

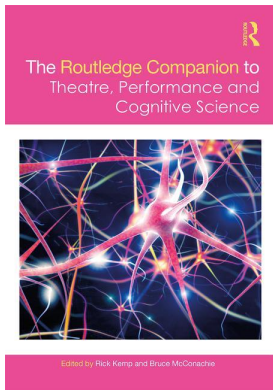
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11

RITUAL TRANSFORMATION AND TRANSMISSION

David Mason

Conventional wisdom has held that rituals communicate meaning. Emile Durkheim launched sociology as a discipline based on the ideas that religion consists of rituals and beliefs, or ‘states of opinion,’ and that the sanctity of ritual objects comes from the objects’ representation of these ‘states of opinion.’ Beliefs, in this thinking, provide a premise for ritual, the acts of which *mean* the content of beliefs (Durkheim 2001, 36). The study of ritual that followed from Durkheim operated on structuralist principles, casting ritual as a sort of literature to be read as symbolically expressive of beliefs, so that, under analysis, the symbolic actions that comprise a ritual would reveal psychological pretexts shared across a culture. Descending through Mircea Eliade and Claude Levi-Strauss, this intellectual tradition exemplified the structuralist divorce of phenomenon from value: the thing itself that is here, in the moment, for our experience, does not matter so much as the way that the thing that is here points to something that is absent. One thing this approach did was excuse scholars of their own absence from the rituals about which they wrote. As long as the value of a ritual resides in the meaning it signifies, a scholar can assess the ritual’s value through someone else’s written description. Durkheim could *literally* read a ritual and tease out the meanings in Aboriginal totemism without visiting Australia. Similarly, Eliade could interpret shamanism without interacting with any shamans in Siberia, Belize or Arizona.

There were alternatives. Some early attention to ritual minded the value of bodies, *per se*. Talal Asad has pointed out that, in the 1930s, Durkheim’s nephew Marcel Mauss set concern for beliefs aside in favour of attention to ‘the mode in which the living human body, as a thing, exists, acts, and is acted upon’ (2012, 42). In what he called *technique*, Mauss identified actions that do not merely signify, but that are ‘simultaneously real, physically effective gestures’ (2009, 76). Mauss’s interest in action anticipated attention to what ritual *does* and the trend of the later twentieth century to set belief and meaning to the side, so as ‘to let the activities under scrutiny have ontological and analytic priority’ (Bell 1998, 211).

The interest in ritual action has made ritual study much more interdisciplinary, with an emphasis on anthropological field work and ethnographic labour. The interest in bodies and action has also drawn ritual studies alongside disciplines like cognitive studies and performance studies, effectively reversing Durkheim’s premise that ritual serves beliefs. Often, it seems, ritual action informs the ‘states of opinion’ that constitute beliefs, not symbolically indicating a *meaning* that is apart from the action, but creating *value* that is indissoluble

from the action. The way in which action—especially the structured and stylised action of ritual—shapes embodied identities can form beliefs, worldviews and self-concepts. Rituals can be seen to transmit and transform, working to conserve tradition in the individual identities that it refashions for its purposes. The mechanisms through which rituals thus function involve the intervention of intentional action in the circulation of perception and self-consciousness through a particular individual's body. A performative theory of ritual does not concern how to understand *reality*, as such, so much as it concerns how to understand processes by which the body in ritual shapes itself, and, consequently, the manner in which the body-brain can manipulate and transform the portions of reality that a body *can* experience as reality. The following essay summarises performance and ritual theory on which this performative theory of ritual rests, particularly the characterisation, via Roy Rappaport, of ritual action as creative, *per se*, and Merleau-Ponty's theory of perception. I then offer a mid-nineteenth-century Mormon temple ritual as a case study in which some creative features of ritual are evident.

The late twentieth-century notions of *performance* that emerged from J.L. Austin's theory of effectiveness in a *speech act*, and which are now crucial to performance studies, characterised some action as 'performative,' suggesting that they actually change things, as opposed to symbolically indicate things.¹ Building on Austin's *performativity*, ritual theory now wields two understandings of *performance* that are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but that are certainly different. On the one hand is the kind of *performance* that Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw identify in *performance-centred* ritual, involving dramatisation—mimetic and, often, narrative—in which belief in what is being dramatised is important. Humphrey and Laidlaw describe this kind of activity as 'weakly ritualized' (2004, 8).² We could also call this kind of ritual activity *weakly performed*.

