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Negotiating Rites

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Introduction

Ute Hüsken and Frank Neubert

RITUAL AND NEGOTIATION: PRELIMINARY REFLECTIONS

IN COMMON UNDERSTANDING, but also in scholarly discourse, ritual has long been seen as an undisputed and indisputable part of (especially religious) tradition, performed over and over in the same ways—stable in form, meaningless, preconceived, and with the aim of creating harmony and enabling a tradition's survival. While these are certainly valid perspectives on rituals, a close look at ritual actions and texts shows that these assumptions can be seriously challenged. Not only are rituals frequently disputed; they also constitute a field in which vital and sometimes even violent negotiations take place. Negotiations—understood here as processes of interaction during which differing positions are debated and/or acted out—are ubiquitous in ritual contexts, either in relation to the ritual itself or in relation to the realm beyond any given ritual performance.¹

We argue in this volume that a central feature of ritual is its embeddedness in negotiation processes, and that life beyond the ritual frame often is negotiated in the field of rituals. It is exactly this point of view that opens up fruitful new perspectives on ritual procedures, on the interactions that constitute these procedures, and on the contexts in which they are embedded. By explicitly addressing and theorizing about the relevance of negotiation in the world of ritual, the essays in this volume hopefully will induce scholars and students alike to think differently and to find new starting points for more nuanced discussions.

This interdisciplinary endeavor thus aims at filling a serious gap in scholarly thinking and discourse about ritual. Ronald L. Grimes initiated explicit discussions on the interrelation of conflict, critique, and ritual with his pathbreaking works on ritual

criticism in the 1980s,² but so far no works have exclusively analyzed the interrelationship between ritual and notions of negotiation. This is exactly what this volume does.³ Although several publications deal with important aspects of conflicts within and about rituals,⁴ the related negotiations have been addressed only implicitly. This also holds true for treatments of the theoretical foundation of ritual studies, such as *Theorizing Rituals: Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, edited by Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek, and Michael Stausberg. This publication of the Dynamics of Ritual Collaborative Research Center at the University of Heidelberg (Germany) presents valuable new suggestions for defining ritual as well as detailed analyses of varying approaches to ritual. Yet the defining aspect of conflict and related negotiations are addressed in various articles only as asides.

Negotiation in fact has become a key concept in the cultural and social disciplines in the past several decades.⁵ Competition, contestation, change, and conflict have become central areas of social theorizing, and the question of how the social is negotiated clearly has gained urgency in a rapidly globalizing world. The increasing fluidity of boundaries, the discovery of the social life of events and even of material objects, the contestation of values and meanings in the context of growing mobility of social actors and their networks, and many other issues became prominent with increasing globalization, all of them involving a form of negotiation. In this volume the notion of negotiation is applied to ritual settings in order to deepen our understanding of how the poles of stability/change, structure/performance, and tradition/innovation are mediated in social encounters. At least two important discussions prepared the ground for this book: a mature debate on the performativity of ritual, and reflections on culture as process and negotiation. Both approaches are foundational for the investigation of activities that we would call “negotiation” in relation to rituals, emphasizing the fluidity and processual character of social interaction rather than its stable characteristics. We consider the concept of negotiation a fruitful tool for analysis, especially when applied to the study of ritual, because “ritual” can be seen as a mode of participation in social activity,⁶ which is itself fluid and therefore always contested, challenged, and negotiated. When talking about negotiations and ritual it is essential to be explicit about one’s understanding of negotiation as well as one’s notion of ritual. There is no lack of definitions of ritual, and no two definitions are alike.⁷ If anything, there is an increased tendency among scholars to avoid the term “ritual” altogether in favor of “ritualization,”⁸ “public events,” or broader notions such as “religious practice.” Moreover some of the traditions discussed here do not even have an indigenous equivalent to the modern Western understanding of “ritual.”⁹ The contributors to this volume represent diverse academic disciplines (Indology, religious studies, social anthropology, Asian history, Sinology). They do not attempt to agree on one uniform definition and understanding of ritual, a term implicitly influenced by a particular religious worldview. Nevertheless the diverse uses of the term in this collection are conceptually connected by the relevance of a varying number of the characteristics attributed to ritual in standard definitions: as repetitive, formally stylized behavior based on scripts or models that is perceived as different from everyday behavior,

