

# Thinking Through Rituals

PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY

Kevin Schilbrack



# Thinking Through Rituals

## Philosophical Perspectives

Edited by Kevin Schilbrack

First published 2004  
by Routledge  
29 West 35th Street, New York, NY 10001

Simultaneously published in the UK  
by Routledge  
11 New Fetter Lane, London EC4P 4EE

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor and Francis Group*

© 2004 Edited by Kevin Schilbrack

Typeset in Sabon by  
Florence Production Ltd, Stoodleigh, Devon  
Printed and bound in Great Britain by  
MPG Books Ltd, Bodmin, Cornwall

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical, or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

*Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data*  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

*British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data*  
A catalog record for this book has been requested

ISBN 0-415-29058-9 (hbk)  
0-415-29059-7 (pbk)

# Thinking Through Rituals

Many philosophical approaches today seek to overcome the division between mind and body. If such projects succeed, then thinking is not restricted to the disembodied mind but is in some sense done through the body. From a post-Cartesian perspective, then, ritual activities that discipline the body are not just thoughtless motions, but crucial parts of the way we think.

*Thinking Through Rituals* explores ritual acts and their connection to meaning and truth, belief, memory, inquiry, worldview, and ethics. Drawing on philosophers such as Foucault, Merleau-Ponty, and Wittgenstein, and sources from cognitive science, pragmatism, and feminist theory, it provides philosophical resources for understanding religious ritual practices like the Christian Eucharistic ceremony, Hatha Yoga, sacred meditation, and liturgical speech.

Its essays consider a wide variety of rituals in Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, including political protest rituals and gay commitment ceremonies, traditional Vedic and Yogic rites, Christian and Buddhist meditation, and the Jewish Shabbat. They challenge the traditional disjunction between thought and action, showing how philosophy can help to illuminate the relationship between doing and meaning which ritual practices imply.

**Kevin Schilbrack** is Associate Professor of Philosophy and Religious Studies at Wesleyan College, Georgia. The editor of *Thinking Through Myths: Philosophical Perspectives* (Routledge, 2002), he writes on the philosophical and methodological questions involved in the cross-cultural study of religions.

# Contents

<i>Notes on contributors</i>	ix
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	xii
<b>Introduction: on the use of philosophy in the study of rituals</b>	1
KEVIN SCHILBRACK	
<b>1 Ritual, body technique, and (inter)subjectivity</b>	31
NICK CROSSLEY	
<b>2 Practice, belief, and feminist philosophy of religion</b>	52
AMY HOLLYWOOD	
<b>3 Rites of passing: Foucault, power, and same-sex commitment ceremonies</b>	71
LADELLE McWHORTER	
<b>4 Scapegoat rituals in Wittgensteinian perspective</b>	97
BRIAN R. CLACK	
<b>5 Ritual inquiry: the pragmatic logic of religious practice</b>	113
MICHAEL L. RAPOSA	
<b>6 Ritual metaphysics</b>	128
KEVIN SCHILBRACK	
<b>7 Philosophical naturalism and the cognitive approach to ritual</b>	148
ROBERT N. McCAULEY	
<b>8 Theories and facts on ritual simultaneities</b>	172
FRITS STAAL	

9	Moral cultivation through ritual participation: Xunzi's philosophy of ritual	188
	T. C. KLINE III	
10	The ritual roots of moral reason: lessons from Mīmāṃsā	207
	JONARDON GANERI	
11	Ritual gives rise to thought: liturgical reasoning in modern Jewish philosophy	224
	STEVEN KEPNES	
12	Ritual and Christian philosophy	238
	CHARLES TALIAFERRO	
13	Religious rituals, spiritually disciplined practices, and health	251
	PETER H. VAN NESS	
	<i>Index</i>	273

# Introduction

## On the use of philosophy in the study of rituals

*Kevin Schilbrack*

### I. Introduction

Rituals, like operas, are mixed and complicated events and, as a consequence, the study of rituals is an interdisciplinary job.<sup>1</sup> It includes sociology and psychology, history, and anthropology, performance studies and gender studies. And when those involved in the study of ritual list the disciplines relevant to the task, philosophy is not excluded – that is, the word “philosophy” can often be found on those interdisciplinary lists. But such lists can be misleading, for philosophy has so far contributed almost not at all to the study of rituals.

