

- How does Nye define “ritual”? How can the same action be a ritual sometimes but not others?
- What shift took place in ritual studies during the 1990s? How is this relevant to your film essay?
- Show how van Gennep’s rite of passage theory can be applied to a specific film.

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4. Ritual

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**RLG290Y
Religion in
Hong Kong**



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TRAVEL

WINTER READING WEEK

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**Application deadline:
February 16**

**APPLY NOW!
FUNDING AVAILABLE!**

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Film Paragraph

- Congratulations on completing this!
- If you did not complete it:
 - ➔ Please do it soon!
 - ➔ Ask for help if you need it
- Final Analysis (due **Feb. 16**):
 - ➔ Instructions on Bb

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Today

- Possible exam questions on belief
- Ritual
 1. What is ritual?
 2. Ritual theories
 3. Ritual studies

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Belief: Questions

- How might the theory of affective and cognitive belief be used to find a message in *The Lion King*?
- Why have religion scholars tended to focus on belief? Why is this a problem?

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Belief: Questions

- How might the theory of affective and cognitive belief be used to find a message in *The Lion King*?
 - ➔ Lecture 2 weeks ago: “Hakuna Matata” and responsibility
 - ➔ Can repeat what we did in class; OR
 - ➔ Show (correct) understanding of theory and use reasonable evidence from film to make a different argument

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Belief: Questions

- Why have religion scholars tended to **focus on belief?** Why is this a problem?
 - ➔ Development of Protestant Christianity
 - ➔ Importance of “faith” over “works” (= emphasis on belief over actions)
 - ➔ Many religion scholars come from Protestant cultures

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Belief: Questions

- Why have religion scholars tended to focus on belief? Why is this a **problem?**
 - ➔ Various meanings of “belief” (in English)
 - ➔ No equivalent of “belief” in some other languages
 - ➔ Sometimes belief is not (that) important

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I. What is “Ritual”?

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What is Ritual?

- Ritual = stuff people **DO**
 - ➔ But *which* stuff?? (Nye p. 129-133)
 - ➔ **Not** necessarily repeated (e.g., rite of passage)
 - ➔ Many definitions!



What is Ritual?

- Nye: ritual as “meaningful **action**” (p. 133-4)
 - ➔ Not about the act itself
 - ➔ About **relation** between act and person
 - ➔ Same action might be meaningful for one person/time/place but not others
 - ➔ Examples?



Rev. Dawn Leger (Anglican)
Christ Church in Stouffville, ON



Eucharist



Eid al-Fitr
(Tajikistan)



Langar (Sikhism)

- Vegetarian food service in Gurdwara
- Free to all
- Principles of equality / no discrimination
- “the light of God is in all hearts”
(Guru Granth Sahib)
- Golden Temple (Amritsar): feed approx.
80,000 people / day

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What is Ritual?

- Ritual as “symbolic action” (p. 135)
 - ➔ Turner: symbol as “lowest unit of ritual”
 - ➔ Symbols: represent more than their material properties
 - ➔ E.g., bread and wine (Christianity)
 - ➔ Anything can be a symbol!
 - ➔ Meaning is in the **relation** between symbol and person/group

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Ed (S01E02)



What is Ritual?

- Meanings of symbols (p. 135–7)
 - ➔ Culturally (and personally) determined, and affected by **context**
 - ➔ Jung: universal archetypes (little evidence)
 - ➔ Point is not to discover “true” meaning
 - ➔ Each symbol can/does have **many** meanings
 - ➔ E.g., cross, the colour white

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Pondo Rite of Passage



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Lao Buddhist Funeral



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Maori Poi Ritual



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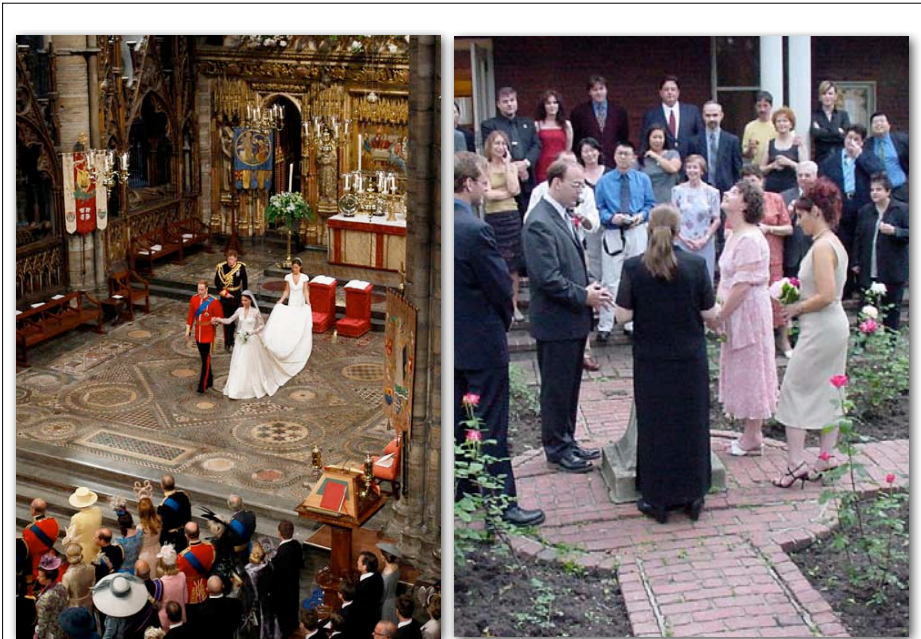
John Beattie

