breaks will come at different times. The lunar month is a more universal segment, and, especially before the advent of electricity, many people would organize events to coincide with the light of the full moon. Approaching the equator there is little difference in the climate between winter and summer, and seasons and their markings may be organized instead around wet and dry periods, or some other local climatic variable.
In Britain the year is broken clearly during the season of Christmas and New Year when all usual activities are suspended for a period of some two weeks, preceded by preparations which may last for another couple of months. This 'festival' is, strictly speaking, a celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ, but it takes place at a time chosen by early Christians to coincide with winter solstice celebrations in northern Europe, and it is characterized as much by feasting and resting from usual routines for many of its participants as for any religious rites. Moreover, in Britain, followers of other faiths observe their own rituals, such as the Jewish Hanukah and Hindu Diwali, close to the winter break from routine which we are almost forced to share.

These local differences are not actually as new as they may seem, for the Scots have long distinguished their winter celebrations from those of the English by placing greater emphasis on Hogmanay, celebrated on New Year's Eve, than on Christmas, whether they are Christians or not. Brought up as an ex-pat Scot in England, myself, I was made aware of this distinction from an early age, and our annual Hogmanay party encapsulated very clearly the elements of van Gennep's scheme: the old year seen off with a rendering of Auld Lang Syne, a liminal period passed listening to the chiming of Big Ben, and then greetings, accompanied by handshakes, hugs and kisses signalling a communal incorporation into the New Year which had opened.

At our parties, we would follow all this with a wild Eightsome Reel, as fellow Scots kicked their heels in an expression of togetherness as Scots, as well as to their specific friends and relatives, but although some English people I know have chosen to celebrate the New Year in this traditional Scottish celebration, and they dress themselves in kilts and other 'Scottish' garments, they draw the line at a dance so common and apparently unrefined. These groups practice weekly all manner of complicated Scottish dancing, and although they incorporate a rite of 'first-footing' into their Hogmanay celebrations, another Scottish practice which echoes the theories of van Gennep, their togetherness is based precisely on excluding dances that any outsider can do, just because they are Scottish (see Photograph 4.1).

The element of abandonment which the Eightsome Reel signified for me, growing up, and which is expressed by the only element of Hogmanay which all Scots agree about - namely, that one must get very drunk - is a characteristic of the liminal period of many festivals for the people concerned, as were initiation rites for youths passing into a transition state before becoming adults. This is well illustrated by carnivals such as Mardi Gras, another Christian feast which has taken on wider appeal, but which is actually the beginning the period of fasting called Lent, and another example of a rite of passage marking a longer period of transition, culminating in Easter in the Christian calendar.
Edmund Leach (1961) has written an interesting little article entitled 'Time and False Noses' in which he examines the way people dress up, sometimes smartly and sometimes in quite bizarre ways, during ceremonies and festivals which mark the passage of time. He notes also that people sometimes even perform roles quite the opposite of their usual ones on these occasions — men dressing and women, kings as beggars, and vice versa. His thesis is that where rites of passage are marked by these examples of formality and masquerade, they form a pair of contrasted opposites to stand at either end of ritualized breaks in the passage of time. Role reversal, on the other hand, marks the middle period when normal time has stopped — another example of the period of liminality.

The British custom of performing plays known as pantomimes during the Christmas period is a good illustration of this phenomenon, for there is always a 'Dame', a buxom female role played by a man, and the main male role — who may be a prince in disguise as a pauper, for example — is very often played by a young woman. There is usually a 'princess', or some other female role played by a girl, too, so that the love scenes between her and the lead 'male' may seem physically homosexual, though the symbolism is clearly heterosexual. The general entertainment value of pantomime, carnival,
holidays and the more original holy days is commented upon in studies made around the world, and ritual, however solemn, usually has its fun side too, as Leach suggests.

Not surprisingly, then, an interest among anthropologists in the study of theatre, media and other types of performance is related to ritual (see, for further reading, Hughes-Freeland, 1998). This, too, marks, for the audience, if not for the players, a break from the routines of working life. Like ritual, performances of one sort or another provide a place and period of separation from 'real life', a break in the relentless passage of time. For the players, theatre and media allows a period of (artistic) licence to behave quite outside the regular norms of social life, and in both ritual and theatre, people take on the task of performance of one sort or another.

My own recent research on theme parks is precisely about places which allow everyone to participate in a world of fantasy whenever they feel inclined — or, at least, when they have the funds available to take a holiday. Here too individuals may choose their own breaks in routine, but still with the possibility of reversing usual roles, and removing themselves from the exigencies of 'real life'. Some of the parks in Japan that I studied recreate the experience of visiting a foreign country, inviting their customers to spend a day or more imagining themselves to be in Canada or Spain, Germany or Holland, even dressing up to play the part of a native.

The apparent allure of cultural themes is found in many other countries, local culture being displayed for visitors in Taman Mini Indonesia Indah, just outside Jakarta, and parks in Taiwan, Singapore and China, although Shenzhen has a funfair of global culture in a park called Windows of the World. In Hawaii, there is a popular Polynesian Cultural Centre, and theme parks in other places offer a trip back in history, sometimes preserving buildings in the process. Colonial Williamsburg and Upper Canada Village in North America, Sovereign Hill in Australia, and Skansen in Sweden, are all early examples of places which encourage visitors to remove themselves, temporarily, to a former period in time. Julian Barnes's novel, England, England, depicts a futuristic view of the phenomenon.

Rituals, wherever they are found, mark out the social categories for the people in question. They may be more or less related to the natural cycles of the seasons, the moon and the human body, but they will always be ordered in a cultural way related to ideas about the social world in which they are found. The range of possibilities offers an element of choice which might seem to contradict our initial definition of ritual, but the appearance of fixed elements of culture in a slippery flexible world may be the attraction to people seeking an identity to espouse - especially if they feel that more traditional rituals have become empty.
References


Further Reading


Novel


Films

*Masai Manhood* (Chris Curling and Melissa Llewelyn-Davies, 1975), another classic 'Disappearing World' film about initiation among these pastoral people of East Africa, also demonstrates cattle values, male-female relations and the power and influence of the elders. There is a companion film called *Masai Women*, made by the same team.

*Ososhiki* ('Funeral, Japanese-style'), an Itani Junichiro feature film, is an irreverent but interesting depiction of events surrounding death in modern Japan.