

Corporeality as a Key to the Assessment of the Dynamics of Ritualization¹

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1. Introduction

In our article we shall inquire into the special quality which has the ability to transform non-ritual action into ritual action – ritualization. Borrowing concepts and terminology from the complex theory of James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey, we are going to demonstrate that non-ritual action – once transformed by ritualization – becomes ‘deliberately non-intentional’. At the same time, we are going to show that even though Humphrey and Laidlaw’s theory provides a firm terminological frame, it is mistaken in the conclusion that ritualization is limited solely to the context of established rituals and that rituals themselves are phenomena primarily static, subject to little or no change. In our subsequent argumentation we shall build on the method of Ronald L. Grimes and within the frame of his discourse we will try to show that ritualization, as the dynamic quality of both emerging and established rituals, is sustained by the ritualists’ corporeality and that it is only by bodily comprehending the physical value of ritual action that we can study the foundations of rituals themselves. We will try to demonstrate that it is possible to develop a certain ‘sensitivity’ to ritualization in its many forms through physical training of a special type and explain in what way this training applies to the concept of ‘deliberate non-intentionality’ characteristic of ritualization. This will be done through an account of a teaching technique called dialogical performance, which was founded in the year 1968 by professor Ivan Vyskočil and which is practiced today at the Theatre Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (the Czech Republic). We shall argue that developing such sensitivity to bodily expressions should form an integral part of training for those scholars who wish to investigate rituals in the field.

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2. James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey and static ritualization

It has been some time now that James Laidlaw and Caroline Humphrey have managed to convincingly show that ritual action is in one way or another different from non-ritual action.² This quality, which has got the ability to distinguish ritual from non-ritual action, shall be called ritualization. According to Humphrey and Laidlaw the emergence of ritualization is conditioned by a special mental state of the ritualists (those engaging in rituals),³ which they call the ‘ritual stance (commitment)’. Its basic characteristic is that it is ‘non-intentional’. What do they mean by this?

Let us imagine human action as a continuous flow of activity. In order for our mind to somehow grasp this flow we must split it into discrete parts and subsequently relate these to one another. The ‘units’ of activity are constituted by gestures or sequences of gestures. From the situational context we can infer the intention of these gestures. In case of non-ritual actions the knowledge of the intention with which an action is done helps us to specify the identity of the action itself. Let us imagine the following situation: we see person A, whom we do not know, get into a car and drive away. At the same time we see person B, whom we also do not know, get into our car and drive away. If we were to answer the question ‘What are people A and B doing?’, based on the situational context, we would probably answer: ‘Person A is driving away in a car whereas person B is stealing the car’. Based on the information we have, we can assess that their intentions (why they are doing this) were different (to use one’s own car, to steal someone else’s – mine). Having the knowledge of the two different intentions we assign the same action (departure in a car) two different identities (driving away, stealing).⁴

Now let us imagine a standard Roman Catholic mass. You, as an anthropologist, set out to get information about the situational context of the ritual and asked two different people standing in line for the Holy Communion for the reason of their attendance, i.e. their intention. Person A: ‘I don’t know, but I do it every Sunday all my life’. Person B: ‘Because I want to deepen my connection with God’. I dare say that these two intentions can be considered comparably different (to engage in a habitual activity, to achieve an experience of divine presence). Nevertheless, in this case if we were asked to give a description of the action of these two Roman Catholics, we would have to say ‘Both person A and B are attending the Holy Communion’ regardless of their diverging intentions. Even though they are attending the ritual willingly (they did not have to

² C. HUMPHREY & J. LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions of ritual* (Oxford 1994).

³ We prefer the term ‘ritualists’ used by Ronald L. Grimes over the term ‘actors’ used by Humphrey and Laidlaw since the latter evokes an idea of a person who behaves in a way that is not genuine or in some way artificial.

⁴ HUMPHREY & LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions* 89.

go), their intention is no longer constitutive for determining the identity of their ritual action and therefore becomes 'non-intentional'. To quote Humphrey and Laidlaw:

Under ritualization the relation which normally exists between intention and act is transformed. We should make clear, however, that this transformation is itself a result of a deliberate act: the adoption of a ritual stance. It may seem to be a paradox, but it is the result of the actor having adopted this stance that ritual acts are non-intentional.⁵

In other words, it is not important why people enact rituals, but the fact that they do. Adopting the ritual stance is solely a mental process of reclassification. Nevertheless, from this observation we may infer another characteristic: separate steps of the actions modified by ritualization (i.e. rituals) are not connected by a logical chain of action and reaction but are grounded in rules which found the ontology of ritual action. Tradition sets what follows what (which does not mean that the sequence is unalterable). People acting ritually then strive to enact a pre-existent ritual act. To the ritualists themselves their actions appear to be somehow 'external' and not of their making. In this sense does Humphrey and Laidlaw speak about ritual actions being 'elementary' or 'archetypal' functioning as entities in their own right with their own separate history. Nevertheless, ritual enactment is 'prescribed' in a slightly different way than other aspects of human action, such as games, coronation ceremonies, or, to some extent, even fighting etc. Ritual not only prescribes how to act but also sets the identity of the action, i.e. how to interpret it. In ritual action the ritualist has willingly agreed to give up this intention – it is therefore necessary to tell the ritualist not only what to do but also what (s)he wants to achieve. That is why ritual action appears, from one point of view, to be something external and given.⁶