On the other hand, we might call Humphrey and Laidlaw's *liturgy-centred* ritual—the kind of ritual for which correct form is paramount—*strongly performed*. Relying on Austin, anthropologist Roy Rappaport argued in the 1970s that the customary invariability that we find in *liturgy-centred* ritual not only creates the category of sacredness that Durkheim placed prior to ritual, but it also transforms everything involved in it—including the human agents. Perhaps ritual *especially* transforms human agents, since 'the use of the body defines the self of the performer for himself and for others' (1996, 436). Rappaport then describes, anecdotally, a ritual act with a *strongly performed* quality:

In kneeling, for instance, [the ritual agent] is not merely sending a message to the effect that he submits in ephemeral words that flutter away from his mouth. He identifies his inseparable, indispensable, and enduring body with his subordination. The subordinated self is neither a creature of insubstantial words from which he may separate himself without loss of blood, nor some insubstantial essence or soul that cannot be located in space or confined in time. It is his visible, present, living substance that he 'puts on the line,' that 'stands up (or kneels down) to be counted.' As 'saying' may be 'doing,' 'doing' may also be an especially powerful—or substantial—way of 'saying.'

(1996, 436)

The mimetic quality of the action—the *weakly performed* aspect of the rite—merely reiterates or signifies concepts of deference and authority. The *weakly performed* aspect of this ritual act is that it *means* subordination. The *strongly performed* aspect of the ritual resides in the blending of the agent's visible, present, living substance with tradition in the doing of the act. Among other things, the *strongly performed* quality of ritual kneeling transforms the kneeling agent

into something much more than a *meaning*. In kneeling, the kneeler becomes a device of the ritual, personally, bodily transmitting in each instance of the act the cultural structure of authority and subordination that the *weakly performed* qualities of the rite only *mean*. Strongly performed, ritual is an extraordinarily powerful transmitter of culture.

Rappaport insinuates that doing ritual kneeling operates, somehow, on the identity, the self, of the kneeler (and, indeed, on the selves of all present), but without a material theory of ritual action, we remain in the realm of symbolic meaning or social function. Austin's *performative utterances* and *illocutionary acts*, as evocative as they are, rely on symbolic formulae whereby some actions have effective power on account of the conventions and traditions they cite, indicatively. By the 1970s, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology of perception, reflections on habit and skill, and concept of personal identity as necessarily wrapped up in consciousness had nudged the concern for *speech acts* in ritual toward a consideration of ritual, *per se*, as a matter of embodiment, aesthetics, reflexivity, etc., providing a way of understanding how the kneeling itself, in Rappaport's example, affects the self and the reality of which the self is a part.³ (For more discussion of phenomenology and cognitive science, see Chapter 18)

Merleau-Ponty (2004, 139) characterised perception as 'communion.' A person cannot come to know an external object *as* an external object, but only as a thing that physical sensation has made available, more or less *internally*. Rather than an object, *per se*, which necessarily exceeds the competence of perception, physical sense offers an individual a selection of an object's qualities, a *reduction* of an object, to a phenomenon that is part of the individual's experienced sensations. Every sensation, then, incorporates (i.e., integrates as a physically constituent part of the human body) some object, drawing the object from an external reality into a person's experience of self that is indistinguishable from the internal consciousness that grounds personal identity. One consequence of the limited interface between a person's self and reality—as senses provide it—is that every perceptual encounter results in a modification of the body (Merleau-Ponty 2004, 144).⁴ Because the body provides for selfhood, such modifications have implications for personal identity. We compose ourselves of what we sense, in a way that is not merely analogous to 'you are what you eat.'

Art, for example, shows us that people can manipulate the qualities of an object that sense can make available to a person, and, thus, manipulate the ever-developing sense of self held by a person who internalises the object via perception. Manipulation of this sort can be active in time and space, in the form of dance, for instance, in which one object that is available to sense is another person's equally sensible body. In Merleau-Ponty's view, a person's *perception* of a dancer, in the action of dancing, constitutes a communion whereby the observer internalises the qualities of the dancer that are available to sense—including such things as rhythm, and even things that are not clearly material, such as the dancer's *intention*, to the extent that intention appears in the narrative arc of a leap, and might also manifest in grace, style, verve, and so forth. The perceiving person, here, incorporates the dancer, becoming a new self of which the dancer in motion is a constitutive part.

