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THE RITUALIZED COMMUNICATION IN SOCIAL RESEARCH ACTS

The most commonly accepted view of what ritual is refers this concept to repetitive, prescribed symbolic actions addressed to a sacred object (see, e.g. D o u g l a s, 1966, p. 66). Ritual is said to constitute a unified whole, in which all its relevant co-ordinates such as time, place, gestural and verbal performances, arrangements of their succession in time, etc., are submitted to strict rules that leave no freedom to participants with regard to their modes of behaviour. A deviation from any rule makes the cere-mony invalid and means blasphemy. However, many anthropologists agree that the notion of ritual (may be used in relation to any "fixed set of solemn observances" L o w i e, 1974, p. 316), whenever they serve affirmative celebrations of values that are integrati-vely important for a given group (see also L e a c h, 1954; T a y-l o r, 1969; V. W. T u r n e r, 1969; H a m m o n d, 1972). It is a very significant concession. It allows to apply the concept of ritual to a much broader domain of actions, i.e. to all mani-festations of the symbolic expression and control of social order. Yet, it continues to imply a limitation in the scope of the term, forcing us to classify such actions as completed rituals or non--rituals.

Other students tend to be more concessive. They propose to define ritual not in terms of completed ceremony, or a definite type of action, but as a communicative aspect of actions of almost any kind (L e a c h, 1964, p. 10-16); cf. M u n r o, 1968, p. 148). This idea comes very close to Goffman's conceptions of the affirmative

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(protective) repairing regulations that operate in everyday inte-
raction. Thus understood, in some of G o f f m a n's work the
notion of ritual is one of the main metaphors of social order
(1971, 1972, 1975).

The advantage of such concession is that we can see how ac-
tions may be _ritualized_, or how interactans display the tendency
towards the _ritualization_ of their conduct.

The concept of ceremony presupposes, to use B. Bernstein's
terms, a relatively strong classification and framing of communi-
cative context in which a course of actions is to be recognised
and realised in accord with strict rules (see B e r n s t e i n,
1980). The classifications and framings, perhaps with exception of
those concerning magic or religious rituals may be, however, of
gradual character. In modern societies there are numerous ceremo-
nies in which: 1) some dimensions of communicative conduct come
under prescriptive rules, but some do not, 2) some performative
prescriptions are rigidly detailed, whereas others are only gene-
ral and allow aleatory conduct, 3) the very conditions for the
commencement of a ceremony may be predefined or left to the deci-
sion of its would-be participants. Thus, it suggests that we sho-
uld rather use the notion of ritual as an ideal-typical concept,
and not as a simple classificatory one. It may probably be sugge-
sted that the strictness of ceremonial rules is, among others, an
outgrowth of the kind and scope of social bonds that are expressed,
controlled by, and revitalized in a given ritual. It seems to in-
crease as we go along the scale of social bond from immediate iden-
tifications and experiences towards those forms of sociality which
are based on apersonal typifications. Or, when we move from the
forms of social relationship in which personal faces are at stake
towards those in which important group symbols, the symbols of
group identity, are celebrated.

The term "ritualization" as opposed to "ritual" may suggest
two meanings. It may mean a process, by virtue of and in which
some practices gain the properties of a ceremony. On the other
hand, it may also be referred to such occasions, when some esta-
blished behavioural routines of ritual value in their proper cere-
monial context, are used by interactants in order to solve some
practical instrumental problems, to control, redefine, or steer
(in the strategic sense) their situations. It does not mean that

they are engaged in a ceremony. They rather try to adjust themsel-
ves to alleged demands of a situation, or to adjust the situation
to their own definitions of what is going on, or to their purposes
and expectations.

A few illustrating examples may be useful.   Suppose, that a
father is expected by his neighbours to punish his son for a mis-
chief, but he does not really think the affair is serious enough
to require real punishment. To satisfy the neighbours, the father
makes a typical scene of calling the son to order. All the people,
including the rebuked son, may be aware that the   admonition of
the boy is only a confirmation of the sense of pedagogical practi-
ces, and that the stern face, words and gestures of the father are
not to display that he is enraged, but that he knows what it means
to be a responsible father. Or, suppose that a couple gets invol-
ved in a serious quarrel, and one of the partners tries to trans-
form the clash into a kind of funny game in which the rough words
and gestures are to be understood as harmless teasing of one ano-
ther. In both cases the participants may derive their lines of be-
haviour from some established patterns such as customs, ceremonies
or manners recognised as typical in a given situation.

