

---

## WHAT IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING?

---

BY ANDREA BAUER  
**BASED ON THE PAPER 'SYMBOLISM IN ANTHROPOLOGY' BY JANET  
HOSKINS**  
*Turner, Geertz, Steiner*



Keywords: Society, cultural systems, ritual, symbolism, rhythm of life, sound, human

The rhythm of human life, sound and movement are essential parts of our lives. Many forms of artistic expression, such as modern dance, music and the rhythm of pantomime can be seen as rituals. The theoretical basis of this is the theory of anthroposophy, which encompasses fundamental philosophical, ontological, and psychological questions. It also deals with the question of existence and provides a fundamental answer based on anthroposophy's concept of man. Rituals played a key part in the evolution of arts. Music is an important factor of religious ritual goals. Some people 'grow into' it as they are raised with religious values and faith, others discover their spiritual path later. Whichever it is, you can never find objective proof of God's existence and power. Besides certainty, we can also assign personal meaning to our experiences, as these are about us and no-one else. Taking part in rituals, we can experience the role of being chosen and feel that we are cared about and taken care of, and devotion is a part of this. Religion may play a key role at the great turning points of our lives, and it is also important in the development of the symbols of mythology and art. It is like something that is created through public consensus as the natural representation, depiction or evocation of something, which involves the possession of shared qualities and the creation of shared ideas. This system cannot be translated or explained purely rationally, as there is further meaning involved. A symbolic system that adds implicit notions to communication. It helps the elements of human existence and has a fundamental impact on the expressiveness of human development and the creation of its harmony. What are the non-verbal schemes we use to preserve them?

## Introduction

Hertz (1909) and Mauss (1936), Durkheim's students, were the first to examine non-verbal communication as a social symptom in their experiments. They analysed the human body as 'physiological material', and described the process as this appears in the context of society and, as a result, is assigned meaning. 'Hertz, for example, analysed the symbolic differentiations of left and right in the human body and found that the slight physiological pre-eminence of the right side is created through education, rituals and codes of conduct to become a symbol of social and cultural dualism and hierarchy: society assigns its own values to the two sides of the body.' (Buda, 1981:95) BODY-SOUND symbolism has been central to definitions of culture ever since Kroeber and Kluckhohn wrote "culture consists of patterns, explicit and implicit". Geertz wrote about a system of transmitted and "inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes toward life" (Geertz, 1973; 89). Victor Turner has more than any other single anthropologist to define the forms and functions of symbols, and their relation to language. He argues that it is important to distinguish a symbol from a sign. A symbol can have multiple meanings and it signifies through a more complex process than a sign. The sensorily perceptible vehicle or 'outward form' is more complex and ambiguous for symbols. The linguistic sign signifies in ways that are arbitrary and conventional, while a symbol has a metaphoric or metonymic relationship to what it designates. Signs tend to univocality and are often deliberate constructs for precise communicative purposes, while symbols tend to be iconic, "where a sensory likeness relation is intended or interpreted" (Turner 1975;172). This is also true for cognitive linguistics, when it tries to define meaning in the relationship between humans and culture. "Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning" (Geertz 2001 quoted in Kövecses–Benczes 2010). In cognitive linguistics, it is a crucial aspect that concepts are affected by culture as well. While cognition is different for everyone, people belong to groups, which has a certain impact on experience and the methods of cognition. Many anthropologists say that the framework is mostly the same for the members of a given culture, consequently they see culture as the total of interpretations shared by the members of the community, as represented by the conceptual frameworks. In Piaget's theory, concepts form increasingly complex structures through simple and experience-based schemata (genetic epistemology). According to Piaget, psychological development is achieved through the ongoing differentiation of the cognitive representation and reconstruction constructionism) of the world. In this process assimilation (incorporation of experience with the environment into existing schemata) and accommodation (adaptation of schemata to the environment) gradually reach a balance. Piaget's theories about cognitive development in childhood had a great impact on the research of intelligence. This means Piaget's work is much closer to constructionism than it is usually acknowledged or noticed. The fundamental claim of this theory is that ways of thinking and social structure develop in parallel. One of these is focusing on your own action, on the locus of control (Rotter, 1954), which triggers action in a specific situation or type of situations, creating a direct connection with what the individual did, is doing or will do in the

