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## Ritual and Emotions: Moving Relations, Patterned Effusions

*François Berthomé and Michael Houseman*

■ **ABSTRACT:** This article reconsiders the connection between ‘ritual’ and ‘emotion’ from a pragmatic, relational perspective in which rituals are seen as dynamic interactive contexts and emotions as fairly short-lived emergent properties and integral components of these interactions. It emphasizes ritual’s capacity to reallocate social positions by instantiating characteristic patterns of relationship, and the way particular emotions crystallize and express these patterns. In short, ritual emotions are treated as the sensate qualities of ritual relationships. From this standpoint, emotions feature in ceremonial settings not as striking experiences grafted onto practices and representations, but as constitutive aspects of ritual interactions themselves, whose properties of bodily salience and relational reflexivity both reflect and inflect the latter’s course in a variety of sensory, expressive, moral, and strategic ways. Four issues relating to ritual and emotion are discussed within the framework of particular ceremonial practices that have been the object of much recent research: (1) the ritual expression of emotions in funerary laments, (2) the waning of cathartic models in the interpretation of rites of affliction, (3) the intense emotional arousal characteristic of initiatory ordeals, and (4) the self-constructive, affective dimensions of contemporary devotional practices.

■ **KEYWORDS:** emotion, pragmatic approach, reflexivity, relational approach, ritual

This article revisits classical and contemporary anthropological debates on ‘ritual’ and ‘emotion’ from a theoretical standpoint that may be qualified as pragmatic and relational (Houseman and Severi 1998).<sup>1</sup> A pragmatic stance implies considering rituals as dynamic interactive contexts, and emotions as both emergent properties and integral components of ongoing human interactions (on the ‘transactional’ psychology of emotions, see, for example, Griffiths 2003; Griffiths and Scarantino 2009). This means that we are interested in emotions as fairly short-lived, actual events occurring in interpersonal situations, rather than as long-standing dispositions underlying individual psychology. A relational approach stresses ritual’s outstanding capacity to reallocate social positions by instantiating characteristic patterns of relationship (Houseman 2006) and the way particular emotions crystallize and reflect these patterns (Bateson 1963); emotions are treated here as the sensate qualities of relationships (Bonhomme 2008).

Seen from this angle, most emotions have the properties of bodily salience and relational reflexivity. First, they are not only embodied, but constitute passing social occasions in which



the individual's body comes to the surface of the self (a sudden blush, an outburst of tears, a slight inflection of the voice) and consequently to the fore of interaction (Katz 1999) instead of being kept on the backburner as in routine interpersonal transactions. Ritual enactments provide participants with salient embodied experiences (and not just mental representations), such that one cannot but ask about how specific emotional qualities contribute to these lived-through enactments. Second, emotions such as anger, shame, sadness, and so forth come to the fore when the course of a relationship is no longer presupposed as a background for routine interaction, but becomes a reflexive issue (Berthomé 2006) awaiting acknowledgement (e.g., tears of joy celebrating regained friendship) or reappraisal (e.g., sulking as a negotiation device). Reflexivity refers here to the way peoples' interactions may, at times, bear on the state of their relationship, regardless of the actors' degree of self-awareness: emotions do not have to be self-conscious in order to instantiate relational twists and turns. As ritual contexts are primarily dedicated to confirming and/or reconfiguring social networks, we should expect emotional expressions to emerge at key moments of ritual repositioning. The feelings of apprehensive dread, giddy joy, or aching plenitude that well up at critical junctures during Euro-American weddings (the bride's entrance, the couple's vows, their instructed kiss, etc.), for example, may be understood as the participants' incarnated recognition of the profound relational recompositions this ceremony is purported to effect.

Within this framework, our aim is not to identify simple, generalizing connections between two abstractions: 'ritual' as collective 'effervescence', 'ritual' as a device for processing undesirable 'affects', and so forth. Rather, our goal is to focus on circumscribed ethnographic situations in order to evaluate the extent to which particular emotional configurations may be correlated with distinctive interactive settings as the embodied reflection of specific relational patterns. In keeping with this empirically grounded, pluralistic perspective, and at the risk of delivering an overly mixed analytical bag, this article considers four different issues pertaining to ritual and emotion within the context of four particular types of ceremonial practice. These are (1) the ritual expression of emotions in funerary laments, (2) the waning pre-eminence of cathartic models in the interpretation of rites of affliction, (3) the intense, violent, emotional arousal characteristic of initiatory ordeals, (4) the self-constructive, affective dimensions of contemporary devotional practices.

### **Funerary Lament**

Lament, or ritual wailing, provides a paradigmatic case for thinking about the expressive aspect of emotions displayed in ceremonial contexts. Since Durkheim's intuition that "mourning is not the spontaneous expression of individual emotions" but "a duty laid down by the group" (1913: 377–78), an idea further developed by Radcliffe-Brown (1922) and especially Mauss (1921) in his programmatic article on the "mandatory expression of emotions," scholars have sought to understand the workings of this dramatic, reflexive process occasioned by situations of loss—prototypically death, but also, for example, the departure of a bride (e.g., Ho 2005; Rasmussen 2000). There has been an impressive amount of recent work on this topic,<sup>2</sup> both in the Ancient World (e.g., Fögen 2009; Suter 2008) and in contemporary societies of Oceania (Feld 1982, 1990), South America (Briggs 1992, 1993; Urban 1988), Europe (Bonini Baraldi 2010; Danforth 1982; Lysaght 1997; Seremetakis 1991; Tolbert 1990, 1994), the Middle-East (Gamliel 2006), and South Asia (Greene 1999; Wilce 1998). A number of authors have stressed the social issues raised by ritual wailing, in particular the degree to which it gives creative, critical, or inflammatory voice to women (see, e.g., Holst-Warhaft 1992; Wienbaum

2001). Taken as a whole, this body of research demonstrates the existence of a cross-cultural, ritualized pattern of emotional stylization in which a peculiar expressive form is articulated with a complex set of relationships organized around the body of the deceased.

