

# Reimagining ritual theory

INAUGURELE REDE DOOR DR. RONALD L. GRIMES

Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen



REIMAGINING RITUAL THEORY:  
JOHN BOURKE AMONG THE HOPIS

**Reimagining Ritual Theory:  
John Bourke among the Hopis**

*Rede uitgesproken bij de aanvaarding van het ambt van hoogleraar Ritual Studies aan de  
Faculteit der Theologie van de Radboud Universiteit Nijmegen op donderdag 27 april 2006*

**door Dr. Ronald L. Grimes**

Vormgeving en opmaak: Nies en Partners bno, Nijmegen  
 Drukwerk: Thieme MediaCenter Nijmegen

ISBN-10: 90-9020778-3  
 ISBN-13: 978-90-9020778-0

© Dr. Ronald L. Grimes, Nijmegen, 2006

Niets uit deze uitgave mag worden vermenigvuldigd en/of openbaar worden gemaakt middels druk, fotokopie, microfilm, geluidsband of op welke andere wijze dan ook, zonder voorafgaande schriftelijke toestemming van de copyrighthouder.

Ritual and theory are not a happily married couple. In popular conceptions, ritual dances, lively with the feet on the ground, while theory thinks, abstractly in a head floating above a desk. Ritual is collective and bodily; whereas theory is disembodied, a captive of the academic ivory tower. Ritualizing is something ordinary people do; whereas theorizing is something the educated do, or worse, a cover-up for doing nothing at all.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars and non-scholars alike typically imagine theory as a tool – a lens through which one gazes at data. Playing the devil, my aim is to lure you away from this habit. Instead of imagining theories as tools, we will try to imagine the act of theorizing as a performance. Like a clown, I want bounce this idea around, hoping to make you smile.<sup>2</sup>

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

For over thirty years I have wrestled with simple-sounding but difficult questions: What is ritual? What do rites do? How do ordinary practitioners cultivate, enact, and assess ceremonies? Recently, when I began work on a new book about theory and method in ritual studies, it was disconcerting to stumble over yet another set of questions with a familiar but different ring: What is theory? What do theories do? How do ordinary scholars cultivate, enact, and assess theories?

The phrase ‘theory and method’ currently exercises such incantatory force that research grant applications must display their theories and methods or go unfunded. Deans will instruct you that graduate research is distinguished from undergraduate research by ‘advancements in knowledge’ and that such advancements are possible *only* by using explicit theories and methods. Even though graduate students complain about being saddled with such baggage, and faculty members sometimes confess in private that theory and method issues are the bane of academic existence, both students and faculty pledge their allegiance to ‘theory and method’. Pledging renders theorizing a scholarly ceremony, the performance of ultimate values espoused by the academy.

When I was interviewed for this position, I asked the dean what would disappoint him most, what was his worst academic fear. He replied: ‘If you brought us nothing that could be transmitted to others, if your way of engaging in ritual studies were purely private and idiosyncratic, that would be disappointing’. Although he did not use the phrase ‘theory and method’, clearly these were his concerns. So, by reflecting publicly on your greatest academic fear, we have processed together into a snake pit.

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

## THEORIZING IMAGINED

In popular parlance, the phrase 'in theory' is the opposite of 'in reality'. A street definition of 'theory' equates it with an unproved idea, a statement out of touch with reality.

In scientific parlance, 'theory' denotes concepts and procedures that facilitate testing, explanation, prediction, and public verification. A theory is a more or less accepted hypothesis. In theory, scientists question theories, but in reality they sometimes resist questioning them, because science, like religion, is a tradition with a certain predictable inertia, a resistance to change.

Because of the hegemony of science, one sometimes has the impression that theory belongs to science and that any other use of the term 'theory' is an act of theft. In religious studies debates about theory and method, colleagues instruct us that we should use the terms to mean what scientists mean or be accused of indulging in covert theology. Two Canadian religious studies scholars, Don Wiebe and Russell McCutcheon, equate 'academic' with 'scientific'. They do so religiously and caricature or attack others who think differently.<sup>3</sup> In their view, the *only* alternative to 'scientific' is 'theological'. They utterly exclude models grounded in the arts and humanities rather than the sciences.

But who really owns the word 'theory'? Who is stealing from whom? You only have to scratch the surface of the term to encounter meanings that diverge from both the popular and the scientific ones.

In ancient Greek, *theorein* means generally 'to look at'. Specifically, it connotes the contemplation of a dramatic action. *Theoria* is what an audience does when it allows itself to be drawn into rapt identification with deeds transpiring on stage. In its ancient Greek sense, *theoria* is not a passive gaze. It is an act of deep receptivity. *Theoria* is what happens when spectatorship is transformed into visual and emotional participation.

Early Christian usage appropriates but transforms the classical Greek idea. For instance, Gregory, Bishop of Nazianzus, treats *theoria* and *praxis* as a pair. *Theoria*, is the divine vision that restores human beings to their original nature. *Praxis*, or practice, is the resulting service to humanity that arises from *theoria*. Theory and practice are necessarily a pair; each requires the other.