By accepting the ritual stance, the individual willingly agrees not to be the author of his/her own acts.⁷ Nevertheless, here we reach a valid paradox intrinsic to this argumentation: even though during ritual enactment we give up on deciding on the intentions of our acts, in the end it is again us who do these acts (I do not have to attend). We willingly give up what we could call the 'intentional supremacy' of the actor. Here lies the biggest difference between non-intentional ritual action and non-intentional action such as obsessions, urges and tics. With these we have no choice but to do them, they are mostly unconscious. In ritual action intentionality stays but is transformed through ritualization and becomes 'deliberately non-intentional'. In ritual we are and are not at the same time the authors of our own actions.⁸

⁵ HUMPHREY & LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions* 94.

⁶ HUMPHREY & LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions* 96.

⁷ HUMPHREY & LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions* 98.

⁸ HUMPHREY & LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions* 99.

As we have seen, for ritualization to occur it is necessary to adopt the ritual stance. Ritual stance is physically demonstrated by something which Humphrey and Laidlaw have called 'boundary-marking acts'. These acts function as a clear yes or no signal by which an individual informs his surroundings that right now (s)he has entered the ritual space and is adopting the ritual stance.⁹ These acts can have the form of kneeling or prostrating oneself on a certain place, doing specific movements etc. Humphrey and Laidlaw conclude that these boundary-marking acts are taken up by an individual only within the realm of a certain ritual tradition, that they are taught just as other social constructs. This presumption brings them to two important conclusions: (1) adopting the ritual stance is possible only within the framework of an already existing ritual tradition; (2) new rituals, if ever they emerge, will always be only modifications of the previously established ritual forms.

For Humphrey and Laidlaw ritualization is a static phenomenon connected solely to the context provided by existing rituals. With this concept, unfortunately, we are unable to explain the need of ritual traditions to change and modify their rituals, nor the fact that rituals die and others emerge. It is obvious that ritualization has a dynamic quality of its own which Humphrey and Laidlaw omit. The question now is what mediates the dynamic aspect of rituals.

We are persuaded that the method of Ronald L. Grimes gives an answer to this question. As opposed to Humphrey and Laidlaw, Grimes claims that ritualization is not a state but a process which (a) can emerge and does emerge even outside the realm of the already existing rituals and which (b) is created by the ritualists themselves and mediated by their body and through its expressions (i.e. corporeality).

Grimes correctly realizes that we need to start searching for ritualization where Humphrey and Laidlaw have left off or were afraid to go – in the corporeality of ritualists. Why corporeality? Let us explain this on a simple example. At the entrance to an unspecified sacred precinct, ritualists perform different things. Some bow, some prostrate themselves, some do not do any visible movements, etc. Humphrey and Laidlaw would classify all these different bodily expressions as one category – as boundary marking acts by which the ritualists have given a signal to their surroundings (and themselves) that they are adopting the ritual stance. For Humphrey and Laidlaw the crucial fact is that these acts happen and they would, no doubt, consider these different bodily expressions as only different forms of 'saying' the same thing: 'Right now I am engaging in ritual action'. Grimes, on the other hand, would definitely disagree and would emphasize the aspect of innovation which people incorporate into their actions once they start physically expressing themselves. He would be interested in how these acts happen. It is precisely these details (i.e. how people physically behave) which represent the dynamic aspect of personal innovation within an outwardly fixed ritual order. Ritualists sit or stand in a certain place,

⁹ HUMPHREY & LAIDLAW: *The archetypal actions* 105.

they do certain things and decide to avoid doing other. They are annoyed by their neighbors, they are glad to see them or they just do not care at all; they are bored and yawn or they get excited and enthusiastically wave their arms; they scratch, fart, sleep, shout, or sit in a pose of quiet expectation and concentration. The same counts for those who preside the ritual action. They move in a certain way, they make mistakes, they use different tones of voice in different ritual sequences etc. All these forms of physical expression somehow mold the ritual enactment and at the same time they are being molded by the more or less fixed ritual framework. The fact is, once people stop attending a certain ritual, once they stop investing their corporeality, the ritual diminishes and dies. Even though this still does not convincingly prove that the dynamics of ritualization are mediated by the corporeality of the ritualists, it clearly shows that the body forms an integral part of ritual action. We can now claim that ritualization is not a process bound to the dominion of the mind and ending in a static mental state (ritual stance) as Humphrey and Laidlaw would like to see it. We may not leave the body out of ritual action (as many theories of ritual do) or reduce it to a mere indicator of the ritualists' mental processes (there can be lie and deceit in physical actions just as in speech).¹⁰

Once we realize the important position which our body and its expressions (i.e. corporeality) hold in ritual action, there is no need to state, as Humphrey and Laidlaw do, that ritualization occurs only within the framework of existing rituals and that it is bound to ritual action. Since we willfully carry our body with us all the time (or our body carries our will?), it seems logical to say that ritualization can spring up even outside the sphere of rituals. In fact, there is only a very small number of gestures or physical expressions in ritual (if there are any at all) which are not paralleled in a non-ritual context; therefore, it seems reasonable to say that there is only a very small number of situations in our daily life (if there are any at all) which may not become ritualized.