There is at present a lack of philosophical interest in ritual. Philosophers (including philosophers of religion) almost never analyze ritual behavior; those who study ritual almost never refer to philosophy.<sup>2</sup> The primary reason for this absence of a philosophical contribution to the study of rituals, in my judgment, is the assumption that ritual activities are thoughtless. That is, rituals are typically seen as mechanical or instinctual and not as activities that involve thinking or learning. This assumption reflects a dichotomy between beliefs and practices and, ultimately, a general dualism between mind and body, as Catherine Bell has noted (Bell 1992; cf. Grimes 1990: 1). But this inability to see rituals as thoughtful is unnecessary. My goal in this introduction, and ultimately, in this book, is to argue that there are rich and extensive philosophical resources available with which one might build bridges between ritual and thought, between practice and belief, and between body and mind. There are, I want to argue, several philosophical tools available for thinking through rituals.

One can begin to show the value of philosophy to ritual studies in a minimal way simply by noting that rituals are, whatever else they are, actions or practices in which people engage.<sup>3</sup> The last century of philosophy is sometimes described as having made the linguistic turn, that is, as reflecting the appreciation by both Continental and Anglophone philosophers that experience is always already mediated by language. But it is also true that many philosophers in the last century have made action or practice the central term of analysis. The century can also therefore be seen as making the practice turn, the appreciation that the world is revealed through activity (Schatzki

*et al.* 2001). Richard J. Bernstein shows that action and praxis are central terms for analytic philosophers, Marxist philosophers, existentialists, and pragmatists (Bernstein 1971). Practice is seen as central to what it means to be human (May 2001). Contemporary philosophy is thus a congenial partner for those who want to understand ritual behavior.

One can begin to show the value of philosophy to ritual studies in a more perspicuous way. In my judgment, the central obstacle to a philosophical contribution to the study of rituals is the assumption that ritual activities are thoughtless, and this assumption turns on a set of modern views about what knowledge is. It is widely held that knowledge involves accurately representing the external world. Having representations, however, is something that only minds can do. Minds can represent or reflect the world – for example, by thinking “The cat is on the mat” – bodies cannot do this. Thus the assumption has been that bodily movements are not representations and therefore whatever is going on in the movements of rituals must be something other than thinking. And so the implication follows that philosophical tools are not needed. Rituals are consequently interpreted as non-cognitive behavior, for example, as expressions of people’s emotions or neuroses, or as automatic activities, people mechanically “going through the motions.” It is true that ritual is often interpreted as symbolic activity, and on this interpretation rituals may symbolize knowledge. But even in this latter case, the ritual actions are still treated as merely a vehicle for thought, but not a mode of thinking itself, like an illiterate person carrying a book. In a word, then, the primary obstacle to a philosophical contribution to the study of rituals is a theory of knowledge that has been called objectivism or the representational theory of knowledge. But if this is accurate, then it becomes clearer how philosophy has a contribution to make, because philosophy in the twentieth century made the pursuit of a non-objectivist or non-representationalist theory of knowledge a central concern. That is, hand in hand with the practice turn comes a set of philosophical movements with a convergent interest in overcoming the Cartesian dualistic account in which the mind is a disembodied spectator. Richard Rorty (1979), for example, argues that this is a goal that unites the projects of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey, and this argument is developed further by Bernstein (1983) and Frisina (2002). On these postmodern accounts, knowledge is necessarily embodied, intersubjective, and active. As a consequence, I would argue, there are some overlooked philosophical tools for seeing ritual activity as thoughtful. To these I now turn.

## II. Philosophical resources for the study of rituals

In this section I describe several philosophical movements that might help us, in different ways, to see rituals in their connections to thinking, learning, and knowing.<sup>4</sup> These are not, of course, the only philosophical resources – and may not even be the best ones.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the philosophical approaches discussed below have tensions between them; I am not arguing that they can be unified into a single voice. Nevertheless, I suggest that they do provide



valuable and sometimes overlooked resources and, for the purpose of studying ritual, they may help us avoid a representationalist theory of knowledge or other obstacles to seeing rituals as thoughtful. The sketches of these philosophies are so brief that they can do little more than serve to point to directions for future research. But I hope that they are not so cursory that they are misleading or frustrating but are long enough and suggestive enough to interest people in the prospects for attending to the philosophical aspects of ritual. The philosophical approaches that I consider here are the following nine: pragmatism, post-Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy, existentialism, hermeneutic philosophy, Foucault's genealogical approach, phenomenology, cognitive science, feminist epistemologies, and comparative philosophy.