Ritual, similarly, manipulates perception, reducing, organising, and channeling reality into specific perceptual phenomena. The participant in a ritual confronts a field of objects selected out of reality, arranged and modulated. In perceiving that field of objects, the participant internalises and incorporates them and the organised field of which they are constituent parts. In distinction from the conventional mode of watching dance, the ritual participant's mode of *participating* in the ritual amplifies the effects of perception. Following Merleau-Ponty, ethnologist Edward Schieffelin noted in the 1980s that a person incorporates an action to the extent that the person's embodiment of an action achieves a level of skill, of

ease. Habit is partly identified by how little a person must attend to it to do it. In this case, less distinction between self and act remains. A person's Heideggerian *being* can be constituted by acting, and can be conflated with the world that the act makes possible 'in the mode of participation' (Schieffelin 1985, 619). But ritual tends to attend to everything, or, at least, to modulate and manipulate all its mundane action so as to demand attention to it. The ritual participant perceives the ritual's field of objects, the other participants who act in the ritual and the ritual's peculiar action. The ritual participant also *interacts*, physically and sensibly, with those objects and with those other participants, and that interaction is often so alienated by the ritual that the participants must attend to their own action and sense their own bodies as objects in the ritual, which results in a reincorporation of themselves as ritual agents *in* themselves. Ritual systems, thus, involve circulations of perception and action from which a participant is not distinct, and, therefore, by which a participant changes.

The way in which perception and ritual participation construct and reconstruct the identity of an individual can have a radically ontological result, such as what anthropologist Jon P. Mitchell has characterised as a 'transformation of the existential grounds of selfhood' (2009, 56).⁵ In the case of Rappaport's hypothetical kneeler, ritual brings into material fact an individual's subordination. The stylised (ritualised) action draws the kneeler's attention to the sensation of his body as a kneeling object, alienating the kneeler's body, and reincorporating it through reflective perception in a way that reconstructs the self that kneels as a kneeling thing. Ritual *does* what it *is*.

Insofar as ritual tends to be a collective, communal enterprise, the performative transformations can also be communal. Merleau-Ponty's philosophical rationalisation of perception has a neurobiological correlate in the human brain's 'mirror neurons' (2015, 39), which facilitate 'motor attunement' in higher mammals (40). The mechanism, as Bruce McConachie summarises it, operates, thus:

If a spectator watches an aerialist take a step on a high wire or sees a hockey player flick the puck toward the stick of a teammate, for example, the same group of neurons in the empathizer's brain is activated as in the player's brain; neurologically, it is almost as if the observer had taken the step or flicked the puck himself. By working through our perceptions, bodies, and minds, our networks of mirror neurons unconsciously attune us to each other.

(2015, 121)

The way that mirror neurons might provide a foundation for empathy, as McConachie suggests, is beyond the scope of this essay.⁶ Most important, here, is that mirror neurons seem to respond exclusively to *action*, and, for that matter, they seem to respond exclusively to action that reveals some intentional agency. In whatever ways that mirroring combines with other structures and processes, and to whatever complex psychological ends, the fundamental operation of the mirror neuron systems produces in a subject's body the activity in which the perceived other is engaged, along with the physical sense of the perceived other's self-defining agency.⁷ The consequence can be understood as a genuinely material intersubjectivity. Which is to say that evolution has given people, it seems, a neurological mechanism by which perception – in this case, primarily, sight – facilitates the Merleau-Pontian incorporation of other people in a way that is not simply analogical or metaphorical. The subject embodies both the other's action and the other's intent, such that the subject inhabits a new ontological status, a new self, combining both subject and other. As neuroscientist Vittorio Gallese would have it, mirror neurons facilitate a 'literal' embodiment of what can

be perceived in others (2009, 524). Where ritual is concerned, people engage in deliberately stylised, often repetitive, often mimetic and often collective action, which is fraught with agency, such that participants seem necessarily bound to influence and change each other at a sensorimotor level. There seems no reason not to describe this neurological process as an always ongoing transformation of the self, if not *into* another's body, then, at least, as a consequence of contact *with and under the influence of* another's body.

