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The culture of every society is in part spontaneously generated by its members and in part consciously shaped and directed by its political elites. By “culture” I mean both the formalized ideological constructs, such as art, law or religion, and the more informal way in which members of a society perceive themselves, their society and their relations to the material, social and intellectual products of that society. The balance between spontaneous creation and conscious management of culture, however, varies between different types of society and within a society during different stages of historical development. A process of cultural management is more pronounced in societies with a one-party system, sustaining a single ruling elite unified by the urgent pursuit of a number of clearly defined general goals for their society, such as modernization, industrialization, social and economic reconstruction after a military defeat or the emergence from colonial domination, or the building of socialism. It is less pervasive in a pluralist society with less general, permanent and urgent social and political objectives and more piecemeal approaches to their implementation. Cultural management becomes an overriding concern when the first type of society has been newly formed. During the early formative period, when old societies have to be radically transformed in all spheres, cultural management may be so extensive and drastic that it becomes a cultural revolution.

Both cultural management and cultural revolution utilize a large variety of means to achieve the desired changes in the consciousness of individual members of society. Besides reconstructing culture by changing actual social relations in that society, that is, changing relations of production and the economic and occupational structure, breaking up status hierarchies and formal or informal social groupings, the agents of cultural management or revolution may press into service education, political ideology, religion or a new “revolutionary” art.

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Thus cultural revolution differs from cultural management only in the extent of change effected and in the range of tools employed to this end. Most studies have focussed on those cultural revolutions which have been accompanied by fundamental social upheaval and repercussions on nearly every aspect of society; where wide-ranging changes have been wrought either in social relations and forms of ideology, for example the Soviet Cultural Revolution of between 1928–32 (see Tucker 1977 and Fitzpatrick 1978), or in the ideological dimension of a belief system and in the political and social hierarchy derived from it, for example the Chinese Cultural Revolution of the 1960s.

Hardly any attention has been paid to the less spectacular silent revolutions which have left the existing social structure intact and have instead focussed on the behavioural dimension of ideology (in the widest sense), that is, cult and ritual, as a means to change deep-seated moral orientations, fixed by habit, custom and, often, by an older form of ritual. The neglect is due in part to the fact that this form of partial cultural revolution is less obtrusive and in part to the fact that the analysis of ritual is widely believed to be irrelevant to the dynamics of a modern society.

The present work, in contrast, is concerned with ritual as a tool of partial cultural revolution or, better, cultural management, namely with the ritual derived from Soviet Marxism–Leninism in the contemporary Soviet Union. Cultural management and cultural revolution are by no means new phenomena in Soviet society and have been endemic there ever since the Revolution. The means used to this end and the scope of revolution have varied between different historical periods (see pp. 153ff), but a direct, rather than derivative, assault on out-moded value orientations through ritual and cult has always played some part among them. Soviet political elites have realized from the very beginning that they will not succeed in creating a new type of society unless political change is accompanied by efforts which, to quote Marriott (1963: 29), “educate their citizens to this newly chosen way of life and mobilize them in support of deliberately cultivated values” and modes of social behaviour. Most of the Bolshevik leaders were convinced of the urgent necessity of this task. Thus for Trotsky the Revolution meant essentially “the people’s final break with the Asiatic, with the Seventeenth Century, with Holy Russia, with icons and cockroaches” (Trotsky 1960: 94). Lenin was particularly aware of the fact that the socio-political changes wrought by the October Revolution had to be followed by a less violent transformation of basic attitudes if

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the Revolution was to succeed. But for the early Soviet political leaders cultural revolution always went hand in hand with social revolution, with the former consolidating or preparing for the latter. Since the middle thirties, however, cultural revolution or, more properly, cultural management has become a substitute for social revolution and has thus assumed a conservative character. Consequently it has achieved a position of great importance in the arsenal of means to exert social control employed by political elites, although the degree of importance and the approach to tools of cultural management have varied significantly during different stages of Soviet social development. Up to the early sixties, ritual as a tool of cultural management has only been utilized selectively and has never been part of a sustained and general campaign. It is the universal introduction of a *system* of rituals from the early sixties onwards that express the values and norms of Soviet socialism which forms the subject of the present study.