The most salient feature of ritual wailing is the equivocal nature of lament itself, at once wept, spoken, and sung. On the one hand, ‘icons of crying’ (voiced inhalation, creaky or raspy voice, sobbing, falsetto vowels) are upheld by a musical form (melodic contour, pitch stability, rhythmic organization) replete with explicit semantic content from formulaic phrases to improvised syntactic constructions (Briggs 1992; Feld 1990; Urban 1988). This gives funerary wailing a highly stylized and articulate shape that has struck many observers as a theatrical performance in which “genuine sorrow ... is blurred, overlaid and made almost unrecognizable by the histrionic display of grief” (Malinowski 1927: 161). On the other hand, symmetrically (a point often insufficiently stressed), the wailing voice is sometimes rendered unintelligible by manifestations of sorrow and is never fully enclosed within a stable melodic structure; sudden cry breaks and sobs refract back on the conventional form by occasionally disrupting speech and melody, putting the whole aesthetic construction on the verge of collapse. This ongoing oscillation between stylization and affective outburst should not be seen as relating to the either conventional or spontaneous nature of such displays, but is to be appreciated as a dynamic tension constitutive of ritual wailing itself as made manifest through the interplay of speech, melody, and crying at once echoing and subverting each other.<sup>3</sup> This complex pattern of what we might call wavering or faltering agency is not confined to the vocal features of lament. It also applies to its corporal aspects, in which unchecked bodily reactions and the performance of specific ritual gestures—the covering of faces, huddling, reaching out to the corpse, bathing it with unwiped tears (Briggs 1992; Tolbert 1990)—are made to converge.

The recurrent interactive features of ritual wailing are equally well attested. At the heart of funerary lament lies the corpse. Ritual wailing can indeed be understood as an amplified, conventional structuring of the dissonant intuitions evoked by this highly counterintuitive entity (Boyer 2001) regarding the simultaneous presence and absence of the deceased. Laments are directed, often explicitly, toward the person who has died. Punctuated by seemingly inapplicable injunctions and rhetorical questions (e.g., ‘Get up!’, ‘What will become of me now that you are gone?’), these utterances bear witness to the poignant paradox this unilateral interlocution implies. Incorporating appropriate terms of address, the evocation of personal memories, specific forms of solicitude and so forth, they focus on the idiosyncratic connection between the lamenter and the person who has died. As the wailer’s voice moves across a wide range of emotional registers—sorrow, anger, fear, compassion—particular relationships are celebrated and an irretrievable loss deplored; the communicative presence of the deceased that these locutions imply is belied by the absence that an ostensive lack of response betokens. At the same time, laments are not confidential outpourings but are destined to be witnessed or overheard by others who knowingly attend to them. In other words, they are performances; that is, more or less successful instances of a conventional expressive genre, whose efficacy consists in its capacity to affect the emotional and intentional states of others in certain ways. A compelling lament—and participants are highly discriminating about such matters—is one that prompts listeners to call to mind, experience and bodily express, in fits and starts that resonate with the wailer’s vacillations, their own feelings of grief and personal relations with the dead, the particular individual being mourned but also other, more familiar deceased of their own.

As a rule, lamenters’ wailings situate them simultaneously with respect to an addressee who is absent (the deceased) and with respect to living persons who are present but not

addressed (the witnesses). Together, these contrary axes provide the unitary framework in which the act of crying, as an overt expression of sorrow and loss, takes on the special qualities of lament. It is because lamentations are purported to be addressed that they tend to incorporate speech, and it is because they are meant to be appreciated as exemplars of a particular expressive genre that they make use of conventional musical features. The formal properties of ritual wailing are the sensible correlates of its underlying relational structure.

Typically, this two-fold dynamic of lament, in which personal commemoration and exhibited performance are conjoined, comes into play on several levels. To begin with, lament is generally a collective practice which, far from being a random co-occurrence or an undifferentiated affective con-fusion, implies a complex pattern of multiple overlapping voices “simultaneously in-synchrony while out-of-phase” (Feld 1990: 245–46). This flexible co-adjustment may take different forms: sequential ordering (Briggs 1993), responsorial arrangements (Danforth 1982), informal turn-taking (Gamliel 2006), and formal alternation (Seremetakis 1991). Through this dynamic coordination of the laments’ wailing and witnessing roles, different individual voices, intervening as variations within a collective performance, fashion a criss-crossing of relationships centered on the deceased. The dead person is evoked neither as the sum of separate relationships (isolated crying), nor as the focus of a single collective voice (unison choir), but as the least common denominator within a shared social network. Zooming out still further, there is usually a marked split, often ordered along gender lines, between those who undertake laments and the rest of the mourners. Although the latter may count on the formers’ keening to move them to tears to enable them to embed their own expressions of loss in those the wailers’ ostensibly display (Bonini Baraldi 2010), most often they adopt an attitude of apparent detachment and restraint. Men often sit or stand apart from the body, engaging in intermittent low conversation, their personal feelings of sorrow held visibly in check yet—notably in response to the laments’ voices—periodically spilling over in the form of vacant stares, sudden silences, bowed heads, and silent tears. Through this derivative anti-lament of sorts—in which the listeners’ wavering agency is expressed in a passive, inarticulate key in counterpoint to the women’s assertive yet equally troubled vociferations—the network of bodily evidenced personal relationships constructed around the figure of the deceased acquires additional density and texture. This further contributes to the distinctive emotional curvature of the funerary ritual the mourners collectively enact.<sup>4</sup>