Even though we are persuaded that Humphrey and Laidlaw have 'disembodied' ritual science, it would be shortsighted to discard their theory in its entirety. After all, it is, indeed, a magnificent construct which, on the level of our inquiring minds, gives us a very needful insight into the mechanisms of ritualization. Nevertheless, it does not work for itself. We are missing the body and Ronald L. Grimes' method brings back the inquiring mind and 'embodies' it again. What connects the two diametrically opposing views is the concept of 'desired non-intentionality'. Even though Grimes has never used this term, what he describes in his works is on the level of the body very similar to the concept which Humphrey and Laidlaw describe on the level of the mind (see above).

¹⁰ Compare with R.A. RAPPAPORT: *Ecology, meaning, and religion* (Berkeley 1979) 173-217 and 223-243.

3. Ronald L. Grimes and dynamic ritualization

If Humphrey and Laidlaw have tried to show that the important thing about rituals is not primarily why they happen but that they happen, Ronald L. Grimes goes further and shows that the important thing about rituals is primarily not the fact that they happen but how they happen. The 'how' is where the dynamics of rituals lie, the 'how' is where ritualization occurs. We can extend this 'how' into several questions which we are going to try and answer: 'How do ritualists use their body?'; 'How does the body relate to ritualization?'; 'How can we perceive ritualization?'; 'How can we detect ritualization in its emerging form?' and many others.

Many anthropologists have shown that especially those societies which do not ground their rituals in manuals or guidebooks rely heavily on certain individuals who have a more intensively developed feeling for the occurrence of ritualization; in other words, they have ritual sensitivity. In such societies, even though there are rituals which are enacted on a regular basis and which the people themselves consider to be 'the same ritual', the individual performances very often differ to a large extent. There are certain basic moments, characteristic to all performances, which are always present (and which make two performances 'the same ritual'); nevertheless, these constitutive parts are often connected in a very innovative manner. The ritual specialist, then, intently and with great ritual tact observes the performance and changes its course according to the needs of the moment, based on his/her ritual sensitivity (s)he has somehow acquired.¹¹ What is more important, these ritual specialists do not tell the ritualists what to think, that is irrelevant; they decide what to do. Their evaluation, criticism and solution always concerns the bodies, objects and space in which the ritual takes place. Maybe the offering should be placed somewhere else; at a certain point it would be reasonable to take the ritual outside or inside; now it seems most fitting to change the garments or maybe get undressed. These are the types of questions which trouble the specialist's mind – or, shall we say, the body? The ritual must 'feel' correct and we feel things in our body, in our fingers and toes, with our five senses, not with the forces of intellect.

It is precisely this type of ritual sensitivity which, according to Grimes, those who engage in observing or enacting rituals (anthropologists, liturgists, ritualists in general) should acquire. Grimes prefers using the term 'ritologist' for those students of ritual who are trying to develop (or have already managed to develop) this quality and are able to put it to use in what he calls a 'ritological style' of research. Let us pose another 'how' question: 'How do we achieve this

¹¹ It may happen that several of these ritual specialists are present at one time and may even start arguing as to how the ritual should proceed. Needless to say, the gathered ritualists take this as an integral part of the ritual and do not necessarily regard it as inappropriate. See for example V. TURNER: *Chibamba, the White Spirit: a ritual drama of the Ndembu* (Manchester 1962).

sensitivity?'. Grimes is quite specific in his description of the character this training should take:

(Studying living ritual processes) calls for bodily training as part of scholarly preparation and bodily risk as part of scholarly participation and observation. It rejects the 'Gnosticizing', or disembodiment, of scholarship. Furthermore, all the senses, not just seeing, must be developed for studying ritual.¹²

His demand for a strictly 'bodily' training to develop a sensitivity to 'bodily' expressions seems to be legitimate. And since ritualization, the dynamic and living stuff of rituals, is mediated by human corporeality, as we have shown above, by developing sensitivity to our body we develop sensitivity to ritualization. What is more problematic is how to connect this strictly physical training with the specific character of ritual action – its 'deliberate non-intentionality' – which Humphrey and Laidlaw have so skillfully shown to be the state of mind achieved through ritualization?

At this point we shall start connecting Grimes' method with Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory. Grimes states:

A scholar in the field should pursue a specific set of bodily, imaginative, and intellectual exercises for unlearning, for achieving the no-mind of a student, for not-doing. We learn by contrast. The would-be knower must practice ignorance and blindness if he or she would continue observing other people's actions;¹³

and

The goal of field study is to maximize the process of interaction, not to arrive at 'conclusions' (stoppages? blockages?) or make predictions. Ritological style is a mode of gift-giving and 'going with'.¹⁴

There are some very strange phrases in these descriptions such as 'achieving the no-mind of a student', 'practice ignorance and blindness', 'unlearn', 'not-doing', 'mode of gift-giving' and most importantly 'going with'. Grimes' descriptions might seem to be enigmatic or puzzling at first sight. Definitely not what we would expect in a 'decent' academic discourse. This enigmatic quality stems from the fact that Grimes is trying to put into words something which is best understood once we experience it physically; once we have 'done it'. Nevertheless, as we will show later on, these descriptions fit exactly the characteristics of the 'deliberate non-intentionality' of ritualization as Humphrey and Laidlaw

¹² R.L. GRIMES: *Beginnings in ritual studies* (Washington, DC 1982; rev. edition: Columbia, SC 1995) 14.