My analysis of ritual thus focusses on the way in which ritual has become an important means to structure and maintain power relations in Soviet society. Whereas most recent books on aspects of the Soviet political process have concentrated on the distribution of, and struggle for, power within or between political elites, this study attempts to shed light on power relations between the political elites and the masses. I try to show that this aspect of the distribution of power – which has become neglected by political sociologists as a consequence of the discrediting of the “totalitarian” approach to Soviet society – is still vital to our understanding of Soviet society.

This process of creating and introducing such a complex of rituals has gone largely unnoticed in the West, and of those few scholars who have become aware of its existence, many have not realized the full implications of it. These lacunae of knowledge and understanding can be found in the writing both of specialists on ritual in industrial society and of authors who have made a special study of the value system and the methods of its inculcation in contemporary Soviet society. Thus Shils in an article on ritual in modern society (1969) maintains that contemporary Soviet rulers are deliberately anti-ritualistic. Hollander (1973), in the sections of his book that deal with values and political socialization in Soviet society, shows not only imperfect knowledge but also inadequate understanding of the new system of rituals. He devotes only a few lines to the new ritual which, basing his information on a very inadequate Western source, he writes off as “not having taken root” in Soviet society (*ibid.*: 192). He is unaware of the very

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important propaganda function of ritual, and the very special way in which ritual inculcates political norms and values, when he claims that "Soviet propaganda tries to affect its audience primarily on a conscious rather than sub- or semi-conscious level . . . The effort to prompt people to act on the basis of motives and impulses of which they have little or no awareness has no easily identifiable Soviet equivalent [to American practice in the field of advertising]" (*ibid.*: 127). And a more recent study of political culture by White (1979) that has as one of its chief aims the study of the formation of political attitudes, omits discussion of the system of socialist rituals.

A fuller and more informed discussion of the new system of rituals can be found in a few, relatively unknown, articles on the subject (see McDowell 1974; Unger 1974; Powell 1975; Binns 1979).

Little, therefore, is known by Western readers about either the rituals themselves or about the many theoretical implications of their utilization, and a few introductory remarks are in order. These rituals span a wide spectrum. They range from mass political ritual, such as that contained in the celebrations of the Anniversary of the October Revolution, through rituals of initiation into various social and political collectives, such as the Pioneers, the Army, the working class, to such individual *rites de passage* as the Festive Registration of the New-Born Child and the socialist wedding and funeral rites. In addition, there is much ritual in the holidays of the calendric cycle, such as a summer solstice, a Harvest Festival or a winter carnival. While some of the holidays and rituals have their origin either in Russian or earlier Soviet times, many have been newly devised or adapted during the sixties and seventies. It is only from this period onwards that one can speak of a system of Soviet rituals which, although highly diverse in form, have been unified by their common value content.

The theoretical and empirical study of this system of Soviet rituals will cover the following aspects. The book starts with a definition and theoretical analysis of ritual and related concepts, drawing on recent Western work in this field. A short critical overview of the theoretical and practical approach to ritual by Soviet social scientists and workers in the field of ideology, comparing their work with that of Western students of ritual, will throw light on its nature and function in Soviet society. This is followed in chapter 2 by a theoretical discussion of ritual in contemporary Soviet society, which will deal with the question of *why* ritualization of social relations has come to predominate as a means of maintaining social control at the present time and, by

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comparison, has had relatively little importance in earlier periods. It will present a historical analysis of Soviet ritual in relation to other strategies of maintaining social control adopted at different stages of Soviet social development. Chapter 3 is concerned with the problem of whether the Soviet system of rituals is sacred or secular or whether it holds an ambiguous mixture of the two attitudes, and discusses whether the beliefs and rituals of Soviet Marxism–Leninism are best viewed as ideology, religion or as political religion. Chapter 4 covers the problems surrounding the organization of the Soviet system of ritual. It provides information about how individual rites or holidays are actually created or adapted and introduced into Soviet life, looks at the work of ritual specialists and masters of ceremony, at financial and political support for this work and at the relations between ritual specialists and those who actually perform the rites.