Funerary wailing acts as a generative matrix. It induces mourners to jointly participate in a dramatic actualization and reappraisal of a network of relationships centered on the person of the deceased. By producing and being attentive to lament, mourners’ individual expressions of sorrow are given socially recognized form and direction, and reciprocally, their conventional manifestations of grief are upheld by bodily engagement and biographical reflexivity. This process, however, is far from harmonious. The counterintuitive character of the corpse around which wailing takes place (attesting at once to the presence and absence of the deceased), the equivocal properties of lament itself (an uneasy combination of crying, speaking and singing), and the contrary interactive schemes it articulates (an unresolved tension between personal dedication and aesthetic performance), all define a context in which participants walk, with greater or lesser success, an ambiguous, erratic line between expressive abandonment and demonstrative control. Thus, for wailers and witnesses alike, personal sentiment and stipulated practice are not so much seamlessly melded as they are shown to be imperfectly alloyed. This complexity is an essential feature of ritual lament. It accounts for the unbalanced, wavering agencies it mediates and underlies the distinctive, shared experience it affords: a collective, situated enactment of the poignant uncertainties and social challenges of irretrievable interpersonal loss.

### Dealing with Affliction

Like the proverbial stone capable of killing two birds at the same time, a cathartic model of ritual action has been used by many anthropologists to account simultaneously for the universal grounds of ritual behavior (unresolved emotional tension) and for the specific mechanisms of ritual efficiency (providing outlets for controlled emotional release). This model probably owes much of its appeal to the captivating folk-images it evokes. On the one hand, a “hydraulic model” of emotions (Solomon 2007) as energies accumulating within the organism to be discharged without; on the other hand, a functional view of ritual as a regulating device used to restore a state of homeostasis where social or individual balance has been threatened. Combining both generalizations (humans and societies as holding-tanks of undifferentiated emotional energy, rituals as artful safety valves), the cathartic model may be applied to a vast range of ceremonial occasions—exorcism séances (Obeyesekere 1981), conflict resolution gatherings (Robarchek 1979), spirit possession (Lewis 1971), “rituals of rebellion” (Gluckman 1963)—centered on the loose category of ‘rites of affliction’.

Such a general model is amenable to multiple variants ranging from ritual as a mechanical device allowing stopped up affects to be discharged, to ritual as an enactment of intellectual operations whereby anarchical emotions are given definite structure. In the first case, ritual is conceived of as an artificial extension relaying or monitoring a natural tendency towards emotional discharge whenever circumstances prevent this from happening spontaneously or safely. Thus, Malinowski (1948), echoing ethological notions of ‘displacement behaviour’, characterized repertoires of magical operations as sets of ‘ready-made acts and beliefs’ whereby, in particularly stressful situations of uncertainty and failure, potential spontaneous ‘emotional outbursts’ (anxiety, desire, anger) may be transformed into standardized, controllable ‘substitutive actions’. By casting a spell at his enemy and pointing a magical dart at him, ‘the man under the sway of impotent fury’ extends into a methodical procedure his natural tendency to clench his fist and mutter imprecations. According to Malinowski, “as the tension spends itself in these words and gestures, the obsessing visions fade away ... and we remain with a conviction that the words of malediction and the gestures of fury have travelled towards the hated person and hit their target” (1948: 81). In the second case, ritual is conceived of as a cognitive subordination and ordering of chaotic and unexpressed affective disturbances. Thus, Lévi-Strauss, comparing shamanistic healing with the psychoanalytical model of the ‘talking cure’, famously argued that during Cuna healing sessions for difficult childbirth, the shaman’s narrative of spiritual journey and cosmic battle transposes the mute suffering of the parturient onto the discursive level. The body in pain is equated to an ‘affective geography’ and the succession of sufferings to a supernatural ordeal. This ‘organic transformation’ of her ineffable disorder is held to be predicated on a ‘structural reorganization’ achieved through a succession of symbolic operations. Thus, “the shaman provides his patient with a language within which unspoken and otherwise unspeakable states may be immediately expressed. And this shift to verbal expression ... causes the release of the physiological process” ([1949] 1958: 226). Pushed to its limits, this view implies that emotions are worthy of anthropological analysis only insofar as they consist in “indirect effects of alterations occurring in the normal course of intellectual operations” (1971:597). One is left to wonder whether ritual ‘makes sense’ of raw suffering (a point belied by the semantic opacity of shamanistic discourse; see Severi 2007) or whether it suppresses suffering by means of a mysterious psycho-physiological parallelism (Neu 1975).

The anthropological literature on ritual is replete with accounts situated between these two extremes. Scheff (1979, reworking Breuer and Freud 1895), for example, stresses the aesthetic

distanciation and repeated discharge required for an optimal 'abreaction' of distress, suggesting that sweating and shaking often elicited during curing ceremonies achieve a release of and from fear. De Martino ([1963] 2005), in reference to exorcism in Sicilian ceremonial dances, emphasizes the physiological relief and symbolical structuring simultaneously afforded by trance in a formalized frame. Turner (1968) analyses the dual—cognitive and affective—character of ritual symbolism, the milk tree among the Ndembu, for example, being understood both as standing for the structural principle of matriliney (the 'ideological' pole of meaning) and as arousing desires and feelings linked with breast-feeding (the 'sensory' pole).