Pragmatist philosophers, as their name suggests, are primarily interested in understanding knowledge from the perspective of practical action. Seeking to overcome the idea of the knower as a spectator and to replace it with the idea of the knower as participant and problem solver is therefore a theme common to all the pragmatists (including here Peirce, James, Santayana, Whitehead, and Dewey). On a pragmatist approach, therefore, what the knower knows is not a static body of propositions but an ongoing process between the agent and its environment. Knowing and acting are not separate and the subject qua agent, engaged and purposive, is seen as a more *complete* subject. James Feibleman proposes that one read the pragmatists in this way:

For if knowledge is to be derived from experience, as most philosophers as well as all experimental scientists pretty well agree that it is, then it must be the whole of experience, experience in all of its parts rather than only in some, that is meant. Action must be included as well as thought and sensation.

(Feibleman 1976: 170)

In other words, just as the rationalists looked to reason as a source of knowledge, and the empiricists looked to the senses, the pragmatists add action as a third source of reliable knowledge.

Applying a pragmatist account of knowledge to rituals studies has not yet been explored in any depth (although see Jackson 1989). But such an approach has the potential to provide the conceptual tools to see rituals as activities in which ritualists are not simply repeating traditional gestures but are rather raising and seeking to settle a problem. From this Deweyan perspective, rituals seek to move the participants from disquiet to resolution, they involve the testing of hypotheses, and hence they are a form of inquiry (Dewey 1991). Thus a pragmatist philosophy of rituals might ask the questions: what problems are ritualists trying to solve, what afflictions or difficulties are they trying to overcome, and what do they learn in their rituals?

One of the greatest obstacles to a philosophy of ritual, in my judgment, has been the view that language must be about empirical facts if it is to be even possibly true. Given this view, ritual language (and religious language generally) is in a difficult situation. If it is not to be taken as meaningless babble,

then ritual language must be either an attempt to describe empirical facts in the “external” world (in which case it is often contradicted by scientific descriptions) or a symbolic expression of feelings or values (in which case it is non-cognitive, that is, neither true nor false). Given this understanding of the limits of what meaningful language can be about, the twentieth century revolution in linguistic philosophy, signaled especially by the later writings of Ludwig Wittgenstein (Wittgenstein 1953), is of primary importance for the study of ritual. Wittgenstein rejects the idea that meaningful language must be descriptive, arguing that language has many legitimate uses:

Giving orders, and obeying them – Describing the appearance of an object, or giving its measurements – Constructing an object from a description (a drawing) – Reporting an event – Speculating about an event – Forming and testing a hypothesis – Presenting the results of an experiment in tables and diagrams – Making up a story; and reading it – Play-acting – Singing catches – Guessing riddles – Making a joke; telling it – Solving a problem in arithmetic – Translating from one language to another – Asking, thanking, cursing, greeting, praying.

(1953: 11–12 [27])

On Wittgenstein’s view, these different uses of language follow their own rules, just as different games do, but that is no fault, especially when one sees that these ways of speaking and thinking arise from particular practices or forms of life in which they have their sense. Wittgenstein did not develop a philosophy of rituals, but he did comment on them suggestively, and criticized the assumption that rituals involve science-like hypotheses or attempts to control the natural world (Wittgenstein 1979; for insightful discussions, see Cioffi 1998; Clack 1999).

Peter Winch applied Wittgenstein’s pluralistic understanding of language to the study of social action (including religion) and to the study of rituals (1958, 1970; the best assessment of Winch is Lerner 2002). Winch argues that rituals are often criticized for being irrational, impractical, or non-scientific behavior, but one should not use criteria taken from one practice to criticize another. Focusing on Zande witchcraft rituals, Winch argues that one should interpret them as rational in their context. Specifically, Winch argues that they express an attitude about contingencies in general, rather than seeking to control or predict a particular contingency (like an illness).

Another example of a post-Wittgensteinian linguistic philosophy that appreciates the variety of uses of language and that has therefore proven useful for ritual studies is John Austin’s analysis of speech-acts (Austin 1965; cf. Searle 1969, 1979). Austin argues that words can have what he calls “illocutionary” force, in that one can do things with them. When one christens a ship or pronounces a couple married, for example, the words one uses bring about real changes in the world. Ruth Finnegan argues for the value of this approach for the study of ritual precisely in that it avoids the limited view of language mentioned above. Given Austin’s approach, she says,

prayer and sacrifice need not be explained (or explained away) as being merely “expressive” or “symbolic” and thus very different from most everyday speech acts; rather they can be brought under the same general heading as such acts as “announcing,” “saying goodbye” or greeting. . . . Austin’s analysis helps us out of the dilemma of having to allocate all speech utterances into just one or the other of two categories: descriptive or expressive (or symbolic) utterances.