- Instrumental vs. expressive action (p. 134-5)
 - ➔ “Literal” vs. “symbolic” action
 - ➔ Expressive/symbolic action = “ritual”
 - ➔ Some actions may be instrumental OR expressive, some actions may be both
 - ➔ Driving a car; cutting/growing hair; clothing

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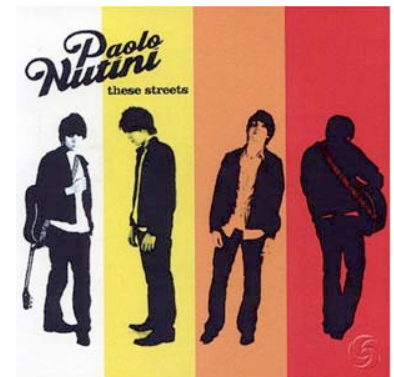
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Today's Song

- "New Shoes" by Paolo Nutini (2006)



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“New Shoes”

Woke up cold one Tuesday,
I'm looking tired and feeling quite sick,
I felt like there was something missing
in my day to day life

Hey, I put some new shoes on,
And suddenly everything is right,
I said, hey, I put some new shoes on and
everybody's smiling, it's so inviting,
Oh, short on money, but long on time,
Slowly strolling in the sweet sunshine

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What is Ritual?

- Ritual = stuff people **DO** (i.e., actions)
 - ➔ But *which* stuff?!
 - ➔ Many definitions!
- Ritual as meaningful or symbolic action
 - ➔ Symbols have many different meanings
 - ➔ Meaning is relational

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Welcome back!

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2. Ritual Studies

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Ritual Studies

- Ritual studies challenged academic assumption that religion was only about **belief**

➔ Focus on
ACTIONS



Ritual Studies

- Crisis in the 1990s (Nye p. 148)
- If so many things can be called “ritual,” is this really a useful term?
- Change in focus: ritual theories used for **interpretation**, not as description
 - ➔ Theories as tools for understanding actions, and not for labelling them as “ritual” (or not “ritual”)

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Old question:
“Is this action a ritual?”

New question:
“What does this action **mean**?”

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Ritual Studies

1. Ritual studies showed that **actions** were important in religion
 - ➔ Religion was not only about belief
2. Shift in focus within ritual studies
 - ➔ From “Is this action a ritual?” to “What does this action **mean**?”

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3. Ritual Theories

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Ritual Theories

- Emile Durkheim (society)
- Sigmund Freud (neurosis)
- Harvey Whitehouse (memory)
- Malory Nye (power)
- Arnold van Gennep (rites of passage)

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Ritual Theories

- Emile Durkheim (society)
- Sigmund Freud (neurosis)
- Harvey Whitehouse (memory)
- Malory Nye (power)
- Arnold van Gennep (rites of passage)

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Ritual Theories

- Many theories focus on the FUNCTION of ritual (not “content”)
 - ➔ **Not** about symbolic meaning
 - ➔ About the **effect** of the ritual on participants

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Emile Durkheim

- Ritual binds people together (p. 141-2)
 - ➔ Ritual does not just express relationships: “the performance of rituals actually **creates** those relationships”
 - ➔ Regular attendance at religious site (church, mosque, synagogue, temple, etc.)
 - ➔ Other examples?
 - ➔ *Lion King?*

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Hakuna Matata



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Sigmund Freud

- Ritual = neurosis (p. 143)
 - ➔ Repetition brings comfort; avoids real problem(s)
 - ➔ Might be true sometimes (not always): but need to know **context**
 - ➔ Examples?
 - ➔ *Lion King?*

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Hakuna Matata



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Harvey Whitehouse

- Rituals and memory (p. 143-4)
 - ➔ “**Imagistic**” mode: high intensity (dramatic and/or traumatic)
 - ❖ E.g., wedding, funeral, car accident
 - ➔ “**Doctrinal**” mode: mundane repetition (routine)
 - ❖ E.g., daily prayer, national anthem
 - ➔ *Lion King?*

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Imagistic



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Imagistic



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Doctrinal



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Doctrinal



64

Doctrinal



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Power

- Rituals involve power relations (p. 149)
 - ➔ Can **express** power or **challenge** power
 - ➔ (Note: this is *not* Nye's theory)
 - ➔ Examples?
 - ➔ Royal wedding, Indigenous rites of passage
 - ➔ NFL: taking a knee
 - ➔ *Lion King*?

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Power



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Power



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Power

- The same ritual can mean different things
 - ➔ Need to know **contexts**
 - ➔ Bloch: social/historical contexts (p. 149)
 - ➔ Bell: individual contexts (p. 150)

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Hakuna Matata



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Ritual Studies: Example

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- What is the meaning of this action?



- What is the meaning of this action?

Possible answers:

- Form relationships (=Durkheim)
- Avoid difficulties (=Freud)
- Remember (=Whitehouse)
- Express power (=Nye)