In contemporary arts and humanities the term 'theory' has at least two connotations. In one usage, it labels almost any collection of concepts used to manage discreet bits of information. In a second usage, characteristic of postmodernism, the term 'theory' refers to concepts capable of orienting a transformation or intervention. In critical-theory circles, 'theory' has an activist ring.

One common feature of these six uses of the term is the assumption of a chasm between perceiver and perceived. Another feature is a visualist epistemology, one that

conceives the act of knowing as analogous to looking across a canyon with a telescope. The lens analogy is useful in reminding us that distortions necessarily accompany insights.<sup>4</sup>

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

## A PRIMAL RITUAL STUDIES SCENE

For the purpose of reimagining the act of theorizing it helps to know the various meanings of the word 'theory', but we also need to examine the actual theorizing practices of working scholars. In pursuit of this goal, I am writing a series of case studies on scholars who theorize about ritual on the basis of ethnographic field research. One such case study is that of John Bourke among the Hopis. His encounter is with the Hopi Snake Dance is what one might call 'a primal ritual studies scene'.

The year is 1881; we are in the American Southwest. U.S. Cavalry officer, Lt. John Gregory Bourke, is riding west from Santa Fe, New Mexico. He is accompanied by others wheeling along in a horse-drawn field ambulance. They are traveling toward the Hopi mesas of northeastern Arizona. Bourke has been given a year's leave to conduct an ethnographic scouting mission on the rites of several tribes. Besides being a soldier, he is an anthropologist who is about to witness the Snake Dance and write the first, most widely read, account of it.

Bourke, a graduate of West Point Military Academy, is only thirty-five years old. Even so, he is already a seasoned soldier, having fought in the Civil War at age sixteen, then in two of the fiercest Indian wars, those with the Apaches and the Lakotas. Bourke is regarded by Indians and soldiers alike as dogged, courageous, fair-minded, and literary. Bourke's Apache friends call him 'Captain Cactus' and 'Paper Medicine Man'. When Apaches want favors, Bourke, ever the scholar, trades them for religious knowledge. He writes, 'I did not care much what topic he [an Apache] selected; it might be myths, clan laws, war customs, medicine—anything he pleased, but it had to be something, and it had to be accurate'.<sup>5</sup> Another ethnographer, Frank Cushing, of the Smithsonian Institute in Washington, has told the Hopis they should admit Bourke to the Snake Dance, which occurs every second year in late August.<sup>6</sup>

Then as now, no site in North America has been continuously inhabited for a longer time than the three high desert mesas inhabited by the Hopis. They have a ritual tradition that is one of the most enduring in the Americas. Whereas the rites of many other first nations people were obliterated or subverted by Christianity, those of the Hopi were, and are, largely intact.

Then as now, the Snake Dance is secret, sequestered in underground ceremonial chambers called kivas. However, Hopis sing and dance not for themselves alone but

also for the planet. Despite this planetary aim, to give away kiva and Snake Clan secrets would be to court disaster and death.

Then as now, Hopis say their lives depend on the performance of the Snake Dance. Without rain, which their deadly ancestors, the serpents, bring, they would die. They dance in order to be Hopi, in order to be human.

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

When Bourke arrives at Walpi on First Mesa, the Hopis show him great courtesy despite the circumstances. Bourke's visit has no official government status, and the kiva is not open to most Hopis, much less to American soldiers. Because Bourke anticipates resistance, he and his men fake a ceremonial entry. His men pay him exaggerated homage as if he were a revered personage on a mission of great consequence. When the Hopis protest Bourke's intrusion, he pretends not to understand. Hoping to distract them, he aggressively shakes their hands, pump-handling them like a politician. He pushes past those who would obstruct him, climbs down the ladder, and enters the underground ritual chamber. Inside the kiva now, Bourke himself tells us what he encounters:

The stench had now become positively loathsome; the pungent effluvia emanating from the reptiles, and now probably more completely diffused throughout the Estufa [kiva] by handling and carrying them about, were added to somewhat by the rotten smell of the paint, compounded, as we remember, of fermented corn in the milk, mixed with saliva! I felt sick to death, and great drops of perspiration were rolling down forehead and cheeks, but I had come to stay, and was resolved that nothing should drive me away.<sup>7</sup>

These words come from a witness who sweated only half as much in the face of Geronimo and his greatly feared Apache warriors. The underground portion of the rite, executed in close, dark quarters, requires the handling and herding of rattlesnakes with eagle feathers. Bourke is terrified. But, with military discipline, the lieutenant<sup>8</sup> does not abandon his post, although his compatriots evacuate theirs.

