Pratt Institute
Graduate Communications Design

STARTING QUESTION

Why do people continue to maintain or pass on rules and rituals that once made them uncomfortable?

It began with a birthday-song ritual in my family
that I once felt uncomfortable with,
but later found myself maintaining and passing on.

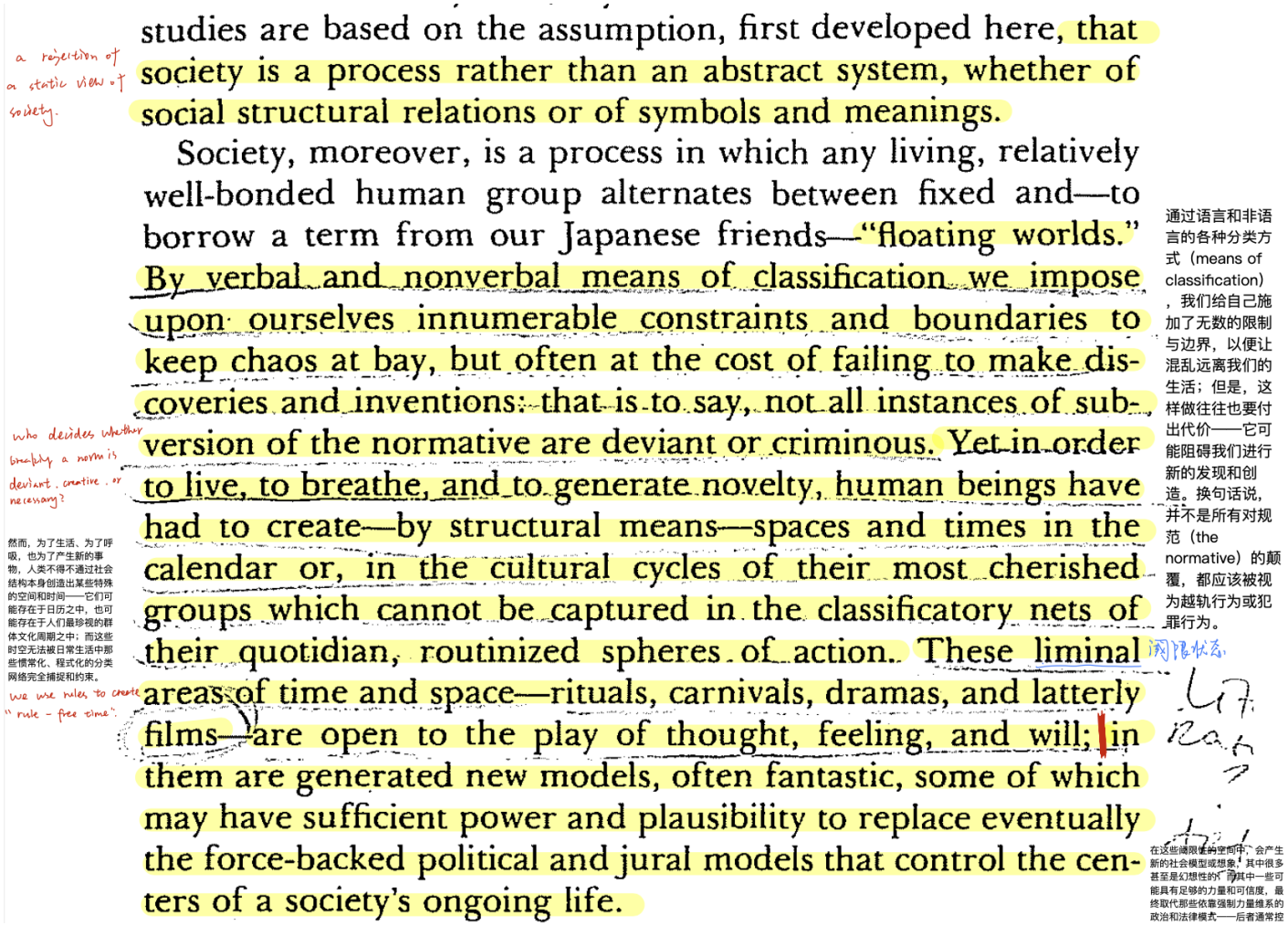

to you…
祝你
快乐…
Happy…
birthday…
祝你…
Happy…
生日…

FIRST SHIFT

Rethinking what continuation means

Victor Turner

The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure — Foreword



studies are based on the assumption, first developed here, that society is a process rather than an abstract system, whether of social structural relations or of symbols and meanings.

Society, moreover, is a process in which any living, relatively well-bonded human group alternates between fixed and—to borrow a term from our Japanese friends—"floating worlds." By verbal and nonverbal means of classification we impose upon ourselves innumerable constraints and boundaries to keep chaos at bay, but often at the cost of failing to make discoveries and inventions: that is to say, not all instances of subversion of the normative are deviant or criminous. Yet in order to live, to breathe, and to generate novelty, human beings have had to create—by structural means—spaces and times in the calendar or, in the cultural cycles of their most cherished groups which cannot be captured in the classificatory nets of their quotidian, routinized spheres of action. These liminal areas of time and space—rituals, carnivals, dramas, and latterly films—are open to the play of thought, feeling, and will; in them are generated new models, often fantastic, some of which may have sufficient power and plausibility to replace eventually the force-backed political and jural models that control the centers of a society's ongoing life.

a rejection of a static view of society.