separated through a (cognitive) frame; invested with meaning that is not necessarily immediately connected to the action performed; referring to and making use of symbols; consisting of building blocks; being traditionally sanctioned; taking place at specific places and/or times; rehearsed, structured, patterned, ordered, sequenced, and rule-governed. This plurality of characteristics makes it possible to see the ritual dimensions not only of a wide range of events, but also of discourses about events, performances, or actions that some might call ritual, others not. Thus the rituals or ritualized behavior investigated in the following case studies represent a broad spectrum, such as worship (*pūjā*) in a Tibetan Buddhist tradition practiced in Canada (Campbell), animist mortuary rituals in northern India (de Maaker), a New Year's festival in Swahili society (Echtler), atonement rituals (*prāyaścitta*) in ancient Indian texts (Aktor, McClymond), rituals of Tibetan "Treasure revealers" (Holmes-Tagchungdarpa), initiation rituals in Tibetan Buddhism (Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz) and in Wiccan religion in the United States (Bado), Jewish same-sex wedding rituals in the United States and Canada (Lash), rites connected to imperial power in eleventh-century China (Meyer), festivities remembering Martin Luther in the former East Germany (Stephenson), "hook-swinging" ritual as viewed by colonial, Brahmanic, and subaltern actors in South India (Schröder), the historical development of the interpretation of Indian Tantric rites (Wilke), and scholarly discourse on ritual (Potts). Not only are the actions and corresponding discourses diverse, but also the materials that form the basis of the individual case studies; some contributors use texts, some analyze ritual performances, others use both textual analysis and qualitative field study.¹⁰

As with "ritual," we decided to work with a very broad concept of "negotiation" in this volume. Negotiations take place on all levels of human activity; they are expressed by a wide variety of actions and discourse and in all shades of intensity. As negotiations take different forms, there is no single definition that is clear-cut and convincing, as the contributions to this volume show. Accordingly in many cases other terms could easily replace "negotiation" as it is used here. The processes called "negotiations" here range from mere interactions, textual reinterpretations, discussions aimed at achieving an agreement or a uniform tradition, to violent fights. In this volume we started from a tentative definition of negotiation as "any process of interaction during which differing positions are explicitly or implicitly debated and/or acted out." Consequently what unites the diverse (and markedly different) understandings and uses of this term here is the open eye for processes that originate in disagreement and that at the same time aim at a certain form of agreement, even though such agreement might not actually be achieved. It becomes clear that rituals are not stable entities, but ways humans deal with one another. The investigation of social reality reveals that rituals are indispensable in situations of crisis and conflict. They provide a frame and a means to socialize, especially in times of change—that is, in situations that are seen as a chance and as a threat at the same time. Finally, rituals provide opportunities for what might be labeled "proxy negotiations" when disagreements in other fields of social interaction are debated and acted out via rituals or negotiation about rituals.

Disagreement and conflict—the very foundation of negotiation as we understand it here—trigger activity and critical thinking. Whereas explicit differences of opinion create reflexivity and awareness of one's own and others' positions, implicit and presumed or imputed disagreement stimulates different modes of action.¹¹ This volume is based on the insight that negotiations pervade human social life and are an essential ground for social life.¹² Rituals as modes of social action are no exception. The negotiations initiated by disagreement and conflict on the correct performance or meaning of rituals—understood as modes of action—shape and reshape rituals and consequently discourse on rituals. However, negotiations are not only about change and stability in ritual, but also about change and stability maintained or created by ritual. Analyzing these negotiations thus helps identify which issues matter and what exactly is at stake; while the dynamic aspects of ritual are revealed, its crucial features also come to the fore.

PARTICIPATION, SUBVERSION, AND CONTEXTUALIZATION

Three major themes emerge from the analyses presented in the essays assembled in this volume. First, *participation* comes to be regarded as central to negotiations around ritual, both as negotiated participation in ritual and as participation in the negotiations about rituals. Second, the disagreements and conflicts that are the basis of processes of negotiation seem to be caused by *subversion* of ritual prescriptions, ritual roles, and power relations surrounding the ritual performances. Third, the concept of negotiation helps to more thoroughly *contextualize* both ritual prescriptions and concrete ritual performances.

Participation proves to be central to several of these investigative essays. While participation in ritual is often mainly understood as “deep participation,” and as such is characterized by deep attention, deep commitment, and intensity, all of which go hand-in-hand with a (perceived) loss of individual agency,¹³ what becomes clear in this collection is that participation must be understood in a broader sense to include any mode of attending to (or refusing to attend to) a ritual. This breadth implies varying levels of intensity in different roles and in different states of awareness of one's own participation and its implications.

While all our contributors address the issue of participation at least implicitly, those engaged in qualitative field studies identify participation both as a means of investigation and as an important aspect of negotiation processes taking place in and around ritual. In some rituals or ritual systems participation or attendance is an integral means of making statements, of creating, maintaining, or changing relationships (de Maaker, Holmes-Tagchungdarpa). However, it seems that here participation points to the importance of the agency of one's role in ritual, not to individual agency; awareness of the agency involved on the part of participants is therefore largely irrelevant. Thus in de Maaker's case study the negotiation of social relationships occurs by means of participating or refusing to participate in the postmortem gift exchanges in Garo

society. A range of options, including the obligation to and the freedom not to participate, allows people to negotiate between distinct interests and to readjust the social network. Through their mode of participation people simultaneously negotiate the relationship between their “House” and that of the deceased. The public’s participatory role is also underscored by Holmes-Tagchungdarpa, who argues that public consumption (communalization) of a Tibetan ritual tradition is crucial to its success or failure. The practicing community can either verify or refuse to verify the lineage (that is, the teaching, the teacher, and the practice) through community participation in initiation rituals. Thus different social groups play a key part in negotiating the lineage’s authenticity.

