

## Ritual and Identity in Late-Twentieth Century American Drama

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In a previous article on ritual and drama, I suggested that ritual in British political drama of the 1990s should be read as performance and confirmation of identity.<sup>1</sup> The assertion of group membership and loyalty was found to be made from the sacrifice of Others (or from self-sacrifice); furthermore, this ritual destruction was read as confirming a current identity (and not the means to a more authentic nor liberated identity). A good test of this hypothesis, therefore, would be its application to dramas that focus on identity; the so-called “minority” drama of America in the late-twentieth century would appear to offer an ideal testing ground. In pursuit of this end, this article will offer a re-interpretation of a famous Albee drama, examine several key African-American and feminist-themed dramas from the sixties onward, and conclude with a discussion of the politics of ritual exchange.

### 1

Perhaps the most influential words written on the self(same)/other dichotomy are to be found in Hegel’s master/slave relation—where the central issue is one of giving or withholding recognition (*Anerkennens*).<sup>2</sup> Hegel’s encounter of consciousness with consciousness and their struggle for dominance (recognition received, but not necessarily returned) is normally read as a mythic point of origin, the Ur-event of self-consciousness, which defines, once and for all, types of man or mind (post-Kojève). What, though, if one were to read this famous encounter as referring to an on-going process in which contestation, with its moments of assertion and deference, never ends and is indeed always up for re-negotiation? What if we read the definition of Self through the Other as a process that never ceases, in which the elements of hierarchy are forever to be renewed or inverted in a cyclical process beyond simple repetition, where Hegel’s encounter of subjectivities happens ever afresh and, yet, where prior outcomes are reinforced by formalized repetitions, rituals in all but name? Hegel’s text itself suggests such a reading with its frequent use of such on-going forms as Desire (*Begierde*) and Work (*Arbeit*)—key terms in Hegel’s conceptual vocabulary—as well as the presence of such concepts

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as infinity, or open-endedness (*Unendlichkeit*), process (*Prozeß*), and movement (*Bewegung*). These terms indicate that the situation alluded to may indeed be read as more than a singular nodal-point; that more than just one originary, causal—and therefore mythic—event is involved. Indeed just as a process may include crucial junctures, so the struggle for identity will feature more intense, more important moments—and these conjunctures will be liable to repetition.

The facts of repetition, whether in its forward-looking guise as a fresh re-negotiation or in its backward looking form as the re-confirmation of an established position, also suggest that we are all always already a part of this process; that the life of identity is always caught up in this struggle, that there is no final “before” or “after.” Such a process must encompass the relations between individuals, the kinds of recognition existing between individuals and their communities (real or imagined), and the relations between communities themselves. The repetition involved, as well as the emotional stakes, justify the use of the term “ritual” in this context and suggest that identity is a product of rituality and that ritual performances will be concerned with identity. As Marc Augé, writing in *A Sense for the Other* (1994), notes: “. . . if there is one thing that societies sincerely studied by ethnology display at all latitudes of the globe, it is the co-presence of the Other at all levels of identity.”<sup>3</sup> It is the role of this Otherness in American drama and its configuration with ritual and identity confirmation that will provide our topic.

Contemporary American drama is a child of the traditions inherited from the pre-war period and from the neo-avant-garde of the sixties—especially the radical drama of African-Americans and of women writing in the seventies. In the words of one commentator, in a reference to African-American dramatists that could equally be applied to woman writers: “The demonised ‘other’ turned away from assimilationist strategies and embraced its own racial identity, its otherness.”<sup>4</sup> In the above given definition is included the depiction of violence, reflecting the violence perceived and felt as domination, as well as the violence of its putative countermanding—not least including symbolic violence as the expression of frustration and pain in dramatic form. These developments reflect an engagement with the European heritage of Expressionism and the Theatre of the Absurd and, not least, with Antonin Artaud’s Theatre of Cruelty. According to Artaud drama should derange the viewer, now a participant, in order to “unleash the repressed unconscious.”<sup>5</sup> American drama was cross-fertilized by the meeting of the social and psychological unconscious, the confluence of the excluded Others of society and the Self.

A key product of this important cross-fertilization was the work of Edward Albee, who played a key role in revitalizing American theatre in the 1960s. Albee is, perhaps, the paradigm case of this rebirth of American drama in the late fifties and early sixties in that his drama is both nihilistic and crusading, destructive in content yet morally optimistic in intent. The optimistic, even utopian, tenor in his

work signals the move towards a therapeutics of authenticity in drama. A key feature of American avant-garde drama of the sixties and seventies, this concern with therapeutics or “cure” aimed to replace inauthentic stereotypical and existentially-limiting social roles with the “real” or “true” Self (be it black, female, gay, lesbian, or just essentialist human).

So in Albee’s *The Zoo Story* (1959), for example, Jerry’s ritual murder or suicide seals both tragedy and redemption. Jerry’s self-sacrifice (he throws himself at Peter who is reluctantly holding a knife) becomes the symbolic cleansing of Peter’s self.<sup>6</sup> Sacrifice leads to authentic recovery (or the recovery of the authentic). In *American Dream* (1961), also an absurdist-influenced play, we find the usual existentialist attack on the constricting nature of the family—an attack that is made in order to allow the character’s real selves to escape their limitations (after Artaud). As in the visual arts, where Dadaist models became influential, so the neo-avant-garde in drama looked to Expressionist models as part of the aesthetic radicalization that was to inform the post-war cultural revolution of American—or more precisely, Western—culture.

However, it is *Who’s Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1962) that most acutely exemplifies the return-to-authenticity paradigm. George’s violent provocation of Martha takes on a sacralized ritual form intended to “cleanse” Martha of her reliance upon delusion and masks. The play’s central ritual structure, occurring at the play’s structural and logical climax, is the recitation of the Mass of the Dead. This Latin exorcism, a religious ritual transplanted for dramatic effect, performs a change of identity, casting out one self for Martha and, perhaps, for George, even as he pronounces last rites over their fictional child.<sup>7</sup> This ritual calls forth Martha’s howl as a response, a movement that takes us beyond words and masks towards Martha’s true emotional self.<sup>8</sup> The howl represents an escape from the larger ritualized game they play, that of their relationship: in George’s words, “You know the rules Martha.”<sup>9</sup> Agreement, communion and community between George and Martha, comes in their use of the same words—now is the time for the props, the guests, to go as they are no longer needed, neither for any further games, nor for the negation of the game. This scene leaves a sense of truth in the audience, a sense of the masks we use and their “Other-side” as utopic potential and promise.<sup>10</sup>

This event, together with the response it elicits, Martha’s scream of pure anguish, is often read as representing (when not simply viewed as vengeful George’s torture of Martha) as a new beginning, a rebirth, a potential escape to a new Self. Indeed the pure, wordless sound, symbol for the emergence of pure affect, is a very telling piece of dramatic illusionism; Martha returns from her imagination and its isolation to an authentic Self in community with her husband and, therefore, society (with this possibility then holding open the idea of a potentially cleansed society). If the functioning of the ritual element is clear, the authentic return it is supposed

to deliver (also the promise of the return of the authentic) is less convincing.<sup>11</sup> Coercion of another is hardly self-reconstruction; liberation appears to be imposed. Nevertheless, as drama, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* was, and remains, a very effective experience. It has become a modern-day classic.

Matthew Roudané, in *Drama since 1960*, has read Martha's ritual "cleansing" as an aspect of René Girard's theory of the "sacrificial crisis."<sup>12</sup> As communities are supposed to be cleansed of general lawless violence by a sacrificial violence, so the violence of Martha and George's relationship is to be cured by an act of sacrificial violence (an imaginary child is to be killed). However, it might be more accurate to say that, whilst certain identities are being reaffirmed, other (imaginary) identities are being rejected (all identities are of course and at a certain stage imaginary—the issue really comes down to whether they are shared or not). Unity, a communication no longer at cross-purposes, a sense of community, is being re-made via the scapegoat of a designated Other, through the violence perpetuated and through the identities exchanged, then shared as a result.<sup>13</sup> Here the therapeutic shock of violence involves the sacrifice of a fantasy world, of part of Martha's self—even of her point of view. However, if we were to apply this notion of a return to authenticity to the application of State or patriarchal violence, we might not see it as still appearing quite so "progressive." Furthermore, if the sacrificial Other *in* the text is the imaginary child, then the sacrificial Other *of* the play for the audience (the play as ritual, play-going as a ritual experience) is Martha herself. It is her point of view that is sacrificed to our congratulatory self-recognition as those chosen few capable of being beyond role-play, beyond illusion.