Recently, however, along with the exhaustion of a functional-symbolic approach to ritual and of a 'toilet-flush' approach to emotions, a number of anthropologists have grown dissatisfied with the cathartic model and have offered new perspectives on the affective processes at stake in so-called affliction rituals. Kapferer's detailed account of Sinhalese exorcism (1983) is emblematic of a double move from ritual as symbolic enactment to ritual as performance (Turner 1987) and from emotions as enduring tensions awaiting resolution to emotions as ongoing contextual shifters (Katz 1999), part and parcel of an interactive process of transformation. The goal of exorcism is to redefine the relationship between the patient and the malevolent demon under whose gaze he has been inadvertently caught in the course of a solitary episode of sudden fright. In the ritual performance, through offerings and invocations, demons are deliberately tricked into joining a public gathering in the form of terrifying dancers displaying stereotypical 'moods' (*rasa*) in elemental, dramatic form (the furious, the terrible, the lustful, etc.). Unintended isolated fright in the absence of an identifiable object is thus recontextualized as artificially evoked and publicly acknowledged terror embodied by conventionally objectified figures of chaotic passion. This phase ideally culminates in the patient's falling into trance as an embodied testimony of demonic capture. However, this climactic moment, rather than being a conclusive, assuaging emotional release, provides the condition for switching to an emotional accommodation of an altogether different kind (Kapferer 1979). Once the trance is over, the patient becomes a witness to actors playing the part of demons as inept social agents embodying the moods of the 'loathsome' and the 'comic', ridiculed by the ritual expert acting the role of the 'straight man'. The systematic dissolution of ritual seriousness brought about by the use of prosaic language, burlesque gesturing, irony, and double-entendre, demonstrates the demons' inability to fit into everyday patterns of interaction. Terror is thus vigorously excluded as 'off key', with the patient being strongly invited to join in collective laughter that is less harmless comic relief than an active annihilation of both the demonic grip and the ritual frame (Kapferer 1975).

Kapferer's focus on the interplay of empirical media (dance, trance and music, esoteric and everyday language, use of space and objects) to account for the ritual dynamic leading from terror to laughter is a welcome attempt to break from an intellectualist and 'balance recovery' approach to ritual efficiency. At the same time, the emotions occasioned by the ritual performance are seen either as the embodiment of certain values and ideas or as by-products of the various expressive forms and aesthetic devices employed. Their relational bedrock, as made manifest in the ritual participants' interactions, remains largely unexplored. Much the same may be said of Schieffelin's (1985) analysis of Kaluli spirit séances. The medium's haunting songs, participants' worried or playful interaction with the dead, as well as various dramaturgical elements, are shown to contribute less to affective discharge than to the coordinated 'construction' of the reality the séance enacts. But here also, a foregrounding of the 'performative' dimension of emotional expressions goes together with a relative neglect of their relational foundations, that is, that which underlies the distinctive patterning of this ritual reality.

Once the positioning of participants within a ritual context is seen to be more a matter of intentional interconnections than of symbolic identities or performative roles, the distinctive emotional curvature of a particular ritual process may be understood as an internal dimension of the relational work it accomplishes. For instance, if the distinctive mix of powerlessness, fear, and animosity characteristic of witchcraft accusations is correlated with a specific pattern connecting the unsuspecting ‘victim’, the eye-opening adviser and the elusive suspect (Favret-Saada 1980, 2009), a relational approach may clarify the afflicted person’s shift from helplessness to empowerment through counterwitchcraft measures. Bonhomme (2008) thus reveals the two-fold affective dynamic of Gabonese initiation rites undertaken against witchcraft. A divinatory consultation first positions the patient as a silent, myopic, motionless, and passive pawn at the hands of the diviner who, through actions and words, deciphers signs of attack on the surface of the patient’s body. This emphatic asymmetry, by mirroring the predatory nature of witchcraft itself, precipitates the afflicted individual’s sense of victimization, as attested by her helpless tears. The succeeding initiation session turns the relational chessboard around, converting the patient into a clairvoyant hunter, detecting and unmasking her supposed assailant in the smoky reflections of a looking-glass, publicly communicating her riposte to an audience. The shift from passivity to activity translates into the move from helpless tears to furious blows with which she strikes the witch’s image. Beyond the particular case of witchcraft, a relational frame may also be used to account for the affective dynamics of dispute settlement ceremonies (Berthomé 2009) as an alternative to cathartic (Robarchek 1979) or ethnopsychological (Watson-Gegeo and White 1990) models. In much the same way, pragmatic approaches to shamanistic practice (Hanks 2006; Severi 2002; Stépanoff 2007) offer promising perspectives for further investigation into its emotional aspects.

### **Initiatory Ordeals**

The anthropological imagination has long been captured by the experiences of intense pain, fear, surprise, helplessness, and confused humiliation brought about by the violent, disorientating ordeals that occur in many initiation rites: arduous operations, shameful deprivations, mockery and brutal hazing, apparently pointless beatings and chores, the forced ingestion of repulsive foodstuffs, and so forth. The fact that these stressful performances provide the novices with little substantive knowledge and needlessly reiterate their already well-established subservience toward their initiators, makes them even more intriguing.