It also appears that mirror neurons provide a neurological ground for the kind of distributed agency that William Sax identifies in ritual (2009). Given the ways in which mirror neuron systems join the acts and intents of people, ritual can have a teleological purport that does not issue from a particular individual, but coalesces in a collective (Sax 2008, 478). We can hypothesise that the ritual action effects in participants, a mirroring attitude that approximates a sharing of intention and action through a group. In Rappaport's hypothetical case, those who observe the action of the kneeling incorporate the kneeler's action and partake of the kneeling experience. How participants understand and express the kneeling that mirrors in them will be contingent on what is made possible for each participant in the particular cultural complex that the kneeling, inevitably, affirms.

Ritual, then, persists as an especially robust means of transmitting culture. Ritual participants often do not so much *learn* culture in the form of beliefs as much as they *become* culture and its transmission to the next generation. Pierre Bourdieu insisted that the performative consequence of ritual not only does not depend on beliefs, but can shape and even create the beliefs on which ideologies are founded.⁸ Indeed, in its direct operation on physical bodies, ritual conserves culture across generations in a way that can be so effective that it can be oppressive. Bourdieu argued that rituals such as initiations—which he preferred to call *rites d'institution*—preserve authority in a society by embedding the function of that authority in the very self-experienced identities of initiates.⁹ By incorporating others' action and intention, the ritual participant comes to be, personally, the physical function of authority and the vehicle by which that authority asserts its exclusivity and reproduces itself, through time.

Case study: Mormon temple ritual in 1846

Ritual's capacity to transmit and transform can be seen in the temple rituals of the mid-nineteenth-century Mormon community, based in Nauvoo, Illinois. These ceremonies were distinct in some important ways. First, for some years, these rites were open to only a handful of people, though scores of members of the community laboured on the temple building in Nauvoo, Illinois. Consequently, through the early 1840s, the Nauvoo rites accrued a certain mystique within the Mormon population. Second, the rites not only opened up to the larger community late in 1845, but became suddenly obligatory for most of the population of thousands. Third, the attempt to accommodate the new interest of thousands in satisfying a ritual obligation ran just ahead of what the community perceived as a necessary mass evacuation of the city they'd built around the temple, and an emigration, altogether, from the United States. In this context, the Mormons' Nauvoo Temple rituals operated as the process by which members of the community performed their *bona fides*. The rites expressed individuals' commitment to a community that faced dire calamity, and the rites also worked to inscribe a new, communal identity on individuals. Through

cognitive mechanisms, the Nauvoo ritual fashioned new identities for its participants that were composed of, and which affirmed, the unique qualities of the community. The effectiveness of the Nauvoo rites in transforming Mormon identity played a not insignificant role in the event of more than 10,000 people crossing the Mississippi to accept homelessness in the dead of winter. One of every ten of them would die during the following year.

In February 1846, Increase Van Deusen went into the Mormon temple in Nauvoo, Illinois, to receive, he was told, a 'reward' for faithful service in helping to build the unusual building (1847, 3). Van Deusen was among the last of the several thousand Illinois Mormons to pass through this temple ritual between December 1845, and February 1846, when the evacuation of Nauvoo began. Van Deusen participated in what had developed from a decade of Mormon experiments with temple rituals, involving washing and anointing ceremonies cribbed from the first books of the Bible, to which had been added a pageant that dramatised the Bible narrative of creation, Eden and The Fall. To this complex, ritual gestures and oaths borrowed liberally from Masonic rites were attached. Van Deusen was among the smaller portion of the community who did not follow Brigham Young to the Rocky Mountains, and who became quickly estranged from Mormonism as they had known it under Young's murdered predecessor, Joseph Smith. Since one premise of the rites was secrecy, historians have relied on those who ultimately rejected the community under Young's leadership for full descriptions of the ritual. Among the few of these accounts from the period, Van Deusen's seems to be the most at pains to describe the components of the rite, accurately (though not shying from opportunities to excoriate Young). In 13 pages, tightly packed with nineteenth-century type, Van Deusen describes 'The Drama,' as he calls it, that gave roles in its narrative to all initiates, so that they found themselves not viewing a dramatisation of Bible stories, but personally acting out the stories in the roles of Adam and Eve.