Later, above ground, Bourke describes another scene, which, again, we will see through his eyes:

Fill every nook and cranny of this mass of buildings with a congregation of Moqui [Hopi] women, maids and matrons, dressed in their graceful garb of dark-blue cloth with lemon stitching; tie up the young girls' hair in big Chinese puffs

at the sides; throw in a liberal allowance of children, naked and half-naked; give colour and tone by using blankets of scarlet and blue and black, girdles of red and green, and necklaces of silver and coral, abalone, and chalchihuitl [turquoise]. For variety's sake add a half-dozen tall, lithe, square-shouldered Navajos, and as many keen, dyspeptic-looking Americans, one of these a lady; localise the scene by the introduction of ladders, earthenware chimneys, piles of cedar-fuel and sheep manure, scores of mangy pups, and other scores of old squaws carrying on their backs little babies or great ollas of water, and with a hazy atmosphere and a partially-clouded sky as accessories, you have a faithful picture of the square in the Pueblo of Hualpi, Arizona, as it appeared on this eventful 12th day of August 1881.<sup>9</sup>

Although Bourke's book is called *Snake-Dance of the Moquis* [Hopis], the description of that rite is only a portion of the volume. The account is propped up with two bookends: At the front is a travel narrative; at the back is a theory. The book is a classic of early American ethnography, a rare work of observation, even though John Bourke and Peter Moran, whose job it is to sketch the rites, cannot keep up with the pace of the ritual actions. The Snake Dance liturgy lasts for sixteen days, not for an hour or two on Sunday morning, so they are exhausted. Bourke has no idea what the costumes, objects, and spaces mean, nor does he know what will happen next. Bourke is quite aware that the complexity of the event far exceeds his ability to observe and document. Consequently, his arrogance in breaching the secrecy of the kiva is softened with genuine humility about his ethnographic account of the rite.

Sadly, Bourke is unable to make friends with the Hopis in the way he had with Lakotas and Apaches, even though he fought the Lakotas and Apaches and only observed the Hopis. He records a discussion with Nanahe,<sup>10</sup> an exceptionally frank Hopi who tells him the truth to his face:

I saw you in the Estufa [kiva] at the dance; you had no business there; when you first came down we wished to put you out. No other man, American or Mexican, has ever seen that dance, as you have. We saw you writing down everything as you sat in the Estufa [kiva], and we knew that you had all that man could learn from his eyes. We did not like to have you down there..., but we knew that you had come there under orders..., so we concluded to let you stay.... One of our strictest rules is never to shake hands with a stranger while this business is going on, but you shook hands with nearly all of us, and you shook them very hard.... You being a foreigner, and ignorant of our language, can do us no harm.... A secret order is for the benefit of the whole world, that it may call the whole world its children, and that the whole world may call it father, and not for the exclusive benefit of

the few men who belong to it... If they [the secrets] became known to the whole world, they would cease to be secrets, and the order would be destroyed, and its benefit to the world would pass away'.<sup>11</sup>

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

His intrusiveness challenged, Bourke leaves the Hopi mesas, going to visit the Mormons, who have been busy as bees converting Hopis into Christians. Although he turns something of an ethnographic gaze upon the Mormons, he is so relieved at being away from the kivas and rattlesnakes that he does not actually begin to theorize until later.

After leaving Walpi, Burke compares what he has witnessed with what he can learn from books about rites in Greece, Guinea, Scandinavia, and Polynesia. His conclusions are partly determined by Hopi data and partly by reading. His theorizing is comparative, but the comparisons are not always even-handed. Some of them are driven by the desire to show how the American way is superior to the Hopi way. Occasionally, he inverts the hierarchy, suggesting the superiority of Hopi ways. Out of the comparison, he constructs a theoretical category, 'ophiolatry'. The Snake Dance is classified as the worship—really, the idolatry—of serpents. This classificatory act is his most fundamental theoretical move.

By 1891, only seven years after the publication of *Snake-Dance*, Burke's theory of Hopi ophiolatry falls under the critique of Jesse Fewkes, another ethnographer, who conducts a more prolonged study examining variants of the Snake Dance at three other Hopi villages. Fewkes concludes that the ceremonies are not about snake worship but ancestor veneration and rain-making.<sup>12</sup>

Even though Bourke's theory is displaced by Fewkes, Bourke's book nets considerable cultural and academic capital. Eventually, he is elected president of the American Folklore Association. For Bourke, the stepping back was also a stepping up.