¹³ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14 [italics ours].

¹⁴ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14 [italics ours].

have defined it (see above) but this time on the level where ritualization actually takes place: in the body.

Grimes has developed a method enabling us to practice sensitivity to the bodily aspect of emerging ritualization. Nevertheless, save some short remarks in his works,¹⁵ he has never given a full account of these seminars. This is understandable because writing and talking about something which is designed to be experienced physically can only end up in a misunderstanding. In the view of this fact, the enigmatic phrases, which Grimes used when describing his method, will stay for the time being unclear, puzzling and maybe even obscure. To give an idea of their quality and to explain how they connect to Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory, we ask the reader for patience as we have to make a short excursion by giving an account of a well-established method standard applied as a teaching tool at the theatrical faculty of the Academy of Performing Arts in Prague (the Czech Republic). This tool, a seminar called dialogical performance, has a tradition of more than forty years and aims at developing (in a different context of course) exactly the type of sensitivity which Grimes describes.

4. Dialogical performance (with an inner partner)

Dialogical performance is a discipline founded by professor Ivan Vyskočil [illustration 1] in 1968 and since 1992 (three years after the fall of the communist regime in 1989) taught at the Theatre Academy of Performing Arts in Prague.¹⁶ It is a compulsory course for all students of Authorship Acting (one of the departments at the Theatre Academy of Performing Arts) and as such forms the basis of all other actor disciplines. The aim of dialogical performance is to develop a psychosomatic condition of sensitivity to one's own being on stage and to understand the dramatic structure of theatrical work. The course is very often attended by non-actors (lawyers, religious studies scholars, psychologists, filmmakers etc.) who put this sensitivity to use in their own fields of profession

¹⁵ R.L. GRIMES: *Ritual criticism: case studies in its practice. Essays on its theory* (South Carolina, Columbia 1990) 135-144. For a description of one of the first lessons, see: GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14-17.

¹⁶ On his personal web pages (<http://www.ivanvyskocil.cz/html/dialogicke.html>, last visited 21.05.2009) Vyskočil summarizes the techniques, aims and ideas behind dialogical performance. Unfortunately, the pages are so far only in Czech. Nevertheless, we shall translate and quote the most important parts of this text further in our article. In 2001 Ivan Vyskočil founded the Institute for Research and Study of Authorship Acting of which he is the director. The aim of this institute is to introduce the methods taught at the department of Authorship Acting to a more academically and theoretically oriented audience by organizing lectures and conferences (<http://www.damu.cz/umeni-veda-vyzkum/ustavy/ustav-pro-vyzkum-a-studium-autorskeho-herectvi/statut-ustavu/>, last visited 21.05.2009).

or for their own personal development.¹⁷ The course has got the following structure: it takes place once a week during the day in an empty room equipped with only chairs for the participants (audience-performers) to sit on. The number of participants varies from eight to fifteen. They are accompanied by an assistant or Vyskočil himself. The audience-performers take their seat at the side of the room watching the empty space where performances are going to take place. The assistant sits with her/his back to the audience-performers facing the empty space and says a few introductory sentences in which (s)he stresses that what is to follow are only ‘attempts at trying, striving to find, teaching oneself and finding, (and that the goal is) not to display any kind of art’;¹⁸ (s)he then bids the audience-performers to come into the middle of the room and start performing [see figure 1].¹⁹ The performance does not have the character of anything prepared. The task which lies before the performer is to simply start moving – somehow. The situation into which the performer enters is that of being alone with her(him)self in front of the audience-performers (the yet-to-be performers) and the assistant.



Illustration 1: Ivan Vyskočil
[Photo: Pavel Kolaja 2007]

Figure 1

Even though direct communication with both the audience-performers and the assistant is forbidden, and even though they stay seated and only watch the performer, their role is not passive. They provide a frame within which the performance takes place. In case of the audience-performers, their main task is to create the correct mood – a feeling of appropriateness which will enable the performer to start doing something in the first place; at the beginning the per-

¹⁷ During the summer semester of 2009, a slightly modified version of dialogical performance has started being taught at the Faculty of Philosophy at the Charles University in Prague. These courses are attended by philologists interested in non-verbal communication techniques and by many students of pedagogy who consider it as a good way to develop their pedagogical skills – to be able to assess and adequately react to the impulses coming to them from the class.

¹⁸ Vyskočil’s personal web pages (<http://www.ivanvyskocil.cz/html/dialogicke.html>, last visited 21.05.2009).

¹⁹ The assistant does not decide who goes to the front, it all depends on the free decision of the participants.

former is stressed and often feels embarrassed. After all, (s)he is alone in the middle of the room with thirty pairs of eyes intently fixed on her/him. The feeling of appropriateness from the side of the audience-performers is therefore crucial because the performer then has got a firm frame – (s)he enters the designated space where (s)he can afford to fully concentrate on her/his bodily expression.