通过语言和非语言的各种分类方式（means of classification），我们给自己施加了无数的限制与边界，以便让混乱远离我们的生活；但是，这样做往往也要付出代价——它可能阻碍我们进行新的发现和创造。换句话说，并不是所有对规范（the normative）的颠覆，都应该被视为越轨行为或犯罪行为。

who decides whether broadly a norm is deviant, creative, or necessary?

然而，为了生活、为了呼吸，也为了产生新的事物，人类不得不通过社会结构本身创造出某些特殊的空间和时间——它们可能存在于日历之中，也可能存在于人们最珍视的群体文化周期之中；而这些时空无法被日常生活中那些惯常化、程式化的分类网络完全捕捉和约束。

we use rules to create "rule-free time".

在这些受限制的空间中，会产生新的社会模型或想象，其中很多甚至是幻想性的，而其中一些可能具有足够的力量和可信度，最终取代那些依靠强制力量维系的政治和法律模式——后者通常控

The Ritual Process represents an attempt to free my own thought, and I hope that of others in my field as well, from grooved dependence on "structure" as the sole sociological dimension. A good deal of the philistinism perhaps rightly ascribed to our discipline has been due to this "single vision," as William Blake would have called it—this obdurate evasion of the rich complexities of cultural creation. Our goal should be to study man alive and woman alive, in the many levels of their mutual dealings. This book is, if nothing more, a modest step toward realizing that goal.

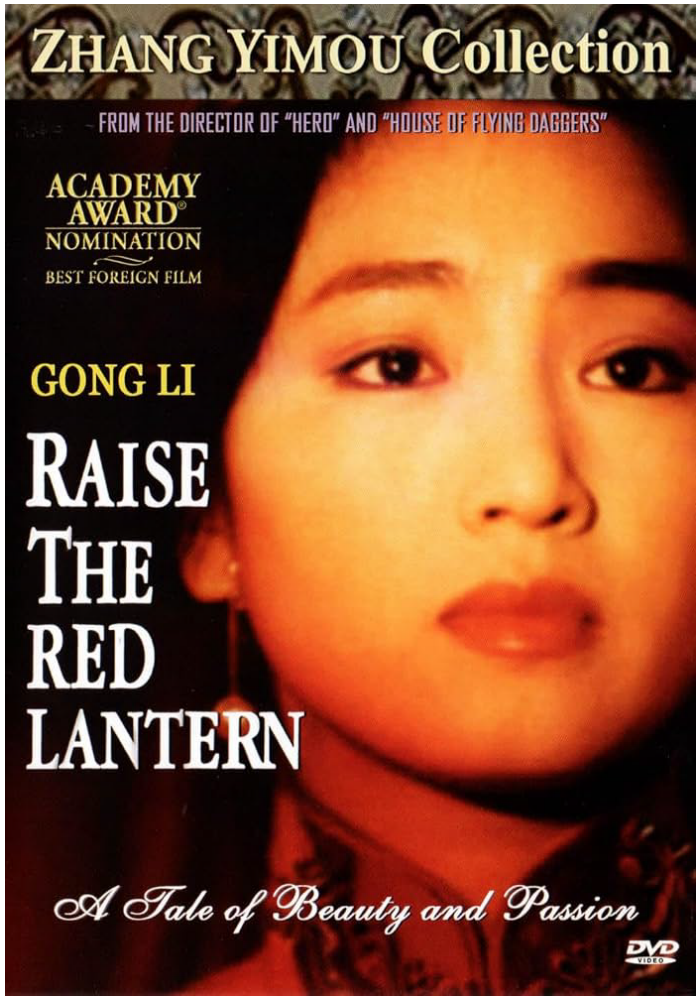
VICTOR TURNER

University of Chicago

Ritual can temporarily loosen everyday social structures.

