

ritual: definitions and directions

Allison Parrish

ritual

"a showing of a doing"

Schechner (1977, p. 65)

**"the performance of more or less invariant
sequences of formal acts and utterances
not entirely encoded by the performers"**

Rappaport (1999, p. 24)

- Rites of passage (baptism, prom, weddings)
- Seasonal/calendrical (Halloween, New Years Day, May Day, TNO)
- Political (court procedures, parliamentary procedures, elections, parades)
- Religious (prayer, sacrament, confession)
- Interpersonal (greetings, gift-giving)

what does ritual *do*?

"The central role that religion plays in people's lives is to get things done, to make things right and to keep them that way."

–Tremplin (2006, p. 112)

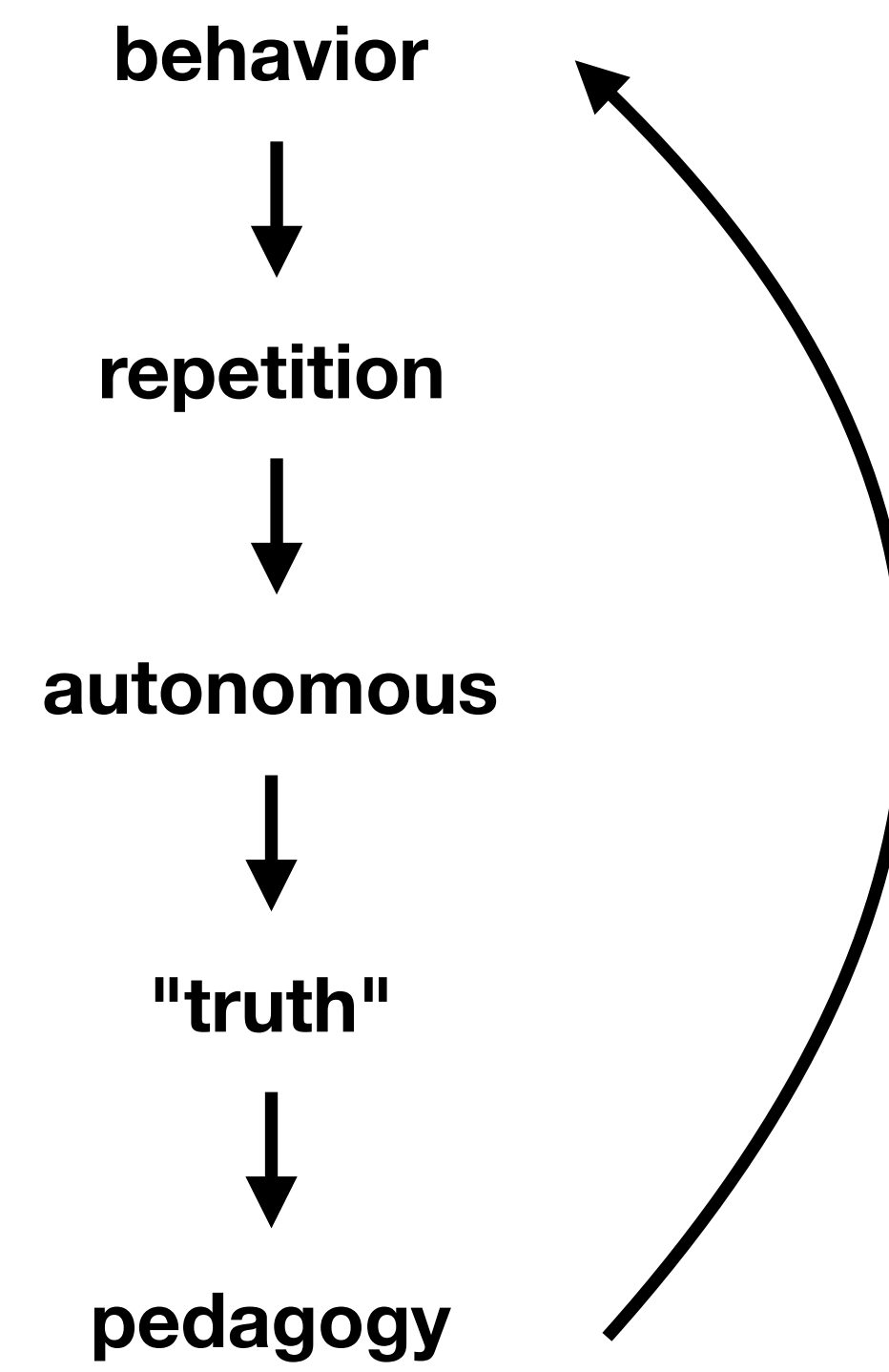
functional taxonomy

- Solidarity and social cohesion (Durkheim)
- Collective effervescence (Durkheim) and "communitas" (Victor Turner)
- Construction of power (Geertz)
- Negotiation (courtrooms, elections)