Thus understood ritualization seems to be universal as a con-
tingent tendency that may occur in any course of everyday inter-
action. The special attention which we pay to its   manifestations
in research act situations is justified by their importance as a
methodological problem concerning the validity of studies based on
communication techniques. Except for those techniques which con-
tain entirely standardized possibilities of the choise of answer
and do not require any additional speech production on the part of
informants in all other modalities of sociological   investigation
based on talking the ritualization is likely to occur, especially
when the respondents' beliefs and opinions are the subject of study.

It often happens to the sociologist when he asks people to for-
mulate their beliefs that they do it in a way which   allows   the
researcher to suppose that they do not express their personal views,
but merely retail some ready-made catchwords, clichés and plati-
tudes. He may only have an intuitive knowledge that they are like-
ly to cover their genuine judgements, or try to mask the fact that
they have nothing interesting to say, or that they feel they ought
to speak in such way because the situation requires them to do so.

They may thus be said to ritualize their verbal interaction with
the researcher by displaying the tendency to use a strongly   con-
ventionalized vocabulary, utterances and stylistic patterns reco-
gnizable as taken from an other communicative context.

The ritualization may occur here as a solution of some trou-
blesome interaction, when a person is morally or institutionally
obliged, or feels he is obliged, to answer some questions that he
would not want to answer, or to talk to somebody whom he would not
want to talk to, and he is not interested in revealing   his opi-
nions. In particular, the person may suspect that his expressions
will not be taken at their face value and can serve as indicators
of his unarticulated attitudes, beliefs, etc., though he does not
control the rules and purposes of diagnosig and does not want to
be tested. He may also suspect that any formulation of his true
views could prove somehow dangerous for him, e.g. by placing   him
in a difficult, uncomfortable position in relation to the inter-
viewer or to other persons, if some information happened to get
outside. Such cases have much in common with strategic interaction
as described by G o f f m a n (1969).

The ritualization may be seen here a controlling or covering
move in interaction, i.e., "an intentional effort of an informant
to produce expressions that he thinks will improve his situations
if they are gleaned by the observer" (G o f f m a n, 1969, p. 15).

There are, by and large, two sets of regulative   principles
that seem to account for the tendency towards   the ritualisation
of communicative conduct on the part of informants, when they are
not interested in talking, yet feel they have reasons to talk. One
is the norm of politeness. The other refers to much more complex
problems, connected with what could be considered as a measure of
acculturation to sociology. People identify sociology in terms of
its cross-institutional dependencies, social usefulness and trust-
worthiness. When the sociologist is defined by his potential   in-
formants as an agent or functionary of an institution   which is
dependent on, or subserving some larger institutional network, e.g.,
the state bureaucracy, it may happen that the informants will not
refuse to talk with the researcher in order to avoid the possible
consequences of refusal. Nevertheless they will be prone to adopt
ritualized speech patterns safeguarding them against possible un-
covering moves. The situation resembles in many ways the training

in total institutions, when a person is demanded to acquire a re-
stricted and sharply confined repertoire so that he would be ready
to react in ways appriopriate for the given institution. It may
lead to the situation in which some informants assume that the
researcher expects them primarily to supply a mere affirmation of
the normative perspectives that they think they are   expected to
share. In this sense, the ritualization might be accounted for al-
so by means of the sociocentric cognitive-communicative .orienta-
tion embedded in the restricted code (see B e r n s t e i n, 1975).

     However, the notion of the restricted code would have to be
extended to spheres of discourse organization | far beyond those
which operate within a social class category. A remark by   Z n a-
n i e c k i (1952, p. 255) on properties of some sociological te-
chniques of research is worth quoting here: "some   questionnaires
are modelled [...] on the examination question asked by educators
(in the most general sense of the term) in order to ascertain whet-
her educands have learned what they were taught about the   right
ways of acting in definite situations. When an educator asks how
a certain problem should be solved he does not imply any uncerta-
inty; he is absolutely certain what the right solution is, and the
educands know that he is". From my own research practice I   can
quote an example that fully confirms the observation by Znaniecki.
A young girl was asked to interpret a short poem. At the beginning
of her answer she was not able to cope with the task, but   she
quickly came to use standard pompous formulations known to her
from school contexts. They could fit any kind of poetry, but had
no informative value as to her personal understanding of the poem.
The girl defined the situation in terms of a quasi-examination and
located me in the teacher's position. She displayed what she tho-
ught she was expected to display, namely, the learned   competence
of a good pupil.