Van Deusen and his wife presented themselves at the temple early in the morning, on account of little more than an invitation, and with no more indication of what to expect than the charge to bring along their 'night clothes' (4). Directed to the attic storey of the building, husband and wife went into separate rooms. Increase Van Deusen then recounts being laid out horizontally in a tub, washed, anointed liberally with scented oil and dressed in simple but distinctly ceremonial attire, so that he proceeded through the remainder of the event in a tight, cotton undergarment, the markings of which, he was told, signified devotion and protection. During these initial rites, he was also ordained to be a king (15). The officiators then led him to another room where he followed directions to lie down on the floor. From his place on the floor, he heard a 'rumbling noise' and a voice declaring, 'Let the light be divided from the darkness.' Van Deusen himself understood the purport of this recitation not merely as a reading of scripture, but as a representational performance, '*as if* the Almighty himself is first in the act of creation' (7).¹⁰ The dramatic recitation proceeded through the remaining stages of creation, as more or less dictated by Genesis, and then coalesced around Van Deusen himself. An individual in the role of God entered the room and mimed the formation of Adam from the earth, by patting the floor, and then Van Deusen's body, in turn. After having been awoken as Adam, and then returned to sleep, Van Deusen was reunited with his wife, who entered the ceremony as Eve. Van Deusen was fed the

lines he was to speak in the drama, including, on the appearance of his wife as Eve, ‘This is bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh’ (8). As Adam and Eve, the two went to yet another room made up, to remarkable effect, as Eden (8).

The couple then acted the roles of Adam and Eve, interacting with others who played the roles of God and the devil. The ceremony called on the pair to eat the forbidden fruit (in the form of raisins tied to a tree), to play the discovery of their nakedness and to speak their parts of the biblical script (i.e., ‘She gave me of the tree and I did eat’). In accord with genesis, the officiator playing the devil returned to the ceremony to be cursed, and then departed by crawling out of the room, ‘on his belly, dragging himself slowly along’ (9). The rite then expelled Adam and Eve from Eden, which sent the Van Deusens into a fifth room, representing ‘the world,’ where they encountered the devil again, bombastically encouraging them to be falsely religious. Eventually, God again appeared here to dispatch His nemesis, after which Increase and Maria Van Deussen were guided through a series of oaths accompanied by Masonic gestures and hand-clasps, at which point additional ceremonial items were added to their costumes (including a robe and a cap). The sixth room into which they were led represented, they were told, ‘the Millennial [sic] Morning.’ Here, as the culmination of the rite, the Van Deusens knelt at an altar to take ritual oaths to become forever enemies of the United States and not to reveal any element of the temple ritual through which they had just passed (12–13). Van Deussen was then led through a ritual conversation with an officiator behind a screen. By repeating the appropriate responses to questions and by demonstrating that he had learnt a series of ritual gestures, Van Deussen found himself admitted to the seventh and final room, as though entering ‘the kingdom’ (15). There was no formal activity here. Instead, the room was crowded with individuals all dressed identically in the white robes of the ceremony, who were then instructed that the ‘the laws of the land are no more binding on us’ (15). Van Deussen left the temple still wearing the cotton underclothing that he had assumed as part of the ritual, along with the charge ‘always to wear this garment under [his] clothes, while [he was] in the world’ (6).

Although the source of this account directly separated himself from the community – and, thus, seems not to have been affected in the way the rite intended – others who would not report on the rite in deference to their secrecy vows reveal some experience of the ceremony as transformative. Norton Jacob described his passage with his wife through the rite in December 1845, as ‘the most interesting scene of all my life and one that afforded the most peace and joy that we had ever experienced since we were married, which has been over fifteen years’ (Buerger 2002, 79). Samuel Richards reports feeling ‘lost to myself’ in the Nauvoo temple, and seeing ‘the earth reel to and fro, and [it] was moved out of its place’ (Anderson 2011, 5). Wilford Woodruff, who, in his capacity as the president of the LDS Church decades later, would bring an end to LDS–Mormon polygamy, felt a ‘connection’ to the gestures and signs of the Nauvoo ritual ‘as to the blessings of God’ (Anderson 2011, 8). Jacob and Woodruff were both among the first group of 100 Mormons to enter the Salt Lake Valley in 1847. During the emigration to Utah, Richards was evangelising for the faith in Great Britain.