(Finnegan 1969: 550)

As Benjamin Ray says, “the performative power of ritual language [is] its ability to rearrange people’s feelings and command psychological forces to make things happen in people’s lives” (2000: 110; see also Ray 1973; Tambiah 1979; and for a critique, Grimes 1990 ch. 9).

The recognition of the performative and other non-descriptive functions of words in rituals is important. However, many of the post-Wittgensteinian approaches to ritual sidestep and do not challenge the positivist idea that ritual uses of language are disconnected from the world and therefore non-cognitive. If the idea of cognitive ritual language is to be an interpretive option, what is needed is a way of understanding how rituals can make or reveal a world, not only in the psychological sense that Ray mentions, but also in an ontological or metaphysical sense that ritual behavior creates and reveals ways of being in the world. Here existentialism may help.

Existentialist philosophy is a reaction to philosophical and scientific systems that forget the concrete individual in their pursuit of abstract systems of thought. The primary value of existentialism for our purposes follows from its conception of the human condition as an embodied, social, and active being-in-the-world (Heidegger 1962; cf. Todes 2001). This understanding calls into question dualisms that have blocked an appreciation of rituals as thoughtful. In the first place, being-in-the-world seeks to move beyond a Cartesian, representationalist, or objectivist model of knowledge (Bernstein 1983). Second, the existentialist approach denies the romantic split between one’s “inner,” secret self and one’s “outer,” public action. Subjectivity is really “intersubjectivity,” as Sartre says. And third, it undermines the idea that what is given to experience is value neutral. What is immediately given is rather a ready-to-hand life-world revealed by our projects. This connection between facts and values is important for the study of practices that claim to reveal fundamental norms.

In the middle of the twentieth century, existentialism received a warm reception in both theology and religious studies, and so some may assume that as a tool for the study of ritual existentialism has already been put to good use. It is true that Mircea Eliade took as his task the rediscovery of the existential dimensions of ritual life in archaic societies and that he adopts Heideggerian language in his analysis of the sacred and the profane as two modes of being in the world (Eliade 1959: esp. 8–18). But the implications of being-in-the-world for understanding ritual actions as thoughtful – and in particular the existentialist idea that the body is the subject of

consciousness (Sartre 1956: 303–59; Wider 1997) – have not yet been appreciated. For Sartre, the body is not identified as an unthinking *res extensa*, which would be the body defined as an object among other objects, the body defined “in-itself” from the outside. Rather, the body indicates (to use Sartre’s nice phrase) “the possibilities which I am” of moving and otherwise engaging with the world. The body is the seat of one’s conscious engagement with the world; it is that by which objects are revealed to me, that which “makes there be a world” (303–6). From this perspective, “knowledge and action are only two abstract aspects of an original, concrete relation” (308). This provides a way of speaking of ritual action and ritual knowledge as growing out of and shaping a level of intentionality that is more basic than the linguistic.<sup>6</sup>

Existentialist approaches to the study of ritual will tend to see rituals as part of a search for meaning. On an existentialist view, being human perpetually and necessarily involves giving oneself projects and purposes, living toward the future, and creating oneself through one’s actions. Insofar as ritual is not merely a conservative bolster for the status quo but, as more and more are arguing, can be conducive to change and even to revolution (e.g. Lincoln 1989, 2000, 2003: ch. 6), one might therefore draw on existentialism to argue that ritual can be a way for people to navigate change and to choose who they will be so as to create a future not like their past. Here is relevant Sartre’s belief that even one’s “thrownness” is not a limit on one’s freedom, for one always chooses what meaning one’s situation will have.

Hermeneutic philosophy is another movement influenced by Heidegger’s analysis of projective understanding that shows promise for ritual studies. Though Schleiermacher and Dilthey originally developed hermeneutics in the nineteenth century for the interpretation of texts, and Heidegger and Gadamer adapted it for the interpretation of human understanding more generally, it is primarily Paul Ricoeur who has applied hermeneutics to the study of human action. Ricoeur argues that meaningful actions may become the objects of study “through a kind of objectification similar to the fixation that occurs in writing” (1991: 151); this objectification is possible, he says, because actions themselves have a propositional content and structure. Ricoeur therefore proposes using the written text as the paradigm for understanding human action and reading as the paradigm for the human sciences, arguing that with this approach human action is opened “to anybody who *can read*” (1991: 155; emphasis in the original).