     This example reveals other possible motives of communicative
ritualization. Informants are often asked to answer questions con-
cerning matters which they are unfamiliar with,yet which they feel
they ought to have some knowledge of. Having no determined views,
they may adopt verbal stamps that cover their poor knowledge, un-
certainty, or hesitation. They may be said to act under   pressure
of a necessity to maintain their prestige in the eyes of resear-
cher. Thus L a b o v's suggestions that formally high speech may

cover substantively poor information (1972), may be applied direc-
tly to the problem of ritualization. Another motive of ritualiza-
tion may be in that some informants presume that patterns of ca-
sual, ordinary talk are inadequate to the research act situation
and that they ought to use more conventionalised ways of speaking.
        Almost all these cases constitute acts of communication which
take place under the pressure of some norms that require or impel
someone to maintain the contact even if it is unpleasant or objec-
tionable for him. An exception is the last case, when an informant
may be easy to cooperate with, but feels an uncertainty   whether
his communicative skills are sufficient to cope with the task for-
mulated by the sociologist and thus he resorts to ritualizing his
speech production. In some respects these phenomena could be rela-
ted to B. Malinowski's concept of phatic communication (M a l i-
n o w s k i, 1946). However, while Malinowski's intention was to
describe such occasions on which the participants engage in verbal
exchange for the sake of talking itself, the situations mentioned
above revolve around the negative definitions of situation aimed
at avoiding a disclosure of one's personal and private views. Ne-
vertheless, such contact maintenance, although it is brought about
by non-spontaneous motives to communicate, seems to be one of the
more salient properties of ritualized communicative conduct, beca-
use the tendency towards ritualization is likely to occur   as   a
contingent solution whenever at least one of the   participants
finds reasons for preventing refusal or for breaking the contact.
        The main sources of ritualized communication patterns and stra-
tegies can be found in practices of institutions which govern the
public discourse. They have created a distinct speech style that
penetrates into everyday communication. The core of the problem is
not that the vocabulary and stylistic properties of   that speech
are getting conventionalized, but that people learn who can be the
official legitimate sender in public communication and how they
should construct their messages in order to conform with those ta-
ken from the public discourse. By and large, people learn that in
the public communication it is more important "what-has-been-said-
-so-many-times" than what could be said from their own perspecti-
ve. The pattern to be followed is known from broadcasts or press
interviews, which are known to be controlled and often   prepared
according to a carefully written script. As a result, the infor-

mants may be well aware of the fact that the public discourse is
to replay and thus confirm what everybody should know and share.
The possibility for easy identification of the specific "journa-
lect" of mass media and official pronouncements with the language
used by sociologist changes according to the eagerness of politi-
cal spokesmen and journalists to appropriate the vocabulary of
social science.

The two way transfer of the communicative culture between mass
media and sociological research based on extensively surveyed
samples, is probably unavoidable. It implies that we should not
feel entitled, at least for some topics of investigation, to refer
our results to the original objectives of study. I suggest that
for the studies of "social consciousness" we are able, at best, to
estimate the degree to which our informants are exposed to and to
which they accept some specialized modes of speaking and communica-
ting derived from the public discourse. Moreover, it is possible
to state when these patterns are visiably displayed and thereby
identifiable, i.e., when we are able to recognize the areas of
high conventionalization in their speech. Nevertheless, we have
little or no possibility to control the degree od ritualization,
if the research act contact is maintained for negatively defined
phatic reasons, and the patterns of speech style and vocabulary
are drawn from everyday modes of talking.

The consequences of such ritualization of research acts in
sociology depend heavily on the type of social and political struc-
ture of the society. The more open is the public discourse and the
more autonomous is the common image of sociology, the less ritua-
lized is the informants' conduct. I think, however, that the pro-
cesses of ritualization are so multifarious, both with regard to
the dynamics of a particular occasion and to the properties of the
situation of research as a whole, that they are hardly controlable.
There is no chance to prevent or eliminate them on the level of
short-term, superficial contacts between informants who are forced
to act like machines for giving answers and interviewers who may
be described in terms of sensing devices. The problem of rituali-
zed communication may thus be seen as a contribution to the dis-
cussion of the proper application of communication based techni-
ques.

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KOMUNIKOWANIE RYTUALNE W BADANIACH SPOŁECZNYCH

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