given situation. This is opposed to the external locus of control, when the individual believes that there is no causal link between what happens to them in a given situation and what they do in that situation. It is a recurring idea in Piaget's work that there is a dialectical relationship between adaptation, accommodation and assimilation. This means we adapt to our environment, and we adapt our environment to our schemata. For Piaget, it always means that we live in a constructed world with constructed representations and nothing happens on its own. As opposed to constructionism, innatism says that the human nervous system has "pre-wired" categories, preexisting schemes or processes for solutions that help us navigate the world. Of course, there are conventional ways out of this, which mostly use the concept of maturing. One is constructionism, which comes up in at least 3 different contexts. The first is that the internal structures of *mental life* are not pre-formed, but they are built while in interaction with the environment. In another, somewhat different interpretation, constructionism and the construed nature of mental life is linked to *one's own actions*. In the first, there is interaction with the environment, as opposed to the pre-formed system, whereas the second, with a focus on the individual's own activity, offers an interpretation for the problem of constructionism in which mental representation develops from the own actions of the person, the agent. (Pléh, 1999) Here human nature is in focus, especially the inner world of the small child. How do children experience themselves and their environment? In this exploration of their environment. Turner defines the properties of symbols in the semantic system of the complexity of association and ambiguity. Symbols can trigger social action and personal action as "we master the world through signs, ourselves by symbols" (Turner 1975;159) What symbology is it that is represented by the rhythm of symbols that represent time in sound and music? Like the system of sound symbols in different religions. In Islam, the voice of the muezzin calls people to prayer 5 times a day. In Islam he is a person working in a mosque who sings the call to prayer (Adhan) before the Friday Prayer and five times a day before Salah (prayer at dawn, at noon, in the afternoon, at sunset and in the evening). Jewish people use the Shofar, Christians use bells, and Muslims use the singing voice to call the believers to prayer. What common and personal sound system or invisible linguistic codes (Berstein, 1975) are there through which these rituals define the rhythm of everyday life?

### **Religious symbols and cultural systems**

Turner explicitly acknowledges Clifford Geertz's notion, which signals the ways in which his approach is compatible with, but quite distinct from, the more cultural approach to symbolic interpretation, which Geertz has proposed. While Turner sees symbols as "instrumentalities of various forces – physical, moral, economic, political, and so on – operating in isolable, changing fields of social relationships" (Turner, 1975; 145), Geertz sees them as part of a cultural system. Turner studied symbols and identified forms of dramas and metaphors in a series of detailed studies moving from the Ndembu to a wide range of other societies. His famous notion of liminality (an 'in-between status') was developed through an analysis of the ritual process, in which the meaning of particular symbols is constituted through their effectiveness in producing transformations in rites of passage. He then extended the drama metaphor to studies in the 'anthropology of performance,' suggesting that non-Western

societies were cyclically enacting a dramatic script in successive performances of pilgrimages, rites of affliction, and calendrical festivals.

Geertz innovated by arguing that culture is not something private, hidden away inside individuals, but is embodied in public symbols. He defined his new paradigm for the study of religion by asserting that “sacred symbols function to synthesize a people’s ethos – the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood – and their worldview – the picture they have of the way things in sheer actuality are, their most comprehensive ideas of order” (Geertz, 1973;89). The study of symbols was a way to understand the complex ways in which people communicate with each other and transmit their way of life to future generations. Geertz argued that the anthropologist should study ‘the native’s point of view,’ and should interpret symbols in rituals accordingly. For Geertz, the anthropological interpretation was the construction of the religious interpretation of events: “Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a particular style of life and a specific (if often implicit) metaphysic, and in so doing sustain each with the borrowed authority of the other” (Geertz, 1973; 90). He also argued that symbols were part of a series of cultural patterns that provided both a ‘sense of direction’ and a ‘power of self-control’. He analysed religion as a cultural system that creates ‘an aura of utter actuality,’ in which all symbolic activities are “devoted to producing, intensifying, and, so far as possible, rendering inviolable by the discordant revelations of secular experience.” Ritual performances, like the elaborate Balinese dance drama opposing Rangda and Barong, which he analyses, make “the model for and the model of aspects of religious belief mere transpositions of one another” (Geertz, 1973;118). Religious symbols offer a ‘model of’ the relations between the self and the world, and also a ‘model for’ how to act in this world. He actually says these are a set of distinctive ‘mental dispositions’ that motivate specific forms of action. As opposed to this, Victor Turner argues that symbols can be used instrumentally, to trigger social action, while Geertz stresses the fact that they are first of all ‘conceptions of a general order of existence’ that provide a map, a model of the world.