Participation, both its frequency and its repetition, is an important mode of gradually becoming an insider when it comes to internalizing “foreign” or “new” rituals. Thereby one not only learns the practices but also makes sense of them (Bado, Campbell). Looking at ritual practice opens our eyes to the importance of the body as a learning agent. It elucidates how participation is learned or enacted by means of the body. Here the performance approaches to ritual prove especially helpful, wherein ritual action, enacted either visibly or in imagination (Wilke), is seen as action of the body, thus dissolving the Cartesian mind-body distinction. This is also confirmed by Seligman et al., whose investigation of Confucian and Jewish texts brought to light that ritual action “trains the most basic impulses, so that the inner comes to reflect the outer, and not the other way round.”¹⁴ This body-centered perspective on participation is very much in accordance with Schieffelin’s interpretation of participation as a state of body-and-mind “that privileges resonance, identification, and engagement,” a fundamental aspect not only of ritual but also of everyday life.¹⁵ Campbell thus describes how individual participants in Buddhist rituals of worship negotiate the ritual’s meaning in relation to their own worldviews through participation. The tradition in its Canadian form privileges participation in the service over apprehending the ritual’s meanings. Familiarity is gradually achieved by means of repeated attendance. Consequently a variety of meanings and purposes is attributed to the ritual by the practitioners. With time and repetition, interpretations of the ritual that were initially personal and subjective are worked out. Visualizations (also formalized ritual actions), however, a common practice in Tantric Buddhism, cannot be “properly performed” without some preknowledge of what is to be visualized, and so some instruction is required. Bado argues that initiation into Wicca religion is largely somatic training, achieved through physical participation in rites. The gradually developed “body-in-practice” is an acting and learning agent, and so the awareness of ritual practice, as a step-by-step process, recedes into the background as the ritual action is incorporated by the novice, and the tradition is thus made his or her own. In any case a closer look at the way people acquire the knowledge of and about ritual and how it should be performed or presented also helps us understand the deeply felt and sometimes even violent quarrels over ownership, performance, and rights to certain ritual traditions.

In some case studies the negotiations are explicitly focused on the mode of participation. Here the critical questions are Who participates in what role? and What are the

limits of stretching, interpreting, and redefining ritual roles? (Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz, Lash). In these case studies disagreement and the subsequent negotiation processes regarding the modes of attending evoke awareness of participation. The mode of participation seems to be determined largely by the position one holds in relation to performing the rite, but also by one's initial mind-set and expectations. By contrasting American and Canadian Jewish same-sex marriages, Lash clearly shows how the legal status in the two countries affects the mode of participation: in the United States, where same-sex marriages are not legally acknowledged, the rites are performed as rites of resistance, whereas in Canada, Jewish same-sex marriages are performed as rites expressing conformity with Jewish tradition. Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz show how the perspectives of (potential) participants in Tibetan Buddhist initiation rituals from different cultural backgrounds (Himalayan and Western Buddhists) collide on how female ordination should be performed. Here the issue is not only who participates and how, but also who participates in what role in the negotiation processes; in short, negotiations are about performances rather than strictly about meaning.¹⁶

When an entire ritual tradition is in question, participating and performing can become a means of *subversion* (Schröder). Thus Schröder focuses on ritual as a discursive formation in which aspects of ritual action and their discursive context merge, providing a dynamic resource for the negotiation of social and religious identity. In her case study from India the lower castes' participation in the ritual is clearly a form of resistance to the normative power of colonial rule, thereby subverting the ruling norms by articulating and acting out alternative positions. By contrast the upper castes attempt to disengage from the "uncivilized lower classes of society" and thus refuse participation in terms of active local support as well as in general public discourse, thereby also making a strong statement about their status.

As Schröder's case study shows, the term "negotiation" implies tension between change and stability, but it also draws attention to subversion and transgression of idealized standards or a seemingly stable hierarchical order. In other words the rules of ritual performance are sometimes, willingly or not, transgressed.¹⁷ This fact necessitates negotiations about whether, and how, to make good on such transgressions. Schröder's essay shows how specific performances take place and are labeled as rituals in order to subvert both traditional religious and sociopolitical hierarchies by explicitly transgressing rules. Echtler's case study is an impressive confirmation of the well-known thesis that rituals serve as a frame for transgressions of social norms and values. These transgressions are a means to negotiate and stabilize social relationships. Viewed from another angle, the transgressions contribute to the formation and maintenance of personal and collective identities. Both Schröder and Echtler show how subdivisions of society (i.e., non-Brahmans, and young men and women, respectively) use ritual transgression to affirm their identity to themselves and to "the other."