Zhang Yimou

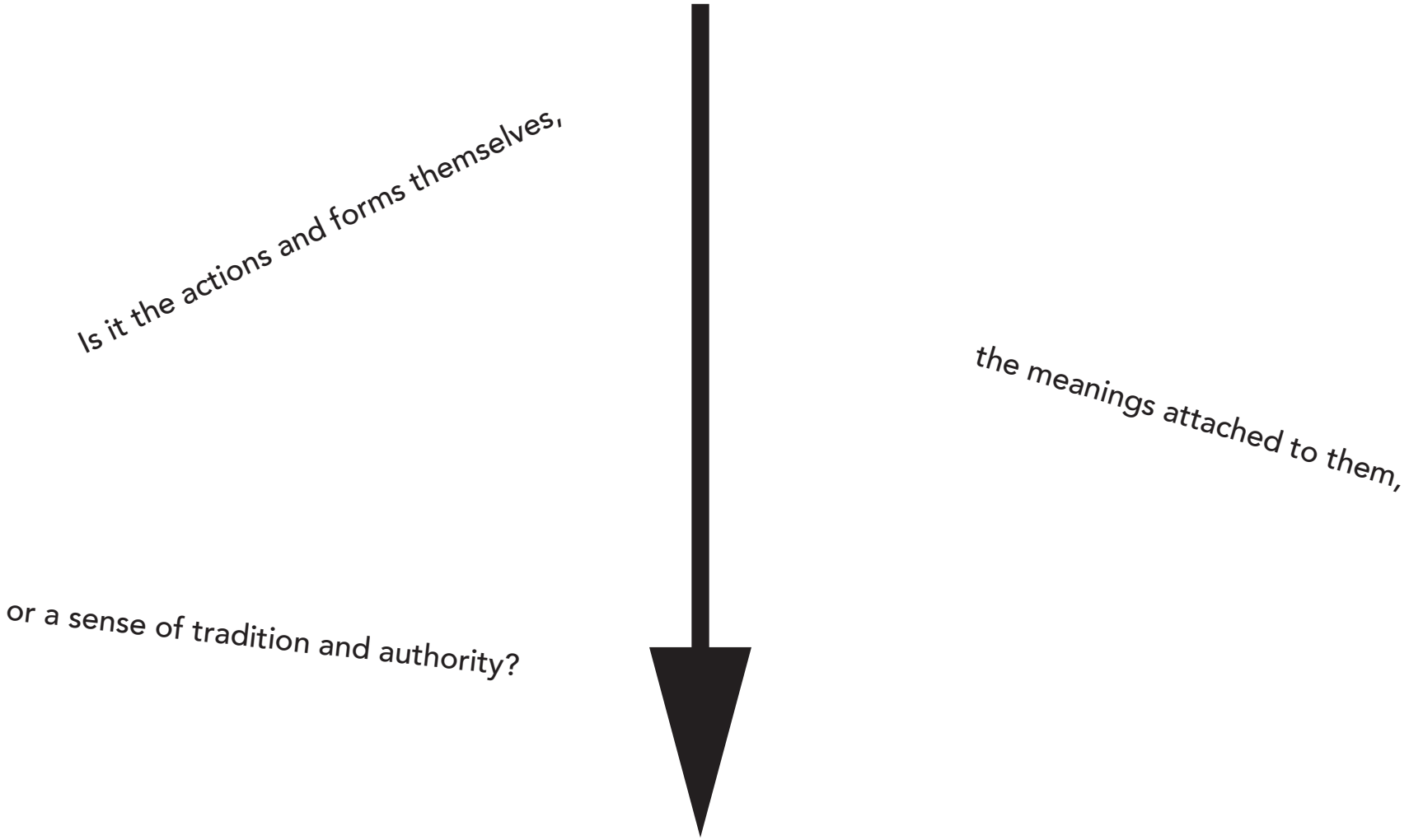
Raise the Red Lantern (1991)





Do tradition and authority necessarily have to come from the distant past? Can repetition itself help create the feeling that "this is simply how things are supposed to be"?

Why do people continue to maintain a ritual?



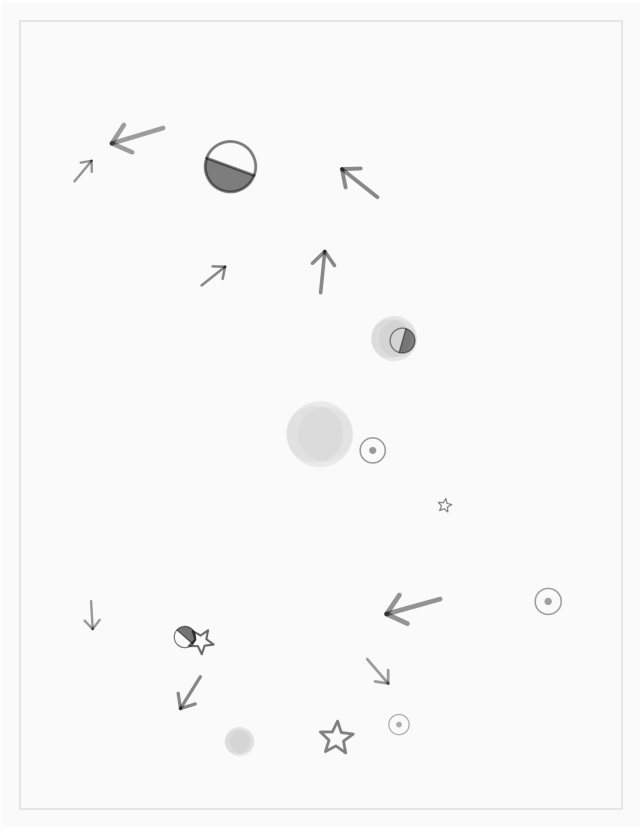
When a ritual is continued and passed on, what exactly is being carried forward?