Where the rite effected such transformations, we can see physical interactivity operating on the participants’ experience of self, shaping and transforming it into something collective, and also as constituted by elements of the rite. As witnesses

to each other's participation in the ritual, the collected participants perceptively incorporated each other. Through basic processes of neurological mirroring, the acts and intents of Masonic gestures and postures of worship shared an agency throughout the performing and perceiving bodies. For one thing, the ritual was rather dense with points of direct physical contact between participants, which provided for particularly Merleau-Pontian intersubjectivity. As Van Deussen reports it, for example, the Nauvoo ritual involved a number of Masonic hand-clasps, or what Van Deussen calls 'grips,' performed interactively with a ritual officiator (Van Deussen 1847, 10). Van Deussen makes no attempt to interpret the meanings of these grips. In the ritual context, the meaning is not so important as the action, which, in this case, imposed direct perception of an other, sensed as a deliberate agent pursuing the intention of the ritual, in concert with the reflective perception of the self, acting similarly as an agent of the ritual. A participant such as Van Deussen could not escape perceiving the officiator's hand in the grip, his own hand in the grip, himself as an agent that has deliberately cooperated to form the grip, the officiator completing the grip and perceiving the participant as a feature of the grip, and so on. What I have called above the circulation of perception and action involves Van Deussen's consciousness of his hand, the actual position and shape of his actual hand, in contact with another hand, in an actual space and in a moment of time in which his body in that space and time was embedded, and in which it was available to his own conscious perception.¹¹ This circulation evokes Merleau-Ponty's doctrine of communion via perception: in addition to perceiving and in-corporating the other with whom he shared the ritual grip, the Nauvoo initiate necessarily perceived himself as a participant without whom the action of the ritual could not occur. The initiate experiences ritual action as expressive of his own identity, reciprocally comprising other participants and the action itself.

I would add that role-playing, as seen explicitly in the Nauvoo rite, also contributes significantly to ritual's substantive transformation of bodies and selves. Role-playing often enters into ritual's perceptual loop as a participant's experience of the ritual comes to include the reflective perception of the participant's own embodiment of a role from sacred lore and its narrative trajectory. Nauvoo ritual participants not only in-corporated and embodied each other and the action of the rite but also in-corporated Judeo-Christian roles. The Adam 'role,' in this case, existed prior to the ritual in a common religio-literary tradition, bearing both a cultural significance and an already-accomplished narrative. The Adam role, here, and all that Adam's story entails, became, by perceptual in-corporation, a part of the participant's own identity, lending the self a teleology according with the goals of the group.¹²

A final point. What the body recognises as a self, as Bruce Wilshire argues in *Role Playing and Identity*, emerges from the way in which the body's action reiterates the action of others and appropriates that action for itself through reflection on its own reiteration of the ways in which others perceive it.¹³ This complex is always in operation, always shifting, ever renewing, so that the self – as Kierkegaard and others have intuited – is never being but only becoming. Acting the role of Adam – reciting Adam's lines and eating Adam's raisins, as the Nauvoo initiates did—brought an initiate into a field in which his action deliberately reiterated the action of others. The initiate's body perceived its own action as the self-referential activity of the temple and also as a reiteration of that activity. As evident in the self-conscious description

he provides, Van Deusen's ritual role-play approached a reflective consciousness of his body as the mimetic mechanism that the rite's officiators and his predecessors in the rite expected. Van Deusen's ritual performance can be read, thus, as a strong move towards a new *habitus*, the lived, embodied character of this community, which was, at this moment, so desperate to separate itself from the United States.

Consider Rappaport's kneeling subject, again, in comparison with the Nauvoo ritual. Where 'subordination' might be a *meaning*, signified by the body's ritual act, the body can also be understood to *perform* subordination. The body's act creates the subordination that it signifies, and in a manner that participants experience sensibly, as a facet of reality. In the place of subordination, the Nauvoo rite employed bodies in acts of *insubordination*, not merely signifying, but *creating* treason, in reality, in the act of kneeling and swearing enmity against the state. The kneeling in this case also performed submission to the community, of course. In coordination with other such curated acts as ordination to kingship, kneeling, here, embedded an antipathy to the United States and a commitment to the triumph of the clan in an identity shared by thousands. For a genuinely embattled group, the rite created privilege, experienced as privilege, in affirmation of a divine will for the group's survival.