Some authors (e.g., Bloch 1992) have explained such phenomena in symbolic terms; others have looked to the social hierarchies they occasion (Boyer 2001; Morinis 1985; Siran 2002), while still others have emphasized the psychological mechanisms they bring into play, proposing interpretations along Freudian (Heald 1986; Ottenberg 1989), behaviorist (e.g., Bourdieu 1986, relying on Aronson and Mills 1959) or cognitive lines. Among the latter, the “ritual form hypothesis” (Lawson and McCauley 1990; McCauley and Lawson 2002) and the “frequency hypothesis” (Whitehouse 1996, 2000, 2004), see the intense ‘emotional arousal’ of initiation rites as contributing to the transmission of these rites by enhancing the participants’ memory of them. A high degree of ‘sensory pageantry’ entailed by violent, shocking enactments is taken to provide the novices with vivid, affectively charged images that constitute if not a body of revelatory knowledge, then haunting memories that are a source of ‘spontaneous exegetical reflection’. It is not unreasonable, albeit intensely debated (Kensingler and Schacter 2008; Levine and Pizarro 2004; Reisberg and Heuer 2004), to think that emotional stimulation may indeed act to focus participants’ attention on the exceptional nature

of their undertakings, and that this may facilitate their recollection of these events (Turner 1967). At the same time, however, because the disorientating trials novices undergo largely prevent them from grasping that which counts most for the ritual's reiteration, namely, the manner in which it is performed (Barth 2002; Boyer 2005; Houseman 2002a), initiatory ordeals are perhaps not the most felicitous basis for an account linking emotion to memory to transmission. Moreover, such a general approach leaves many peculiarities of these ordeals unexamined.

To get an idea of these peculiarities, consider the rather tame, nutshell-size Eastern European initiation ritual of menstrual slapping (Houseman 2007). A girl, upon confiding to her mother that she is menstruating for the first time, receives a slap in the face, preceded by congratulations and/or followed by a show of affection. The mother may accompany her action by formulae such as 'May you have a rosy complexion all your life' or 'May this be the most the pain you'll ever feel'. However, in response to her daughter's hurt and bewildered disbelief, she can offer only woefully inadequate explanations: 'It's for good luck', 'It's a tradition', 'I don't know but my mother did it to me'.

A purely intensive understanding of emotion, one that distinguishes only between greater or lesser degrees of 'emotional arousal', plainly does not do justice to this event. The daughter's hopeful anticipation of approval, the mother's pleased concern, the traitorous nature of the dutiful slap, the mother's comforting embrace, her chagrined attempts to explain, all form a definite emotional, embodied pattern whereby the announcement of a commonplace physiological event becomes the basis for an initiatory ritual marking the daughter's accession to womanhood. In other words, the participants' emotional experience is inseparable from the relational implications of their behavior, in which such familiar interactive patterns as parental authority, domestic intimacy, mutual recognition of same-sex identity, and the *de facto* exclusion of male family members all come into play. Taking such considerations into account requires a more pragmatic approach to initiatory ordeals (Berliner 2008; Bonhomme 2005, 2008; Handelman 1990; Houseman 1993, 2001, 2002b, 2008; Troy 2008; Zempléni 1996), one that emphasizes the interactive conditions under which they take place and sees their distinctive emotional qualities as deriving from the particular relational contexts ritual performance puts into place. Such a perspective suggests, for example, that in male initiation rites, forms of inflicted suffering are intrinsically linked to the relations of secrecy they enact. At certain times, novices are encouraged to demonstrate personal courage and fortitude by enduring purportedly mysterious yet recognizably painful procedures (e.g., circumcision, scarification) in circumstances of exhibited dissimulation (e.g., out of women's and children's sight but not out of their hearing). At other moments, knowingly beyond the uninitiated's ken, they are collectively submitted to clandestine degradations whose ironic, arbitrary, or paradoxical qualities (having to cry on command, being beaten for no apparent reason, learning to 'forge' by getting one's fingers crushed repeatedly), leave them frightened, shocked, and ashamed. On still other occasions, under the cover of darkness or hidden behind masks, for example, the novices are made to attack or harass the defenseless uninitiated themselves. Through these complementary modes of violently incarnated secrecy, articulated in various ways in the course of their initiation, the novices (and other participants) are made to experience, at once bodily, emotionally and relationally, the process whereby they are ritually redefined.

Another typical feature of initiatory ordeals is their manifest incongruity. The menstrual slap, for example, though highly evocative, remains difficult to grasp in terms of everyday attitudes and patterns of behavior. The polysemous symbolism it calls to mind—involving violent punishment, access to procreative power, the loss and circulation of blood, personal

accomplishment, feminine rivalry, uterine continuity—provides ample grounds for inferences regarding its possible import. At the same time, menstrual slapping is blatantly counterintuitive, not so much in terms of the representations it evokes than in terms of the relational condensations it enacts. It is this pragmatic counterintuitiveness—the unexpected violent act together with a demonstration of affection—that makes menstrual slapping so difficult to make sense of. Interpretative reflection is thus hard put to account for the enigmatic, lived-through experience it purports to justify, such that participants are prompted to appreciate this event as being, in some difficult-to-define fashion, meaningful in and of itself.

The same may be said for many initiatory hardships, especially those of the paradoxical, dig-a-hole-to-fill-it-up-again variety, which are the hallmark of male initiations. Puberty rites for women often include painful, distressing episodes, but their interactive and emotional qualities are usually markedly different. Generally, emphasis is placed less on violent, partially incomprehensible vexations than on imposed solitude and the anguish of prolonged uncertainty (e.g., Lemaire 2008). This divergence—which may reflect basic relational and physiological differences underlying male and female access to procreative adulthood (Moisseeff 1992)—suggests that many of the violent episodes found in male initiation rituals may have less to do with initiation per se, than with the specific, gendered relational issues these particular rituals bring into play.