Roudané's analytic use of the Girardian concept of ritual offers an insightful application of ritual to drama. However, it provides a reading that remains, nonetheless, firmly within the authenticist paradigm that insists that real selves are to be found once the apposite liberatory ritual has removed the false veneer of imaginary social detritus. Yet, can violence in fact be cleansed by sacrificial/ritual violence in the manner that Girard describes: rather, is violence not sanctified, made legal, through the agencies of State, Law, and Religion and the communities or elites that these institutions serve regardless of their pretensions to universality?<sup>14</sup> The aporias of Girard's theory conceal the fact that rituality in everyday life is all too often attended by a violence (whether symbolic or real) that acts as the real force behind the ritual guardians of community identity. By contrast, a constructionist reading of ritual would find of Girard's theory that the violence—as with Hegel's process of recognition—is never finally cleansed. Rather, it remains fore-ever immanent, lurking in the latent threat behind the guarantee of exclusive community, in the pogrom, lynching, and in genocide. Or in the simmering threat of these actions, which keeps identities labelled "other" or "secondary" in their "proper" place. The twentieth century provides many examples, from the genocide of the Armenians and the Jews to the conflicts in the ex-Yugoslavia and in Rwanda—and in matters

of race-hate, homophobia (as a mark of a particular brand of masculinity), and the policing of female gender-roles (where space is delimited by the threat of rape). And then there is always the on-going “cold war” or, should I say, “culture wars,” of identity in America.

What we have, therefore, is not a purging of violence, but rather a continual reliance upon it to police the margins of identity and to maintain “purity” and authenticity, together with the notions of “home” and territoriality. Girardian catharsis does not cure these injustices: rather, it justifies their threat. A theory of ritual that foregrounds the role of identity exchange would suggest, rather, that identity is in a continual process of construction, whether cemented in affect through sacrificial violence or through non-violent symbolic sacrifice (which would include the representation, but not the fact, of violence). Symbolic violence may, after all, be the path of least violence. The process in question appears to be one in which an endless reconstruction of identity through an endless sequence of masks is stabilized through ritual in the performance of community (a ritual with a violent, if symbolic, sacrificial exchange at its heart). On this reading it is a new phase of the game, play, or construction of identity, with a new set of implications for gender/community alliance, that is not surpassed or suppressed, but manufactured at the end of *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?*

The class or elite educational implications of the play's title (its usual reading) also guides us towards hierarchies of gender and sex. The heart of the play appears to lie in the male guidance of the exorcism that frees a woman from her delusions. The surprising conclusion of this radical play would appear to be that access to the (authentic) truth is a middle class white male preserve (*plus ça change*). The modern shaman follows closely the lines of hierarchy already established (the reader might try to imagine the play with the gender roles inverted).<sup>15</sup> What once looked like a means of escape from a false normativity or illusion now more closely resembles a conservation of roles, a re-confirmation of masks. The question is: what role, which illusion, and whose norms? The interrogation of point of view reveals the true beneficiaries of the ritual exchanges that make up this aspect of American Drama.<sup>16</sup>

We must await the oppositional and minority drama of the seventies for a theatre that both exploits avant-garde technique, with its often direct reliance upon, or reduction to, ritual, and attempts to represent the point of view of women and other “Others” with some adequacy.<sup>17</sup> In the drama of the later seventies and the eighties, a treatment of role play and stereotypes as open to the strategies of appropriation and subversion already replaced the quest-for-authenticity motif. Roles became exchangeable, or even interchangeable, in a self-conscious preference for a constructionism beyond the search for, or the return to, essence and authenticity. Autonomy, insofar as this category escaped theoretical censure (“standing alone” as the ideal of a particular masculinist enlightenment model) was achievable through

other means than a return to normative and, anyway, mythic models. In much drama that was politically and theoretically aware, an on-going, open-ended process of community self-making that presupposed some form of social constructionism as its underlying assumption gradually replaced the search for a lost authenticity as a metaphysical underpinning for dramatic rhetoric.

## 2

Two important anthologies, *Contemporary Black Drama* (1971) and *Black Drama Anthology* (1972), provide the quantitative data for the next stage of the argument as we look to the wider frequency of rituality and identity in American drama, taking African-American drama as our test case. The plays of Amiri Baraka (Leroi Jones) then provides the focus for a discussion of qualitative issues—with other dramas from this tradition being brought in for purposes of comment and counterpoint. These anthologies offer a range of thirty plays from the 1960s, representing a cross section of drama of the African-American Dramatic Renaissance.<sup>18</sup> The plays in these collections will be categorized by the type of key ritual element, or sacrificial exchange, they employ to make their point. The proportions of these and any relevant sub-categories may then be noted.

A typology of the sacrificial exchanges found in these two collections would feature two basic types, depending upon the (implied) audience's sympathy and identification with the victim ("the Same") or their celebration of the fact of victimhood ("the Other"). The sacrifice of the Other consists of the death or abjection of a member of a different community than that of the audience. The sacrifice of the Same finds the victim to be a member of the community of the Same (as the audience). The category of the Same may in turn be divided into cases where the action is committed by a member of the community of the Other or committed by the community of the Same. A further division is also possible between Involuntary and Voluntary sacrifice (or suicide). In the category of the sacrifice of the Other (where it is a member of the opposing community who is the victim), we find, for example, Baraka's *Junkies are full of (Sh. . .)* (the killing of the Mafia types) and Olive Pitcher's *The One* (the killing of the—white—German soldiers).<sup>19</sup> In the second category, the sacrifice of the Same (where it is a member of the community of identification who is the victim) we could include James Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie* and Archie Shepp's *Junebug Graduates Tonight*. Both of these plays will also serve as examples of the sub-category where the Same is sacrificed by the Other (one of "us" killed by one of "them").<sup>20</sup> The parallel sub-category, the killing of the Same by the Same (where victim and aggressor come from the same community of identity) can be further sub-divided into Involuntary and Voluntary Sacrifice. Involuntary Sacrifice (where the victim is not a volunteer) is found in Ed Bullins's *The Gentleman Caller*, Charles Gordone's *No Place to be Somebody*, and Baraka's *Junkies are full of (Sh. . .)*.<sup>21</sup> Voluntary Sacrifice, or suicide, is represented

by Adrienne Kennedy's *Funnyhouse of a Negro*—although if we include an act of self-sacrifice that nevertheless takes place at the hands of the Other, then we would also have to include Baldwin's *Blues for Mister Charlie*.

Of the plays gathered in the two collections, seven (a quarter of the total) feature a sacrifice of the Other, whilst thirteen prefer a sacrifice of the Same to register their polemical intent. In four of these thirteen, in which the Same is sacrificed, the Same is the victim of the Other; in eight the Same is the victim of the Same. In seven of these, the participation of the Same as victims is involuntary; leaving one (at least) clear-case of voluntary self-sacrifice, or suicide. Clearly an overwhelming majority of these plays employ the rhetoric of sacrifice to intensify the communication of their message. A full two thirds of the plays under discussion employ such means, so twenty out of the thirty African-American plays under discussion employ sacrificial rhetoric, suggesting a pre-eminent role for sacrificial rhetoric in the drama of African-Americans. Moreover, it is not only sacrificiality, as such, that plays the key persuasive role: many of these plays prefer the deployment of the sacrifice of the Same to make their point. Nearly half of the total number of plays, thirteen out of thirty, or two thirds of all sacrificial exchanges, feature the sacrifice of the Same.

To summarize:	total plays	30
	those featuring sacrificial exchange	20
	of which the sacrifice of the Same	13

The most popular sacrificial relation is the one that gains or intensifies the sympathy of, or identification with, the community portrayed as the Same. It is telling that, historically, the only other genre to make a more thorough use of this trope has been the Christian saint's life in its sub-generic form of the martyr text, or *passio*.

The dramatic sacrificial exchange constitutes the key moment in the play's identity politics, the one which hammers home its message. The death witnessed, the sacrifice performed on stage (or screen), provides the key exchange relation for the audience, fuels its identitarian sympathies, and provides emotional support for its implied political or ethical position as suggested by the play. A loss on stage—felt as such in the case of the Same, celebrated in the case of the Other—is their gain. A death performed, becomes, in its staging and repetition, a ritual sacrifice that functions as a symbolic sacrificial relation uniting audience with text, subject with object, "I" with putative "We." A collective identity is brought into being, which offers possibilities for rhetorical persuasion.

How does this rhetoric of sacrificial exchange work in individual dramas? If we take the plays of Amiri Baraka collected in these anthologies, then we find that *Bloodrites* and *Junkies are full of (Sh. . .)* are plays in which the ritualization of struggle over the issue of identity and the role of death in this ritual play a

crucial part. Both plays include the sacrifice of the designated Other in the name of community identity. In *Bloodrites*, the Other, inflated into a negative Other in the theological sense, is played by a masque of white devils (named after various European-American historical personalities and white stereotypes). These devils are depicted as interfering in the constructive efforts of the black characters: in a ritual Dance of Death, they are defeated and die. In *Junkies are full of (Sh. . .)*, it is the Mafia, behind the supply of heroin to a black community, who play this role (they die in a shoot-out with black vigilantes). *Junkies are full of (Sh. . .)* also includes the sacrifice of the Same by the Same as a black pusher is killed by those of his own community who oppose the selling of drugs in the streets in which they live (the pusher is left hanging from a lamp-post with his Mafia boss, respectively labelled “Slave” and “Master”).