A few years after the publication of *Snake Dance*, other anthropologists arrive at the mesas. In the wake of scientific and popular publications by these social scientists, a sea of gawking tourists swamps the Hopis, along with the Zunis and Navajos. The Santa Fe Railroad issues a tourist's guide for the Snake Dance and begins using Snake Dance images on posters to attract ticket-buying tourists. The Hopi Snake Dance becomes one of the most photographed, painted, and written about indigenous liturgies in the Americas.<sup>13</sup> As late as 1984, Emory Sekaquaptewa, a Hopi and anthropologist, has to complain about white people who simulate Hopi performances and believe that non-native people have a right to Hopi rites, as if they were in the public domain.<sup>14</sup>

In 1895, the year before his death, Bourke was patronized by Buffalo Bill's Wild West show. Along with defeated Indians, whom Bourke had fought and written about,

he and other aging soldiers are put on display. Only in his late forties, he is already being cast in the role of an old war horse. When he dies at forty-nine, this lifelong student of ritual is buried without ceremony in Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>15</sup>

The dramatic arc of the research narrative is this: The protagonist hears a story about strange ritual behavior. In the process of gathering information about the rite, he triumphs over adversity and returns to theorize about it. Building upon an ever-widening comparative perspective, he brings home the boon of knowledge, which politicians, educators, and artists can put to good, culture-enhancing use. He theorizes and story-tells his encounter with the Hopi Snake Dance. On the basis of both the stories and the theories, others arrive at the scene. Soon, it is media-constructed, photographed by Edward Curtis and hundreds of other camera-carriers.<sup>16</sup> As a result, today the rite is completely sequestered. No longer available as an object of study, it is today the object of fantasy-driven art and speculation-driven scholarship.

#### THEORIZING REIMAGINED

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

This incantatory refrain, which, I trust, you have now memorized and will be able to chant upon entering a kiva, the Aula, or the grave, is to remind us that theorizing is as much an action as ritualizing is. Since Bourke stepped down and into Hopi liturgy in order to know, rather than to be, from a Hopi point of view, he just did not 'get it'. Not getting it was the irritant that drove the Hopis to sequester the rite and Bourke to theorize about it.

I chose Bourke as an example, not because he is exemplary, but because he is transparent. His compulsive journal-keeping and candid accounts allow us to peer into his research process. Bourke's style is recognizably nineteenth century, and it plays out as thoroughly American. Consequently, he seems less enlightened than 'we' are. Courageous and heroic though he may be, Bourke theatricalized dishonestly, invaded sacred precincts without proper invitation, and theorized in prejudicial ways.<sup>17</sup>

However, Bourke may also have been more enlightened than we are. He at least knew that he was generating metaphors. Watching Peter Moran, his sketch artist, Bourke wrote, '...As long as he [Moran] could manage to endure the noisome hole, his pencil flew over the paper, obtaining material which will one day be serviceable in placing upon canvas the scenes of this wonderful drama'.<sup>18</sup>

Bourke knew that he and Peter Moran were not literally witnessing either a playwright's drama or an artist's scene. Quite deliberately, Bourke wrapped the rite in dramatic and artistic metaphors. He saw the Snake Dance as *if* it were drama and art. Although we may be better theorists than he was, he was a better writer than most

scholars in our field, partly because he understood the importance of imagination and metaphor in the study of religion.

Bourke's book is preliminary, the outcome of a scouting mission. His writing is a mixed-genre patchwork rather than a systematically applied theory governed by a scientific method. Bourke's research was determined less by his theory than by his worldview—the shared, taken-for-granted values and assumptions of Victorian America. His theory was mainly about cultural evolution, only secondarily about religion or ritual.

It is easy to debunk Bourke's theory of religion. Because he was an American who lived in the colonial nineteenth century, as well as a military man, we can readily see how culture-bound he was. When, for example, he confesses his antipathy toward snakes, referring to them as 'mankind's first enemy',<sup>19</sup> rather than viewing them as promising but dangerous relatives, we recognize that he was imposing a Christian interpretation on the snakes. Whereas Bourke's seeing the rites as drama and as art was constructive, his seeing snakes as symbols of evil was obstructive.

Bourke, like his colleagues, Jesse Fewkes and Frank Cushing, was known primarily for his descriptions, not his theories. In late nineteenth century anthropology, reputations were made mainly on the basis of ethnographic descriptions embedded in journey narratives. Even though he was obliged by scholarly convention to push his data in the direction of theory, theorizing was not what built nineteenth century academic reputations.

Today, journeys and narratives about these journeys continue to shape ethnographic research and writing about ritual. But the tendency in twenty-first century scholarship is to shrink or omit the narratives, leaving ritual descriptions to serve as grist in the mill of theory. Whereas nineteenth century descriptions of rites were largely narrative-driven, twenty-first century ones are more theory-driven. The intention in making such a shift is to render research publicly accountable, but the *effect* is to disembodify research, severing it not only from the researcher but also from the research narrative (which one typically hears over a beer) and the research performance (which one hears on ceremonially exalted occasions such as this).

Whereas I chose Bourke's account because it is so transparent, I chose the Snake Dance because it remains opaque. The literature on this religious rite is enormous, but our understanding of it is paltry. The theoretically driven approaches are no more productive than the narratively and visually driven approaches. Our grasp of the rite is in inverse proportion to the amount of writing about it. Most narrative accounts take a banal form: 'This happens, that happens, this happens'. A mountain of detail is accumulated and boxes of photos are taken, but there is no living connective tissue.<sup>20</sup> We non-Hopis have transposed the Snake Dance liturgy into an item of visual and verbal culture. As Nanahe observed, we have learned what can be learned using only our eyes.