This general theoretical introduction of the new Soviet system of ritual is followed by a long and detailed (as detailed as existing sources permit) description and analysis of all the major rituals and holidays performed at the present time. Besides describing the actual scenario of various versions of each ritual, a short outline of their social context and historical background is given to help the reader to see them in perspective. While most of the rituals and holidays are fairly recent creations or revivals, two of the mass political holidays have long and eventful histories. The concluding chapter of this descriptive section will therefore be given over to a historical analysis of these holidays and their ritual from 1918 up to the present time, showing how changed social and political conditions and concerns are reflected in the changing ritual form and content of these holidays.

Having familiarized the reader with the actual rituals and holidays, the next chapters give a theoretical interpretation of them from various angles. Chapter 11 presents an analysis of the ritual symbolism employed, and chapter 12 deals with the nature of syncretism in Soviet ritual. Chapter 13 offers an evaluation of the impact of this ritual, assessing it in terms of the number of participants and in terms of its effects on attitudes and on behaviour.

The concluding chapter presents a comparative study of political ritual in modern society. Besides looking at some contemporary societies it examines the ritual systems of the two modern historical societies which reveal the most striking parallels with the Soviet system. Short descriptions, based on available secondary sources, of such ritual in the USA and Britain, in some developing African countries, in

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France after the 1789 Revolution and in Nazi Germany are given, which relate each system of ritual to the notions of civil and political religion. Comparisons between the ritual of each of these different societies and that of the USSR will establish what is general to ritual in modern society and what is unique about ritual in contemporary Soviet society, and some explanations for these patterns are suggested.

The preceding outline of the contents of this book indicates that it tries to fill serious gaps existing both in the field of Soviet area studies and in the sociological/anthropological study of ritual in modern industrial society. In addition, it has something to offer also to sociologists of religion. For Soviet area specialists, the book is particularly relevant to those interested in problems of ideology and political socialization. But it should also be of interest to a much wider circle of students of Soviet society, since a study of a society's ritual sheds much light on the general problem areas found in that society and on the strategies adopted by political elites to deal with them. Sociologists and anthropologists involved in the study of ritual should find in this work many insights both of a substantive and a theoretical nature about areas as yet insufficiently or not at all explored. I am referring to such areas as ritual in an industrial and state socialist society; ritual with an avowedly secular orientation; ritual sponsored "from above" rather than spontaneously generated by those performing it; ritual still in the process of creation and implantation into social life. In addition, the amount of descriptive material on a large variety of rituals, as yet chiefly unknown in the West, will be valuable to students of ritual for comparative purposes. Sociologists of religion will be interested in learning about the efforts of Soviet political elites to replace conventional religious rites with the new rites of Soviet Marxism-Leninism. They may also gain something from the application of the notion of political religion to the beliefs and practice of Soviet Marxism-Leninism.

Finally, a few comments have to be made on the methods employed to collect the data presented in this book. The first and most extensively used source has been the written accounts of the various rituals presented by Soviet ritual specialists, that is those actively involved in the creation and the introduction of the rites, by Soviet social scientists and by newspaper correspondents. The second source of information has been my observation of various rituals during two study visits to the Soviet Union in 1977 and 1978. The third method has entailed having informal talks with Soviet citizens from different walks of life

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who have been participants in these rituals, as well as with Soviet people who are professionally involved either in the study or the practical organization of some or all of these rituals.

Unlike most anthropological studies of ritual, which base themselves mainly on sources two and three, this work has had to rely more on the first source of information. This is for two reasons. First, the greater impersonality and reliance on written communication in industrial society makes written sources more widely available and direct oral communication more difficult for the student of ritual. Secondly, the greater degree of closedness of Soviet society in comparison with most other societies makes access to something even as public as ritual a problem for a foreign outsider. Although some of the rituals are relatively easily observed others are more inaccessible. They may be difficult to locate, or they may be performed by selected collectives in non-public buildings or admission to public spaces is reserved for selected people and by ticket only, as is the case with the culminating events of some of the mass political holidays. While observation of rites can thus be difficult, systematic interviewing of participants in the rites is impossible for the foreign researcher.