TESTING THROUGH MAKING

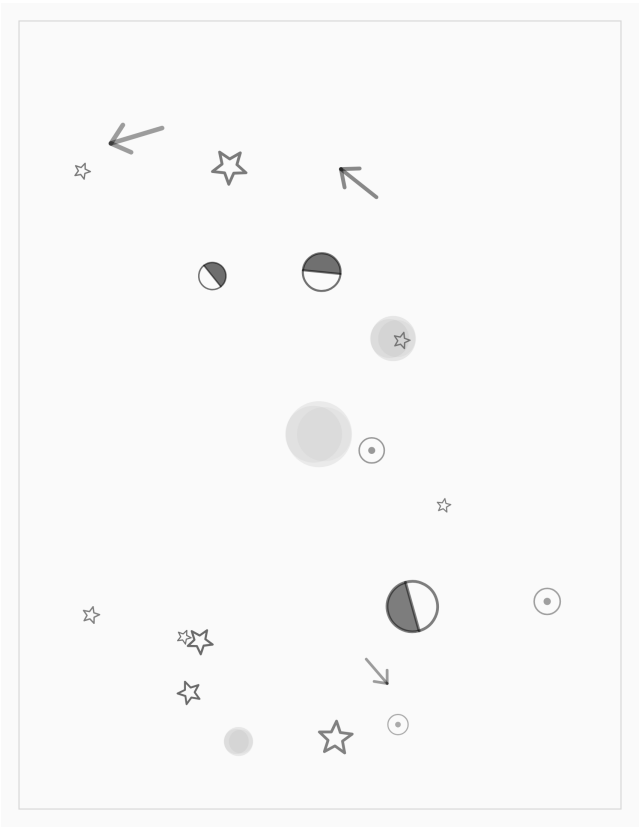
If I remove the specific story and context,
can I still recognize a ritual through its structure and features?

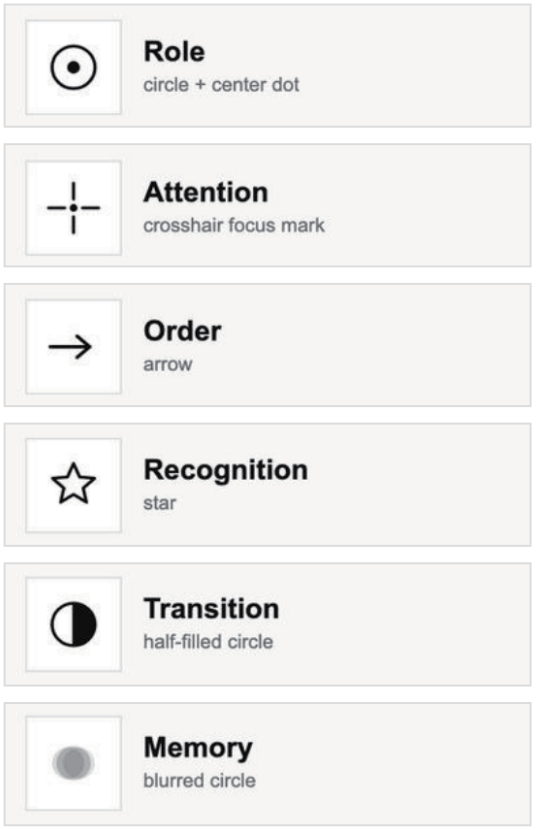
Birthday ritual → Abstraction → Other rituals → Ordinary activities → Visual comparison

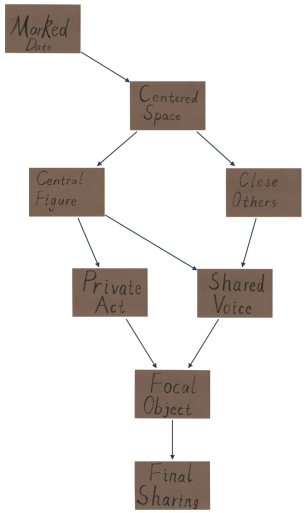
Graduation Ceremony

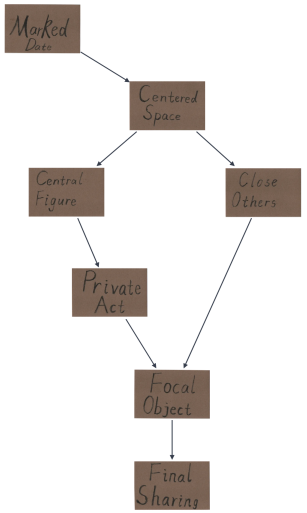


Wedding Ceremony

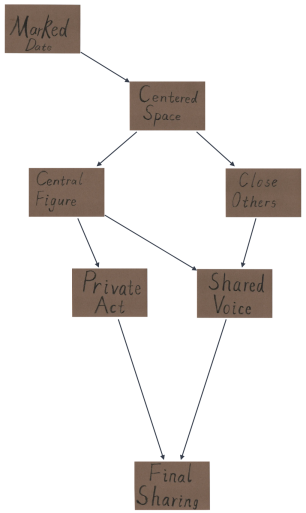




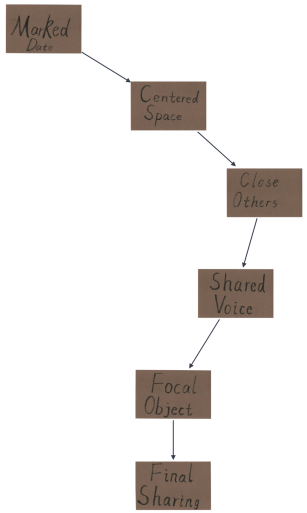




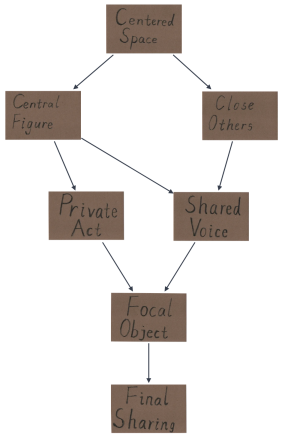
Removing Shared Voice
The structure could still continue with relatively little change.