But our feet are ignorant. (Even theorists need feet, if for no other reason than to step back.) Because our performances are both imperial and inept, we have much information, little understanding, and no wisdom about the Snake Dance.

If ever there were a challenge to the viability of ritual studies as a discipline, the Snake Dance is it — not just because it is bizarre to our eyes but because we scholars have so obviously failed to make any sense of it. Now, do not get on the edge of your seats now. I am not promising to make sense of it either. My aim today is not to make sense of the Hopi Snake Dance but to tease out the meaning of the 'the white man's' theorizing dance.

From a Hopi perspective, the Snake Dance is liturgy, a sacred rite. From Burke's viewpoint, it was an illustration of a theoretical category, ophialotry. From the point of view of tourists, it was, but is no longer, a spectacle. From my point of view, on this occasion, the Hopi Snake Dance is a 'primal ritual studies scene', an illustration of the dynamic loop that ties field research on ritual to theorizing about it. In calling Bourke's journey among the Hopis a 'primal ritual studies scene', my aim is less to evoke Freud's myth of the primal crime than to offer a perspective, one that refuses to rank theorizing above ritualizing or treat theory and ritual as incommensurate activities.

So let me say it plainly: theorizing is a ritualized enactment performed by scholars. Magically, it transposes ritual into data. Ceremonially, it enables theorists to step back, then up into positions of academic leadership. Theorizing ritual is the academic ceremony that goes on after the indigenous liturgy ends. Theorizing may be as essential to First World life as the Snake Dance is to Third World Hopi life. With the Snake Dance, Hopis make it rain. With the ritual-theory dance, the First World can make things predictable or profitable. Hopis paint their faces, while academics put on dark robes and funny hats. Hopis enter kivas. The educated elite enter this ceremonial chamber, the Aula. Each group dances its own kind of dance. Each way of masking exercises its own kind of authority. Theorizing, however public and scientific its mask, is incubated underground, where smelly things writhe in the dark. Like painting and storytelling, theorizing is an art engaged in by a people who are both enculturated and embodied.

When I treat theories as tacit narratives or incipient performances, some scholars react religiously, like Hopis protesting that a sacred boundary has been violated.<sup>21</sup> In European and North American academic circles, storytelling and ritualizing are given bit parts, not lead roles. Stories and rites are stigmatized as 'local', 'ethnic', or 'indigenous' whereas theories are exalted as 'universal', 'empirical', or 'academic'. When I am playing director, the role of theorist is just one voice among many. Sometimes the theorist plays a leading role, sometimes not.

Each act, ritualizing and theorizing, has its own style of posturing, its own stage, its own geographical and conceptual space. Since theorizing is an act performed, it

transpires in a setting or on a set. It is place-specific. We are used to locating rites in space but not used to locating theories in space.<sup>22</sup> However much the magic of words makes it appear that theories dwell either nowhere or everywhere, they, in fact, arise and decline somewhere. Theorizing enables perspective, but the theorizing eye is not panoptic; it is neither universal nor divine. As Apaches say, 'Wisdom sits in places'.<sup>23</sup> In other words, it is wise to theorize as if the place where you do it matters.<sup>24</sup>

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

The stepping back is a response to danger and disorientation. In search of safety and orientation, students of ritual back away from kivas and sanctuaries, in order to cope with the dissonance. However much theorizing is governed by information gathered in notes, it is also driven by a desire to escape alive, tell the story, erect a theory, and generate academic capital. Theorizing is an attempt to control an object of perception experienced as unmanageable, by stepping back then taking up a tool that renders the dangerous ritual scene more predictable and less threatening.

Now, to summarize the essentials of a performative approach to theorizing about ritual:

1. Ritual studies may be practiced either as a science or as an art. Theorizing in the arts should ape theorizing in the sciences. In a science-dominated era, theorizing ritual will be more fruitful when multiple theoretical styles are played out in counterpoint. By choosing to practice it as an art rather than as a science, I am not suggesting that we give up ritual theory, only that we put theorizing in its place by recognizing its reliance on imagination, its roots in metaphor, its entanglement with narrative, and its dependence on performance.
2. Because theorists are embedded in places, times, and communities, we better understand theories when we comprehend their relation to the lives and times of those who create and consume them. Theories, like rites, must be understood in their social and historical contexts.
3. Theorizing is a ritualized performance. It is ceremonial insofar as it exercises power, guards scholarly values, and garners academic capital. It is magical insofar as it transforms data into values or prescriptions for action.
4. Theorizing is not superior to ritualizing; these are just different kinds of enactment.<sup>25</sup> There should be no hierarchy between those who ritualize and those who think about ritual.
5. The methodology implied by a performative approach to theorizing requires us to focus on the social drama and politics of human interaction; the bodies, voices,

and roles that animate it; the scripts and conventional genres that dictate it; the material culture that concretizes it, and the settings that frame it.