As with existentialism, some may feel that hermeneutics is not a new tool for the study of ritual. It is true, for example, that Clifford Geertz defines culture as an “acted document” and a “system of signs” and so conceives of the ethnographer’s task as providing a vocabulary in which what ritual action “says” can be expressed (1973: 27). Geertz credits Ricoeur, “from whom this whole idea of the inscription of action is borrowed and somewhat twisted” (1973: 19), and he conceives of action as a form of social discourse. Hermeneutics of ritual in this sense has been criticized, however, insofar as it reduces sensual, embodied actions to textual, disembodied signs. Ruel Tyson,

for example, raises the question whether the most important aspect of social action is “its ‘said,’ its conceptual, statable, propositional content, and the conceptual structures, sponsoring it and making it decipherable” (Tyson 1988: 105). For Tyson, a semiotic theory of ritual intellectualizes actions – not in the sense that it reads them as bearing a sense that they do not really have, but in that it ignores the gap between the performative domain of action and the relatively bloodless domain of writing. Similarly, Paul Stoller argues that treating the body as a text strips it of its smells, tastes, textures, and pains (1997: xiv). And he asks: “is it not problematic to use the body as text metaphor in societies in which the body is felt and not read?” (Stoller 1997: 5–6).

If a hermeneutic philosophy can shed light on rituals without distorting them, therefore, it needs to develop a hermeneutics of performance that does not lose the richness of ritual action. One suggestion about how to do so comes from William Schweiker, who argues not that ritual performance should be seen as a kind of text but that both rituals and texts should be seen as “mimetic” in that they both involve the creative practice of imaginative understanding. Hermeneutics, then, understood as a mimetic play (using Gadamer’s term, *Spiel*) of understanding in its own right, can provide a vocabulary that can do justice to the textual, the performative, and the rule-following features of a culture (Schweiker 1987, 1988; on ritual mimesis see also Stoller 1997: 65–7). Another proposal for a non-textual hermeneutics of performance comes from Lawrence Sullivan, who points out that throughout most of human history “the problems of meaning, understanding, communication and interpretation have been thrashed out without references to texts and without resort to text as a primary metaphor” (1990b: 41). Students of culture should therefore recognize that human reflection is found not only (and not even primarily) in books, but also in other meaningful activities like canoe-making, pottery, basket-making, weaving, house construction, musical performance, and astronomy, all of which can be taken as reflective interpretations of their makers’ worlds:

The notion of text now stifles the attempt of religious studies to confront the full range of religious experiences and expressions – even those recorded in texts . . . [and it] diverts us onto a wide detour that escapes a confrontation with other modes of intelligibility.

(Sullivan 1990b: 46, 50)

Sullivan proposes that hermeneutics flower into an approach that recovers the sensual dimension of religion (Sullivan 1986) and that in the same way that new ways of understanding symbolic life were opened by Freud’s hermeneutics of dreams, a non-textual reality, a hermeneutics of the sensual world might do the same:

I am suggesting that religious studies could look not only at dreams but at shadows, at flowers, at sounds, at pottery and basketry, at smells and

light, at the crafts and domestic sciences, and regard them as symbolic vehicles for the full load of human experience.

(Sullivan 1990b: 51)

These revisions of hermeneutic philosophy of rituals have yet to be fully assayed.

It is in part because of his dissatisfaction with hermeneutics, however, that Michel Foucault develops his genealogical approach (see especially Foucault 1979, 1980, 1998). Foucault's objection to hermeneutics is that it treats disciplined practices, in which people are trained to have certain affects, desires, and competencies, as if they were really symbolic activities with hidden meanings that need to be decoded. His genealogical method therefore differs from hermeneutics because it seeks not the meaning or interpretation or understanding of the practice, what the practice "says," but rather the *effect* of the practice, what the practice does to those who participate in it.<sup>7</sup> As Hubert Dreyfus notes,

Since the hidden meaning is not the final truth about what is going on, finding it is not necessarily liberating, and can, as Foucault points out, lead away from the kind of understanding that might help the participant resist pervasive practices whose only end is the efficient ordering of society.