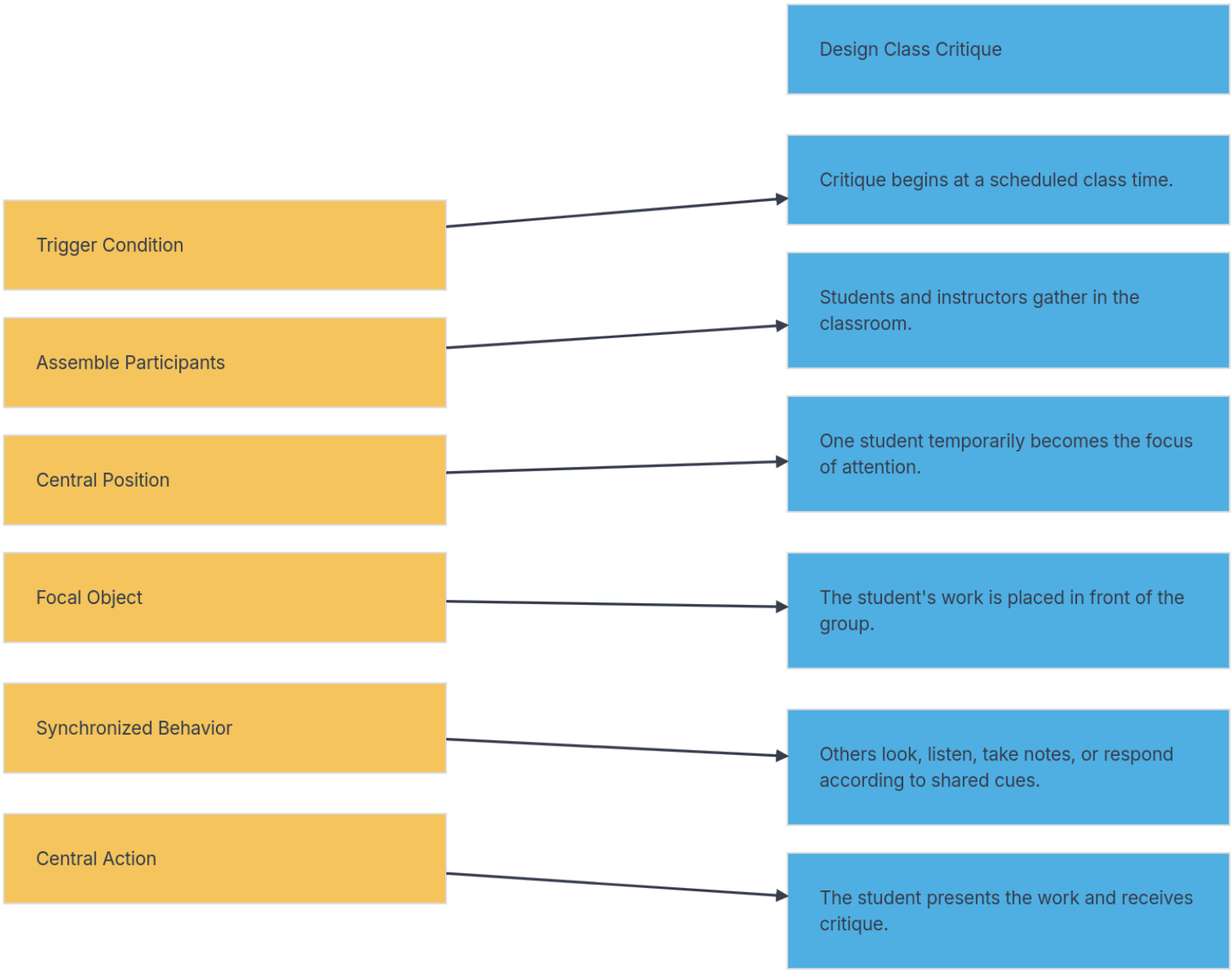
Removing Focal Object
The actions could still be connected, but the material center of the ritual disappeared.