To conclude: Theorists, like snake-handling Hopis, engage in a dangerously elevated activity, so it is only proper that theorists withstand critique from practitioners. We should learn not only *about* the Hopi but also *from* the Hopi. What Hopis do with their own sacred scenes is to sequester or mask them, rendering them sacred. Then, in counterpoint, they unmask or set loose ritual clowns, who both police and mock liturgical activity.

The Koyemsi, or mudhead clowns, are sometimes depicted as dolls riding Palölökong, the feathered water serpent. He rises up out of a jar, becoming erect in the process. He rises up precipitously toward the sky.<sup>26</sup> Such serpent-ancestors are as essential as rain, but they are also as dangerous as the devil. The Hopi scenario requires that these sacred clown, like theorists, ride high. However, it also requires that they be thrown off into the dirt. So be assured: like others who aspire to theorize about ritual, my landing spot is predetermined.

Hopis, I imagine, would consider the act of theorizing about ritual to be like trying to contain sidewinder rattlesnakes in pots. By whisking them lightly with eagle feathers, Hopis can herd the snakes, capturing them temporarily in clay pots. Later, dancers release the snakes in kivas and on the plaza. Finally, they recapture the snakes and, having blessed them with corn meal, let them go. In two years, the whole process starts over again. I am guessing that Hopis would tolerate our theorizing of their rites if, in the end, we promise to break our theory pots and let the data go so they will be plentiful when the whole round starts over again.

*Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.*

Colleagues, friends, and family, your worst fears have been set loose in public. Soon, you will exit, descending the stairs out of this ceremonial chamber. Below, you will shake many hands and consume a few libations for your own ancestors. Likely, you will engage in a little ritual criticism—arguing over the merits of the oratory, remarking on the decorum of the faculty on display, gossiping about the color of the shoes, and puzzling over the intrusions from, and into, the audience. You will judge whether the performance deserves containment, dancing, or sacrifice.

Let us now begin the celebration, and, since the bridge to celebration is gratitude, let me be the first to express mine:

Susan Scott: A sure sign that we did the right thing in getting married is not only the survival of our gene pool but also the fact that, after twenty-plus years, we still hang on each other's every written word. Thank you for helping me herd this serpentine oration.

Cailleah Scott-Grimes: Thank you for a year of effervescence bubbled by e-mail from the Alps across an ocean. My academic year has been a trying one. Without your infectious joy, I would have been tried and found wanting.

Bryn Scott-Grimes: Thank you for sending down through your bedroom floor the gift of guitar music while I was writing this lecture. Since I am musically illiterate, if there is any music in this lecture, I owe it all to you.

Hans van der Ven: Thank you for imagining this position. If you had not envisioned it, the Chair of Ritual Studies would not be, nor I would not be stepping in toward it. (And there would be no snakes in the Aula.)

Peter Nissen: Thank you for doggedly persisting. If you had not pushed mountains of paper on my behalf, either the Chair would be empty or I would not be sitting, so to speak, in it.

To the Radboud University administrators and other guardian angels of the kiva doors, thank you for opening them. I am grateful for your generosity in using your keys.

Chris Hermans: Thank you for smiling as you argue with me. If you did not perform both acts simultaneously, we would be less effective as a pair of nit-picking alpha male academics.

Hans Schilderman: You are the wizard of lists, boxes, and arrows. Since I too venerate them—my students tease me about them—I hereby name you high priest in the cult of scientific iconography.

Carl Sterkens: Thank you for always telling it like it is. You never once sidestepped a single question I asked you. You have been my *Michelin Guide* to the exotic world of Dutch academic culture.

Eric Venbrux: In my experience, there are few like-minded souls in academe. You are one. Thank you for being my co-author and train partner.

Thomas Quartier: Thank you for melting so much good Catholic candle wax on my behalf, and for believing that this position would happen, when unbelievers, including me, did not.

Gunther Sturms: Without Alfred, his valet, Batman is merely Bruce Wayne. Thank you for managing the details of the conference and inauguration, thereby making it appear that I am competent.

Isolde Driesen: When I forget to walk, I become less than human. Thank you for walking so many sidewalks and fields with Thomas and me.

Kim deWildt and Rob Plum: You are one of my favorite unmaritally married couples. Thank you for taking me in, feeding me, and making me feel less like a stranger in these nether lands.

Ute Huesken: Thank you for being the living, breathing, laughing link to the dynamics of ritual and for hunting down more ritual mistakes than I ever thought possible. What I merely imagined, you and your colleagues have actually proved.

Finally, to all of you who have patiently witnessed this academic prancing and dancing, thank you. In the end, even scholars, poor actors though we may be, depend on a gracious audience.