At the same time, the audience-performers try to ‘connect’ with the performer – that means they try to ‘physically’ feel the impulses which (s)he embodies during the performance. Their role is to observe but also to take part in creating that which transpires on the stage. Their role is not only watching but also that of ‘going with’ the one performing. They do not judge whether the performance is good or bad, they simply accept and physically analyze that which is offered. The role of the assistant is somehow very similar to that of the audience-performers but in a more active way. The assistant stays seated but with her/his bodily movements in a very minimized manner tries to develop a tension similar to that which the performer is expressing. The goal of this ‘going with’ is to physically ‘connect’ with the performer and with the impulses present in her/his movements. After about 3–10 minutes the assistant stops the performance and the performer returns to her/his seat. The assistant then evaluates very briefly what has just transpired. Before we give examples of some of these evaluations, it is necessary to explain the mechanisms of dialogical performance and its character.

5. Aims of dialogical performance

The term ‘dialogical performance’ automatically brings up a question: ‘What exactly enters into the dialogue?’. First, it is necessary to emphasize that the dialogue takes place only within the performer. Direct communication with other people in the room is discouraged (even forbidden). One enters into a dialogue with oneself. The performance in a way reminds the observer of a soliloquy. The dialogue, nevertheless, is not limited to only speech but is reflected in the whole body. The ‘partners’ in the dialogue are created by the ever changing bodily tensions reflected by the performer’s mind and the mind’s notions reflected by the performer’s body. An important aspect of these dialogues is the diversity of the dialogical partners – one may be weak the other strong, one may be nice the other uncomfortable, one may be soothing the other provoking etc. These partners comment on one topic (most often represented by a ‘feeling’ one has at the moment) from two different points of view. The dialogue may be between two same partners all the time or one partner might transform into another partner with a different quality. The common aim underlying all these different types of ‘dialogues’ is to develop a psychosomatic condition of sensitivity towards one’s own mental and bodily impulses. Under

no circumstances should you plan any performance in advance – it must stem from the current moment in which you are fully physically present.

A good start is to notice your body – bent back, hands behind the back, heavy feet etc. You may even begin with a movement of your own (wave your hand). You follow this posture or movement and give it your full attention, you are curious to experience what is going to come. This may be compared to the mental activity of following a certain thought. You get an idea and start thinking about it; you follow the thought and its implications (its inner dynamics) until you come to a conclusion. At that moment, suddenly, you might come upon a counter-argument. The new idea exists in contrast to the previous one but also the new idea has got its inner structure which you try to follow until you come to another conclusion and the process starts all over. Of course, anytime you can return to previous ideas if you feel that they are important. A similar process takes place in dialogical performance but on a more complex level – neither the body nor the mind are excluded from the process. Rather bodily impulses are organically combined with mental notions. You get these joint body-mind impulses and you follow them in the form of physical expressions (movements, talking, shouting, dancing or just breathing, etc.). Just as thoughts, such bodily expressions have a beginning, middle and end. They develop although you cannot be sure of the direction they will take. You simply follow them and give them appropriate attention. At one moment a certain physical expression gets exhausted and a need for another one or an answer arises – maybe you want to bodily comment on what you have just performed, maybe disagree with it – the movement continues in this dialogical manner.

Needless to say, this is a description of an ideal performance. At the beginning many people have got no idea what to do and simply stand in the middle. The ability to be able to physically respond to oneself takes several months or years to develop and is in fact never a finished process. Vyskočil comments on this fact in the following way:

Every participant experiences initial chaos, confusion, which lasts from six to ten sessions. Only then does (s)he begin to concentrate and relax, to perceive, to express in the 'here and now', to react differentially, to perform, to connect, to articulate, to realize and to perceive contrast, polarity and oscillation, genuine counterparts and complementarity, reciprocity, the harmony of opposites; (s)he begins to dialogically perform and to experience the dialogical mode of being (...), (s)he reaches her(his) own psychosomatic condition for creative communication. (S)he acquires these abilities in the horizon of about three years of systematic and continuous study, or even better – training.²⁰

The transformative moment of dialogical performance is when you put your mind in the background and favor your body (especially in the academic field

²⁰ Vyskočil's personal web pages (<http://www.ivanvyskocil.cz/html/dialogicke.html>, last visited 21.5.2009).

we tend to stay encapsulated in our minds).²¹ In real life, it is as if we were carrying our body behind us on a rack. It is there, but only as means of achieving goals (intentions) set by the mind. With dialogical performance it is the other way around – what we carry behind us on a rack is the mind – it is always there, present, it must be active but it plays a different role – it reflects what we do, but what is crucial is the body and its tensions, needs and urges. The body-mind dichotomy, so typical of our ‘Western’ thought, finds here a very original solution.²² Dialogical performance does not strive to divide these two powers. It tries to view both as interconnected and influencing one another. It tries to teach the performers to be able to physically respond to mental processes and mentally reflect their bodily experiences.

What we have just tried to describe were goals and principles of the performance. It is necessary to remark that the whole performance takes from 3–10 minutes and is ended by the assistant. During one meeting each participant performs about 1–2 (maximum 3) times. At the end of every performance the assistant gives a short commentary in which he analyses the functional, the weak and the ‘sick’ (nonfunctional) moments. It is very difficult to give examples of such commentaries without the actual physical experience, but let us try. The assistant may for example say:

There was a moment when you were bending and moving your hands and it was obvious that you were expecting an answer but you ran away from it to another action. It would have been better if you had stayed with the previous action a little longer and investigated what it wanted to say.

or

²¹ Needless to say, this does not mean that you paralyze your mind – on the contrary. The mind is there, it is active, but it acts in a close and direct cooperation with the body, i.e. the thoughts find a direct expression in the body and vice versa.