There is, however, one striking feature of initiatory ordeals, the menstrual slap included, which remains to be elucidated: the intense, concentrated nature of the feelings they involve. In the course of these events, fear and helplessness are instilled in an overbearingly demonstrative fashion; inflicted suffering is ostentatiously excessive; when humiliation is in order, it is pushed to outrageous extremes; surprise, whenever it occurs, is always introduced to maximum effect; obedience is enforced absolutely. The same holds true for more positively valenced emotional qualities: testimonies of admiration are over-the-top, signs of fondness effusive and unrestrained, solidarities uncompromising, and so on. It is this markedly noninstrumental, caricature-like nature of the affective expressions initiatory afflictions afford, in which emotions appear to be actualized largely for their own sake, which underlies both the distinctive flavor and the undeniable saliency of initiatory ordeals. How might this be explained?

Emotions, we suggested, may be fruitfully understood as sensate qualities of relationship that rise to the surface of awareness as a reflexive component of interactive contexts entailing interpersonal repositioning. In this light, ritual contexts, almost exclusively dedicated to defining and reconfiguring relational networks, represent an extreme case. Like other social practices, rituals act as vehicles for the communication of cultural values and ideas; they may also be attributed with certain practical ‘functions’. However, their specificity resides in the fact that they are performed for their own sake, as simplified, interactive microcosms in the course of which social relationships are systemically appraised and redefined. In short, ritual relationships are about relationships; they are, in this sense, maximally reflexive. It should thus come as no surprise that ritual emotions, the bodily entailments of such relationships, manifest identical, self-referential, elemental qualities. Unadulterated by the negotiated contingencies of ordinary interaction, having value in and of themselves, they take on a particularly pure, rarefied form. Reciprocally, to the extent that the core domains of specific emotions are mobilized in a distinctly intense and systematic fashion, their relational potential is realized in a particularly unconditional, consummate way.

Now initiation—which produces social identities by means of actions that provide the axiomatic basis of the identities it produces (Zempléni 1991), thereby engendering the means of its own perpetuation (La Fontaine 1977)—is undoubtedly one of the most intrinsically self-referential, microcosmically reflexive of ritual enactments. We should therefore expect

the emotional expressions it entails—notably in those defining moments of hardship that are initiatory ordeals—to be particularly exacerbated, even by ritual standards. In this perspective, the emotional intensity experienced in the course of initiation rites, far from being an instrumental add-on, is revealed as a constitutive aspect of the initiatory processes itself.

### Devotional Practice

The move from symbolic representations to embodied experience in the anthropology of religion (Csordas 1990; Desjarlais 1992) has entailed a new focus on emotions as privileged means of relating to spiritual beings (ghosts, ancestors, spirits, deities). Contesting a view of embodiment as the unconscious, incremental incorporation of social dispositions and values (Bourdieu's [1972] concept of *habitus* or bodily *hexis*), many scholars have stressed the explicit, reflexive ways special occasions are used to foster 'somatic modes of attention', that is "culturally elaborated ways of attending to and with one's body in surroundings that include the embodied presence of others" (Csordas 1990: 244). From this perspective, ritual contexts may be appreciated as arenas within which salient bodily experiences (from a sudden chill to a sustained trance) are induced, reflected on, and identified as states of proximity with postulated entities whose modality of presence is otherwise problematic. Such a process is especially relevant to devotional practices (prototypically prayer) aiming to establish direct personal contact with beings defined by scriptural traditions. First tackled by Weber ([1922] 1964) in his discussion of the roads to salvation, it figures prominently in recent studies of contemporary 'experiential' religious movements such as Islamic Revival (Mahmood 2005), Sufi services (Shannon 2004), Catholic Charismatic Renewal (Csordas 1994), 'New Paradigm' Evangelical Christian Churches (Luhmann 2004), and the Buddhist Charismatic Movement (Huang 2003). As far as emotions are concerned, several recurrent questions crosscut this vast body of work.

How do ritual activities provide good grounds for claiming direct contact with spiritual beings in the sense of a felt presence? It has been suggested that deep personal involvement with invisible agents may be achieved by cultivating a generic, though unequally shared human capacity for 'absorption', defined as an experience "in which the individual becomes caught up in ideas or images or fascinations ... while diminishing attention to the myriad of everyday distractions that accompany the management of normal life" (Luhmann et al. 2010: 75). It is striking that the same idiom of 'closeness' and 'presence' is used to refer to such involvement by participants in very different religious traditions that rely on widely divergent procedures, from the kinesthetic opulence and sensor-motor stimulation of *dhikr* invocation in Sufi ceremonies (Andézian 2000; Shannon 2004), to the Quaker practice of "sitting in silence" (Schrauwers 2001). Whatever the specific content of devotional activities may be, what allows for a sense of presence is a preset package of postures, gestures, and utterances whereby the supplicant's attention is diverted from daily concerns. Such ritual bracketing ensures that nothing is standing in the way between you and Jesus, God, or Buddha, and what makes these moments so emotionally 'special' or 'unique' (Blackwell 1991) has as much to do with interactive simplification as it does with sensory intensification. However, the suspension of ordinary focus that ritual action enables does not automatically translate into a positive sense of presence. The latter also usually requires the intervention of experienced participants or ritual experts who monitor the experience of others, encouraging them to adopt a self-scrutinizing stance, to scan the flow of bodily sensations and mental images, actively attempting to discern signs of external agency (Halloy 2007; Luhmann 2007).