ritual and the body

If all societies ... set such store on the seemingly most insignificant details of dress, bearing, physical and verbal manners, the reason is that, **treating the body as a memory**, they entrust to it in abbreviated and practical, i.e. mnemonic, form the fundamental principles of the arbitrary content of culture. The principles embodied in this way are placed **beyond the grasp of consciousness**, and hence cannot be touched by voluntary, deliberate transformation, cannot even be made explicit; **nothing seems more ineffable, more incommunicable, more inimitable, and therefore more precious, than the values given body**, made body by the transsubstantiation achieved by the hidden persuasion of an implicit pedagogy, **capable of instilling a whole cosmology, an ethic, a metaphysic, a political philosophy**, through injunctions as insignificant as 'stand up straight' or 'don't hold your knife in your left hand'.

Bourdieu (1977, p. 94)



ethology

bees



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Waggle_Dance.webm

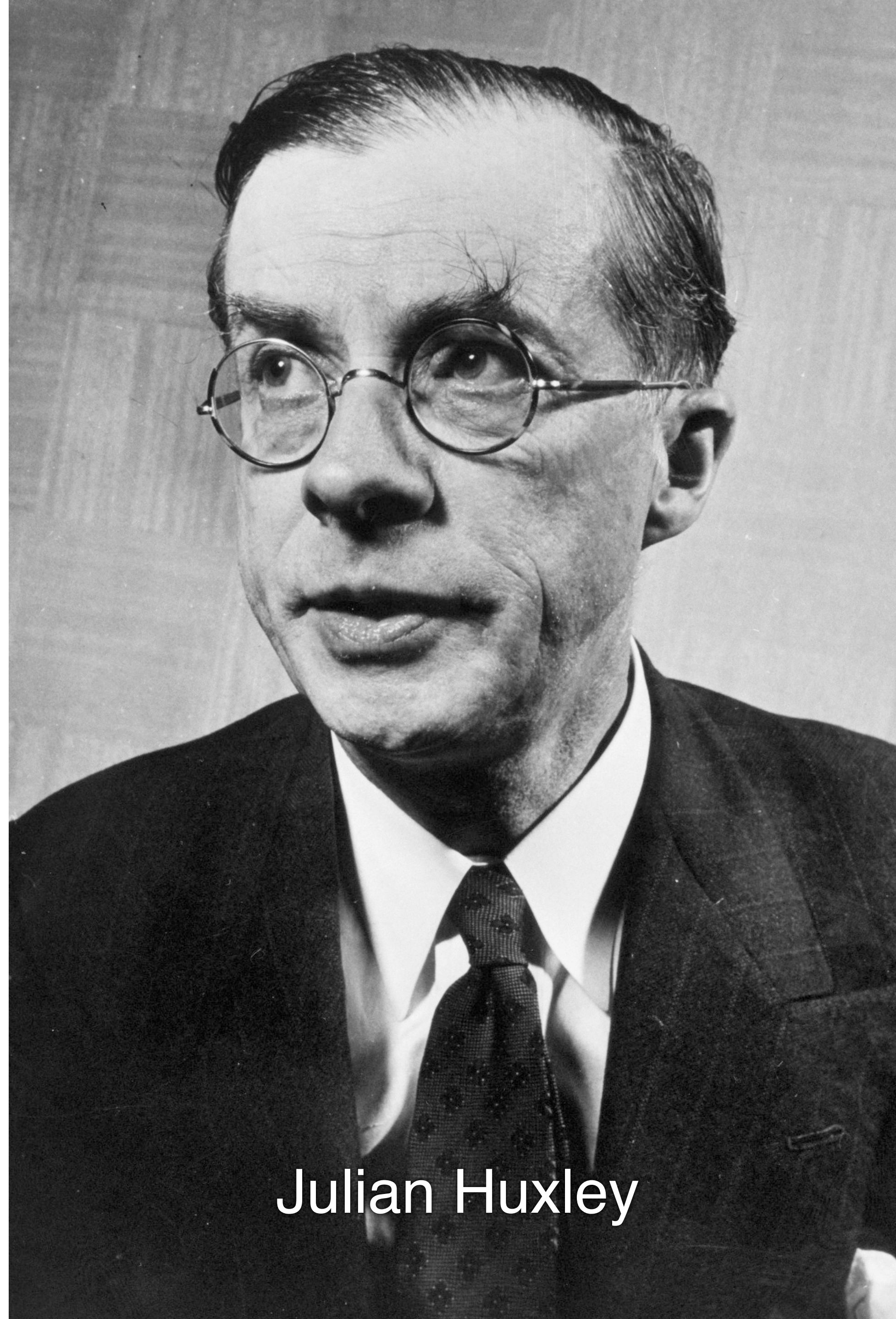


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grebes



Source: https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Baltsende_futen-4961561.webm



Julian Huxley

instrumental



communicative



stylized

Ritual is "the adaptive formalization and canalization of motivated human activities so as to secure more effective communicatory ('signaling') function, reduction of intra-group damage, or better intra-group bonding"

–Julian Huxley, quoted in Grimes (2006)

ritualization

“Ritualization is a way of acting that is designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done to other, usually more quotidian, activities.”

