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Cultural Anthropology

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October 16 2016

### Making the Familiar Strange

There are many subcultures and different ways of participating in such cultures, however I will be discussing a ceremony that seems to be a universal, spanning across all types of people, ages, regions, status, etc. In fact, virtually every individual can participate in the ceremonies, so long as the certain type of ceremony is appropriate. There seem to very different reasons for the specific ceremony and activities within given the context, some it seems happen only for the sake of it happening.

The kind of ceremony that most persons are exposed to first involves a very dramatic age gap, and is obviously a right of passage in two senses. You see, the entire ceremony itself revolves around a specific child, how that child is chosen is determined by the day. Every individual attaches themselves to a concrete day of the year, and declares it as their own, proving their dominance of that day by performing such rituals. So the first right of passage is for the child of focus or child of attention, who has added symbolic meaning to the day. Though the other, more implicit growth is for the other children in the picture, who may not originally understand the purpose of the regularly occurring practice, which the adults responsible must expose them to. The adult responsible for both maintaining the wellbeing of and teaching the child of focus is also responsible for planning, scheduling, and organizing the ceremony (often decorating and preparing a space); informing the other adults responsible for rearing the other individual children which the child of focus knows (through educational institutions, play, or if the adults are familiar with each other before the children) or other adults the adult responsible knows and feels would like to participate in such a ceremony or is interested in the growth of the child (though the ceremony itself often shows no growth, in fact it's more often an impulse-driven, no self-control, celebratory act, at least for the child of attention); and finally in facilitating the ceremony goes according to plan; managing the others present for the event, providing all gifts expected at such ceremonies (like food, drinks, and gifts of thanks simply for

being present, as well as gifts to the child of focus); and maintaining general peace and comfort among all persons (children and adults) involved.

The type of ceremony most experience first follows a concrete schedule much more than any of the other common types. Since the ceremony revolves around the wishes of the child of focus, all the other children he or she wants present should be present (sometimes with their respective adult(s), sometimes without—that agreement is made between that adult and the adult who has acted as the ceremony leader). Typically, these ceremonies all contain a “free” time, where the children do what they wish to do, play, run, etc., though activities are also very common. Children being blindfolded, spun around, and given a bat or large stick to beat a large, hollow, oddly shaped and decorated (often after figures, toys, items) thing, hung in a tree. The children take turns (according to age, height, whoever gets there first—it changes from ceremony to ceremony depending on who organized it) beating the item until it eventually is broken, and bursts with little things to play and lots of sweet things to chew and suck on. Another constant of these ceremonies is the sweet baked good that is presented in a highly unusual way. It is supposed to take place in the dark, with multiple wax sticks of fire protruding from the item, meant to be eaten. These baked goods are always intricately and colorfully designed, the shapes and sizes differ one ceremony to the next as well. The crowd (children and adults) gather around an elevated flat surface, and begin to sing in a synchronized fashion a specific song directed toward the child of focus, and the good, with fire on top, is brought before the child in the dark while everyone chants. When the song is complete, the child uses his or her breath to extinguish the flames, ideally using only one exhale. Lights are allowed again, the wax sticks removed, and the sweet, often sponge-like food is distributed in pieces to all the children, and adults if they would like; no one is permitted to eat until the child of focus has done so. The last characteristic unique to this type of ceremony, is the gathering to give material praise to the child of attention. Everyone is expected to bring gifts for the child, whose day it is, in order to validate that fact. The child then opens the hidden gifts, carefully wrapped in colors and curly string or colorful bags with paper stuffed on top, often aggressively tearing through the meticulous work of covering such gifts. With everyone watching, often being informed periodically of who provided which gift, the child opens and reacts to every gift, one at a time, as the highlight or purpose of

the ceremony. It appears to be that the child has declared a day, and to prove the day is theirs (year after year) they expect attention and gifts, though the manifestations of those practices are often incredibly strange and confusing.