In *Dutchman* (1964), by contrast, we are offered the sacrifice of the Same by the Other, as a young black male is killed by a white female. With its implied repetition of a featured event (the killing of a black male), a repetition that signals the commencement of yet another cycle of temptation and murder, we are clearly on the ground of ritual form. If we have a form of ritual sacrifice in *Dutchman*, it is in the sense of a symbolic sacrifice operating on a number of levels: within the world of the play, the sacrificial exchange will forward the identities of those characters who construct themselves as defined against the community of the victim (the passive white witness in the subway car who stands in for the white population in general). In this instance, the confirmation of identities within and outside the play are opposed—one should not assume, as with sacrifice of the Other, that they are always the same thing. For those watching, the sacrifice of the Same is a confirmation of their identity (the implied audience is black). For a white audience, the reaction is confusion or the distance that comes with allegory.<sup>22</sup>

The structure of Baraka’s plays deliberately leaves very little ground for a white audience, no matter how sympathetic: to such an audience, it acts as a provocation, as a ritual transgression (showing a limit case). For any mixed audience, there is the experience of a polarization that is itself performative of the binarized nature of American society regarding race, both on an everyday basis and as a warning of “the fire next time.”<sup>23</sup> This performative element, first, regarding the confirmation of identities and, second, the polarization is of course a feature of rituality. The sense of the term “ritual” as used here is fundamental not only to audience identity, but also to the meaning of the play itself and holds the opposite sense to that of an exoticism, an ornament, or a historico-anthropological reference—although this is clearly one point of reference in *Bloodrites* (also in *The Slave* where the reference to “ritual” is used ironically).<sup>24</sup> There is no return to authenticity here, unless read as the affirmation of a potential black authenticity when left alone by white society (the murderous girl connotes white America).



In the reality evoked by the play, however, the race point is achieved through a textual-rhetorical sacrifice of women as moral agents; if the white girl represents white America, then the latter is as bad as a (white) woman; “they” are as bad as (white) women, the play seems to imply. The brackets around (white) indicate that racial difference is *already* featured in the term set up for negative comparison: white America as a collective entity (the play is hardly about an individual female psychopath). The negative comparative is, therefore, set up on the grounds of sexual difference. This, often unintended, negation occurs when different indices of identity are crossed, as here with those of sex and race. By comparison, in Ed Bullins’s *The Corner*, the sexual sacrifice of a black woman to the Same (her treatment and rejection at the hands of the play’s leading character) highlights the degradation suffered by all the characters—including the one with whom hope may be associated. The element of gender discrimination in this rhetorical usage of women as negative example, or negative comparative, exposes a sacrificial strategy that black feminist writers critiqued in the seventies (to be discussed in the next section). In fiction this issue has been taken up by such writers as Maya Angelou, Toni Morrison, and Alice Walker.

Staged in the same year as *Dutchman*, Baraka’s *Toilet* (1964) finds the construction of masculinity and race together at issue in a play where the opposing white character—in contrast to the the young white woman in *Dutchman*—is now a young man, Ray Karolis. Ray will be killed in an affirmation of gang identity and of a masculinity that is constructed upon the Other as white—its pole of negative identification. Clearly we are back in the realm of the sacrifice of the Other. The young white man himself insists on fighting the head of the gang, Foots, as a mark of his own masculinity or “honor”—the necessity of violence to the sense of self is a trap Foots also finds himself caught in. The play intimates that as individuals the two may have become friends, indeed there may be some unresolved sexual tension between them; but, just as identity is finally guaranteed by the collective (recognition by the community of the Same) so, in a situation where collective confrontation is the order of the day, the individuals are forced to line up on their “own” side of the race divide. Here we find a reinforcement of the theme of sexed identity as that which requires sacrifice and ritual confirmation. Baraka differentiates between white institutions and white individuals in a play that insists on the waste created by America’s race divide to the detriment of all communities. So, in his *Slave* (1964), Baraka takes the individual tragedies of racial tension featured in *Toilet* and projects them onto a general backdrop of civil war. This is the end-game of slavery, the play seems to say, as its protagonist reverts to the old field-slave who spoke the prologue. In a play that also functions as a ritual transgression, showing the worst in order to cement preferred forms of identity, not only the white professor (who may have been killed in self-defence), but also two children

(who may have been fathered by the protagonist) appear to be sacrificed to the play's ominous message.

In a similar way, Ed Bullins's *Death List* (1970) stages the inter-race problem, of identities at war, within the larger conflict of World War II. Employing historical allegory as critique and prophecy, Bullins sounds a warning, like Baraka, of general disaster and also adds a warning of the particular disaster caused to the community of the Same by the use of the sacrifice of the Other. Identity is to be confirmed by sacrifice and is to be guaranteed dominance by the destruction of all existing forms of alternative identification (the "death list" of the title). If, in plays like *It Bees Dat Way* (1970), Bullins has denounced inauthentic forms of black life in favor of authentic self-knowledge, in *Death List*, he bluntly reveals the supports of an identity that makes no attempt to cover its intolerance of the Other and its reliance upon the destruction of that Other—even when that Other is also African-American. With the last two plays, we have moved from ritual exchange as the definition of a community identity to ritual exchange as the expression of tensions within a community (in the next section the effects of this tension will be observed in African-American feminist drama, as in the drama of other feminists who will reconstitute the notion of community as one based upon sexual difference).

Clearly rituality, whether that included within the world of the play or that of the function of the play for the audience, works by maintaining one belonging-structure and rejecting another. The sacrificial relations, or better the rhetoric of exchange, of transactional identity construction and maintenance, within African-American drama, follow the necessities of a struggle defined by racial difference, occasionally dividing to encompass internal divisions (sex, generation, ideology, class, sexuality, and life-style). Whether the exchange involves the Self or the Other, giving or taking, it is the representation of this exchange that offers, at once, the kernel of ritual and its most fundamental function. Either way, the transaction at the heart of ritual apportioning identity as an aspect of ethical community.

Other classic plays (such as Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play* and August Wilson's *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*), key dramas of their type and time, all having survived the test of time, but not included in the two anthologies used here, would, if counted, increase the proportions of symbolic sacrificiality further. Not only does the type of sacrificial exchange under discussion feature strongly in the very best African-American drama of the period, but it provides the crucial portion, event, juncture, or exchange that is central to the meaning and impact of such drama—and so to what holds our attention and maintains their topicality, survivability, and value. The skilled dramatic employment of sacrificial exchange relations, a highly effective dramatic form of rituality, itself a condensation of the fundamental performativity of the dramatic genre, appears integral to the best drama of the period.

## 3

Lest it be argued that the use of symbolic violence as a means of dramatic persuasion is a largely masculine characteristic, I will now turn to several key women-themed dramas (by women) from the same period. As in the committed drama of African-Americans, the sacrifice of the Same (of one's own community by a member of another community, here defined by gender) is also used to great effect as a rhetorical ploy to destabilize the dominant Other. However, in contra-distinction to the plays discussed above, it is suicide that is the form of the sacrifice of the Same most favored as the chosen mode of sacrificial exchange in these dramas.

As with the drama of African-Americans, ritual violence directed towards the community of the Same is an important means of highlighting inequalities of position and relation. Megan Terry, described as "the mother of American feminist drama," certainly has no inhibitions about the use of violence in her anti-realist plays—indeed, this type of drama, with its tendency to take on ritual guise, appears at times to demand the portrayal of violence as a typical part of its intensification of affect and symbolism.<sup>25</sup> *Keep Tightly Closed in a Cool Dry Place* (1966) features the (sexualized) murder of a woman by one of three men, all of whom are complicit in her death. Their shared masculine imaginary, their relation to the world (their world view) and indeed their identity itself, an identity fundamentally in debt to sexual difference constructed in a brutal and hierarchical manner, is portrayed as being built upon this sacrificial act. By these means, the performance polemicizes against a male imaginary constructed upon sexual violence. The murder on stage, constructing a brand of masculinity, affects the audience, implied as female or female-sympathizing, in the form of a sacrifice given over to *their* enlightenment and solidarity (the relationship of *their* group with the play, conceived as an exchange relation).

Marsha Norman also makes strategic use of symbolic violence, including murder, to make her point in her plays on the problems of feminine identity. In her first play, *Getting Out* (1977), regarded by many critics as her best, an unexplained murder leads to a prison sentence for the woman responsible, events that change her life. In this way, the death of an unspecified Other makes the transformation shown on stage possible: the portrayal of a divided self signals the "before" and "after" of the lead character, marked by the shift of name from "Arlie" to "Arlene." The new self requires not only persistence in a mean job and a measure of personal withdrawal, but also the telling refusal to sacrifice yet another person to her new self: "I aint Arlie. She coulda killed you."<sup>26</sup> These exchanges underline and support, in turn, the audience's collective self-identity as a unit (a sexed group), as sharing opinions—"aware" and "liberated" in terms of the play's guiding ideological stance. Like radical black male dramatists of this period, feminist writers too have found the depiction of the destruction of their own at the behest of the Other to be a powerful means in the making of an oppositional identity. However, along with

using violence against the Other and the Same as a means of agitation and self-renewal, we also find, as in *Getting Out*, a refusal of violence, which often takes the form of violence against the Self.