How do specific emotions come into play in the course of devotional practices? If qualitatively different emotions (e.g., fear, love, tranquility) are to be taken seriously as part and parcel of the various relationships enacted through devotional activities (submission to God, intimacy with Jesus, etc.), they cannot be understood as interchangeable tokens of presence. In other words, it will not do to think of ‘emotion’ only as a salient experience grafted onto practices and representations so as to load them with a heightened sense of reality. As Mahmood has convincingly argued regarding canonical Muslim prayer (*salat*) in women’s piety movements in Cairo, particular emotional dispositions are not “motivational devices [but] integral aspects of pious action itself” (2001: 839; see also Mahmood 2005). Mosque lessons consistently stress that the conditions of felicitous praying include not only prescribed form, suitable attire, and a physical condition of purity, but also a ‘state of the heart’ exemplified by the triad of fear, hope, and love. Because prayer actualizes an exemplary relationship with God embodied in particular items of behavior, supplicants are highly selective regarding the dispositions that allow for proper ‘emotional attunement’ (Hirschkind 2001). Indeed, far from being raw arousal, emergent moods evoked while praying are endowed with intentional structure (being afraid of, having hope in, feeling love for; see Sartre 1938). For instance, reverential fear—the apt disposition for inaugurating prayer—is fostered through preaching techniques and through exercises of imagination involving graphic descriptions of the fires of hell, the trials of death, and the final encounter with God (Hirschkind 2006). In this case, the object of fear (a disposition) and the addressee of prayer (an action) are the same. As Evangelical Christians strive to develop a close personal relationship with Jesus, they are encouraged to practice prayer and Bible reading as dialogic interactions, asking themselves ‘what God is feeling at this point’, silently sharing personal issues and quandaries. Prayer as an instrumental petition (e.g. for a good job, a red car) progressively gives way to prayer as a special moment of intimacy—a date with an understanding and comforting Jesus, bathed in emergent feelings of ‘peace’ and ‘love’ (Luhmann 2004). However, in the same way that devotional ‘absorption’ requires an interactive dynamic whereby participants monitor each other’s experience, various forms of emotional attunement with spiritual entities involve the participants in different types of relational situations. Reviewing medieval Islamic texts, Calasso (2000) differentiates, for example, between the silent tears continually shed by the Saint in accompaniment to his constant praying as a manifestation of his spiritual virtuosity, the weeping fervor of devotees gathered in sacred places, and the collective sobbing elicited by preachers who lead the crowd from tears of repentance to tears of comfort (for a Catholic equivalent see Christian 2004).

Ceremonial occasions of devotion are not only privileged sites for enacting archetypal relationships with spiritual beings, they are also a learning context in which participants mutually adjust their actions (prostration, hugging, etc.) and dispositions (fear, love, etc.) as essential aspects of these relationships (deference, intimacy, etc.). Many devotional movements explicitly aspire to seamlessly integrate dispositions suitable to prayer into the flow of everyday life. As a result, some scholars have stressed an ideal continuity between ceremonial gatherings and daily routine, with the concept of ‘discipline’ (Asad 1993) bridging both realms. However, if such continuity may be striven for or despaired of, it can in no way be taken for granted, except perhaps in the exemplary case of the Saint whose entire life is a silently wept prayer. Although relationships with supernatural beings may well be and often are stabilized beyond ceremonial occasions, their activation in the course of ordinary occupations as a felt co-presence is inevitably intermittent. As Schielke (2009) and Simon (2009) convincingly argue, prayer as a template for a fitting relationship with God, with its simplified context and moral transparency, does not easily translate into the messiness and ‘moral frag-

mentation' of the everyday. Indeed, the whole point of prayer undertaken as a reflexive activity is precisely that it enacts the postulated relationship by the very operation of declaratively celebrating it (through praise, invocation, etc.). In the contemporary devotional practices we are concerned with here, this performative, self-referential property of prayer is what makes it so emotionally exceptional. The perfect relationship devotees aim for, and the sequence of actions and dispositions that are held to embody it, are maximally fused, in stark contrast with the constant negotiation characteristic of the daily emotional grind. In this light, what ritual episodes achieve is probably less an incorporation of enduring dispositions than a fragile instantiation of exemplary, 'perfect' (Smith 1980) relationships. Such compressed, rarefied moments, which act as benchmarks for what it is for God to be present, may subsequently be used as a sounding board to navigate through the everyday, as long as certain reminders are close at hand. Indeed, a variety of routines and media may operate as interfaces between ritual episodes and daily activities, thereby bridging ordinary and extraordinary relationships. For example, cassette sermons, prayer manuals, weekly gatherings, and recitation competitions are widely used within the Islamic Revival (Gade 2002; Hirschkind 2006). In much the same way, Evangelical Christians who occasionally achieve climactic moments of sentimental intimacy with Jesus are encouraged to keep a diary of this relationship, to read biblical passages as personal letters addressed to them by God, to listen to Christian rock music, and so on (Luhmann 2004; for a mainstream Catholic example, see Claverie 1990).