### **Symbols and rituals in the rhythm of life**

Turner developed a view of symbols as operators in the social process, which could produce social transformations, particularly in the context of ritual. He applied this analysis to understand Ndembu ritual, such as the temporary shrine to hunter-ancestors called the chishing’a. The chishing’a is a three- or four-pronged branch whose ends are sharpened to represent the ‘sharpness’ of huntsmanship. The bark is peeled to reveal its auspicious inner quality of whiteness associated in Ndembu thought with milk, fertility, and the ritual and rhythm of nurturance.

Braided grass is tied under the lowest prong to represent animals and ancestral shades who come up from the red grave to drink the blood offered to them by the hunters. These three aspects form part of a complex verbal hermeneutic which encompasses the innumerable nonverbal symbols, traditions, rituals, and webs of explicit meaning in the rhythm of life in Ndembu culture. Turner applied this analysis of symbols not only to the Ndembu, but also to

a wide range of other rituals. (Turner 1967, 1974, 1986, 1987). He talked about theatre as a system that embraces ideas and images of cosmos and chaos, interdigitates clowns and their foolery with gods and their solemnity. It uses all sensory modalities to present non-verbal and verbal symbols and rituals in the process of acting. It teases the rhythm of expression as part of a process similar to what Turner calls a 'social drama': There are four phases:

- a breach (of social rules),
  - a crisis,
  - redress, and either reintegration
- or recognition of schism. (Turner 1987; 34–35)

The stylized, scripted action of ritual defines a creative tension between “what should be performed” and “*what actually happens,*” providing the potential for both continuity and change, since ritual is a way for members of a society to reflect on their own actions. “Cultural performances are not simple reflectors or expressions of culture or even of changing culture but may themselves be active agencies of change, representing the eye by which culture sees itself”. (Turner 1986; 24)

Symbols of the voice of the community and of the individual

An important system of symbols we develop is when we create our rhythm of life, our unique system.

*One of Rudolf Steiner's fundamental teachings is this: “You don't have to believe what I tell you, you need to consider it. You need to incorporate it in your thoughts. If you do that, my thoughts will automatically affect you in such a way that you will see their truth.”*

Rudolf Steiner, the creator of eurhythmy, directed attention to perception, impressions and cognition. In Steiner's anthroposophy, the physical human body is made up from the materials of the physical world in such a way that its structure is adapted to the cognitive self, and through thinking, it becomes the intellectual soul. As the body opens up to sensations, it opens to intuitions and becomes the consciousness soul. It is capable of this because in the spiritual world creates an existence required for intuition, along with its own inner rhythm and rituals. Like the physical body creates its physical organs.

In this concept of man, consciousness unites with the soul in the same way the physical body unites with sensations in the soul. In the rhythm of the sound, which is present in every culture we know, like the rhythms and rituals of the voices and sounds that call people to prayer. With very few exceptions, only humans are capable of coordinating rhythm. Rhythm triggers auditory and motor activity without obvious behavioural responses. (Chen et al. 2008a; Grahn and Brett, 2007). While it can be easily observed in every known culture, the perception of the rhythm of sound varies (Cameron and Grahn, 2014; Drake, 1993; Drake, Penel and Bigand, 2000), and there are other differences (Grahn and Schuit, 2012), depending on culture. (e.g., Cameron, Bentley and Grahn, 2015; Hannon, Soley and Ullal, 2012).