## SOURCES CITED

- Appadurai, Arjun. *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.
- Basso, Keith. *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache*. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1996.
- Bourke, John G. *On the Border with Crook*. Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande, 1971 [1891].  
- *Snake-Dance of the Moquis*. Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1984.
- Campany, Robert F. 'Xunzi and Durkheim as Theorists of Ritual Practice'. In *Readings in Ritual Studies*, edited by Ronald L Grimes, 86-103. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996.
- Curtis, Edward Sheriff. *The North American Indian: The Complete Portfolio*. London: Taschen, 1997.
- Docherty, Thomas. *After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Eagleton, Terry. *After Theory*. London: Penguin/Allen Lane, 2003.
- Fewkes, Jesse Walter. *Hopi Snake Ceremonies*. Albuquerque, NM: Avanyu, 1986 [1894-1898].
- Forrest, Earle R. *The Snake Dance of the Hopi Indians*. New York: Tower, 1961 [1906].
- McCutcheon, Russell. *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric*. New York: Routledge, 2003.  
- *Manufacturing Religion*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2003.
- Stafford, Maria Stafford. *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images*. Cambridge, MA: M.I.T., 1998.
- Vizenor, Gerald. *Edward Curtis: Pictorialist and Ethnographic Adventurist 2000* [cited 2005]. Available from <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/essay3.html>.
- Voth, H.R. *The Traditions of the Hopi*. Millwood, NY: Krause Reprint, 1973 [1905].
- Wiebe, Donald. *The Politics of Religious Studies*. New York: Palgrave, 1999.
- 'Why the Academic Study of Religion?' In *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, edited by Carl Olson, 36-41. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2003.

## NOTES

- 1 Robert Campany puts it this way, 'Until quite recently, our discourse on other cultures and religions was premised—almost totally unconsciously—on at least one fundamental difference between 'us' and 'them': we had the theory, while what they could provide amounted only to 'raw' data; we theorized about their practices; we philosophized, they acted.... To study ritual theory as a mode of practice is to look [in some detail] at what we [and others] do when we theorize about ritual. Robert F. Campany, 'Xunzi and Durkheim as Theorists of Ritual Practice', in *Readings in Ritual Studies*, ed. Ronald L Grimes (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 87.
- 2 Arjun Appadurai writes, 'All these expressions [art, myth, dream], further, have been the basis of a complex dialogue between the imagination and ritual in many human societies, through which the force of ordinary social norms was somehow deepened, through inversion, irony, or the performative intensity and the collaborative work demanded by many kinds of ritual'. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 5.
- 3 Donald Wiebe, 'Why the Academic Study of Religion?', in *Theory and Method in the Study of Religion*, ed. Carl Olson (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Thomson, 2003), 37; Donald Wiebe, *The Politics of Religious Studies* (New York: Palgrave, 1999); Russell McCutcheon, *The Discipline of Religion: Structure, Meaning, Rhetoric*

(New York: Routledge, 2003); Russell McCutcheon, *Manufacturing Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

- 4 The analogy of a lens might also suggest that theories are no more successful than myths and theologies at explaining rituals. Myths and theologies, in effect, extend or add to, rituals, but they do not really explain them. Or, if they do, they obscure as much as they reveal.
- 5 John G. Bourke, *On the Border with Crook* (Glorieta, NM: Rio Grande, 1971 [1891]), 124.
- 6 A scene similar in certain respects to that encountered by Bourke might be imagined on the basis of the Hopi photographs taken by Edward S. Curtis. Edward Sheriff Curtis, *The North American Indian: The Complete Portfolio* (London: Taschen, 1997).
- 7 John G. Bourke, *Snake-Dance of the Moquis* (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 1984), 150.
- 8 Later, he is promoted to captain.
- 9 Bourke, *Snake-Dance of the Moquis*, 156.
- 10 He had been adopted by the Zuni.
- 11 Bourke, *Snake-Dance of the Moquis*, 182-184. As translated into Dutch and read aloud during the presentation by Eric Venbrux: Ik zag u bij de ceremonie in de kiva. U had daar niets te zoeken. Toen u voor het eerst naar beneden kwam, wilden we u eruit gooien. Niemand anders, Amerikaans of Mexicaans, heeft ooit die dans gezien. We zagen u alles opschrijven terwijl u daar zat in de kiva, en we wisten dat u alles in u opnam wat u daar maar enigszins kon zien. Het beviel ons niet dat u daar was, maar we dachten dat u een order uitvoerde, en daarom besloten we u maar te laten blijven. Een van onze strengste regels is om nooit een vreemde de hand te schudden als dit ritueel aan de gang is, maar u schudde ons bijna allemaal de hand. En u deed dat nogal ferm. Omdat u een vreemde bent en onze taal niet kent, dachten we dat u ons geen schade kon berokkenen. Een geheim genootschap is bevorderlijk voor de hele wereld, die heeft er baat bij. Wanneer echter de geheimen aan de hele wereld prijs gegeven worden, houden ze op geheimen te zijn, en het genootschap is dan vernietigd. De weldaad die het bracht voor de wereld verdwijnt voorgoed.
- 12 Jesse Walter Fewkes, *Hopi Snake Ceremonies* (Albuquerque, NM: Avanyu, 1986 [1894-1898]), 307.
- 13 For example see the following: Earle R. Forrest, *The Snake Dance of the Hopi Indians* (New York: Tower, 1961 [1906]); H.R. Voth, *The Traditions of the Hopi* (Millwood, NY: Krause Reprint, 1973 [1905]).
- 14 In the foreword of Bourke, *Snake-Dance of the Moquis*, xv.
- 15 Bourke later writes other important works such as *Scatalogic Rites of All Nations*, which is on the religious character and ritualistic use of urine and human feces. He also writes important treatments of Mexican nativity plays. He lectures, serves on panels, and in 1893 plays a role in the World's Columbian Exposition, which hosts the World's Parliament of Religions. He becomes an active critic of governmental Indian policy and is eventually disillusioned with the military, as well as in trouble with Washington bureaucrats. His friend Frank Cushing write that Bourke is 'killing himself with too many hours a day at the Congressional Library'. Bourke is wearing himself out, Cushing thinks, trying to turn fifteen years of journal writing into publications. Bourke's doctor tells him that nature is calling a halt, but soldiers do not obey orders from nature.
- 16 On the relation of photography to postmodern theory, see Thomas Docherty, *After Theory: Postmodernism/Postmarxism* (London: Routledge, 1990), chapter 3.

