

All these autumn weeks I have watched the great disk going south along the horizon of moorlands beyond the marsh, now sinking behind this field, now behind this leafless tree, now behind this sedge hillock dappled with thin snow. We lose a great deal, I think, when we lose this sense and feeling for the sun. When all has been said, the adventure of the sun is the great natural drama by which we live and not to have joy in it and awe of it, not to share in it, is to close a dull door on nature's sustaining and poetic spirit.(1)

Henry Beston

Moreover, it becomes apparent...that ritual is not simply an alternative way to express certain things, but that certain things can be expressed only in ritual. Ritual is without equivalents or even alternatives... I take ritual to be the basic social act...social contract, morality, the concept of the sacred, the notion of the divine, and even a paradigm of creation are intrinsic to ritual's structure.(2)

Roy Rappaport

Most primal or indigenous societies around the world had three common characteristics: they had an intimate, conscious relationship with their place; they were stable "sustainable" cultures, often lasting for thousands of years; and they had a rich ceremonial and ritual life culminating in seasonal festivals. They saw these three as intimately connected. Out of the hundreds of examples, consider the following:

+ The Tukano Indians of the northwest Amazon River basin, guided by their shamans, use various myths and rituals that prevent over-hunting or over-fishing. They view their universe as a circuit of energy in which the entire cosmos participates. The circuit consists of "a limited quantity of procreative energy that flows continually between man and animals, between society and nature." Columbian anthropologist Reichel Dolmatoff notes that the Tukano have little interest in exploiting natural resources more effectively but are greatly interested in "accumulating more factual knowledge about biological reality and, above all, about knowing what the physical world requires from men."(3)

+ The Kung people of Africa's Kalahari Desert have been living in the same place for 11,000 years! They have very few material belongings but their ritual life is one of the most sophisticated of any group.(4)

+ Roy Rappaport has shown that the rituals of the Tsembaga of New Guinea allocate scarce protein for the humans who need it without causing irreversible damage to the land. Ritual dictates the proper ways and times to hunt the pigs which supply their protein.(5)

+ The longest inhabited place in the United States is the Hopi village of Oraibi. At certain times of the year the Hopi here may spend up to half their time in ritual activity.

+ About ten years ago the old *cacique* of San Juan Pueblo in New Mexico died. The young man elected to take over as the new *cacique* will do nothing for the rest of his life but take care of the ritual life of the Pueblo. All his personal needs will be taken care of by the tribe, but he cannot travel more than 60 miles or one hour from the Pueblo. The distance has grown with the use of cars but the time remains one hour. His presence is that important to the life of the Pueblo.

Our Western European industrial culture provides a striking contrast to all these examples.* We have idolized ideals, rationality and a limited kind of "practicality," and have regarded the rituals of these other cultures as at best frivolous curiosities. The results are all too evident. We've only been here a few hundred years and already we have done irreparable damage to vast areas of what we call the US. As Gregory Bateson notes, "mere purposive rationality is necessarily pathogenic and destructive of life."

We have tried to relate to the world around us through only the left side of our brain, and we are clearly failing. If we are to reestablish a viable relationship, we must rediscover the wisdom of these other cultures who knew that their relationship to the land required the whole of their being. What we call their "ritual and ceremony" was a sophisticated social and spiritual technology for such a relationship.

The Industrial Growth Society has

caused us to forget so much in the last 200 years that we hardly know where to begin. It helps to begin by remembering. All traditional cultures, even our own Western European ancestors, had seasonal festivals and rituals. The true origins of most of our modern holidays date back to these seasonal festivals.

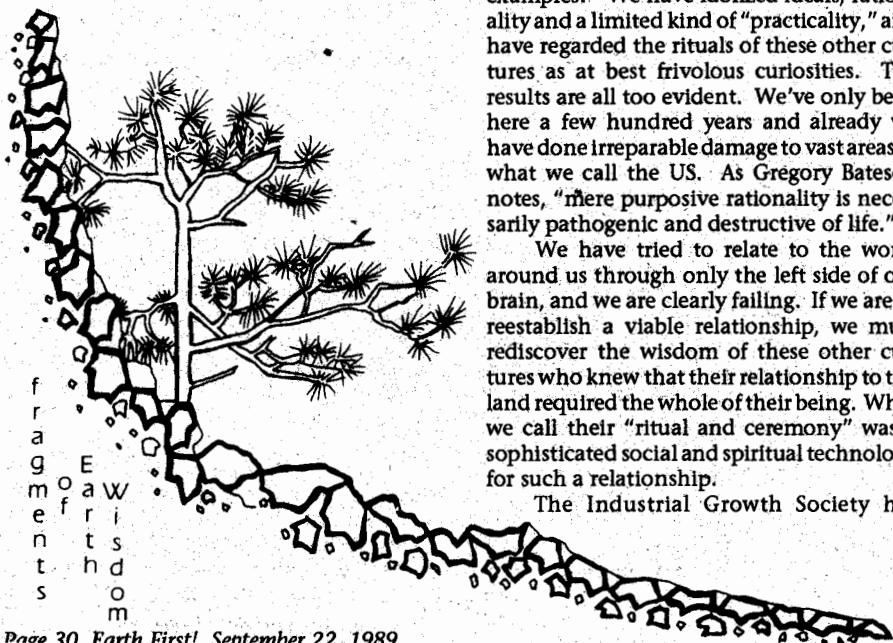
The purpose of seasonal festivals is to periodically revive the *topocosm*. Gaster coined this word from the Greek — *topo* for place and *cosmos* for world order. *Topocosm* means "the world order of a particular place." The *topocosm* is the entire complex of any given locality conceived as a living organism — not just the human community but the total community — plants, animals and soils. The *topocosm* is not only the present community but also that continuous entity of which the present community is but the current manifestation.(6)