On an individual level, life cycle rituals and initiations serve to change individual identities. So discussions on the ritual form and textual basis of the ordination

procedures for Tibetan Buddhist nuns implicitly affect their specific role in present-day Tibetan Buddhist groups as well as their immediate contemporary context (Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz). The same principle holds true for Jewish same-sex weddings (Lash); the ceremonial performance can be used to show that the couple is a “normal wed[ded] couple” by enacting traditional parts of wedding ceremonies, or the performance can demonstrate that a same-sex wedding is something special, that it stands apart from heterosexual weddings, simply by transgressing or subverting traditional forms.

All the features of *negotiating rites* described in this volume’s essays indicate that close attention must be paid to *contextualization* when analyzing rituals. Schröder and Meyer, for example, show that the rituals they analyze cannot be properly understood without reference to the power structures in which participants, performers, and observers are entangled. Even in cases where negotiations are not part of the ritual performance itself, it is clear that negotiations are nevertheless a necessary and unavoidable precondition of ritual performance. If there were no differences or ambiguities to be negotiated, there might not be a necessity to perform rituals at all. Or as Seligman et al. state, “Ritual and ritualistic behavior are not so much events as ways of negotiating our very existence in the world,” and ritual provides the central space for playing out the constant tension between tradition and creativity.¹⁸ The close relationship between the two again raises the question of ritual and context for which Don Handelman uses the metaphor of the “Moebius band”:

The idea of the Moebius surface (or ring) is used to argue for a frame that relates to the problematic of being inside and outside the frame, as a function (to a degree) of the organization of the frame itself. The ritual frame opens to the outside while enabling itself to be practiced as relatively closed. Through such framing, the outside is taken inside and integrated with the ritual. No less, the inside is taken outside of itself and thereby made part of the frame. Therefore, the frame is “in process” within itself, and in an ongoing relationship to its inside and to its outside. The topology of the Moebius ring constitutes a single surface both external and internal, outside and inside itself. The Moebius surface is twisted on itself so that the inside of the surface turns into its own outside, its outside into its inside. If the Moebius form is conceptualized as a frame, then this framing is inherently dynamic, relating exterior to interior, interior to exterior. Changing and recursive, the Moebius frame enables exterior and interior to interpenetrate, while keeping them separate.¹⁹

The negotiated aspects of social life in connection with ritual performances demonstrate the interpenetration of ritual (traditionally “inside the frame”) and context (“outside”). While it seems that, within the frame of ritual, negotiation of social relationships comes to a halt, the results or decisions enacted in rituals become subject to new negotiations right after the performance or even within the frame itself as it opens toward the “outside.” The performative frame of ritual thus only ideally excludes “worldly matters” from its realm.

THE VOLUME

The contributions to this volume are arranged according to three interrelated variations by which the relationship of ritual and negotiation as described above can be understood.

(1) Sharing a World

- a In the eyes of many participants and insiders to a tradition, rituals negotiate their relationship with what is perceived to be the transcendent (gods, ghosts, ancestors, etc.).
- b In the eyes of observers and participants, rites negotiate the relationships of participants among each other and with outsiders.

(2) Getting It Straight

The performance, meaning, structure, and contents of rituals are matters of constant negotiation among participants, specialists, and outsiders. In fact negotiations of rituals and their “proper performance” have often been reasons for tensions and even schisms within religious movements.

(3) Meanings and Values of “Ritual”

The notion of ritual and the classification of certain performances, actions, and events as “rituals” or “not rituals”²⁰ is a matter of constant negotiation among practitioners and scholars and between those two groups. “Ritual” is a term that implicitly carries a variety of meanings and values.

While most of the authors in this volume deal with negotiation processes intrinsic to traditions, others address the question of what happens to rituals when they change over time and thus adapt to shifting contextual circumstances, or when different cultures claim to “share” a ritual. Yet one field that urgently calls for attention in this respect is not dealt with here, namely rites of negotiation. Because our focus is on ritual, we do not deal with the question of why processes of negotiations, such as peace negotiations, tend to take ritual form.²¹ Clearly ritual negotiates the social since it is a mode of participating in social reality, even if it might be argued that “the distinctive efficacy of ritual does not reside in its ability to provide answers to problems raised by social life.”²² However, the issue of how and why negotiations are ritualized, and the related important question as to how this knowledge can be used to make these negotiations successful in different cultural and global contexts, requires thorough dialogue and interaction with political and economic researchers and their respective institutions, which calls for a book of its own. The present volume, with its emphasis on negotiations in and about rituals, may be seen as an initial step to trigger further research in this area.