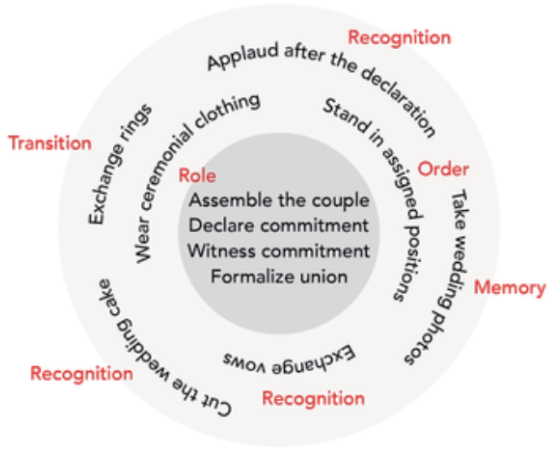


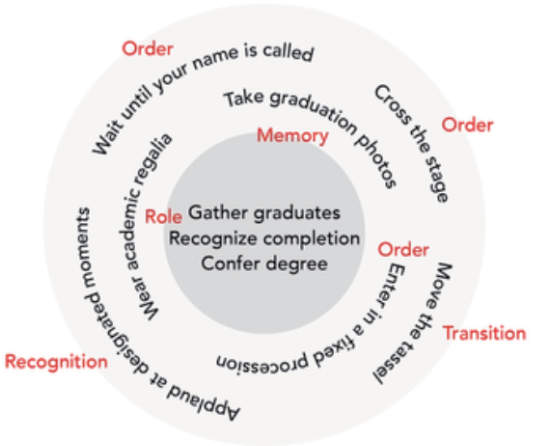
Removing Central Figure
This caused a larger structural change. The private act also disappeared, while the remaining actions reorganized around collective participation.



Removing Marked Date
Almost all of the internal relationships remained intact.


Design Class Critique
Trigger Condition
Critique begins at a scheduled class time.
Assemble Participants
Students and instructors gather in the classroom.
Central Position
One student temporarily becomes the focus of attention.
Focal Object
The student's work is placed in front of the group.
Synchronized Behavior
Others look, listen, take notes, or respond according to shared cues.
Central Action
The student presents the work and receives critique.


Assemble the couple
Declare commitment
Witness commitment
Formalize union
Role
Order
Memory
Recognition
Recognition
Recognition
Transition
Applaud after the declaration
Stand in assigned positions
Take wedding photos
Exchange vows
Cut the wedding cake
Wear ceremonial clothing
Exchange rings


Gather graduates
Recognize completion
Confer degree
Role
Memory
Order
Order
Transition
Recognition
Order
Wait until your name is called
Take graduation photos
Cross the stage
Enter in a fixed procession
Move the tassel
Applaud at designated moments
Wear academic regalia


Present work
Explain work
Observe
Give feedback
Role
Attention
Order
Order
Order
Recognition
Stand while presenting
Put devices away
Do not interrupt
Instructor says "Thank you"
Wait to be invited to begin
Applaud at the end

Step	Version A	Version B	Version C
1	Wait for the birthday.	Wait until the designated date.	Wait for the trigger condition.
2	Gather with family and friends.	Gather a small group of close others.	Assemble participants.
3	Place the birthday person at the center.	Place one participant at the center.	Assign a central position.
4	Place the birthday cake in front of them.	Place a shared food item in front of them.	Introduce a focal object.
5	Light the candles on the cake.	Activate several small light sources on the item.	Activate temporary markers.
6	Sing the birthday song together.	Repeat the same fixed words together.	Synchronize group behavior.
7	Make a wish without saying it aloud.	Form a thought that is not disclosed to the group.	Perform a private action.
8	Blow out the candles.	Extinguish the light sources.	Complete the central action.
9	Cut and share the cake.	Divide the food and distribute it among the group.	Redistribute the focal object.

Shared Structure	Version A—Graduation Ceremony	Version B—Wedding Ceremony
Wait for the trigger condition.	Wait until the scheduled commencement date.	Wait until the scheduled wedding date and ceremony time.
Assemble participants.	Graduates, faculty, and guests gather in a designated venue.	The couple, officiant and guests gather in the ceremony space.
Assign a central position.	Graduates are separated from the audience and positioned as the central group.	The couple is positioned at the front or center, facing each other and the officiant.
Introduce a focal object.	A diploma becomes the focal object of conferral.	The rings become focal objects during the exchange.
Activate temporary markers.	Move the tassel from one side of the cap to the other.	—
Synchronize group behavior.	Graduates enter, stand, sit, and move according to a shared sequence.	Some moments coordinate the group through shared cues, such as standing or applauding.
Perform a private action.	—	—
Complete the central action.	Each graduate is called forward, crosses the stage, and receives public recognition.	The couple exchanges vows and rings, followed by the officiant's public declaration of marriage.
Redistribute the focal object.	—	—

Transition—Marks a recognized change in role, status, or stage.

	Clear Transition	No Clear Transition
Ritual	Graduation Ceremony	Moment of Silence
Ordinary Activity	Clocking In at Work	Class Critique

Memory—Preserves or recalls a person, event, or status so that it can be remembered beyond the immediate moment.