Seasonal festivals make use of myths, art, dance and games. Each of these aspects of ritual serve to keep open the essential connections within ourselves. Festivals connect the following: the conscious with the unconscious; the right and left hemispheres of the brain; the cortex with the older three brains (including the Oriental *tan tien*, four fingers below the navel); as well as connecting the human with the non-human — earth, sky, animals and plants.

I'm often asked the question: What relevance does this kind of ritual have for people who live in the city? The modern city of Siena in Italy provides a good example. Siena with a population of 59,000 has the lowest crime rate of any Western city of comparable size. Drug-addiction and violence are virtually unknown. Why? Because it is a tribal, ritualized city organized around the *contrada* (clans) — with names such *Chiocciola*, the Snail, *Tartule*, the Turtle, etc. — and the *Palio* (the annual horse race). Each *contrada* has its own territory, church songs, patron saint and rituals. Particular topographical features of each *contrada's* area are ritualized and mythologized. The ritualized customs of the city extend back to the worship of Diana, the Roman goddess of the moon. Her attributes were taken over by the worship of Mary when Christianity came in.

Such famous writers as Henry James, Ezra Pound and Aldous Huxley sensed the energy of the city and tried to write about it, but none of them even faintly grasped the year-long ritualized life behind it. About one week before the day of the *Palio* race, Siena workmen begin to bring yellow earth (*la terra*) from the fields outside Siena and spread it over the great central square, the *Campo*, thus linking the city with its origins in the earth of its place. Anytime during the year when someone needs to be cheered up, the sad person is told not to worry because soon there will be "la terra in piazza".

The horse race serves two main purposes. In the intense rivalry surrounding the race, each *contrada* "rekindles its own sense of identity." The *Palio* also provides the Sieneese with an outlet for their aggression,



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and as such is a ritual war. The horse race grew out of games that were actually mimic battles used to mark the ends of religious festivals in the old days.

The Palio is truly a religious event. On this one day of the year the *contrada*'s horse is brought into the church of its patron saint. In the act of blessing the horse, the *contrada* itself is blessed. This horse race is the community's greatest rite.(7)

If we want to build a sustainable culture, it is not enough to "go back to the land." That's what our pioneering ancestors did and, as the famous Western artist Charles Russell said, "A pioneer is a man who comes to virgin country, traps off all the fur, kills off the wild meat, plows the roots up... and calls it civilization."

If we are to truly re-connect with the land, we need to change our perceptions. As long as we limit ourselves to rationality, we will be disconnected from the deep ecology of our place. As Heidegger explains: "Dwelling is not primarily inhabiting but taking care of and creating that space within which something comes into its own and flourishes." It takes repeated rituals through the years for real dwelling. Likewise, as Roy Rappaport observes, "knowledge will never replace respect in man's dealings with ecological systems, for the ecological systems in which man participates are likely to be so complex that he may never have sufficient comprehension of their content and structure to permit him to predict the outcome of many of his own acts." Ritual is the focused way in which we both experience and express that respect.

Ritual is the pattern that connects. It provides communication at all levels — communication among all the systems within the individual human organism; between people within the group; between one group and another in a city; and throughout all these levels between the human and the non-human in the natural environment. Ritual provides us with a tool for learning to think logically, analogically and ecologically. Perhaps most important, during rituals we have the experience, unique in our culture, of neither *opposing* nature nor *trying* to be in communication with nature; but of *finding* ourselves within nature.

**NOTE: Most of these primitive groups' cultures have been virtually destroyed in the last 20 years by the IGS, but they are our only sources of information on what constitutes a sustainable culture.*

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