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## Concluding Remarks

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## Concluding remarks

BY E. H. ERIKSON

We have come to the conclusion of an abundance of papers and of a fascinating series of films. At the end, Dr Shils dropped in to point to the naïve investment of rituals with the hope of salvation. I can not estimate the predictive value of sociology when it comes to salvation. Watching the rituals on the screen, however, one is impressed with the spirit of these occasions. I recognized what I have called the *numinous* element in a number of examples, even in that of the precarious tower of strength (to which we looked up with audible awe) and certainly in the native queen who became radiant under the eyes of her subjects. I also could point to the presence of the second, the *judicious* element, according to which a ritual elects an *élite* of some kind. But I remind you of my earlier list of criteria only in order to emphasize once more that of all the forms of behaviour which we could call 'ritualizations' we probably should limit the term to relatively few which *combine* a number of essential elements, and exclude all those which we could simply characterize as habitual, repetitive, stereotyped, compulsive or obligatory; or as acts of displaying, posturing, gesturing, or signaling; or as methods of formalizing, routinizing, conventualizing, etc. Most of these are present in all ritualization, but only a combination of them (as yet to be specified) defines the whole phenomenon.

Coming from psychiatry, I feel that one should also exclude from ritualization proper certain stereotyped formalizations of symbolic behaviour, obviously dictated by 'magic' fear and characterized by isolation and compulsion which have been called rituals by analogy: the frightened child repeating a traumatic event in play or the neurotic engaged in solitary or symptomatic acts. Dr Morris has added to this list (with diagnostic skill) people speaking in public. Caught in conflicting desires and ambiguous conventions, we seem to resemble the caged animal. But Dr Morris avoided the term ritualization for such behaviour.

What has come to be called ritualization in free animals actually points away from pathology, in that it reveals the *bond* created by communicative behaviour carrying a highly formalized, unambiguous and reciprocal message. To match this in the human world we must, I think, postulate a few minimum requirements for calling behaviour ritualized. The discussion of human ritualization pointed first to the bond between mother and child; and, indeed, the ontogeny of ritualization must begin with the mutuality of at least two human beings (with all of evolution and some tradition behind them), and must then gradually include a widening range of individuals and groups with whom the growing human being becomes able to interact in a ritualized fashion. If we should be inclined to ask, 'but does not the artist ritualize in solitude?' we must remember that his circumstantial solitude only serves to enhance his freedom of communicating with memories and phantasies, traditions and rules, aspirations and prophesies in the creation of which many have participated. And the result of his solitary work is destined to reach many, even if his audience may at first be small and select. 'A hundred years from now', Kierkegaard wrote

in his solitude, 'all the world will read this diary'. The artistic or literary creation, then, shares with other ritualizations a second inherent attribute, namely, *symbolic actuality*, that is an activating, bond-creating quality transcending the rationally real. Thirdly, I would postulate an *instinctual involvement* of all who partake in a ritualization. This was discussed in my paper. But I would like to emphasize once more that ritualization in man must also help to overcome *affective ambivalence*. Both ambiguity and ambivalence, of course, relate to *contradictory affects* which need to be reconciled in favour of survival. In the animal, however, 'instinctive' forms of spectacular greeting have absorbed elements of defensive threatening. In man, ambivalence survives along with 'bonding' behaviour (such phrases as, 'I could eat you up', are sometimes not lost on the child who is the recipient of ravenous affection). Then, there is *catharsis*, the 'discharge' of affect: and here I regret that time did not permit a discussion of Francis Huxley's paper which pointed to the relaxation of muscle tension (here a somatization of suppressed aggression) in dance rituals. In the end, however, we always return to the importance of the singular *social bond* created in people who have come to activate and thus to verify each other in ritualized and ritual ways; and the simultaneous deepening of the psychosocial identity of each participant. The final question, it would seem, is not whether any of this will 'save them' but whether the social animal and, indeed, man would have survived without ritualization or will survive without full and genuine equivalents emerging on a new technological and historical level.