Divergent as the topics and methods may seem, the following essays are connected by the notion of negotiation that conveys insight into the socially embedded and constructed nature of what is called ritual.

Part 1: Sharing a World

This group of essays analyzes the role of ritual in living, establishing, and maintaining different kinds of social relationships. As we stated earlier, rites serve as a mode of negotiation in all kinds of social conflict. Thus negotiation, the ritual forms it may take, and the rituals that end negotiation processes enable the people in a given society to “share their world” by diminishing conflict and disagreement in a ritually legitimized manner.

Often rituals end negotiation processes and performatively enact the results of the foregoing negotiations. This is the main topic of “Negotiating Karma: Penance in the Classical Indian Law Books.” By analyzing rites of penance and expiation (*prāyaścitta*) as described in ancient Indian law texts (*dharmaśāstra*), Mikael Aktor takes a close look at the modes of negotiation connected with such rites. Whereas the ritual performance itself remains rather stable, he shows how a number of negotiations take place in the context of the rituals. First, penance rites are embedded in the constant negotiation of religious values, such as the interpretation of *karma* and the cycle of rebirth. Second, specific actions are subject to different evaluations; therefore whether a penance is necessary (and if so which one is appropriate) must be negotiated. Third, pragmatic concerns lead to negotiations regarding how to apply or interpret certain rules laid down in the law texts. Aktor concludes that in his case studies “negotiations surround the ritual proper, but they can never be located in it.” Instead the performance of a ritual enacts the results of the foregone negotiations and thus affirms them in a socially legible way by imposing a ritually legitimized authority. Thus Aktor sees rituals as both instruments of and subject to politics, but never as politics itself.

Erik de Maaker details the negotiations surrounding death rites among the Garo, a tribe in the hills north of India’s border with Bangladesh. “Negotiations at Death: Assessing Gifts, Mothers, and Marriages” addresses the importance of participation in death rituals in the assessment and reinterpretation of social relationships with special reference to the processes of gift exchange after a person’s death. This ritualized gift exchange, he concludes, allows for negotiations of closeness and distance among the concerned “Houses.”

Magnus Echtler adopts a different perspective in analyzing the negotiation of gender roles in Swahili society. “‘The Clitoris Is Indeed Your Sweet’: Negotiating Gender Roles in the Ritual Setting of the Swahili New Year’s Festival” demonstrates how one form of transgression in the district of Makunduchi, ritual fighting among young men, is replaced by another, namely highly obscene songs that address the relationships between young men and women and consciously subvert the rules governing such relationships in everyday life. Echtler identifies these songs and their ritualized performance as “liminal transgressions” that define and stabilize social relationships far beyond their immediate performance context.

Analyzing festivities remembering Martin Luther in the reformer’s hometown of Wittenberg, Barry Stephenson in “Ritual Negotiations in Lutherland” shows how performance sequences from street theater to liturgy manifest different ways of

negotiating social status and relations. He reveals how the revival of the carnivalesque after the breakdown of East Germany proves to be a powerful mode of coping with or criticizing the political setting, indicating “the health of democratic processes.” He also argues that ritualized mimetic behavior, which is characteristic of the carnivalesque, creates ambiguity that allows for creative negotiations of social identity.

Christian Meyer’s “Negotiating Rites in Imperial China: The Case of Northern Song Court Ritual Debates from 1034 to 1093” demonstrates the influence of scholars and officials on imperial ritual performance. Although major rituals were performed only personally by the emperor himself, as ritual experts the scholars were powerful participants in the court debates on ritual. Meyer shows that the negotiation of ritual performance played a crucial role in negotiating power. Because the concept of *li* (ritual) always included the idea of hierarchy, the rituals’ performances served as instruments and demonstrations of imperial power, and so these rituals became a major medium in power struggles. Accordingly debates about how to perform imperial court rituals, especially which music should be played, were in effect not only negotiations of power between scholar-officials and ruler, but also served as a means of strengthening one’s party in the factional struggles.

Part 2: Getting It Straight

In many cases negotiations evolve around the question of how certain rites must or must not be performed. Questions of “correct” performance at times also lead to schisms within traditions. The essays in this section analyze debates on these aspects of rituals that are usually labeled as “formality.”