The implications of these restrictions on direct access to the topic of research and the consequent greater reliance on secondary data are not as serious as it may appear at first sight. It must be remembered that most of the written accounts of rituals utilized have been rendered by ritual specialists, that is by people deeply involved in the subject matter, whose accounts are usually written for methodological purposes and are meant to guide and advise other people in the field of ritual on the basis of practical experience; they are thus relatively free of bias. They have been written at a time when the process of devising and introducing the new ritual is still under constant examination and more often than not are composed in a critical rather than self-congratulatory or advertisement-type manner. A more serious limitation on this study is the non-availability of direct information from participants in the ritual, as this makes an evaluation of the effect of the rituals very difficult. It must be remembered, though, that adequate information on this aspect of ritual is very difficult to obtain even in societies where the researcher has easy access to information.





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## *Ritual and related concepts*

### A THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

The task of clarifying the concept of ritual presents an unusually large problem. Although anthropologists and, to a lesser extent, sociologists and political scientists have been grappling with this problem since the very beginnings of their disciplines there is still, in the words of Leach (1968: 526), “the widest possible disagreement as to how the word ritual should be understood”. This particular study is not intended to be a theoretical treatise on the concept of ritual. It neither reviews the extensive literature on the subject up to date nor does it claim to establish a new definitive answer to the problem of ritual in general. It merely takes up those aspects of the general debate which seem relevant to the study of a system of rituals as a tool of cultural management and political socialization in modern industrial society and throws new light on the debate on ritual from its own perspective.

Ritual, I suggest in this preliminary definition, is a stylized, repetitive social activity which, through the use of symbolism, expresses and defines social relations. Ritual activity occurs in a social context where there is ambiguity or conflict about social relations, and it is performed to resolve or disguise them. Ritual can be religious or secular.

The symbolic nature of ritual lies in the fact that it is significant not for its ostensible meaning but that it stands for, and has to be interpreted by reference to, a transcendent principle outside the means-goal relationship. The “transcendent principle” is constituted by those beliefs and values at the top of a hierarchy of meaning which order and structure those at the lower levels. The activity can be entirely symbolic, or it can have both a symbolic and an instrumental or expressive aspect. Ritual activity is distinguished from the other two, to quote Myerhoff (1974: 3), in that “it always goes beyond them, endowing some larger meaning to activities it is associated with”. The distinction

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is, however, not always easy to make and careful contextual analysis is often necessary. While most students of ritual have emphasized the difficulty of separating ritual from instrumental activity, the Soviet social context also makes the distinction between drama and ritual problematic. This is the case because much of Soviet ritual is representative ritual, that is a ritual reconstruction and celebration of the revolutionary or patriotic past in a dramatic form, while much of the drama is historical and ideologically charged.

In so far as ritual always entails the enactment of a social relationship between an individual or a group of individuals and another, more inclusive, group, the relationship is shown in such a way that it both portrays and subtly alters the relationship framed in the ritual act. Ritual, in the words of Geertz (1968: 7), provides both “a model of” and “a model for” that relationship. I would extend Geertz’s insight by suggesting that the emphasis given to these two properties of ritual will vary according to the social context in which the relationship is set. If the social context has merely blurred, weakened or temporarily disturbed that relationship and the resulting ambiguity has to be removed, the “model of” aspect will predominate. If, however, the social context is also one of conflict, that is there is a great discrepancy between the ideological definition of the relationship and the relationship as it actually affects the actors, then the “model for” aspect will be more prominent, asserting the ideological definition with varying degrees of consciousness. To rephrase this idea in the words of Terence Turner (1974: 19): “ritual, as a controllable and orderly pattern of action, constitutes an effective mechanism for manipulating or reordering the ambiguous aspects of the situation in relation to which it is defined”.

In the social context of the small, internally relatively homogeneous group, such as the family, *Gemeinschaft* type of group, or societies of the “primitive” type, the interests of the individual and that of the group will have considerable overlap. In this context *all* members of the group have an active interest in removing ambiguity and in keeping conflict at bay. The performance of ritual is motivated by this general interest, and its function is to reaffirm and strengthen a pre-existing value consensus. Consequently, social anthropologists studying simple societies usually adopt a functionalist approach to ritual and are disinclined to explain ritual in terms of conflict management, although there are several notable exceptions among them. But groups of the *Gemeinschaft* type are not only the province of social anthro-