²² This body-mind dichotomy has been well reflected by Radek Chlup, another participant of the dialogical performance seminar: ‘During the performance one lets the body and the mind act spontaneously and outline an embryonic form. It is necessary to capture this form and develop it actively, i.e. to embrace it in a dialogue. Nevertheless, it is not possible to do so at random, because every gesture, every thought has got its inner impetus. This impetus, at least as I understand it, does not have boundaries and it is possible to develop it in different directions and mould it into different forms. The mind and the body react to new impulses in their own manner and subsequently the dialogical performance becomes a process – absolutely unique but at the same time not arbitrary. This dialogue evolves just like a discussion between two people in which the reactions of the partner are not completely foreseeable but at the same time cannot be completely arbitrary – in one way or another they must react to the impulses given by the partner. (...)’ *Dialogical performance and ritual* (= unpublished text written by Radek Chlup for Prof. Ivan Vyskočil, personal correspondence, 2.02.2007) 2.

It was great when you took your time holding your hands and I saw on your face that you wanted to put them apart which you finally did and we could feel the satisfaction.

The assistant is able to give these commentaries because (s)he has been developing the ability of ‘going with’ the performer for a long time. This sensitivity is exactly that which the performer is trying to learn on and for her(him)self. At the same time this sensitivity gives the performer an ability to be able to understand the physical performances of others. This is why the audience are actively present – they are also practicing this ability of ‘going with’. Every participant is required to reflect on the last meeting in a written assessment of the ‘lesson’. The goal of such essays is to make the participants become mentally aware of what happened on the level of the body. By looking at older essays, one can detect what were the ‘topics’ of his dialogical performance. (S)he can say whether there are some topics which return repeatedly and answer the question in what way did her/his performance change, evolve and how it reflects in her/his life outside the classroom. At the end of each semester an examination takes place during which the students perform in front of a committee. Both the writing assignments and the examination is designed to give the students a feedback on the development of the desired ability of ‘going with’, sensitivity to the bodily expressions of themselves and of others. This sensitivity, which one learns during dialogical performance, is of course transferable – once acquired, it is available at any time.

6. Humphrey and Laidlaw’s ‘deliberate non-intentionality’, Vyskočil’s dialogical performance, and Grimes’ ritological style of research

The description of dialogical performance now gives us enough material to inquire into the enigmatic phrases which Grimes used to describe his idea of ‘ritological style’ of research (see above). It also gives us a chance to show the relation between Grimes’ dynamic ritualization and Humphrey and Laidlaw’s static ritualization.

In the previous chapter we have been trying to show that the type of physical training which is practiced in dialogical performance meets the quality characteristic of ritualization as showed by Humphrey and Laidlaw – the ‘deliberate non-intentionality’. It is a type of action where one does not impress her/his expectations into her/his movements. It is the type of action in which one willingly and ‘deliberately’ disposes of any intentions (s)he might have and is absolutely attuned to the impulses coming from one’s own body, thus practicing the feeling for ‘deliberate non-intentionality’. Once in the field, it will be possible for such a trained person to distinguish the moments when ritualization arises ([s]he will have experienced it) and (s)he will be able to follow its

course; (s)he will ‘tune in’ and perceive the ritual performance on its more basal somatic level. Grimes’ phrases such as ‘reaching the no-mind of a student’, ‘practicing ignorance and blindness’ and ‘unlearning’ all describe the state of mind which both performer-audience in dialogical performance and the ritologist need to achieve.

Even though ritualists have their own personal intentions with which they attend a ritual, the ritual itself works with a non-intentional aspect of the ritualists’ corporeality – personal intentions become absolutely unimportant. What matters is the interaction of the participants with the ritual space, objects, types of verbal expression, time etc. framed by the ritual. Just as the assistant ‘imagines and embodies the actions of the performer ‘forward’ to their implicit *telos*’,²³ so must the ritologist imagine and embody the implicit *telos* of separate ritual acts. Just as the assistant criticizes the performance, notices the weak spots and the strong ones, so should the ritologist notice the weak and strong moments of rituals. In order to be able to do this, (s)he must understand with exactly what type of corporeality does the ritual work – with one that is ‘deliberately non-intentional’ (Humphrey and Laidlaw) – and this (s)he can understand only after physical training which will enable him/her to ‘practice ignorance and blindness’ (Grimes) and evade intention focused anthropological work. (S)he must ‘unlearn’ (Grimes) to focus on the intentions of the ritualists and (s)he must ‘connect’ to the corporeality of the participants; in other words to ‘go with’ (Grimes) what is being performed.

Of course there is a great difference between dialogical performance and ritual performance. There are aspects which connect the two but also features which differentiate them from one another. As I have tried to show, the quality which one refines in dialogical performance has the characteristics typical of ritualization in the Humphrey and Laidlawian sense – in order for the performance to be functional and really dialogical, it must be ‘deliberately non-intentional’. The same applies to the cases of ritualization emerging within the more or less fixed framework of existing rituals. The question is whether these two situations, in which ritualization occurs, have something in common and if yes, what exactly.