Bell (1992, p. 74)

behavior

behavior

behavior

behavior

behavior

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behavior

**ritualization involves "a particular
way of naming the social
world" (Couldry 2002)**

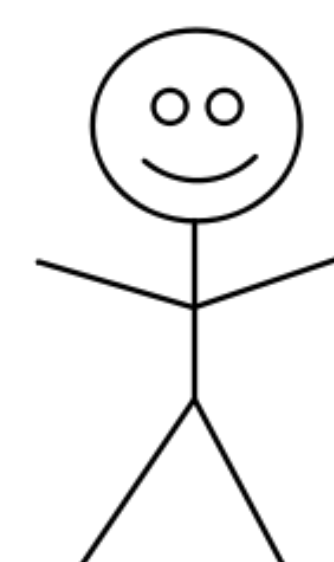
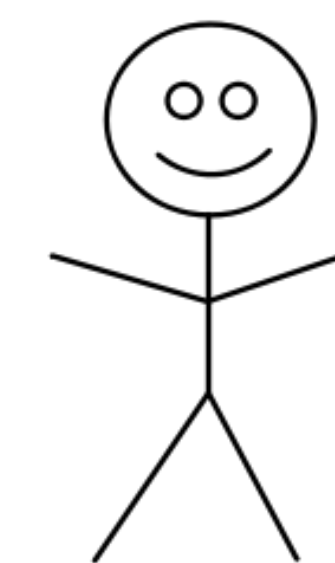
ritual builds social cohesion

“For attitudes to become definitive, they must be cultivated by practice, and the name for sustained, value-laden attitude practice is ritual. [...] In ritualizing, human beings discover, then embody and cultivate their world views, attitudes and ethics.”

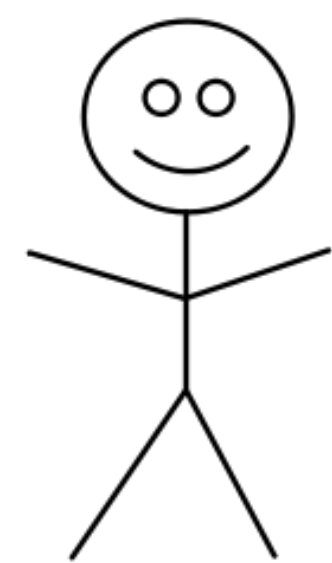
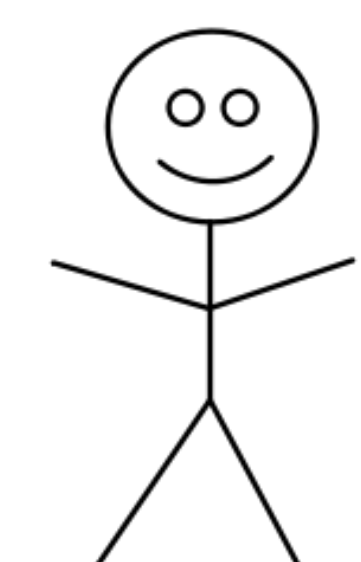
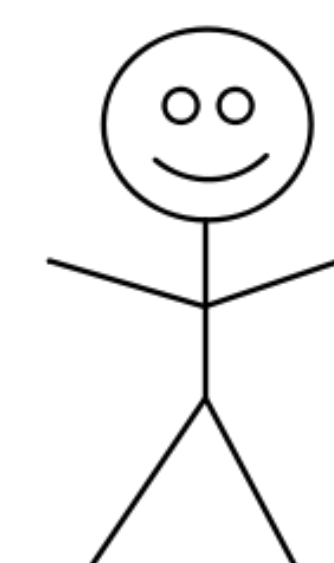
Grimes (2006, p. 135)

"Religious rituals often call for the sharing of resources, for significant intellectual and emotional commitments, and for other hard-to-fake signs of cooperation. As a result, natural coalitional behaviors like trust, solidarity and mutual defense rise over time, as does the cost of defection. Thus rituals themselves are extremely important, whether they are truly efficacious or not, because not participating in them provokes distrust."

