Extraordinary Communal Events

Celebration. Studies in Festivity and Ritual. VICTOR TURNER, Ed. Smithsonian Institution Press, Washington, D.C., 1982. 320 pp., illus. Cloth, $25; paper, $9.95.

The subject matter of this collection of 17 essays by anthropologists, folklorists, and literary and drama critics is the celebratory process. The volume was produced in conjunction with a museum exhibit, "Celebration: A World of Art and Ritual," sponsored by the Folklife Program of the Smithsonian Institution (currently on view at its Renwick Gallery) and masterminded by Victor Turner. Some sense of the richness and variety of the exhibition can be discovered in the generous allotment of black-and-white illustrations that enliven the book.

Though the time span represented ranges from the Neolithic to the present day and the territory covered is global, a compellingly consistent view emerges from the essays. For the reader not already familiar with Turner's work on ritual, symbology, and the dramaturgical process, the introduction will be a useful synopsis. Here Turner defines a set of terms, among them "multivocal symbol," "positional and orective poles of meaning," "liminoid," "ludic," and "communitas," that link him to a venerable ancestry that includes Durkheim, van Gennep, Huizinga, and Gestalt psychology. Turner's own quest for meaning in ritual has served as a stimulus to an expanding group of younger scholars, who monitor the meanings of symbolic objects and celebratory events from a recognizably Turnerian perspective, and many of these are contributors to this volume.

Turner *et al.* understand festivals and public rituals in terms of explicit structural-functional goals. Celebrations are perceived as serving a didactic function, even when the ceremonial objects, costumes, and gestures may not seem, to those who use them, to teach, to cure, or to reflect on social values. Largely unconscious in their motivation, festive practices such as parades, carnivals, and Olympic games are promoted as deeply beneficial to individual celebrants, loosening them from day-to-day concerns while at the same time plunging them into a community of ceremonial players. Thus offered a momentary respite from humdrum lives, a time out of time (Turner's ubiquitous "betwixt and between"), ritual actors would appear to live out Durkheim's culture myth that what celebrants invariably come together to celebrate is social life itself.

Van Gennep long ago (1908) identified as "rites of passage" a series of ritual techniques celebrating transformations in the lives of individuals and groups and in the world of nature. B. Kirshenblatt-Gimblett and W. C. Crocker discuss life-transition rituals as part of either a religious or an educational process. R. D. Abrahams offers a distinction between rites that celebrate individual life-stages and those that commemorate the ebb and flow of nature's bounty. For Abrahams calendrical or seasonal festivals are the very opposite of life-crisis rites (which focus on birth, puberty, marriage, and death), for "they commonly take place on the plateaus of the year when in fact nothing important occurs" (p. 167). He suggests that periodic celebrations of the "lull in the cycle of production and reproduction" call forth an initial celebratory "bang" ("with loud noises produced by drums, guns, firecrackers, and other attention-grabbers," p. 167) to energize the community. M. Weigle and T. R. Lyons, for their part, note that a cacophonic din closes the Holy Week observances in a Penitente village in the Southwest. Tumult and prayer follow an orderly progression of events that dramatize the Passion of Christ and highlight the Christian calendar year. This final outburst of energy contrasts with the solemn formality of the preceding days and, like the fireworks of Abrahams's "Language of festivals," serves to "hearten" the ritual participants.

The ludic aspects of civic and political ceremonies occupy J. J. MacAloon's discussion of the role of sociability in politics and sports. The serious business of politics is made playful, while games become political rites of another kind. W. H. Wiggins, in his documentation of how Juneteenth, a Texan celebration of Emancipation, gained political recognition, concludes that what was a "jollification" festival 125 years ago now affirms "Blacks' right to first-class citizenship" (p. 293). When public ritual is legalized an undercurrent of serious thought surfaces, permitting festivity to transmit a specific message over and beyond the "hoe down" or "good times" aspect. Other ceremonies, for example the Northwest Coast potlatch (S. Walens) and the carnival in Chamula (P. R. Linn), are perceived less from the perspective of a public service rendered and more from that of the individual's contemplative view of the cosmic order. Perhaps anthropologists know less about ritual evocation of "autocosmic" thought than about any other aspect of public ceremony.

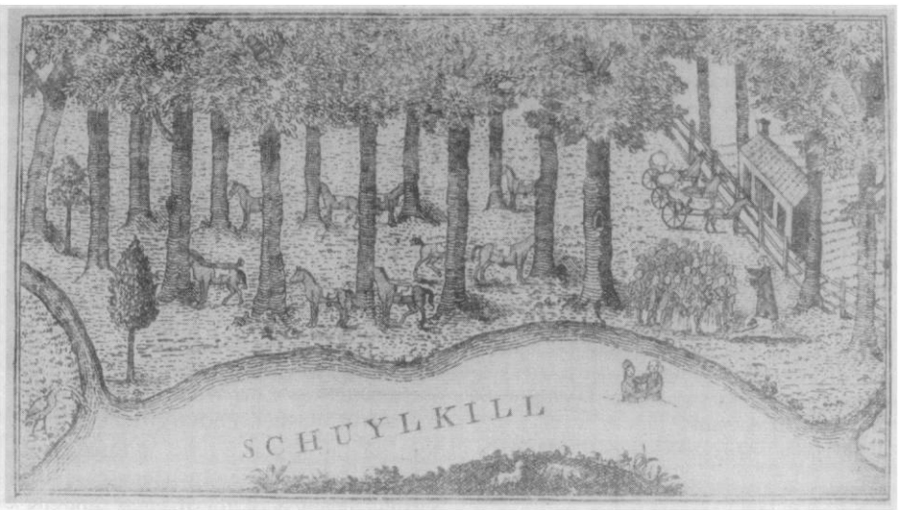
R. L. Grimes conflates the political and fictive natures of public ritual in a