The scholar and Wicca practitioner Nikki Bado explores the role of the body as the site of interaction and negotiation with the sacred in “Performing the Ancient Ones: *The Body-in-Practice* as the Ground of Ritualized Negotiation.” Bado argues that initiation into the Wicca religion by way of somatic training “is embedded in a long and complex multidirectional process of increasingly somatic practice.” In this process the “natural body” is made into a “body-in-practice,” based on a particular mode of perception. In the course of initiation the body is increasingly involved as an acting agent, thus becoming the “knower” of the skills necessary for successful ritual work. Through the gradual integration of the body as a learning agent, the learner first “discovers and [then] creates meaning through bodily engagement, through sensual and participatory conversation and intimate interaction.” The physical body thus “emerges as equally important to belief or intellectual knowledge.” Religion as disembodied belief is thus transformed into religion as embodied practice. The author’s use of the Japanese philosopher Yuasa Yasuo is especially enlightening, as he not only shows how somatic practices turn into learned responses that become habits, but also suggests that spiritual development occurs in a similar fashion.

“Negotiating Tantra and Veda in the *Paraśurāma-Kalpa* Tradition” deals with the discursive sublimation of Tantric rites (including the use of alcohol, meat, bodily fluids,

and sexual intercourse) within the Hindu Kaula Śrīvidyā tradition as it emerges from the mediaeval Sanskrit ritual manual *Paraśurāma-Kalpasūtra*. Annette Wilke shows how the text makes use of the body and sensuality at the same time that it refutes a Veda/Tantra opposition, thus reworking hierarchies, power structures, and definitions of orthodoxy. Merging body and mind in this text is a “soteriological program.” The Tantrics’ “body laboratory,” Wilke concedes, does emphasize interiority and bodylessness, but at the same time it includes corporal experience. This strategy keeps the ritual intact yet purged of all “impurities,” thereby helping to spread the Tantric tradition even in orthodox Brahman circles. Wilke concludes that the imaginary and the virtual “become so prominent that finally only metonymy and metaphor are left—remarkably without substantially endangering the ritual.”

“Same-Sex Weddings in Canada: Rituals of Resistance or Rituals of Conformity?” shows that legal status clearly influences a ritual’s meaning, performance, and function. Shari Rochelle Lash argues that in the United States, where same-sex marriage is not uniformly legalized, such weddings serve as rituals of resistance in both form and content, whereas in Canada the accepted legal status of same-sex marriage leads to nuptials that conform to their counterparts, in this case traditional Jewish weddings.

“The Social Element of Visionary Revelation: Public Rites as a Means of Negotiating Authenticity in Tibetan Buddhist Visionary Lineages” examines the crucial place of rituals in establishing the religious role of a *Gter-ston*, a “Treasure revealer,” that is, someone who discovers religious texts called “Treasures” in Tibetan Buddhism. What does one have to do in order to be recognized as a legitimate Treasure revealer? Amy Holmes-Tagchungdarpa argues that such a recognition is established by a highly formalized procedure. By participating in the rituals discovered in the Treasures and promulgated by the revealers, believers support and thereby help to establish or maintain the legitimacy and authenticity of a revealed text, its corresponding practice, and, significantly, its discoverer.

In “Negotiating Ritual Repair: The *prāyaścitta* Material in the Baudhāyana Śrauta Sūtra” Kathryn McClymond examines intrinsic ritual measures in the Brahmanic Indian ritual system of the Baudhāyana tradition aimed at preventing evil consequences that arise from breaching ritual rules. McClymond shows that it is precisely these “atonement rituals” that allow for stretching the rules, while simultaneously reminding the performers of the “ideal” procedures, thus keeping the rather conservative ritual system intact and alive.

Part 3: Meanings and Values of Ritual

The essays in this section concentrate on rituals and the negotiations about their meanings and their “ritualness.”

Ulrike Schröder analyzes asymmetric power relations in the colonial context of nineteenth-century South India. “Hook-Swinging in South India: Negotiating the Subaltern Space within a Colonial Society” examines archival material that reveals how

officials dealt with the crucial question of whether certain practices were “religious” or “nonreligious,” “ritual” or “custom.” Formal recognition as a religion or as religious ritual by colonial authorities safeguarded a given practice from direct colonial influence; conversely a practice that was explicitly denied such a label was subject to restriction, prohibition, and even criminal prosecution. Schröder also offers insight into the use of such discourses by subaltern actors as a means of subversion and resistance to both colonial superstructures and suppression in traditional social hierarchies. Thus the practitioners of so-called hook-swinging festivals in South India—rituals during which practitioners willingly have themselves suspended on hooks driven through the flesh of the back in worship of the goddess—petitioned for official recognition of their practices as religious rituals, and in order to achieve this made changes in the performances.

“Negotiating Meaning and Enactment in a Buddhist Ritual” explores the ways a religiously and culturally Tibetan ritual tradition is interpreted by Western practitioners in Toronto. Patricia Q. Campbell argues that, although the meaning and function of the ritual may differ among performers, its enactment serves as the unifying element. Moreover she argues that attendance precedes understanding. Yet while diverse meanings are not mutually exclusive, there are limits, Campbell argues, to attending a ritual without being able to attribute meaning to it. In this context she reflects fruitfully on ritual action that takes place exclusively in the mind (thereby conceptualizing the mind as part of the body).