It is, therefore, the suicide theme that has claims to be the privileged dramatic trope of polemical women's drama of this period. Megan Terry, for example, uses suicide to mark out an individual's existence as an identity intended beyond death—one paradoxically achieved through death itself. In her play on Simone Weil, *Approaching Simone* (1970), the heroine chooses suicide to make her protest against unbearable conditions (military occupation and persecutions). Similarly, *'night Mother* (1982) is Marsha Norman's depiction of the suicide of the Self in the face of the inhospitable landscape of the Other.<sup>27</sup> A daughter announces her impending suicide to her mother; the remainder of the play fills in the moments between announcement and accomplishment. Jessie finds that the only way she can be what she wants is to "get off the bus." Identity is extended even into non-identity. As in Terry's *Approaching Simone*, the heroine finds that the survival of an identity that she can respect and value demands nothing less than the sacrifice of her life. However, *'night Mother* is not a play advocating euthanasia or Roman-style honor suicide. Quite the contrary. For the audience, it is the wrong way to live life that is indicated and indicted, whilst the ethical pole, whose concrete predications are left deliberately open in the play, is given a clear affirmation, albeit in the negative. The identity of the (implied) audience, as consisting of those who have attempted to rectify their lives in the face of hostile social economic factors and a constricting ideology, is in this way re-confirmed.

If the politically-committed theatre of white feminists foregrounds problems caused by the correlation of the sex/gender binary with received structures of power, then black feminists find themselves faced with the double task of dealing with racial difference with its received structures of dominance together with those hierarchical structures parasitic upon sexual difference. Two well-known African-American woman playwrights combine these twin problematics to produce powerful, innovative, and lyrical theatre. Both also use ritual form and symbolic destruction as a key tool in their exploration of the politics of identity. Both, in their most powerful and influential works, deploy the rhetoric of suicide.

Adrienne Kennedy's ground-breaking first play, the non-realist *Funnyhouse of a Negro* (1962), features a divided identity, with the Self as a double addressee, one African-American, one European-American, each with a distinct cultural historical heritage yet tied together by conflict, past and present, into a moral bind, and further compounded by the problems of sexual difference and the gender roles predicated upon it. These conflicts prove too much for the play's protagonist who hangs herself. She may also have hung her father—as she herself claims—or it may be that he has hung himself. However, according to another voice in the play, he may not be dead at all but murdered in the imagination of the chief protagonist only. For the father

is reported as having married a white woman at the end of the play, suggesting, whether “true” or “false,” a compounding of the crisis of identity that lies at the heart of the play—of being caught in the “pull” of two cultures felt to be in conflict and, in this instance, without the possibility of a productive resolution—as performed in the mind of the play’s presiding consciousness. *Funnyhouse of a Negro* performs a double symbolic sacrifice twice removed (present as a fantasy within the larger fantasy of the play if not “actual” on this level) and this on top of the fact that the protagonist’s mother has already succumbed to insanity (with the implication that the situation was to blame). The price of a stable sense of self is too high; the sacrificial exchange (in the world of the play), which is a symbolic exchange for the audience (the tragedy as fiction), leaves behind only problems. Yet, if no solutions are proffered, then the causes of such identity crises are perhaps better understood. Perhaps there is a vague sense of a potential authenticity existing somewhere beyond the stereotypes the play has depicted; a potential payoff for the implied audience of the play—a smashing of (imaginary) idols (as in Albee’s *Who is Afraid of Virginia Woolf*) bought at the price of a tragic self-sacrifice. Yet the play’s strength is that it suggests no obvious positive pole with which to identify, leaving the audience to construct a list of identity propositions to suit their own needs.

If, in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*, sacrifice takes the form of self-sacrifice, with an insoluble dilemma on stage pointing up the moral for the audience, in *The Owl Answers* (1965), a later play by the same dramatist, the featured sacrificial exchange appears in a more traditional guise. Towards the end of the play, the heroine attempts to find answers to her problems of divided identity in the realm of the sacred. The mother then sacrifices herself upon an altar (with owl feathers) and a sexual assault upon the heroine takes place after which she is finally transformed into an animal (she may have become a totemic owl). Following Expressionism and European Absurd theatre, the dramatic neo-*avant-garde* also found in shock and transgression, in ceremonial or ritual excess, and in the depiction of sexuality and rage, the means to engage audiences and deliver their message. The dramatization of the politics of identity is performed with symbolic violence.

However, the theme of suicide does not always have to be present directly in the play; it may be implied as an ever-present option. Ntozake Shange’s strong anti-sexist play *for coloured girls who have considered suicide/when the rainbow is enuf* (1974) is, in common with the work of her compatriots in literature at the time (Morrison, Angelou, Walker), more concerned with sexual relations between African-Americans, with the persistence of patriarchal-type power structures between them, than with the received problems of racial difference. The play takes the form of a ritual—or better, a sequence of rituals—nearly all of which feature painful or violent scenes that have disfigured or altered the lives of the characters presented in performance. It would appear that women and children (an ex-soldier murders some of the latter in the course of the play) are but sacrificial victims to be

expended as necessary to the requirements of a voracious all-consuming masculinity. For the implied female audience, this sacrifice constitutes a symbolic exchange for *their* sense of community. In many ways, *for coloured girls . . .* is an African-American woman's version and response to Megan Terry's *Keep Tightly Closed in a Cool Dry Place*. The play's solution is clearly given in the contrast of the final scene, described as a "laying on of hands" when the play's women unite to celebrate their identity, an act of mutual healing that is an answer to the play's parade of horrors and the affirmation of a practical strategic community. In this foregrounding of positive community (under the threat of the negative community of suicide), Shange joins a dramatist from the Latino community interested in similar themes, Maria Irene Fornes (*Fefu and her friends* 1977), to demonstrate the possibility of a women's drama where women's identity is not portrayed simply as stereotypically "open" or "other." But neither is it depicted as naively unproblematic. Women are shown as a divided constituency, as manifesting many contradictory identities, within the group and also within the self. This observation would hold true for all so-called "minority" drama that aspires to more than just agit-prop status.

The function of symbolic suicide as a dramatic rhetoric, as ritual with functional aims, appears to be the creation of a critical community out of a suitable, friendly, audience—in fact the "implied audience" of the drama. This audience would be one whose expected sympathy and affective communion would lead us to describe this kind of drama as belonging to the class of identity confirmation—rather than that of identity transformation with its stripping down to hitherto hidden essential or authentic "human" or "feminine" fundamentals. The plays examined in this section all indicate that rituality plays a pre-eminent role in defining the self-in-struggle in women-themed drama. The fact that rituals focusing upon suicide and the possibility of cure dominate the best of such drama indicates that for women playwrights the violence of self-assertion over another, especially through the symbolic destruction of the designated Other—here a certain masculinity or its institutionalized power structures—is not enough. If the act of suicide indicated the problem, then the rhetoric of cure, borrowing from the therapeutics of the countercultural paradigm—whilst eschewing its abstract and gender-blind utopianism—as well as from the culture of therapy of America in general, wishes only to find the means to construct, to find a new positive in what has been given, as well as in that which can be appropriated. Rituality in women-themed drama foregrounds the work of ritual at its most basic; the performance of mutual recognition as the warmth of a community "for itself" rather than simply "against another."

There is a gentle assertion of a shared homeliness in the "now" of the present (and not the myth of the past, nor the empty utopian signifier of the future). Such a "now" can be felt to potentially expand *towards* eternity, to *have* a future and not be posited somewhere in the future, precisely because of its actually experienced presence in the here and now. This expansion is a present that is brought to birth by

the ritual element in drama and its identity exchange, the result of the sacralizing, suturing “now” of ritual put to temporal use—and not the eternal “now” of the rhetoric of eternity with its anchorage in the “elsewhere,” a place outside of all current experience, the mere generalization and extra-temporalization of our inescapable sense of the now as such (used to underpin systems of ideology and belief). The mirror form of the rhetoric of eternity is that of an everlasting utopian deferral; the future-in-the-present implies a trajectory into the possible.<sup>28</sup>

## 4

Rituality, including, or even featuring, violent and destructive forms of sacrificial exchange, clearly plays a major role in the most innovative and exciting American drama of the late-twentieth century (if not of the century itself).<sup>29</sup> This ritual pre-eminence is the case whichever of the three “parties” of the exchange relation the focus is upon—whether exchangers, exchanged, or audience. However, unlike sender, message, and addressee, the terms of “exchange” in communication theory, a particular relation to Same or Other must further define all our terms. Whether they are “offered” by the Same (possessor, person, identity bearing group) or by the Other may distinguish the exchanged. Likewise, whether they offer some aspect of the Self (or Same) or make an offering of the Other (person or of the Other’s things) define the exchangers. Whose side they take, their identification with exchanger or exchanged, with offerer or with gift, that is with self or with other as presented in the play may also differentiate the recipients of the dramatic ritual (not the “ritual” performed within the world of the drama), the implied audience of the text or actual audience of a given performance.