It was already Victor Turner who noticed that ritual has a static and a dynamic part. As a ‘model of something’ it establishes the existing social order in the hearts and minds of individuals – this aspect of rituals corresponds to the ‘archetypal’ or ‘elementary’ aspect of rituals of Humphrey and Laidlaw (see above). Nevertheless, Turner stresses that ritual is also a ‘model for something’ – rituals as dynamic processes mold social institutions and very often also become the seedbed of absolutely new social forms.²⁴ We have seen that the body and its functions is a prerequisite to any living ritual enactment (without people physically present there is no ritual). Grimes elaborates on this fact and demon-

²³ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14.

²⁴ V. TURNER: *From ritual to theatre: the human seriousness of play* (New York 1982) 82.

strates that the ritualists' corporeality is the dynamic aspect and that ritualization is the means through which the static (structured) and the dynamic (chaotic) come into contact, interact and influence each other. Forms and rules give the ritual process a fixed frame, but the process itself transcends its frame. Victor Turner illustrates this never ending interaction on the image of a river. A river needs banks to evade flood, but the banks without water are a sign of aridity.²⁵

Nevertheless, to the eye of a severe critic it might still seem that dialogical performance has no connection to any actual ritual performance whatsoever. It is very important to note that the interaction between the 'structured' and 'chaotic' aspects takes place in both dialogical performance and existing rituals. The biggest difference is that in case of dialogical performance it has been decided to minimize the rules and the frame (the river banks) to their minimum and let oneself be immersed in the 'aquatic' quality of ritualization. Because of the absence of complicated rules and prescriptions, dialogical performance most often resembles a 'flood' – the performer, assistant and the audience-performers all together create a 'current' which rises just as fast as it recedes. The experience which one gets from attending dialogical performance is therefore not that of animating formal (ritual) structures but that of the dynamic aspect itself in its raw form, which is always present also when ritualization occurs. The idea which explicitly lies behind Grimes' method and implicitly behind dialogical performance is that by repetitive physical experience (and therefore by an inner transformation) of the 'wild' or even 'raging' dynamic aspect within the seminar, one will be able to detect the more subtle and not as obvious forms flowing in the riverbed of the emerging and the already established rituals.

The biggest shortcoming of Humphrey and Laidlaw's theory is that they focused only on ritualization within the context of the already established rituals. Even though they have very correctly and precisely pinpointed its character ('deliberate non-intentionality'), they have been deceived by the presence of the formal static aspect of rituals and overestimated its value. The body and corporeality have absolutely disappeared from their theory and something had to take its place; something had to be the carrier of ritualization and the formal aspect of rituals was an obvious choice. By doing this, they have narrowed the term 'ritualization' and the scope of situations in which ritualization may occur to solely existing rituals thus arriving at the previously mentioned conclusion that new rituals rarely emerge and if they do then only as modifications of the previously established ones. As Victor Turner has shown, even established rituals have a dynamic, creative aspect to them but in a much more subtle way than meets the eye. This is what Grimes realizes and, even more, he exposes the mediator of ritualization – the body. He realized the fact that corporeality plays an absolutely unique role in the process of birth, maturity and death of rituals.

²⁵ TURNER: *From ritual to theatre* 79.

Being in one's body does not, of course, suffice for ritualization to occur. Corporeality is a fact and ritualization occurs once we start using our corporeality in a specifically 'deliberate non-intentional' way. At the same time, corporeality is our mode of being, there is no escaping it just as being within society – these two actualities create the grounds on which ritualization transpires. Since the 'social body' and the 'human body' get into contact also in other cases (and not only within a ritual framework), it is obvious that ritualization will occur also outside of rituals. Ritualization springs up here and there as we live our lives. At first it takes on a very embryonic form and only sometimes happens to develop into a complicated system of acts which we deem 'ritual'. In our society it happens once too often that we do not take notice of these moments of emerging ritualization and we do not react to them appropriately. There are many situations in our lives which would be most fitting to handle ritually (birth of a new life, death, divorce, retirement, breaking up and reconciliation with friends and family members etc.), but sometimes we are just not capable to do it appropriately. As Grimes remarks, in our society we once too often act as a 'ritually disabled people'.²⁶ Training such as the one offered by dialogical performance can teach us how to cultivate the correct feeling for emerging ritualization and thus enable us to respond to it properly.

With rituals the situation is a bit different. Rituals are situations in which we expect ritualization to occur. Nevertheless, depending on the physical expressions of the ritualists', on the 'mood' of the situation, and on many other details of the performance, ritualization may occur in a stronger or weaker way. There are rituals which 'work' (i.e. ritualization occurs) and there are others which are 'sick' and simply do not work (ritualization does not find its appropriate expression). The fact that ritualization changes its volume within rituals and that it can occur even outside ritual context justifies the approach which Grimes has chosen – he has developed a method with which it is possible to refine the sensitivity to the 'deliberate non-intentional' character of ritualization. Nevertheless, this training must be as dynamic as are the moments in which ritualization occurs. Already through training we start physically and therefore mentally changing. Formative gestures, which accompany ritualization,

(...) are physical ways of searching for the sources of creativity, struggling to connect what feels disconnected, trying to discern climactic turns in ongoing processes, and becoming receptive to death or other radical transformations. Ritualizing is a mode of knowing (...) in which knower and known conjoin. The outcome can serve either to maintain or undermine psychosocial chasms (there are not only positive but also negative rituals, such as rituals of chaos and seclusion, authors' note), but in either case it not only elicits reflection on cultural forms but reshapes our bodies, and thus our minds, to be congruent with these forms.²⁷

²⁶ GRIMES: *Ritual criticism* 135.