“Ordination into the Buddhist Saṅgha as an Initiation Ritual and as a Legal Procedure” analyzes negotiations surrounding recent attempts to establish a female ordination line in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition. Ute Hüsken and Petra Kieffer-Pülz show how the conflicting agendas of the agents involved determine their respective views of the ritual of ordination as a Buddhist nun: whereas for the “Western nuns” ordination is seen as a legal procedure (their main concern is to find a “legally valid” way to perform these ordinations), for the “Himalayan nuns” the procedure constitutes a transformative ritual of initiation with long-lasting effects that tie the nun to her teacher. The question of whether and how such an ordination should be performed therefore is evaluated entirely differently by the members of the two groups.

Not only the diverging interpretations of what a ritual means, but also differing approaches to a discursive understanding of the meaning of the term “ritual” are negotiated when it comes to the “meaning of ritual.” “Negotiating the Social in the Ritual Theory of Victor Turner and Roy Rappaport” offers a metatheoretical approach by reflecting on the terminology used by theoreticians of ritual in negotiating basic academic concepts. Grant Potts highlights the fact that the notion of ritual itself is a scholarly construction; as such it is a highly negotiated concept. On the one hand, scholars try to agree on the usage of the term “ritual,” while on the other hand negotiating the relationship of ritual to the obscure notion of “the social.” Narrating a history of the idea that rituals are constituent facts in negotiations of social relationships, Potts analyzes scholarly discourse on ritual.

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The comparative reflections on negotiations gathered in this volume highlight those issues that are usually at work behind the scenes. Conflicts that require negotiations in order to reconcile diverging agendas make the crucial issues evident both to observers and participants, especially when diverse perspectives and their agents confront one another. Because disagreement—the engine that drives negotiations—triggers and initiates activity and thinking about possible ways of reconciliation, it also creates reflection, reflexivity, and awareness of one's own and others' positions. However, when the disagreement is more implicit, simmering below the surface, it may also instigate unreflected action. As it is, disagreement and efforts to solve the ensuing problems decisively shape ritual and lead to ritual creativity. Several of the case studies in this volume clearly demonstrate that rituals are also a means of expressing and enacting subversion and resistance to dominant discourses. They are strategically used to make unpopular or uncomfortable statements and to reverse existing hierarchies. The analysis of negotiations therefore contextualizes rituals; rituals cannot fruitfully be treated if they are detached from their contexts and their contextual negotiations, especially since rituals also frequently enact the results of completed or ongoing negotiations. By so doing rituals express newly formed or altered social relationships (as in marriages, initiations, or healing rituals)²³ that result from the foregoing negotiations. In other words, "ritual continually renegotiates boundaries, living with their instability and vulnerable nature."²⁴ This volume shows that the boundaries of ritual are continually renegotiated as well. It is precisely the process of negotiation that highlights the oscillating mutual influence of rites, boundaries, and structures.

Notes

The idea for this volume was born at a conference held by the Dynamics of Ritual Collaborative Research Center at the University of Heidelberg, when the editors realized that many contributions to the conference referred to the notion of "negotiation" in relation to the analysis of rituals. The exchange on the topic and the copy editing by Susan Scott was made possible through generous funding by the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (German Research Council) and the University of Oslo.

1. On form, see, for example, Gladigow, "Sequenzierung von Riten und die Ordnung der Rituale," 57–76. The main proponent of the theory of meaninglessness is Frits Staal; see "The Meaninglessness of Ritual," 2–22, and *Rules without Meaning*. For a critique see Michaels, "Le rituel pour le rituel' oder wie sinnlos sind Rituale?," 23–47, and "Ritual and Meaning," 247–61.

On preconception, see, for example, Rappaport, *Ritual and Religion in the Making of Humanity*. Rappaport interprets rituals as formalized action perceived as not encoded by the actual performers (see especially 32–33).

On harmony, see Radcliffe-Brown, "Religion and Society," 153–77.

A classic of social-functionalist approaches to ritual is Victor Turner's *The Ritual Process: Structure and Antistructure*. In addition Bruce Lincoln presents a functional analysis of myth's

and ritual's roles in creating and maintaining social stability based on Durkheimian notions in *Discourse and the Construction of Society*.

2. See Grimes, "Infelicitous Performances and Ritual Criticism," 103–22; "Ritual Criticism and Reflexivity in Fieldwork," 217–39; and *Ritual Criticism*. Other works dealing with instances of negotiation and ritual criticism include Schieffelin, "On Failure and Performance," 59–89; Howe, "Risk, Ritual and Performance," 63–79.

3. Closest to taking up this question is a volume edited by Ute Hüsken on ritual mistakes and failure, *When Rituals Go Wrong*.