The rhythm of rituals of music/sound is present across many areas like calls to prayer, the measurement of time, the ability to hear, movement, attention, aesthetics, and symbolic meanings. Despite the challenges arising from the significant diversity of areas, many methodological and theoretical aspects of studies in neuroscience can be used. Like the basic elements of rhythm, sound and movement are used in various religions and rituals. The theoretical basis of Steiner's thoughts is the theory of anthroposophy, which encompasses fundamental philosophical, ontological, and psychological questions. It also deals with the question of existence and provides a fundamental answer. This is a philosophy based on anthroposophy, where we can rely on behaviourist psychology and the system of psychoanalysis. Similarly, the method of eurhythmly was developed from the versions of movement that accompany diction and recitation, from the search for patterns of movement. This method kept the ancient form, rhythm and art as its basic model. "In this a new method of performing on stage appeared: speech made visible through movement, and sound, expressing and *keeping* the rhythm and pulsation of speech and emotions." (Bagdy 1991;59)

The method translates the spoken word into visible movement, it focuses on the elements of speaking through movement, while it is capable of elevating movement to art and poetry. The fundamental elements are sounds.

When humans react on an instinctive level to an emotional-impulsive impact, whichever culture they belong to and whatever worldview they have, they express their psychological state similarly, as we can hear it in the symbolic expressions of rituals and religion. Movement is strongly linked to pure vocal cries, so the sound of a cry and the reactive movement stem from the same internal tension. While in rituals, the spontaneity of gestures is controlled by education, they might, at the same time, contribute to self-definition. As the individual is strengthened and the self is separated from the external world, sound, emotions and expression emerge, and an image of human existence appears, like poetry, which often speaks to the individual from the community.

*An excerpt from János Áfra's collection of poems, Rítus (Ritual), shows what an honest person with a clear voice is like:*

*"Take your pieces everywhere, break up the unbroken unity, scatter yourself, betray nothingness. May your traces that remain sparkle in endless space and may your fragments recognise one another from afar."*

János Áfra starts his third collection of poems, Rítus (Ritual) with this radical poetic imperative. The speaker of the collection is distanced from the Self, from the directness of the personal quality of poetry, from the confessional nature of self-revelation. It is much more attracted to the impersonal, some very simple yet complex talk about what we share, which speaks to the individual. It helps to be alone with the experience within and overcome difficulties, which means I can keep exploring my inner room and stay safe. This is the experience of self-efficacy, which, on the frontiers of skills, triggers emotional response from

the individual, the perception of which provides important information when realistic solutions need to be chosen. This means it represents a certain potential of emotional intelligence in the context of attainable results in life management.

The conditions of successful life management, which is high-level thinking and problem-solving, a positive cognitive style (which includes proper self-assessment and the experience of self-efficacy, the ability to tolerate failure).

The exploitation of human strengths makes it possible to channel inner potential in the right direction. This includes the personal factors of the individual's motivation for action, the individual's relationship with themselves, others and communities, and their emotional intelligence. With the ability of self-awareness, considering the environment, nature and the universe together as a whole, which may, for example, play a role in decision-making in situations, when strengths and limits are considered. This balance and existence depend on the individual's inner self and on external impacts. The inner vibrations of sounds are also parts of the external world that affects us. The effect can be grasped through our uniquely trained inner force. The rhythms of elemental sounds, the traditions and structures of rituals are the specific manifestations of primary experience, and later they become their symbolic representations. Like the accents, strength, stresses and melody of speech reflect the mood and feelings of the person communicating, all this is represented by the sound experiences of our rhythm of life. We have been ritually celebrating the passage of time and the milestones of our lives for thousands of years. Rituals are symbolic actions that are repeated regularly in the same way. They convey our values, attitudes and goals, basically they are the core of our culture. They significantly contribute to the foundation and maintenance of a feeling of community and to the development of our rhythm of life. They define a framework, organise our lives and make our unpredictable lives predictable. Despite the periods determining our rhythm of life, we can always expect that they will contribute to the significant steps we take. For ourselves and or the community we belong to, also representing our traditions. These are, in a way, revelations that cultural, religious or personal rituals tell us we are not alone. There are others around us with similar values, beliefs and ideals. They serve as examples and models; they provide a shared identity while helping us preserve our wellbeing as a protective factor. At the same time, they help us see the human being as seen by society. See the gap between the body experienced and the body seen, or the development of a level of integration. Not verbal communication, which we mostly use to transfer and obtain information. But the use of non-verbal channels, which are primarily used to express our behaviour towards one another and, in some cases, to replace verbal communication. As a result, this form of expression is also suitable for decoding the real, yet sometimes hidden, intentions or emotions of other people. The change the function of which is to establish a relationship between the individual and the external world, in the context of the natural development of our rhythm of life. Where the question is not just how we are affected by these sound rituals, but also what non-verbal schemes we use to pass them on from generation to generation. Non-verbal communication is not uniform at all. In the debate about its universal or culturally determined nature, there are two sides: there are the "universalists", i.e., ethologists and psychologists who believe that non-verbal communication has developed over human evolution and is genetically inherited, and, on the other side, there are