²⁷ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 63.

The similarity between the above mentioned lines and the description which Ivan Vyskočil offers concerning the aims of dialogical performance are remarkable (see above) and show that what Humphrey and Laidlaw have correctly identified as ‘deliberate non-intentionality’ of ritualization may be practiced, learnt and subsequently applied. This is what Grimes proposes in case of his ‘ritological mode of study’ and this is what Vyskočil practices in his dialogical performance seminar.

7. Summary: what is all this good for?

If an anthropologist is lucky, (s)he goes into the field equipped with complex theories of all kinds. In an ideal case (s)he has had time to study all the different phases of a ritual which is to be observed; (s)he knows the language and therefore has the necessary background and tools with which to question the ritualists and get answers. Nevertheless, in the moment (s)he takes part in the ritual, the anthropologist is confronted with a problem: how do I observe the ritual? Do I take part, or do I stand aside, hide so that I am invisible? How is my filming going to influence the ritual enactment? etc. These questions become even more pressing when an anthropologist is invited to a ritual (which [s]he might not have any knowledge of) unexpectedly, without the possibility of preparing for the event. In this case, being a guest, the scholar might feel inappropriate not knowing how to act.

An anthropologist must keep a certain distance from the ritualists to be able to assess the ritual action. But at the same time (s)he must be aware that since (s)he is physically present, (s)he is taking part in the ritual, (s)he has a role which was assigned to him/her by the other ritualists who, naturally, somehow reflect the presence of the scholar.

The heteronymous application of theories to performance (voyeurism) or becoming a convert and rejecting theory (whoring) are at best temporary tactics for tricking out meaning and should not become determinative for scholarly style.²⁸

It is only an illusion that a possibility to somehow escape the physical and become ‘invisible’ could exist. Even if we turn on a camera and go away, the camera itself is still there and plays a role just as the other objects utilized within the ritual. There is no such thing as an ‘objective’ observer and if we try to disappear from our work we deceive both the reader and ourselves.

Ritological style is a mode of ritual research which articulates as part of the data the gestural and symbolic dimensions of the researchers themselves. These data

²⁸ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14.

include one's own bodily and imaginative activities in the face of ritual enactment.²⁹

The ritologist physically learns through systematic training to develop a ritual sensitivity which corresponds in its character to the mental quality of 'deliberate non-intentionality' of ritualization, which he is studying during rituals. To do this, (s)he must learn to be able to achieve the 'no-mind of a student', (s)he must 'unlearn' to see intentions in the actions of the ritualists – ritualization is, after all, characteristic for its non-intentionality. What (s)he must focus on is the physical expression of the whole group, how they interact with each other, with the space, with the objects and – with the ritologist him/herself. (S)he must start 'going-with' the inner dynamic of the ritual performance, detect which gestures are functional, which have ended up in an indefinite way. (S)he must critically evaluate whether ritualization found a fitting expression. This criticism should 'take the form of imagining and embodying actions 'forward' toward their own implicit *telos*'.³⁰ There are functional and 'healthy' rituals on one side and nonfunctional and 'sick' rituals on the other. A trained ritologist ought to be able to discern all the possible nuances in between these extremes.

What we have been trying to show is that by developing the ability of 'going with' in seminars such as dialogical performance – physically learning what it means that a certain action is 'deliberately non-intentional' – the prospective specialist wanting to study ritual in the field would be equipped with a very effective tool for assessing the (non)functionality of rituals, their strong and weak moments. By being able to attune to her(him)self, to others, to the space, objects, smells, sounds, tastes and subsequently by incorporating her(him)self into the data, (s)he will avoid (or be able to reflect, admit and therefore neutralize) the two big threats of anthropological work – 'scientific voyeurism' on the one hand (the tendency to present anthropological data as 'objective', disembodied facts) and 'scientific whoring'³¹ on the other (the incapability to isolate oneself from the object of study) which are in fact only two sides of the same coin obscuring the scholar from the eyes of his reader and thus giving a false account of that which (s)he witnessed.

Since the ritual dynamics are mediated by the ritualists' corporeality, we consider physical training of the sort as we have described in our account of dialogical performance or as that which Ronald L. Grimes practiced in his Ritual Studies Lab basic to any anthropological training. We are well aware that dialogical performance is not primarily designed for training anthropologists, theologians, religious studies scholars and other specialists on ritual. Nevertheless, by describing the dialogical performance seminar, its layout, mechanisms, the abilities which the students acquire and very vaguely also the performance itself (how can one describe in words what is understandable only through the

²⁹ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14.

³⁰ GRIMES: *Beginnings* 14.

³¹ After GRIMES: *Beginnings* 13-14.

body?), we meant to illustrate the claim which, following Grimes, we have been trying to prove in our article – ritual dynamics (ritualization) are mediated primarily by the corporeality of those engaging in ritual action. To understand how rituals are born, how they function, whither, and subsequently die, we must engage in developing sensitivity to our corporeality and the corporeality of others.

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