(Dreyfus 1984: 80)

In other words, on a genealogical approach, social practices like rituals do not repress what they are really about (as they are said to, for example, in the hermeneutics of suspicion of Freud and Marx). Rather, they reveal their strategies in the very production of trained bodies.

Thus a Foucauldian analysis of rituals is centrally about controlling bodies, and it focuses on power. But Foucault is distinctive in that on his account power is not coercive:

What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted is simply the fact that it does not weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than a negative instance whose function is repression.

(1980: 19)

Through small, quotidian "micro-practices," power works by creating the possibilities for people to live as a certain kind of subject. (Susan Bordo (1993) provides some especially good examples of this point.) A strength of Foucault's approach is thus the explicit attention it gives to rituals' role as disciplinary practices. In this light, how people stand, move, hold their hands, and so on, is moved from the category of "the natural" to the category of the social, and as having an effect on people's "souls." As Foucault says,

genealogy seeks the significance of events “in the most unpromising places, in what we tend to feel is without history – in sentiments, love, conscience, instincts” (Foucault 1998: 369). Thus it permits students of ritual to see the body as inscribed with cultural signs and ritual is a central tool of inscription (for Foucault’s treatment of religion, see Foucault 1999).

Some critics argue, however, that a weakness of Foucault’s approach is that it lacks the sense of a thinking body. Some complain that subjectivity is eliminated altogether. Foucault does use the phrase “the mindful body,” but by it he does not mean a body that is full of mind, but a body that is “minded” in the sense of watched over, under surveillance, or self-monitored (as a contrast, see Scheper-Hughes and Lock 1987). Despite Foucault’s attention to the body, ultimately he does not see the body as a source of human agency. As Chris Shilling puts it:

Once the body is contained within modern disciplinary systems, it is the mind which takes over as the location for discursive power. Consequently, the body tends to be reduced to an inert mass which is controlled by discourses centred on the mind. However, this mind is itself disembodied; we get no sense of the mind’s location within an active human body. To put it bluntly, the bodies that appear in Foucault’s work do not enjoy a prolonged visibility as corporeal entities. Bodies are produced, but their own powers of production, where they have any, are limited to those invested in them by discourse. As such, any body is dissolved as a causal phenomenon into the determining power of discourse, and it becomes extremely difficult to conceive of the body as a material component of social action. (Shilling 1993: 80)

In this respect, its critics say, genealogy does not move beyond the problematic modernist dualisms of mind and body mentioned at the beginning of this chapter.

By contrast, phenomenology argues for the ineliminability of the body as subject. For phenomenologists like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the mind is not the only or even the primary source of engagement with the world. As Merleau-Ponty says, “The body is our general medium for having a world” (Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146). And Merleau-Ponty explains that the body opens up a meaningful world for us in three senses:

Sometimes it is restricted to the actions necessary for the conservation of life, and accordingly it posits around us a biological world; at other times, elaborating upon these primary actions and moving from their literal to a figurative meaning, it manifests through them a core of new significance: this is true of motor habits such as dancing. Sometimes, finally, the meaning aimed at cannot be achieved by the body’s natural means; it must then build itself an instrument, and it projects thereby around itself a cultural world.

(Merleau-Ponty 1962: 146)



Thus our bodies determine what presents itself in our world sometimes in terms of their innate structures, as when some part of the world is presented as providing a place to rest; sometimes the world is mediated in terms of acquired skills common to bodies in general, as when some part of the world is presented as providing a place for sitting or for dancing; and sometimes the world is mediated in terms of acquired skills that are culturally specific, as when some part of the world is presented as providing a place for sitting in *zazen* (see Dreyfus and Dreyfus 1999). All three dimensions of corporeal subjectivity would be present in a ritual.

Thomas Csordas (1999) explains why a phenomenological approach to ritual is so important. Since the 1970s, the metaphor of the text has come to dominate the study of culture. On this perspective, and as we saw above in the discussion of hermeneutics, a culture is treated as a system of signs or symbols that can be read. In the past 20 years, there has been a shift from discussion of "signs" and "symbols" to "discourse" and "representation," but such post-structuralist terms are still broadly semiotic. The metaphor of the text is, as Csordas says, a hungry metaphor, "swallowing all of culture to the point where it became possible and even convincing to hear the deconstructionist motto that there is nothing outside the text" (1999: 146). When one holds that discourse does not disclose the world but rather constitutes it, then the notion of experience drops out. Without phenomenology, therefore, it is difficult to pose the question about the limits of discourse. It seems to be fallacious to ask whether there is anything beyond or outside discourse or to ask what discourse refers to. In the study of rituals, then, phenomenology can provide a dialogical partner for those approaches that treat ritual as cultural inscription and do not take into account the materiality of the lived body (cf. Csordas 1994; for an excellent treatment of how a phenomenological approach to subjectivity like Merleau-Ponty's *can* be combined with Foucault's, see Crossley 1994).