Our key terms may, therefore, be identical (exchangers=exchanged=same group identity as audience) as in charity, group-internal or self-sacrifice, or different (two of the three terms are nonexchangeable), as in a killing prompted by bigotry or a pogrom, or an audience consisting of the group to be critiqued by the depicted victimization of their Other. For example, when a member (the exchanged) of the sympathy group (the “Same” of the recipient) is shown as destroyed by an “Other-to-be-viewed-negatively” in order to gain sympathy for the “Same,” then, *in the text*, the sacrifice is clearly made *of this Same by the Other* (the exchanger); whereas, on the level of the relationship with the audience or recipient, it is a sacrifice *offered by the Same*—as in *Dutchman*. Cases of dramatic suicide are a clearer case of this rhetorical formula: to sacrifice one’s Self or someone of the order of the Same in order to critique the identity deemed “Other.”

Just as one person’s perception of destruction can be another’s perception of creation, so dramatic ritual destroys symbolically in order to create a symbolic identity (to negate symbols to create symbols). It is in this way that the exchange relation at the heart of the ritual sacrifice or transaction creates or perpetuates identity confirmation or construction. This kind of rituality plays a significant role

in American drama of the post-war period and may also be a special feature of the post-expressionist, post-realist, avant-garde, and absurdist trends of committed American theatre—if it is not to be identified as a feature of drama as a genre. What are the implications of the theory of ritual exchange in terms of identifying the active and affective, and so crucial, aspects of any given drama—both in how it makes meanings and in terms of its politics of performance?

There are four general aspects to the relation of drama with performativity—only two of which concern rituality. The four basic levels of performative interrelation are (i) the relationship between representation and event, and between symbol and function (art as semiotic, art as anthropology, the rituality of drama as such); (ii) in the “speech act” sense of “doing things with words,” of word as “event” (“the performative” aspect of linguistic acts, leading directly to rituality as an intensification of the verbal/gestural texture of a part of the drama); the non-ritual aspects are (iii) realization on stage, the actual staging as opposed to the text version (the aspect of drama usually called “performance theory”); and (iv) each particular realization and its audience (the pragmatics of drama, performance as interpretation; context, the meaning relations of *this* particular performance of a given drama).<sup>30</sup>

In the case of type (i) performative, where all (of the) drama may be analysed as a form of ritual, we find the forms of the *Lehrstück* and in American drama Baraka’s *Blood Rites* and Kennedy’s *Funnyhouse of a Negro* read as a whole.<sup>31</sup> In case of type (ii) performative, where only some, or part, of the drama may be read as ritualistic, as presenting a ritual process or event where an identity-bearing exchange is clearly staged, we have the murders in Baraka’s *Dutchman* and *Toilet* and the deaths (real or imaginary) in *Funnyhouse of a Negro*.<sup>32</sup> Where cases of types (i) and (ii) are found together then a further intensification of the texture ensues, as is the case whenever one ritual form is embedded within another (including ritualized elements within the drama, framed incidents, intensification by performative effect, re-framing, such as a play within a play, and any self-reference effect).<sup>33</sup> In this way, drama offers the gamut of possibilities from episodic ritual to a sequence of embedded rituals; from an isolated ritual event functioning as climax or intense point of significance (as in any realist play that includes a ritualistic event) to any ritualistic form that includes further such forms within itself—such as *Funnyhouse* with its deaths at the end or the climax of *Bloodrites*.

Ritual performativity provides a bridge between representation and thing (event), and between symbol and function, that is, between representing and being.<sup>34</sup> Hence, performativity lies at the core of the identity function as the product of intensified or effervescent experience; rituality unites sacrality and art on the grounds of identity: even as it unites individual with collective (identity propositions) on the grounds of sacrality. The sacrificial/destructive mode, in effect, cements identity through creating this kind of intense experience. Ritual



frames the sacred, creating a place for it, and exchange (sacrifice/votive proof) fills it. If ritual punches a symbolic hole in time through into eternity, then this trans-historical Other provides the ground for the identity of Self and community that is beyond all sublunary contingency. A metaphysical unity is affirmed and—all too often—opposed to other forms of community (or to other negative poles of identification: Nature, animals, demons).

Indeed, if secular forms of art and entertainment (high, middle and low) are read as evolving from more obviously sacralized forms and seem in the process to be losing their general and collective sacred aura (Durkheim's "the sacred is the social"), then they nevertheless appear to be retaining their identity function—the basic role of rituality in life, not least when it calls up the rhetoric of eternity to cement identity relations.<sup>35</sup> This retention is equally the case when this self-same identity is played with and transgressed (*fête* in representation, "carnival," inoculation, definition through the exploration of limits). New cultural identities, not least those "socially Othered," must fight to find their place in popular and elite culture and then use their place in representation, their new mirror, which both reflects themselves *and* signals their presence to others, for a range of ends, such as self-confirmation, problem solving, recognition and questioning of terms of membership, and play/transgression.<sup>36</sup>

What then are the politics and ethics of ritual in drama and of drama as ritual? First, there is the question of rhetoric (casting the negative). The ethics of symbolic violence are read as a mode of Othering (range: criticism of dominant to scapegoating of "minority" culture). Even more than suicide (the form favored by the women-themed plays we have looked at), it is, as we have seen, the self-sacrifice of the Same, by the Other (the other of the Other), where the "symbolic" sacrifice of a member of the Same, of one's own side, or identity group, as committed by a member of the group designated the Other, that offers the most powerful rhetorical form of negating this Other. If such a means is most particularly used to denounce those deemed dominant in the social formation, it can, however, also be used otherwise (in racist agit-prop, for example).<sup>37</sup>

Additionally, there is the question of function (in actuality, often regardless of intention). Ritual (even ritual transgression) is not used for, and does not in practice incite, change as such, but functions in three major ways. First, rituality (identity exchange) works to bring about the *confirmation* of a pre-existing identity, or cultural/ideological point of view, of a group or self-conscious cultural unit (usually by the symbolic destruction of the others or of the Other, so designated by the Same, society, or the implied dominant point of view). Second, this process affirms *community* membership, and, therefore, it is not so much individual identity that is at issue, but self-recognition through a group (the element of recognition explains the addressee of a self-sacrifice, the other members of the Same are to find community). Third, drama, therefore, (especially drama of the performative

ritual pole) does not so much enact or convey an argument as such, but works by *adding affect to argument* (an intensification due to rituality, the accompanying sense of the sacred—as with Durkheim’s “collective effervescence” as social source of the sacred).<sup>38</sup> What is conveyed then is the feeling of belonging and its sacralization—regardless of the putative secularity of the context.<sup>39</sup> More recently, the definition of the sacred in the secular world has been posited, by Michael Taussig in *Defacement* (1999), as that which must not be profaned (a negative sacred), that which offers the very possibility of profanation (or what one might describe as, “con-sanguinity”).<sup>40</sup> Maurice Godelier, in *The Enigma of the Gift* (1999), also notes that what is held back from profane exchange is to be used only in ritual self-recognition and affirmation.<sup>41</sup> In sum, rituality, therefore, functions in the following three interconnected ways: as the (i) *confirmation* of (ii) *community*, by (iii) *adding affect to argument*.

Where does this leave the polemical *Lehrstück*? (Almost the basic rhetorical unit of political or engaged drama). What might a *Lehrstück* strategy based upon the perspective of rituality look like?<sup>42</sup> Two broad poles of engagement suggest themselves: re-affirmation and problematization.

The ideal end of political drama has been the achievement of a sought-after change of audience position (a transformation of political identification). Yet, after what has been shown and said in the course of this discussion, would it not be simply more honest to describe that which takes place in the course of a successfully performed political drama as *re-affirming*? As we have seen, the re-affirmation of a given collective identity is precisely one of the traditional functions of ritual; it is this force that makes the best of political drama so effective—not some magical formula by which “reactionaries” become “revolutionaries,” or vice versa. As a matter of dramatic strategy, the best outcome that can be hoped for (and already this is a lot) is the one where a given identity (stable and remaining the “Same”) acts upon new information (facts or arguments) to which it already has a prior susceptibility and in this way takes up a new position: *one that does not require a massive, contentious, or fundamental identity shift*. Most often the identity in question already possesses a pre-disposition or openness to the issue treated by the performance, that is *we are treating of someone who already cares about the type of topic being presented* (examples might include the liberal, the activist, the investigating anthropologist, those with an interest in the “Others”’ points of view, Baraka before a white—non-racist—audience). In this case, the “argument” presented would be one that is intra-identity, a matter of nuance or re-alignment and, as such, constitutes an act of *re-affirmation* on the basic structure of the identity in question—*indeed the re-affirmation is often presented as better served by the re-alignment*.