A Juneteenth parade in Anderson, Texas. [From W. H. Wiggins's paper in *Celebration*]

comparison of a traditional ethnic drama replayed annually in Santa Fe, New Mexico, for the amusement of tourists with an avant-garde dramatization of Garcia Lorca's "Blood Wedding" by the experimental Actor's Lab in Toronto. Both rituals are made to reveal their spontaneous unintentional aspects, which Grimes calls "ritualization" and attributes to "primary psychobiological roots" (p. 277) as opposed to their more decorous or liturgical ones. This vision of the dual nature of a celebratory event was introduced by Turner earlier in the book, but the distinction between controlled and uncontrolled behavior (structure and anti-structure) is not systematically utilized until Grimes's paper.

"Religious celebration" is a separate category introduced by Victor and Edith Turner. The designation, however, fits some rituals that have already been tagged rites of passage or calendrical rites. The material clearly defies attempts at simple classification. The Turners do make a discrimination between "iconophilic" and "iconoclastic" religions that is vital to the book and the exhibition. Most of the cultures represented are iconophilic ("lovers of images," p. 216), but some are severely critical of any use of visual symbolism. The iconoclasts are conceived as revolutionary in their search for expressive forms. These are largely verbal and kinesic. For example, Shaker meetings and Methodist revivals, described by D. W. Patterson ("Word, song and motion: instruments of celebration among Protestant radicals in early nineteenth century America"), emphasize the spoken word. Prayer, testimony, and sermon replace painting, sculpture, and other Christian decorative arts. Congregational hymns, spirituals, and dance movements, especially the "spontaneous bodily manifestations" typical of the Shakers (p. 227), lend to these Protestant celebrants a measure of the spirit of "communitas" while also giving them the freedom to pursue their singular right to a spiritual journey unencumbered by the material objects of more traditional religions.

Patterson's treatment of the Protestant's quest for individual spiritual enlightenment reminds the reader that attachments to traditional objects and their usages are both conformist and static. But without the conservative impulse it might not have been possible for the ethnographer-folklorist to have caught so many celebrants at work and play. Unlike the Shakers, who have left a written record of their devotions, many of the peoples recorded in *Celebration* can no longer be counted on to explicate the meanings behind their objects and events. It remains therefore for the analyst to consider any available cultural clue in order to interpret the meanings of a particular object.



An 18th-century river baptism near Philadelphia. [From D. W. Patterson's paper in *Celebration*; reprinted from M. Edwards, *Materials toward a History of the Baptists in Pennsylvania*, 1770]

B. A. Babcock and J. C. Crocker have discovered the process of layering contemporary meanings over more traditional ones. The pottery figurines ("clay voices") Babcock discusses belong to a traditional Cochiti cultural repertoire and at the same time represent a particular artist's personal statement about her heritage. Crocker ("Ceremonial masks") does not find it necessary to revive historical meanings when the informants themselves cannot remember the significance of their masks. Whether or not their origins are recalled, mask and clay figures are shown to continue to do their work through the reaffirmation of social values. This suggestion that social utility transcends historical context fits well with Turner's model of the festive process as outlined in his introduction.

Cochiti figurine, around 1890; height, 15¾ inches. [From B. A. Babcock's paper in *Celebration*]

If social change has been given short shrift in this volume, it is because most of the contributors (Babcock and Crocker are exceptions) see change as destructive of the best of human endeavor. The late Richard M. Dorson ("Material components in celebration") cites "the industrial work ethic" as having "blighted the impulse for communal festivals" (p. 34). But Richard Schechner, alert to the fact that traditional ritual can outlive its time and space and still thrive, attributes the success of the 55-year-old Union City, New Jersey, Passion Play to a need for cultural roots on the part of Americans in the 1980's. The theater, in this instance "America's Oberammergau," becomes the agent responsible for sending down roots and creating tradition.

But changes do occur and have been duly noted. For example, Abrahams sees new forms of celebration arising from new kinds of non-agrarian work, which in turn have produced new festival schedules. The celebratory events he fixes on are nevertheless the homey old-fashioned family festivals from the baseball game to the Thanksgiving turkey dinner, symbols that strongly support the integrity of the middle-class family. Only Barbara Myerhoff ("Rites of passage: process and paradox") suggests that we consider introducing new rituals to accommodate uncelebrated milestones in the human life-cycle: divorce,

"menopause, surgery, 'empty nests,' retirement" (p. 132). At these times people feel detachment, loneliness, and terror; and Myerhoff's remedy would be to construct rituals to subvert such feelings. Would the attempt to celebrate these unfeted moments not belie the meaning of celebration as defined in this volume? Focusing inward on the private world of pain would, of necessity, curtail that spontaneous, joyous, ludic outpouring of the public festive spirit that inspires this communal enterprise.