Finally, many authors stress the extent to which the stabilization of emotional connections with God goes hand-in-hand with a new sense of agency on the part of the devotee. Thus, Mahmood (2005), for example, speaks of fashioning oneself as a 'docile agent', whereas Luhmann (2007) shows how evangelical Christians' conversion narratives resort to highly personalized yet stereotypic images of self-destruction, of hitting bottom and finding oneself anew by falling in love with God. In this respect, neopagan and New Age ceremonial provides an interesting point of comparison. Indeed, much of the latter makes use of a similar dynamic whereby axiomatic dispositions and particular experience-focused performances are fused into the construction and definition of special selves and affecting relationships. A striking feature of neopagan and New Age ceremonial is the high degree of personalization and plasticity of ritual enactments, along with the vast and indefinite range of Others with whom relationships may be enacted. Inspired by what they feel and believe they should be feeling and believing, participants make use of various religious traditions (drawn from personal experience, ethnographic accounts, esoteric publications, and fictional works) as open-ended resources for the creation of recurrent ceremonial activities ('spiritual' dancing, liturgical enactments, visualizations). These performances are presumed both to proceed from the participants' conscious emulation of attitudes and feelings associated with exemplary if somewhat mysterious figures (Native American Shamans, Celtic priestesses, Ascended Masters, Angels, Mother Earth) and to enable them to experience these beings and their characteristic attitudes and feelings within themselves. Such entities and the ways of connecting with them are much more malleable than within institutionalized, scriptural traditions. Concomitantly, the process of 'emotional attunement' with an independent external agent tends to give way to a process of emotional refraction whereby the instantiation of archetypal agencies empowers the participants to form relationships with heretofore unexpected aspects of themselves. Thus, through tearful yet joyous Wiccan menarche rites (Houseman 2010), young women are awakened to their feminine identity as a spiritual being ('the Goddess') harboring a new-found creativity (their 'Inner Child'). By 'opening up' to 'who they are' through chanting, visualizing one's desires and 'speaking from the heart' about oneself, ordinary individuals—in overcoming 'fear and limiting beliefs' so as to be able to walk on burning coals—are revealed

as both ordinary and extraordinary beings (Danforth 1989). In contexts such as these, collective effusions and the mutual recognition of participants, act, respectively, as a touchstone for and as a testimony to a process of self-enchancement.

### Conclusion

Ritual occasions, when envisaged as relatively well-circumscribed interactional processes with far-reaching relational implications, afford us with a privileged arena for investigating emotions within the social sciences. Among the guidelines for further inquiry that may be drawn from this short overview, one is of particular importance. We have repeatedly stressed that any model presupposing an undifferentiated emotional factor (variously defined as 'effervescence', 'arousal', 'tension', etc.) cannot do justice to the context-specificity and distinctive shape of particular affective expressions as they appear in ritual contexts. Emotions feature in ceremonial settings not as appendages to or end products of practices and representations, dedicated to enhancing memorization or to reinforcing belief. Rather, they are constitutive aspects of ritual interactions themselves, both reflecting and inflecting the latter's course in a variety of sensory, expressive, moral, and strategic ways.

The approach adopted emphasizes the reflexive dimensions of ritual contexts as they pertain to correlations between relational patterning, on the one hand, and affective manifestations, on the other hand. The two terms of this equation are equally complex: tears, for example, are taken to be just as variable and intricately organized as the interactive conditions under which they appear. Thus, because participants' actual behavior does not always conform to ceremonial prescriptions, our concern has not been to account for what may be said to 'trigger' specific emotional reactions (crying, violent aggression, cowering). Nor has it been to apply unequivocal labels ('sadness', 'anger', 'awe') to the felt qualities of ritual relationships, which are typically characterized by dynamic shifts and recurrent indeterminacies. Instead, it has been to trace out some of the subtle processes whereby, concomitantly, ritual practices acquire emotional and intentional depth and the exceptional personal experiences they afford are situated within conventional forms. In such a perspective, emotions, like the relational configurations they embody, are inherently intersubjective, emerging as much between interacting individuals as arising within them. Indeed, one of the implications of this account is the need to rethink, in light of the careful study of actual ritual events, the hasty yet well-entrenched dichotomy between 'internal states' and 'public displays'. Finally, our focus on the climactic moments and internal logics of collective enactments should not eclipse issues concerned with the coming and going between ritual events and everyday life. To begin with, although some ceremonies may reach spectacular heights of emotional intensity (e.g., Schieffelin 1976 on the Kaluli Gisaro), ethnographies are full of disappointingly tedious rituals; the ritual/extra-ritual divide is not one between greater and lesser affective involvement. Moreover, certain rituals, such as initiations, may establish, almost from scratch, a whole microcosm of *sui generis* relationships endowed with distinctive emotional values. But many ceremonial occasions, such as devotional prayer, imply routinization and a high degree of permeability with commonplace actions and dispositions. We have sought to accentuate the connection between patterns of relationship, emotions, and reflexivity in ritual contexts. However, a generalization of this approach requires paying further attention not only to the particularities of the mundane emotions and interactive expectations these contexts draw upon, and to the various modes of reflexivity they bring into play, but also to the way ritual relationships become entangled with day-to-day intercourse.

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## ■ NOTES

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2. Attention has also been paid to lament as a devotional practice having particular religious (Patton and Hawley 2005) or theological (Harasta and Brock 2009) implications. The prevalence of recent studies on funerary lament (see Feld and Fox 1994 for a concise but useful review of the anthropological literature) has prompted one author to suggest that lament has become a pervasive model whereby (post-)modern theoretical discourses constitute themselves as narratives of loss (Wilce 2009).
3. In Karelian laments, for example, whereas vocalizations expand the expressive potential of crying, their descending melodic contour is moulded on the pattern of a sigh (Tolbert 1990: 87; see also Feld [1990: 264] regarding the continua, such as that between inarticulate howling to well-formed sentences, characteristic of Kaluli 'wept thoughts').
4. This affective reverberation may take more complex forms, as when, for example, Tamil 'weeping songs' are performed in the courtyard for an audience of men who are held to 'hide' their grief, by hired musicians who strive at once to personify and to distance themselves from the supposedly 'spontaneous' emotional outbursts of the women lamenting within the house (Greene 1999).

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