The case of “problematization” follows naturally from the positing of intra-identity differences; here, the role of political theatre is *to dramatize the problems*

and tensions that exist within a given identity/community. And to explore these tensions is to exploit them for pleasure or for aesthetic ends. This exploitation is the traditional use of ritual form and, especially, of ritual transgression and the exploration of limits (on representation, on saying and showing, of form and of content). It is also the tendency of much of the best avant-garde theatre from the sixties to the present day (examples may be found wherever such divisions as class, gender, sexuality, some form of religious or cultural ethnicity, or simply morality are found to sub-divide a posited or received community—as in Fornes's *Fefu*. . .).

The theory of ritual, sacrifice, and exchange in drama offered here, of a rituality that performs an identity exchange, would suggest a move towards two general and complementary directions. The first direction would be a politics of Recognition and Affirmation, for the Same or against Others, and especially for the pleasures of the Same (which may be sub-divided, or opposed in turn)—the general tendency of this brand of rituality would be exclusive with varying amounts of reliance upon difference for self-definition. Clearly, such a direction can show (and has shown) both progressive and reactionary faces; as our study has indicated, sacrificial exclusion may equally be used to reinforce the identity, and so resistance, of a “minority” or subaltern group, or it may be employed to keep such a group in a state of terror and political abjection.<sup>43</sup>

The second direction would be towards a politics of Complexity and Self-division, of problem-stating, and, perhaps, even problem-solving, including exposing and enjoying, where the focus is upon differences in general within the identity/community in question. The general tendency of this type of rituality would be inclusive, welcoming of hybridity and difference and, as such, always open to alliance-making and to the pooling of cultural differences in order to combat differences on another level, differences perceived as diminishing identity options (economic exclusion, class prejudice, power imbalances, and undemocratic hierarchies).

## Notes

1. Peter Nesteruk, “Ritual, Sacrifice, and Identity in Recent Political Drama—with Reference to the Plays of David Greig,” *Journal Of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* 15.1 (2000): 21-42. The author wishes to thank Anthony Gorman, Nicole Boireau, and Clare Pilsworth for their ideas and assistance—all have made this a better article.

2. G. W. F. Hegel, *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1977) 104-118; *Werke III: Phänomenologie des Geistes* (1807), eds. Eva Moldenhauer and Karl Markus Michel (Frankfurt: Verlag, 1971) 145-55. A more accurate translation, however, prefers the feudal, lordship, and bondage, for the original *Herrschaft und Knechtschaft*, giving the participants as lord and bondsman in place of the classically inflected, master and slave, popularized by Alexandre Kojève's influential readings.

3. Marc Augé, *A Sense for the Other: The Timeliness and Relevance of Anthropology*, trans. Amy Jacobs (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1998) 93. Anti-Semitism, for example, one of civilization's favorite forms of othering, has a long history in drama, demonstrating the exclusionary construction of medieval Christian identity. The Oberamgau "Passion Play," among many medieval dramas, features the ritual exclusion, denunciation, or sacrifice of Jews (justification for pogrom virtually constitutes a medieval visual genre, where "The Profanation of the Host" or kidnapping of a Christian child for ritual sacrifice, leads to the sacrificial burning of the guilty—often including women and children). Modern drama has sacrificial ritual at its origins, whether one defines them as Classical and Greek, or Medieval and Christian. Whilst much popular and mainstream drama resembles Greek New Comedy in its themes and form (sentimental, inversion/recognition), it is modern political drama that resembles the religious and tragic (ritual) genres of the past.

4. Matthew C. Roudané, *Drama Since 1960: A Critical History* (New York: Twayne, 1996) 17.

5. Antonin Artaud, *The Theatre and Its Double*, trans. Mary Caroline Richards (New York: Grove, 1959) 41.

6. Edward Albee, *The Zoo Story and other Plays* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1962). This play further intensifies the theme of community and communication in the dog scene—complete with loss and gain auditing of the exchange relation: "And what is gained is loss" (123). The accidental killing functions like a ritual, with potential freedom for Peter being traded for Jerry's self-sacrifice (his final and desperate act of communication and communion, which is also his freedom from a life he finds unlivable) 140.

7. Edward Albee, *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1964) 220.

8. 233.

9. 235.

10. 238.

11. Compare Paddy Chayefsky, *Tenth Man*—a version of Solomon Ansky's *The Dybbuk*—in which a play set in a synagogue (including prayers) culminates in a ritual excommunication, resulting in the return of an authentic and feeling self in the face of an empty unfeeling world. An authenticist variation of the boy meets girl sentimental plot with a gothic twist.

12. See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, trans. Patrick Gregory (1972; Baltimore: John Hopkins, 1977), for the notion of a "sacrificial crisis" that demands violence for a re-foundation of order (49).

13. For another reference to exchange as "sacrifice" and as constituting a sexual and gendered identity. Martha: "Some men would give their right arm for the chance" (*Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* 28).

14. For revolutionary rituals as a violent affirmation of an ideological point of view or political community (where minds are changed by force on the streets), see Peter Shaw, *American Patriots and the Rituals of Revolution* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1981). The American Revolution, origin of the modern USA, is read as a ritual, with the employment of violent (riot) and symbolically violent (hanging or burning in effigy) ritual action as a part of mass demonstrations held to support republican identity against the old pro-English identity and as a ritual rehearsal for revolution (7-12 and 227-

28). The role of ritual “festivals” by a dominant group to oppress a chosen minority (an example of lawlessness, or carnivalesque inversion, used by the dominant community, in pogroms, and in Northern Ireland’s “marching season”) is exemplified in the persecution of Thomas Hutchinson, who became the scapegoat in a sequence of ritual protests and disorders (33-35). In the origins of the USA, Catholics were also treated as scapegoats (205). The role of victim or scapegoat requires symbolic violence, the popular hanging (or burning) in effigy; as from Guy Fawkes to Lord Bute and Lord Grenville (216 and 219). Such performative acts of symbolic violence are usual in popular and factional demonstrations; they precisely demonstrate the existence of a political community constructed through opposition to another point of view and destructive of it for its own affirmation—accompanied by a Durkheimian “effervescence”; the seal of the sacred.

15. How often do Absurdist/Existentialist formulas come down to this kernel of gender imbalance? An imbalance suggesting that the point of view of the implied viewer is male, leaving the female to the passive—often sacrificial—role. (See the otherwise excellent films of Wim Wenders and André Tarkovsky). Regarding this structure of gender relations and gradient of knowledge bestowal, Albee also shares ground with the traditional comedy of manners, *The Philadelphia Story* (date 1940, play by Philip Barry, film by George Cukor) and, across the Atlantic, with another ground-breaking play, John Osborne’s *Look Back in Anger* (filmed in 1959) where another George tells his wife that he only wishes to liberate her from her illusions.

16. My argument would suggest the following re-interpretation of some sixties and seventies ritual drama from the utopian/universalist tradition (“The Living Theatre”). A given drama may be shown to be not “liberating” with respect to a questioned identity but as affirming the generational and ideological difference of the sixty’s counter-culture in comparison to other forms of life. The latter are sacrificed/exchanged for the audience’s self-affirmation by having in their turn sacrificed symbolically members of the implied audience’s communities of identification (sympathetic characters within the world of the drama). This rhetorical structure was also popular in contemporary cinema; the cult film *Easy Rider* (1969) provides a well-known case in point. The ideological point of view of this film is certainly sympathetic to, if not definitive of, the counter-culture—certainly it has no place for the ideological point of view of the “hicks.”

17. A play may function as a ritual exorcism for the audience: in this sense it is the play *itself* that functions as a ritual for the audience (as well as *containing* a ritual for the characters, which the audience witnesses). As in the later plays of Eugene O’Neill, games and masks are by-passed in favor of a sense of authentic being achieved for the audience (their catharsis)—being the ideological position that one can oneself (as opposed to a character in a play) go beyond masks and roles. Allan Lewis, *American Plays and Playwrights of the Contemporary Theatre* (New York: Crown, 1965) notes the influence of the Italian “*teatro del grottesco*” of Luigi Chiarelli on the masks and unmaskings of O’Neill’s *The Great God Brown* (1926) with a trend that will come to the fore in the authenticist stream in drama in the 50s, 60s, and 70s. Recent examples can be found in the Steven Soderbergh film *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* (1989) and in certain films by the Canadian director Atom Egoyan.

18. Clinton F. Olivier, ed., *Contemporary Black Drama* (New York: Charles Scribner’s, 1971), and Woodie King and Ron Milner, eds., *Black Drama Anthology* (New York: Columbia UP, 1972).

19. Other examples include: Ossie Davis, *Perlie Victorious* (the symbolic death—not a murder—of

the white landowner); Lonnie Elder, *Charades on East 4th St.* (the near death of the white policeman); Ron Milner, *Who's got his Own* (the near death of a white boy); Phillip Hayes Dean, *The Owl Killer* and Charles Gordone, *No Place to be Somebody*—the near deaths in Milner and Elder function symbolically in the same way as the “actual” ones.

20. Archie Shepp's *Junebug Graduates Tonight* includes the line, “Come back, America, my son has given his life for you,” indicating the symbolic force of the death for the implied audience (King and Milner 74).