- 17 Enlightened by postcolonial and postmodern theory, we know better than to dissemble in conducting field  
research, push our way into sacred precincts, or assume there are primitive minds inferior to ours, right?
- 18 Bourke, *Snake-Dance of the Moquis*, 141.
- 19 Bourke, *Snake-Dance of the Moquis*, 141.
- 20 Gerald Vizenor writes, 'Crucial to the resolution of these vagaries of photographic esteem is a visual  
method of interpretation; a choice of metaphors and visual reason that does not separate natives as the  
other in an eternal academic disanalogy' (Gerald Vizenor, *Edward Curtis: Pictorialist and Ethnographic  
Adventurist* (2000 [cited 2005]); available from  
<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/award98/ienhtml/essay3.html>.)
- 21 Ritualization is, in itself, neither good nor bad. But once we reimagine theorizing in this way, we can no  
longer assume that it is either superior to, or utterly different from, the Snake Dance or any other liturgy.  
Some religious studies scholars have objected to my saying such things, because they like to rank theories  
above storytelling and ritualizing.
- 22 Since scholars do sometimes write histories of a theories, we are more accustomed to recognizing a theory's  
time-boundness than its space-boundness.
- 23 Keith Basso, *Wisdom Sits in Places: Landscape and Language among the Western Apache* (Albuquerque:  
University of New Mexico, 1996).
- 24 Spatializing theory helps counteract the danger that words assume a 'godlike agency in western culture'  
(Maria Stafford. *Good Looking: Essays on the Virtue of Images* (Cambridge, MA: M.I.T., 1998), 5.
- 25 Terry Eagleton articulates a similar view, 'If theory means a reasonably systematic reflection on our guiding  
assumptions, it remains as indispensable as ever. But we are living now in the aftermath of what one might  
call high theory'. Terry Eagleton, *After Theory* (London: Penguin/Allen Lane, 2003), 2.
- 26 Terry Eagleton writes, 'At the very moment when the United States government is flexing its muscles more  
insolently than ever, some cultural theory has begun to find the very word 'theory' objectionable. This has  
always been the case with some so-called radical feminists, who distrusted theory as an imperious assertion  
of the male intellect. Theory was just a lot of callow, emotionally arrested men comparing the length of  
their polysyllables'. Eagleton, *After Theory*, 54.

INAUGURELE REDE  
DR. RONALD L. GRIMES



Ronald L. Grimes, one of the founding editors of the *Journal of Ritual Studies*, is the author of several books on ritual, most recently, *Rite Out of Place: Ritual, Media, and the Arts* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Among his other works on ritual are *Deeply into the Bone: Re-Inventing Rites of Passage* (University of California Press, 2000) and *Readings in Ritual Studies* (Prentice Hall, 1996).

Ordinarily, ritualizing and theorizing are construed as polar opposites, but if one attends to the performative dimensions of theorizing, this dualism dissolves. Here, John Bourke's account of the Hopi Snake Dance is used as a case study to illustrate the narrative and performative underpinnings of theory-construction. Believing that theorizing about ritual is more fruitful when multiple theoretical styles are played out in counterpoint, Grimes calls for a recognition of theory's reliance on imagination, its roots in metaphor, its entanglement with narrative, and its dependence on performance. He suggests that we better understand theories when we comprehend their relation to the lives and times of those who create and consume them. The methodology implied by a performative approach to theorizing about ritual requires: focusing on the social drama and politics of human interaction; attending to the bodies, voices, and roles that animate it; examining the scripts and conventional genres that dictate it; documenting the material culture that concretizes it; and understanding the settings that frame it.