sociologist, linguists and anthropologists who believe These include the semiotic approach (Sebeok, Hayes and Bateson), the theory of metacommunication (Watzlavick, Beavin, Jackson) and the theories of face-to-face interaction (Goffman, Kendon, Harris, Key). The gesture of culture, which is typical of the given community, and which is assigned meaning through social symbolisation and is passed on through social learning.

## References:

- Bagdy E. (1991): Az euritmia alapjai. In: Bíró, S.–Juhász, S. (ed.): Nonverbális pszichoterápiák. Magyar Pszichiátriai Társaság, Budapest
- Bagdy E. (1991): A nonverbális pszichoterápiák. In: Nonverbális pszichoterápiák. Editor: Juhász, Sándor. Magyar Pszichiátriai Társaság, Budapest.
- Bagdy E. (2002): Hangzás, mozgás, ritmus: A muzikalitás lelki szerveződésének méhen belüli gyökerei, Magyar zenei tanács.
- Bauer A. (2020): Az életritmus, *Parlando* 69/1., URL: [https://www.parlando.hu/2020/2020-1/Bauer\\_Andrea.pdf](https://www.parlando.hu/2020/2020-1/Bauer_Andrea.pdf)
- Bezczky G. (1990): A jelentésteremtő metafora. *Helikon*, 1990/4. 379-389
- Csíkszentmihályi, Mihály, 2008. *Kreativitás. A flow és a felfedezés, avagy a találmányosság pszichológiája*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.
- Bredács A. (2012): A zene, tánc, színművészet, képző - és iparművészet területein képzésben részesülő 14–16 éves tehetséges tanulók csoportjaira jellemző tulajdonságok vizsgálata pszichometriai és pedagógiai eszközökkel. PhD dissertation. ELTE Neveléstudományi Doktori Iskola, Budapest
- Buda B. (1992): Szimbólum. In: *Világirodalmi lexikon*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.
- Chandler, Daniel 2011. *Semiotics for Beginners*. URL: <http://users.aber.ac.uk/dgc/Documents/S4B/>
- Crystal, David, 2003. *A nyelv enciklopédiája*. 2nd edition. Osiris Kiadó, Budapest.
- Csíkszentmihályi M. (2008): *Kreativitás. A flow és a felfedezés, avagy a találmányosság pszichológiája*. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.
- Hoskins, J. (2015): Symbolism in Anthropology. In: James D. Wright (editor-in-chief), *International Encyclopedia of the Social & Behavioral Sciences*, 2nd edition, Vol 23. Oxford: Elsevier. pp. 860–865. ISBN: 9780080970868, translated by Andrea Bauer
- Kővári Z. (2009): Tanulmányok. *Morfium, Matricídum és Pszichoanalízis. Témák és variációk Csáth Géza és Kosztolányi Dezső életművében*. *Thalassa* (20) 2:3-38. Kiadó Rt
- Iványi T. (2008): *A szúfi út (taríqa)*. Körösi Csoma Társaság, Budapest
- Losonczi Á. (1972): *Az életmód az időben, a tárgyokban és az értékekben*. Gondolat, Budapest,
- Losonczi Á. (1969): *A zene életének szociológiája. Kinek, mikor, milyen zene kell?* Zeneműkiadó, Budapest