21. This category would also include a sexual sacrifice, as in Ed Bullins's *The Corner*, together with Clifford Masson, *The Story of a Slave Rebellion*, Charles (Imayo) Gordon, *The Breakout*, and William Brancs, *A Medal for Willie* (the sacrifice/refusal of Willie's medal by his mother, who refuses the identity it implies).

22. In Charles Fuller's *A Soldier's Play* (1981), if the exchanges that make up this theatrical *tour de force* also work on many levels, it is for the identities constructed within the world of the text that the death of CJ functions as a sacrifice (he is perceived as letting the side down); however, for the implied identities of the audience, it is the murder of the sergeant that functions in the same way. The former is a death enacted for, or before, the outer frame of white domination as seen by a character within the play (by an African-American). The second killing is, in a sense, “for” the black community (the natural justice position of the implied audience) as revenge from within that same community. By contrast, in the slightly earlier *Zooman and the Sign* (1980), it is not the accidental gang murder of a young black girl that upsets the neighbors of the family who have lost their child, but that family's public implication of their neighbors in their daughter's killing by their very silence (a sign explaining the neighbor's apathy is hung outside the home of the dead girl). Again, black on black relations are at issue (but always within an outer frame of white racism or its general heritage). The parallel lies in the link of identity to violent death: in *A Soldier's Play*, it is the doubling of sacrificial murders for race and for justice; in *Zooman*, it is the lack of action taken over a violent death until the self-image (identity) of a given group is affected (and then, in a final stroke of irony, the culprit is accidentally shot himself, another “innocent” victim is added to the list).

23. For the problems of definition regarding the word “race,” see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., “Editor's Introduction: Writing ‘Race’ and the Difference It Makes” and “Talkin' that Talk,” *Race, Writing, & Difference*, ed. Gates (London: U of Chicago P, 1986) esp. 4-6 and 403.

24. For several cogent points on ritual in the drama of the period found, see the following articles found in Errol Hill, ed., *The Theater of Black Americans: A Collection of Critical Essays* (New York: Applause, 1987). (i) On the topic of exoticism and ritual: ritual is divided between exotic (imported or “artificial”) and home-grown and plural—see James Hatch, “Some African Influences on the Afro-American Theatre” (13-29). (ii) On ritual as product of repetition and the everyday and as definitive of identity, see Shelby Steele, “Notes on Ritual in the New Black Theater” (30-44). (iii) For a definition of Black Drama as the transition from drama to ritual, from “showing” to “being involved,” to the “helping out” of all, of community making (and so from realism to performativity)—a “national ceremony which affirms a shared vision”—see Kimberly W. Benston, “The Aesthetics of Modern Black Drama: From Mimesis to Methexis” (61-78, esp. 63), who also notes the following as users of the ritual aesthetic (also in a religious context): Barbara Ann Teer, Carlton Molette II, and

Paul Carter Harrison (73).

25. Helen Keyssar, *Feminist Theatre* (London: Macmillan, 1984) 53.

26. Marsha Norman, *Getting Out* (New York: Avon, 1978).

27. Julia Kristeva argues that it is an aspect of women's struggle with the Symbolic as an alien form and the divisions in the self this rupture from a language that is theirs and not theirs, simultaneously home and alien environment, that may cause women to move to suicide as a way of "getting out." Kristeva uses the life of Maria Tsvataeva, a Russian poet, as a case study in *About Chinese Women* (London: Marion Boyars, 1986) 34-44.

28. The theoretical implications of the view of "rituality" expressed here, with its central concept of "identity exchange," would suggest one solution or alternative route to the debates surrounding "the gift" and "exchange." If utopian thought has preferred a gift that is pure and selfless, then others have pointed out that any gift can always be re-appropriated into a network of exchange relations which appear to belie this purity. George Bataille, a major inheritor of the Durkheim/Mauss tradition in gift exchange and a major influence on current thinking on the subject (see especially *Visions of Excess* [Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1985] and *The Accursed Share: Vol. I* [NY: Zone, 1988]), has, in his own original contribution to this debate, suggested an otherwise unreachable outside to everyday sublunary exchange relations (of things, people, signs) that inspires intense ritual experiences and that is the true end of sacrificial forms of gift exchange (*potlatch, kula*). Bataille's reading takes us beyond reciprocity and also, apparently, beyond utility and function. The rhetoric of exteriority (here linked to a rhetoric of the sublime or, in temporal terms, of eternity) has been much discussed in deconstructive philosophy; the "outside" is found to be a means of shoring up an otherwise foundationless structure on the "inside," that is, the "return" on "the gift" is the possibility of exchange itself, of society—on this reading, there is no exchange-free gift. We may, of course, simply read Bataille's account as phenomenologically accurate in terms of the symbolic meaning of such events, but find that the social function of such exchange-free gifts is to cement community identity, to suture the individual into the community (and, when apposite, into a position in the hierarchy of that community, often, again when apposite, in relation to other communities). All of this presupposes a poverty stricken, not to say ideologically loaded, misrecognition of so-called "gift exchange" in modern societies; the gift is neither the solution (utopians) nor the problem (free-marketeers) but, in fact, a range of differing relationships—relationships that not only testify to the survival of gift-type relations in our administered capitalist world, their ubiquity, variety, and fundamental role in human life, but also their fusion with their supposed anti-theses, the commodity form and rational (structuring and exchange) relations. See for example: (i) gift exchanges between relatives and friends (the investment is in the relationships and, also, in one's role, the self of the giver as confirmed by the gift—charity, donations, etc). (ii) Destructive sacrifices of the other (rather than of self) pogroms, bigotry, and other forms negative Othering (symbolic destruction) as community affirming; the purchase of commodities for identity purposes as opposed to investment as capital (fashion, conspicuous consumption—"symbolic capital" in a more democratic sense than that given by Bourdieu, who limits the term to that which can be turned into things/material reward at a later, deferred, stage). (iii) Finally, and most tellingly, the passing up and down of goods and favors (from patronage, promotion, and "tips" to cyclic present giving), such that "larger" go downward and "smaller" go upwards (the relative sizes marking place in hierarchy)

in the tightly organized structures of modern organizations, universities included. At the very heart of modern rational-bureaucratic institutions is replicated the gift type of exchange of any and every “closed,” close-knit, and supposedly “primitive” social form (only the technology is primitive or “simple”). For Weber and for Marx, proponents of the domination of instrumental reason and the commodity, there is in these examples some considerable irony.

In place, then, of absolute (materialist) reciprocity and absolute (idealist) gift, I wish to suggest a “disjunctive reciprocity” as recognizing the interaction of both levels, of symbol and function, of the translation (in all senses of the word) that takes place between sign and matter, between idea or symbol and things (or bodies), where the destruction of one leads, not to an absence, loss or irrational, unprofitable waste, nor a metaphysical positing of a sublime realm (both evincing the same error). Rather the “return” or result of the exchange relation appears on the other side of this (metaphysical) fundamental heterogeneity: matter becomes identity; blood and burnt offerings (actual or symbolic) become self and beget community. This exchange, however, is an identity exchange, its field of operation is recognition, and we none of us function without it. Repetition offers its everyday form: rituality. Repetition plus intensity (with the sublime appeal to the rhetoric of eternity, the absolute “outside”) is its cyclic manifestation, the participation in which unfailingly leads to the question of identity as recognition—identity as belonging. As in those great proclaimers of the ineffable relation to the “otherside,” mysticism and asceticism, the apparent disavowal of self leads in practice to a renewal of self.

29. Albert F. McLean, Jr., *American Vaudeville as Ritual* (Kentucky: UP of Kentucky, 1965), suggests that the American Dream, or Myth of Success, was the key ideological component of Vaudeville, which flourished between 1880-1930, from the early growth of mass culture in America to the arrival of Radio and Cinema, functioning simultaneously as an “emotional safety valve and as a means of self-recognition” (213). This sense of community, generated through intense shared experience, united diverse peoples, cultures, and classes, in an ideology-making ritual that sought to overcome the tensions of urbanization and industrialization (13). Humor functioned as a “retaliation against an environment which promised much and yet never yielded quite enough” (109). Scapegoats and stereotypes formed an integral part of this humor, encompassing attacks upon the rich and powerful and upon minorities, such as the Jews, Irish, Blacks, older women, beggars, and the very poor (the usual combination of carnivalesque targets)—despite a lessening in smut and virulent intolerance after 1900 (117). Melodrama and melodramatic scenes were included in the Vaudeville programmes up to the 1930s—theatre, having finally reached a mass audience, was immediately to lose it to cinema.

30. Further interrelations: as well as being distinct in terms of exterior deixis versus interior self-reference, “ii” is also a particular case of “i” and “i” a general case of “ii”; “iii” is a particular—genre—case of “ii”; “iv” is the particular—most actual/empirical—case of “iii.” Drama as, or with, ritual combines all the previous types; each performance “iv” embodies both “iii” and the general performative “i” and includes examples of “ii.”