–Tremplin (2006, p. 130)



behavior

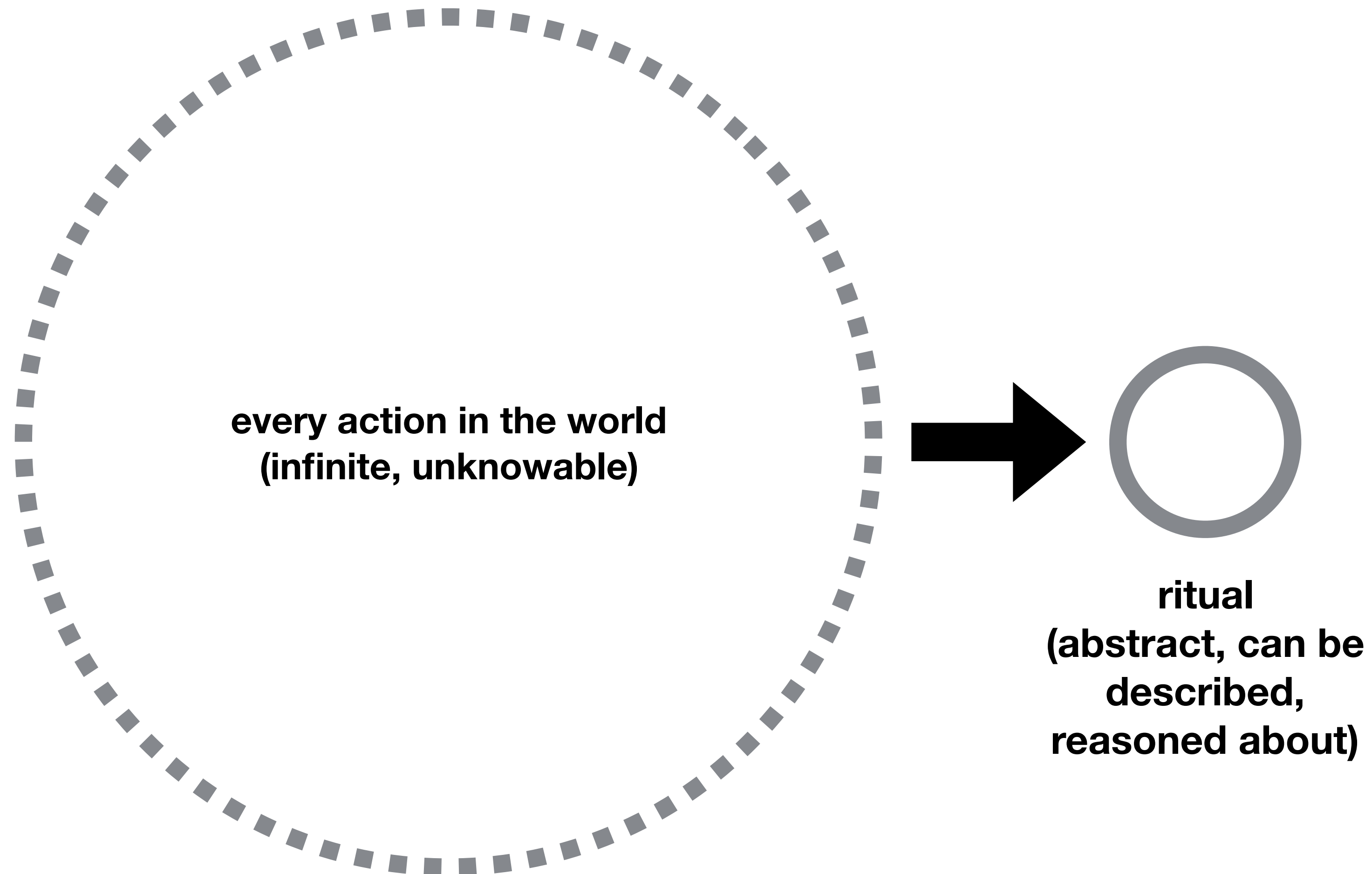


ritual is material

"[E]lements of nature—animate and inanimate—are intrinsic to the ritual process.... [R]itual [is] the form of material relations that appeals to, appropriates, and manipulates the energies of forces within and beyond physical laws. [...] Objects are meaningful as a result of the agencies accorded them by human cosubjects in the very process of forging social relations among people, the unseen occult forces, and the forces of nature."

– Ogundiran and Saunders, pp. 9–10.

rituals are reflexive



rituals are generative

“[R]itual is the predication of identities ... so profoundly enacted that they suffuse bone and blood, thereby generating a cosmos, an oriented habitat. In such rites, people enact a momentary cosmos of metaphor. Ritually, people do not dance merely to exercise limbs or... to illustrate sacredly held beliefs. Ritualists dance, rather, to discover ways of inhabiting a place.... [R]itual helps people figure out, divine, even construct a cosmos.”

–Grimes (2006, p. 146)

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