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Ecology in Simple Settings

Cave Life. Evolution and Ecology. DAVID C. CULVER. Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass., 1982. x, 190 pp., illus. $25.

Ecology during the past quarter century has been strongly influenced by mathematical models. By developing these models, ecologists hoped to predict and to uncover generalizations about the way species are organized into communities. It was a new brand of natural history, one in which the biological peculiarities of individual species were judged to contribute little to the structure of communities. At the same time, population geneticists continued to develop models of the relative importance of selection and neutral mutation in the evolution of populations.

Many of the models are difficult to test empirically because their underlying assumptions are either violated or unverifiable in most communities. The relative simplicity of cave communities seemed to Culver to make caves ideal settings in which to evaluate the assumptions and predictions of theoretical ecology and population genetics. In this slim volume, which deals chiefly with caves in eastern North America and in Europe, Culver carefully lays out hypotheses and their alternatives based on predictions from general models and evaluates the predictions by reviewing previously published evidence.

The first topics to be discussed are the often grottesque features of cave animals. Are their long appendages, long life-spans, and reduced eyes and pigments adaptations to the rigors of the cave environment (low food supplies, high humidity, and darkness), or are they merely inevitable phenotypic responses to life in a natural dungeon? Culver is correct in pointing out the importance of this question for evolutionary biology, but the evidence from cave animals is equivocal, chiefly because experiments investigating the relative contribution of environment and genotype to phenotype have scarcely been done. Whether the loss of pigment and eyes resulted from selection or from the accumulation of selectively neutral mutations also remains uncertain. Culver's calculations suggest that the neutral-mutation explanation remains a possibility, but these calculations depend fundamentally on the estimation of divergence time of cave animals from their above-ground ancestors. The divergence time, in turn, must be calculated indirectly because of the virtual absence of fossil cave animals. Some of the estimates seem to be based on the degree of "regressive evolution" (pigment and eye loss) and thus add an element of circularity in the calculation of evolutionary rate.

The rest of the book is similarly characterized by the author's inability to decide unequivocally between alternatives. Is competition the chief factor determining patterns of habitat occupation by cave animals, or are predation and physical factors also important? Are large-scale patterns of distribution due chiefly to differences in habitat area between caves, or do such historical factors as glaciation, stream alteration, and richness of the above-ground biota also play a role? Usually there are arguments to be made on both sides of each of these questions, so that in most instances it is less a matter of distinguishing between alternatives than it is of establishing the relative importance of each factor.

Culver tends to blame inadequate data for most of his failures to accept or reject hypotheses definitively, and indeed there are great gaps in our knowledge of the natural history of cave animals. I am inclined to put more of the blame on the underlying models and on the methodology used to test the hypotheses that arise from them. The ecological importance of competition, for example, is inferred by calculating competition coefficients that are based on habitat overlaps between co-occurring species. The assumption is that habitat separation is effected and maintained by competitive exclusion where the two species come into contact. Aside from the likelihood that factors other than competition could bring about such a pattern, the less drastic effects of competition (reduced growth rates and fecundities of individuals, for example) are ignored, and there is no information on the resources being competed for or on the methods used by the species to monopolize these resources. Similar criticisms apply to the section on predation. This interaction may be important in some caves, as is suggested by the limited overlap between salamanders and some of their potential prey, but there is little discussion of methods of predation or of antipredatory characteristics. The extent to which competition, predation, and other biological interactions have influenced the evolution of cave animals is not considered. In short, current theoretical models of competition and predation, which are based on densities and growth rates of interacting populations, yield little insight into the ecological and evolutionary importance of these interactions and steer investigators away from the study of mechanisms.

Culver's thorough treatment of the literature makes it clear that much interesting biological work remains to be done in caves. If models are to guide this work, they will have to incorporate assumptions that are more verifiable, and they should emphasize the nature and consequences of individual interactions. I should like to see studies that compare cave communities with one another and with communities in other environments that are characterized by a chronic scarcity of such resources as food. Only in this way will it be possible to know whether the ecological responses and evolutionary pathways of cave animals are unique or whether they are typical of organisms in marginal environments of all kinds.

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Biogeography

Areography. Geographical Strategies of Species. EDUARDO H. RAPOPORT. Translated with revisions from the Spanish edition (1975) by Barbara Drausal. Published on behalf of the Fundación Bariloche by Pergamon, New York, 1982. xvi, 270 pp., illus. $29.50.

Areography is the first in a series of books to be published by the Fundación Bariloche, an Argentinian nonprofit organization devoted to supporting nonconventional creative research in a wide variety of disciplines. The intent of the series is to provide English-speaking readers access to a diversity of current thinking in Latin America.

Rapoport's book treats the study of the geographical ranges of taxa, from subspecies to supraspecific categories. His subject is the mathematical and sta-