31. See the analysis of David Greig’s *Petra*, especially concerning ritual structure and embeddings, in Nesteruk, “Ritual, Sacrifice, and Identity.”

32. See the analysis of Greig’s *Europe*, especially concerning sacrifice and rituality, in Nesteruk, “Ritual, Sacrifice, and Identity.”



33. For a consideration of the theory of the art-work as ritual, applied to performance installation and video, see Peter Nesteruk, "Light and Time: Vision, Image, Other," *Lontana et luninuso* (forthcoming 2005).

34. For the ontological status of drama, we must interrogate the relation of drama to performativity. As we have seen, drama can be read as the ultimate performative: form=content; words=actions; description=the thing; symbol=function; fictional=real. Finally, then, the illusion becomes the event (certainly on an identity level, where the event is the self). However, it is rituality that is the real key to drama's performative intensity. There is a parallel in music, where in dance (as for ritual), it is a question of the assertion of being as identity; in this sense, dance functions as a cure for the lyric as loss, as the division of being and identity. What of the relation of mimesis to the performative? The form of presentation known as "realism" is low on ritual performance and is, therefore, less "real" than ritual, which, being performative, is the real (is "real" and "not real" simultaneously)—realism is mimetic but not performative. Ritual drama may be formal and artificial, but it is always real (in the sense of being performative). Therefore, two poles emerge: drama as real (as a ritual performative) may be opposed to the drama of the real (simple mimesis). Of course, all drama as ritual will also contain some measure of performativity: just as all ritualization, no matter what the degree of formalization, will contain mimetic or citational elements. On the role of performatives/performance theory in overcoming dualisms in theory (symbol vs. function, structure vs. culturist), see Ruth Finnegan, "How to do Things with Words: Performative Utterances among the Limbo of Sierra Leone," *Man* 4.4 (1969): 537-52; esp. 548-50.

35. See Peter Nesteruk, "When Space is Time: The Rhetoric of Eternity," *Time and Eternity: The Medieval Discourse*, eds. Gerhard Jaritz and Gerson Moreno-Riano (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2003) 403-26.

36. See Judith Butler, *Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative* (London: Routledge, 1997), who equates the performative ("speech acts," whether words or gestures) with rituality (3). Furthermore, Butler draws on Austin and Althusser's views on ritual and performativity to support her own: "Austin's view that the illocutionary speech act is conditioned by its conventional, that is 'ritual' or 'ceremonial' dimension, finds a counterpart in Althusser's insistence that ideology has a ritual form, and that ritual constitutes 'the material existence of an ideological apparatus'" (25). And finally, "... the social performative is a crucial part not only of subject *formation*, but of the on-going political contestation and re-formulation of the subject as well. The performative is not only a ritual practice; it is one of the influential rituals by which subjects are formed and re-formulated" (160).

37. It is worth noting a trend in the (official) theatre, in Broadway, in the West End, and in film (*Trainspotting*), where we find the appropriation of the underclass as entertainment value (as "truth," authentic, as the traditional low-other of comedy, and as comic re-enforcer of superiority of the audience).

38. See Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (1915; London: Allen and Unwin, 1965), for the ritual as social collectivity and the persistence of religious forms in secular identities (48, 226-27, and 232). See Victor Turner, *Dramas, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Societies* (London: Cornell UP, 1974), for the influential utopian appropriation of Van Gennep's concept of "liminality" or "in-betweenness"—as expounded in Arnold von Gennep, *The Rites of Passage*, trans. Monika B. Vizendom and Gabrielle R. Caffee (1908; Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1960).

According to Turner, ritual would proceed through three stages: (i) "separation," or approach, leaving of (old) order, or previous state or identity; (ii) "transition," or in-betweenness, other-worldliness or suspension of order; (iii) "incorporation," or return to order. Appropriations of Turner have highlighted the "in-between" stage as potentially liberative; choosing to forget the third stage of a return to order (unless of the new order, in which case, the first stage is a ritual denunciation of that audience's despised other). Contextually any ritual inversion is, therefore, always already controlled by "the dominant order" no matter how local. For any inversion to become stable, "progressive," or dominant, the new dominant must already have been installed (a sympathetic audience). Ritual is only revolutionary if the revolutionaries pretend not to have already taken the auditorium. Otherwise a performance of collapse serves only to release tension and show the role of order for social survival and cohesion (functioning like an inoculation, as Roland Barthes has observed); this is the traditional role of transgression and Others in Art (comedy; melodrama; the Gothic; the Disaster/Apocalypse genres, etc). See further, Caroline Walker Bynum, "Women's Stories, Women's Symbols: A Critique of Victor Turner's Theory of Liminality," *Fragmentation and Redemption: Essays on Gender and the Human Body in Medieval Religion* (New York: Zone, 1991) 27-52, for an account of the limits of Turner's use of van Gennep's theory of liminality in ritual from the point of view of gender, which notes that reversibility, or ritual inversion, like the narratives they underpin, are read as primarily male, with women being "liminal" to a male dominant. See also Michael Taussig, *Defacement: Public Secrecy and the Labour of the Negative* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1999), for an update of this relation of ritual, the secret, *homo duplex* (after Durkheim), and gender. Finally, see Catherine Bell, *Ritual: Perspectives and Dimensions* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1997), for a comprehensive survey of theories and approaches to the question of ritual: especially (a) for the possibility of an application to drama (159-64); (b) for ritual in the modern period (76; 201-202; 223-42); (c) for "ritual" as a negative critical category symptomatic of the West's aspirations to "enlightenment" superiority, as constituting a world "beyond" ritual, in the relation of knower to known (80 and 138).

39. See Robert Bellah, *The Broken Covenant: American Civil Religion in Time of Trial*, (London: U of Chicago P, 1992); "Civil Religion in America," *The Religious Situation* (Boston: Beacon, 1968); and "Liturgy and Experience," *The Roots of Ritual*, ed. James D. Shaughnessy (Grand Rapids: Ferdmans, 1973), for civil religion (including its own rituals and myths) as a part of secular society and the absence of division between civil and religious belief systems/ideologies regarding their cohesive functionality upon identity and community (and the concomitant creation of a local or civic sacred). See also George E. Marcus, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Moment in the Human Sciences*, ed. George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer (London: Chicago UP, 1986): "The problem is to describe the processes by which a notion of the sacred and an apparently anachronistic moral sensibility are kept prominently alive among a group of people who otherwise inhabit thoroughly secular affluent middle-class worlds" (170). For example, "American Dynasts adhere far more than contemporary Tongans do to an ideology of mana as has classically (and perhaps ethnographically) been described for Polynesia" (172).

40. Taussig, *Defacement*, esp. 21.

41. Maurice Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, trans. Nora Scott (1996; Cambridge: Polity, 1999) esp. 19 and 72. See further, Annette B. Weiner, *Inalienable Possessions: the Paradox of Keeping-with-*

*Giving* (Oxford: U of California P, 1992).

42. For the *Lehrstück* (after Brecht), see Andrey Wirth, "The Lehrstück as Performance," *The Drama Review* T164 (Winter 1998): 113-21, who asks the question: does drama change minds and identities? Or is the real change for those who participate: the actors? Brecht's *Lehrstück* are best read as problem plays for which there is no simple ideological answer. Such drama fills in details for an audience that is ready (already sympathetic). More importantly, it provides the affective emotional dimension to a dry thesis or idea (it is after all a ritual form and ritual renews—identities, subject positions, participants of problematics—by a strategic use of intensity).

43. For ritual as a means of protecting a (here an Andean Indian) communal identity from the threat posed by other groups (Church, State, Anglos, Latinos), see Billie Jean Isbell, *To Defend Ourselves: Ecology & Ritual in an Andean Village* (Austin: U of Texas P, 1978). For the relationship of Indians (here New Mexico) and other identities as refracted through ritual, see Ronald Grimes, *Symbol & Conquest: Public Ritual and Drama in Santa Fe, New Mexico* (London: Cornell UP, 1976), where a social, ethnic, and religious division is performed in a ritual designed to bring together both groups, but which actually shows, even performs, the domination of one by the other on a date celebrating the Conquest, where a Spanish mystery play meets Indian play of revolt (albeit muted and demonified). However, the representation tries to tame the difference; the communities' identities are clearly juxtaposed in the actually performed drama (154-59). Particular tension is shown over the interpretation of key events (161). Oppositional identities are maintained by the drama despite its unitary thrust. Yet, it is the sacrificial burning of a gigantic effigy that completes the festival. This event provokes intense feeling and a generalized sacral, "frightening," atmosphere (210) that cuts across identity lines—ironically achieving what the plays struggle (and often fail) to achieve. A communal effervescence shared by groups (Spanish, Indian) replaces the tension between both groups. The social unity, so obviously lost in the former rite, is regained in the face of a shared sacrificial ritual—but by conscious design? Sacrificial destructiveness (of an Other/scapegoat) appears to be more potent than a historical re-enactment designed to reconcile (but by opposing the two communities reopens old or latent wounds and exposes an existing imbalance of power).