	Clear Memory Function	No Clear Memory Function
Ritual	Funeral Ceremony	Ribbon-Cutting Ceremony
Ordinary Activity	Looking Through a Photo Album	Waiting in Line

SECOND SHIFT

**The more I abstracted ritual,
the easier it became to compare,
but the harder it became to recognize.**

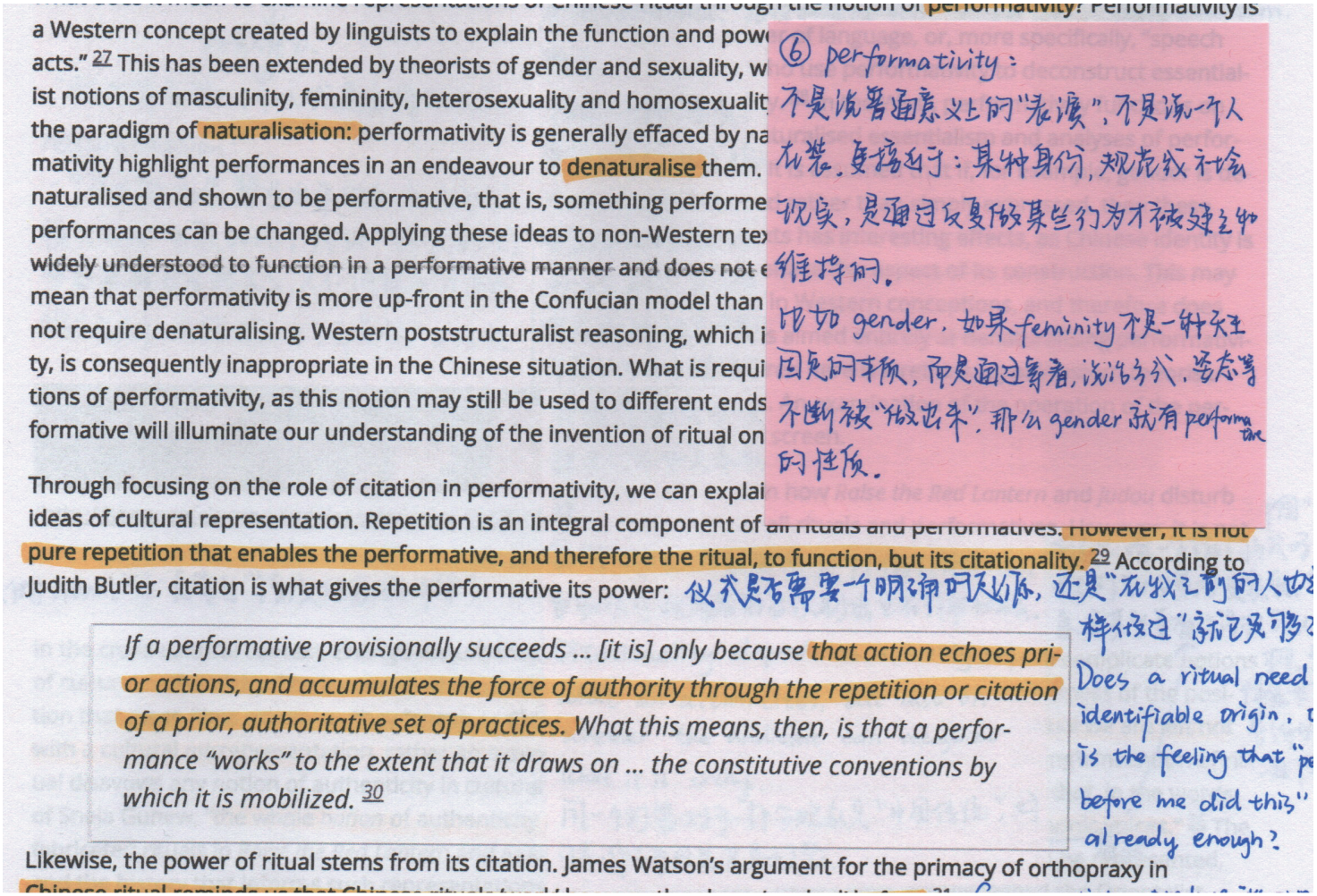


**Context may be part of what makes a ritual
recognizable and meaningful.**

DO THEORIES HAVE CONTEXT TOO?

Radha O'Meara

"Inventing Rituals: Cultural Politics in Zhang Yimou's Historical Films" (2018)



a Western concept created by linguists to explain the function and pow
acts." [27] This has been extended by theorists of gender and sexuality, w
ist notions of masculinity, femininity, heterosexuality and homosexualit
the paradigm of naturalisation: performativity is generally effaced by na
mativity highlight performances in an endeavour to denaturalise them.
naturalised and shown to be performative, that is, something performe
performances can be changed. Applying these ideas to non-Western te
widely understood to function in a performative manner and does not e
mean that performativity is more up-front in the Confucian model than
not require denaturalising. Western poststructuralist reasoning, which i
ty, is consequently inappropriate in the Chinese situation. What is requi
tions of performativity, as this notion may still be used to different ends
formative will illuminate our understanding of the invention of ritual on

⑥ performativity:
不是说普通意义的"表演"，不是演一个人
在装。更接近于：某种身份，规范或社会
现实，是通过反复做某些行为才被建立和
维持的。
比如 gender，如果 feminity 不是一种天生
固定的本质，而是通过穿着，说话方式，姿态等
不断被"做出来"，那么 gender 就有 performa
tive 的性质。

Through focusing on the role of citation in performativity, we can explai
ideas of cultural representation. Repetition is an integral component of all rituals and performatives. However, it is not
pure repetition that enables the performative, and therefore the ritual, to function, but its citationality. [29] According to
Judith Butler, citation is what gives the performative its power:

> *If a performative provisionally succeeds ... [it is] only because that action echoes prior actions, and accumulates the force of authority through the repetition or citation of a prior, authoritative set of practices. What this means, then, is that a performance "works" to the extent that it draws on ... the constitutive conventions by which it is mobilized.* [30]

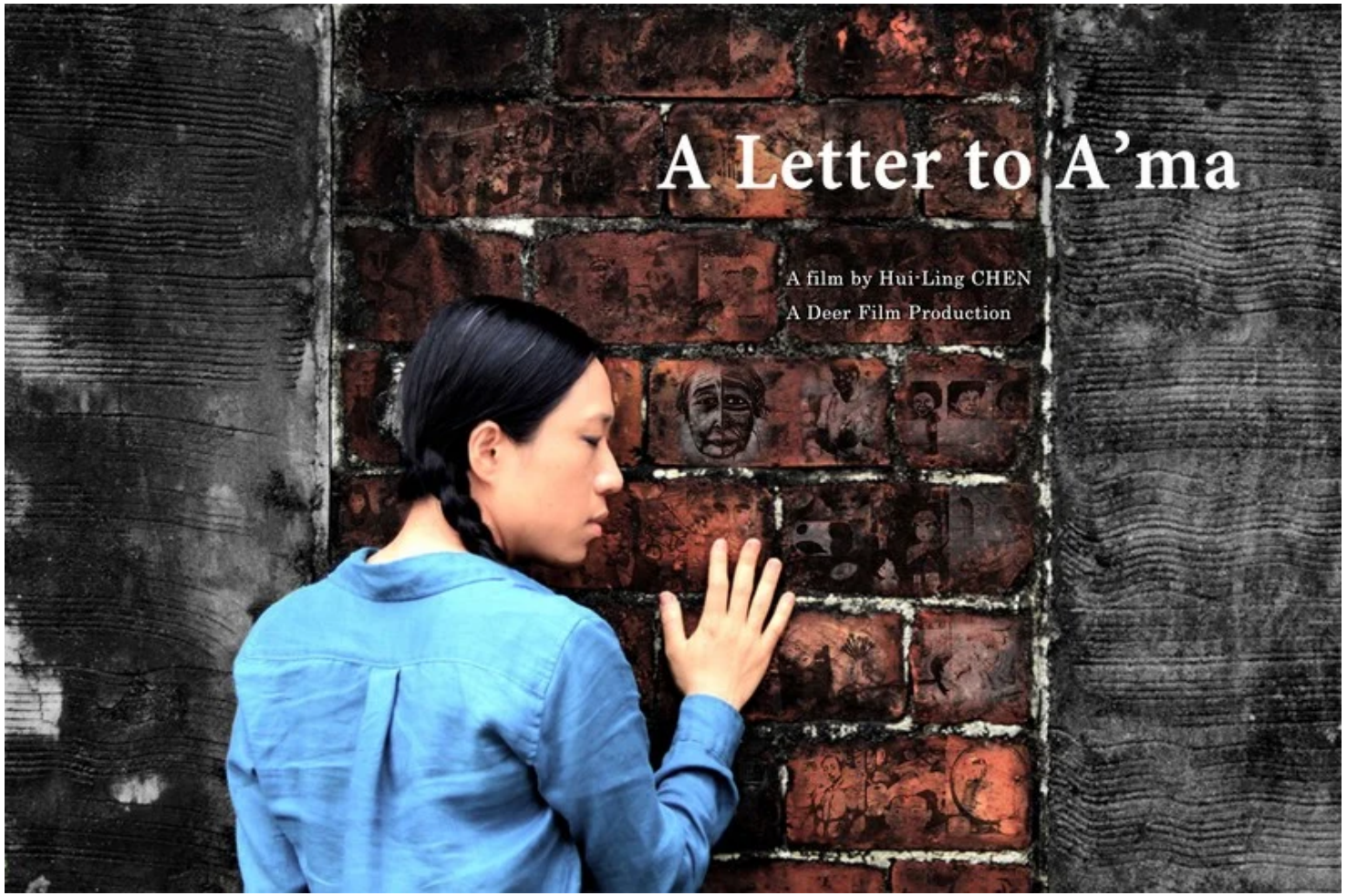
Likewise, the power of ritual stems from its citation. James Watson's argument for the primacy of orthopraxy in

仪式是否需要一个明确的开始，还是"在我之前的人也
样做过"就已经够
Does a ritual need
identifiable origin,
is the feeling that "
before me did this"
already enough?

Can a theoretical framework move directly across cultural contexts?

WHOSE POSITION AM I SEEING FROM?

Chen Hui-ling
A Letter to A'ma



Different memories can remain different and still create connection.

I have mostly been looking from the position of the child.

What I can see easily

- Pressure
- Expectation
- Discomfort

What I may be missing

- Why do elders insist?
- Did they also feel uncomfortable?
- Who is allowed to stop?
- How do age, gender, and family position matter?

WORKING QUESTIONS

1. When someone continues or passes on a ritual that once made them uncomfortable, what are they actually maintaining?

   The behavior itself, a relationship, a role, or a familiar sense of order?

2. Does the same theory of ritual change across different cultural contexts?
3. Do people need to believe that a ritual has a long history in order to keep maintaining it?

Jiayi Li
2026.09.23