Cognitive science was not originally receptive to the study of embodied thought, but in the last ten to twenty years there has been evidence of a paradigm shift. The traditional model of thinking in cognitive science is often labeled "cognitivism," in which thinking is understood as computation, that is, the manipulation of internal symbolic representations. On this approach, the model of the mind is the computer, and the "world is (just) a source of inputs and an arena for outputs, the body is (just) an organ for receiving the inputs and effecting the outputs" (Clark 1998: 36). But there has been a growing appreciation of this approach's shortcomings. Emerging as alternatives is a variety of approaches that challenge the identification of thinking and representing. In its place are proposed a range of alternatives that either minimize (Clark 1997) or, in the extreme case, eliminate internal representations (e.g. van Gelder 1995; for a critique, see Clark and Toribio 1994). On these new models, thinking is necessarily dynamically related to a body in a world. As Tim van Gelder writes, "In this vision, the cognitive system is not just the encapsulated brain; rather, since the nervous system, body, and environment are all constantly changing and simultaneously influencing



each other, the true cognitive system is a single unified system embracing all three" (van Gelder 1995: 373; similarly, Haugeland 1998: ch. 9). For this reason, Francisco Varela and his colleagues call thinking "enaction," a term that emphasizes their view that thinking "is not the representation of a pregiven world by a pregiven mind but is rather the enactment of a world and a mind on the basis of a history of the variety of actions that a being in the world performs" (Varela *et al.* 1991: 9).

Moreover, Mark Johnson argues that not only must a mind be in a body to think, but that body metaphors are the very substance of abstract thinking.<sup>8</sup> He argues that from our sensorimotor activity there emerge patterns in our knowing interactions with the world. That is, as we orient ourselves spatially and temporally, direct our perceptual focus, move our bodies, and manipulate objects for various purposes, we also develop structures to our experiences. For example, the bodily experience of tracking an object visually from point A along a path to point B produces the pattern, or what Johnson calls an "image schemata," of *source-path-goal*. This pattern or schemata gives rise to metaphors such as "purposes are directions" (as when one says "I am *on the way* to get a Ph.D.") or "arguments are journeys" (as when one says "I can *follow* what you are saying"). Such metaphors constitute our understanding of intentional action and structure even our most abstract reasoning. Bodily experience is thus the basis for cognitive activity.

These developments in cognitive science are pregnant for the study of rituals. Tamar Frankiel (2001) hypothesizes that the ritualized body is deeply invested precisely in image schemata. Rituals teach people to embody the distinctions in basic schemata such as up/down, inside/outside, and center/periphery, and in this way the rituals reinforce and elaborate the basic patterns through which people perceive their world. Different societies emphasize different schemata. For example, one society may focus on scale and hierarchy, extending and developing that pattern in its metaphors, while another focuses on the schemata of center and periphery (Frankiel 2001: 82). In this way, Johnson's theory can provide a vocabulary for the comparative study of rituals that lets us see how bodily movements give shape to – or more: give rise to – thinking through rituals (see also Andresen 2001).

Susan Bordo points out that feminists began to develop a critique of the "politics of the body" long before it was in philosophical fashion (Bordo 1993: 15–23). There has consequently been an enormous amount of theoretical work by feminists on the body (e.g. Davis 1997; Price and Shildrik 1999; Schiebinger 2000), and by feminist philosophers on the body (e.g. Daly 1978; Jaggar and Bordo 1989; Young 1990; Sawicki 1991; Grosz 1994, 1995; Butler 1993, 1999; Weiss 1999; McWhorter 1999; Sullivan 2001), though relatively little of it has been explicitly on rituals. Feminist philosophy has much to offer ritual studies. For example, feminist epistemologists have stressed the political, racial, and gendered specificity of the knowing subject. They have argued for the socially constructed nature of the knower and so, in this context, one can see two possible directions for feminist epistemological