4. See, for example, Rao, "Regeln in Bewegung"; Wolf, "Kosmologie in Verhandlung"; Schnepel, "Der Körper im 'Tanz der Strafe' in Orissa." The volume *Discourse in Ritual Studies*, edited by Hans Schildermann, deals with the possibility of changing diverse aspects of rituals and performances, change here implying that these aspects are made "more suitable" from the view of both practitioners and "customers." The volume *The Power of Discourse in Ritual Performance*, edited by Ulrich Demmer and Martin Gaenzsle, asks questions regarding discourse on ritual and deals with different sorts of negotiation on the practitioners' level as well as on a theoretical and metatheoretical level. However, theorizing about the interrelation between ritual and the processes of negotiation is missing. *Social Performance: Symbolic Action, Cultural Pragmatic and Ritual*, edited by Jeffrey C. Alexander, Bernhard Giesen, and Jason L. Mast, deals more explicitly with negotiations of and around what the authors call "social performances," of which ritual is a special form. The authors include in their study all kinds of historical and modern performative acts, including both singular events and regularly held social rituals, to show the influence of these events on social reality.

5. See, for example, Byron and Kockel, *Negotiating Culture*; Festenstein, *Negotiating Diversity*; Pottier, *Negotiating Local Knowledge*; Karsten, *Negotiating History and Culture*. On negotiation in the context of ritual studies, see, for example, Rao, *Negotiating the Divine*; Roberts, "Toasting Uyghurstan," 147–79; De Pee, *Negotiating Marriage*; Guinn, *Protecting Jerusalem's Holy Sites*. A search of the Karlsruher Virtueller Katalog (kvk) for titles including "negotiating" resulted in 1,904 entries in the Library of Congress (www.ubka.uni-karlsruhe.de/kvk.html, accessed December 17, 2009).

6. See Houseman, "An Upside-down Perspective on Ritual, Media and Conflict," 2.

7. See, for example, Snoek, "Defining 'Rituals,'" 3–14.

8. For a critique directed toward the usefulness of "ritualization," see Houseman, "An Upside-down Perspective on Ritual, Media and Conflict."

9. See Stausberg, "'Ritual': A Lexicographic Survey of Some Related Terms from an Emic Perspective," 51–100; see also Meyer's contribution in this volume.

10. The authors in this volume who deal with ritual texts suggest that, frequently, scripts (here written texts) for rituals are *pre-scripts*; in other words, they do not necessarily represent actual practice but rather idealized versions of rites, versions that still have to be adapted to the actual local, historical, and social setting. (On the relation between performance and script, see Snoek's attempt to define ritual in "Defining 'Rituals,'" 11–14.) Moreover Schröder points to the fact that in the case of India, an orientalist assumption that texts form the basis of a religion created the hegemony of religious texts over practices, and Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz examine negotiations that try to harmonize the performance and textual aspects of a Buddhist initiation ritual. Authors dealing with rites they have personally encountered are explicit about their position; indeed the scholarly perspective is regarded as one of many possible views on rituals (see especially Potts; Hüsken and Kieffer-Pülz), since the entire analytical process benefits from the engagement with practitioners and critics.

11. In *Ritual and Its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* Seligman et al. rightly point out that ritual is “not necessarily—or even not primarily—something one thinks about” (25). They argue that ritual is an unreflected mode of action, whereas “sincerity” is their label for pure reflection.

12. In some strands of sociological theory “negotiation” plays a prominent role in the conceptualization of society. Thus, for example, in social exchange theory the term is used quite narrowly to denote processes similar to marketplace activity, “in which people are guided by what they stand to gain and lose from others” (Macdonis and Plummer, *Sociology*, 28). Symbolic interactionism, as another example, deals with social interaction and the negotiation of meaning and identity as means of the constant re-creation of society understood as a constantly ongoing process.

13. See Schieffelin, “Participation,” 621.

14. See Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 35ff.

15. See Schieffelin, “Participation,” 615–20.

16. See Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 51.

17. For examples of such willing or inadvertent transgressions and ritual modes of “dealing” with them, see the essays in Hüsken, *When Rituals Go Wrong*. The notion of transgression is also a topic of Actor’s and McClymond’s contributions to the present volume.

18. Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 8, 37.

19. Handelman, “Framing,” 571–82.

20. See Neubert, “Ritualkritik, Ritualdiskurs und Meditationspraxis,” 411–39, for an analysis of a debate in which the question of the ritualness of certain practices is at stake.

21. Other examples are negotiations of marriage alliances, especially in the Indian context, and negotiations in the wide sphere of economy.

22. Houseman, “An Upside-down Perspective on Ritual, Media and Conflict,” 2.

23. See, for example, Sax, “Heilen Rituale?,” 213–15.

24. Seligman et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 9.

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PART ONE

Sharing a World

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