Although the man who documented the 1846 Nauvoo ritual did not leave the United States and disavowed the movement shortly after its mass emigration, thousands of Van Deusen's peers did throw themselves into a miserable, deadly Iowa winter, a plague of disease and malnutrition over the succeeding year and then a 1,000-mile trek to an unknown and unidentified homeland. The Mormons continued to perform parts of the Nauvoo rite in their temporary Iowa settlements, and even in the migration on the Midwest plains. The Nauvoo ritual continually regenerated a common teleological purport, an agency, and transmitted that agency throughout the community in the Mormons' own bodies. Intuiting that the Nauvoo temple rites were 'the cord which has bound this people together' (Buerger 2002, 75), one of the first things Brigham Young did upon arrival in the Great Salt Lake Valley in 1847 was designate a spot for the construction of a new temple, the model of which, lying abandoned in Illinois, not only lived large in the Mormons' imagination, but remained embedded in their bodies (Mason 2014, 72). Such effectively transformative rituals—those that are strongly-performed—do not succeed on account of meaning, even if meaning is important. Transformative rites work self-referential action as a tool on the very self-hood of participants, transforming them into intersubjective agents of the ritual itself, and, consequently, of the collective identity of the performing community. The ritual initiate becomes, then, the living transmission of that collective identity, that *culture*, to the next generation.

Notes

- 1 Austin's *speech act* does not come out of a vacuum. The ways in which Hans Vaihinger and Alexius Meinong wrestled with the paradox of fiction in the late nineteenth century, as well as ideas developed by Husserl, Brentano, Wittgenstein and Kenneth Burke earlier in the twentieth century, anticipated Austin.
- 2 Humphrey and Laidlaw attribute the term *performance-centred* ritual to Jane Atkinson.
- 3 In addition to Rappaport, important figures in the development of 'performative' theories of ritual include Stanley Tambiah, Bruce Kapferer, Jonathan Z. Smith and Edward Schieffelin.

- 4 For a summary of approaches to the ‘paradox of human subjectivity,’ denoting the problem of embodied self-perception, see Dorothée Legrand (2014).
- 5 Mitchell concurs that the ‘heightened reflection’ in ritual ‘reconstitutes selfhood’ through an incorporation of other ritual agents.
- 6 McConachie cites Evan Thompson’s argument that empathy emerges from a multi-stage process, at the beginning of which is the activation of mirror neurons (2007, 121).
- 7 What I have called, here, ‘self-defining agency’ can be correlated with “intention” as understood by Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw (2004, 92–93). Their analysis of Jain ritual leads them to conclude that, whereas an agent’s intention to extend a greeting informs and constitutes the act of waving, what distinguishes ritual is that the intention of ritual action is primarily the action itself, as itself, without additional signification.
- 8 ‘The habitus is the universalizing mediation which causes an individual agent’s practices, without either explicit reason or signifying intent, to be none the less “sensible” and “reasonable”’ (Bourdieu 2005, 79).
- 9 Bourdieu understands *belief* as ‘socially fashioned dispositions’ to recognise validity – an inclination that social practice imposes on the body *to defer in this situation in the manner that feels appropriate*, rather than propositionally stated ideas such as *this person deserves my loyalty*. The ritual inclination that the body inherits (re)produces a field in which the propositional belief works (Bourdieu 1991, 125).
- 10 Emphasis mine.
- 11 This circulation-perception loop echoes what performance theorist Erika Fischer-Lichte calls an ‘autopoietic feedback loop’ that arises in the interaction of performers and audiences (2008, 55). Fischer-Lichte borrows her term from Humbert R. Maturana and Francisco J. Varela (1980), where autopoiesis is the distinct feature whereby living systems, as opposed to non-living systems, change in response to environment. In recent work, Bruce McConachie acknowledges autopoiesis as a workable metaphor for the circulation of sense, intentions and understanding (2015, 141).
- 12 I am applying to performance, here, the ‘role-theory of religious experience’ developed by psychologist Hjalmar Sundén et al. See Källsted (1987).
- 13 A conscious self comes into being ‘when it can experience objects or persons which are in fact other than itself—but with whom it is mimetically involved—and then can reproduce them as other in their absence.... The body must be able, to some extent, to appropriate as its own its mimetic reproduction of them’ (Wilshire 1991, 152).

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