

In concluding this review, I cannot help but lament the lack of ethnographic material in this volume. The articles in *Beyond Goffman* consist largely of extended discussions which touch upon, often in thread-like fashion, some of the phenomena of which Goffman spoke. But there is very little attempt to assess these notions in the world of lived experience and there is only a minimal appreciation of the ethnographic Other. However, nowhere can one more productively utilize, assess, clarify and perhaps extend Goffman's work than in the realm of ethnographic inquiry.

References Cited

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The Hutterian People: Ritual and Rebirth in the Evolution of Communal Life

Peter H. Stephenson

Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1990. ix + 272 pp. \$43.75 (cloth)

Reviewer: David Scheffel

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On the anthropological map of the world, the Hutterites occupy a rather prominent place. Their long and well-documented history, their orderly designed colonies spread out over a large and easily accessible area, their anti-materialistic communalism, which contrasts so starkly with the surrounding society, have made the Hutterites a popular object of research among North American anthropologists. In Canada, Peter Stephenson belongs to the inner circle of the experts, looking back at a career that began almost 20 years ago under the guidance of John Bennett. This book is the synthesis of several strands of research devoted to the Hutterites and based on fieldwork conducted in Saskatchewan in the early and mid-1970s.

Dr. Stephenson sets out to address a topic which, he claims, has been neglected so far, namely, the role of ritual in the persistence and evolution of the Hutterian culture. He proceeds chronologically, devoting the first three chapters to a review of reasonably well-known historical facts concerning the origins and early lifestyle of the Hutterian Brethren in 16th-century Central Europe. The rest of the book introduces the reader to demographic, economic and religious aspects of modern Hutterite society in North America, with emphasis on several dominant symbols which link the past with the present and encapsulate the Hutterian "ethos" and "eidos."

To the extent that I could follow Dr. Stephenson's difficult prose, I see his book as an attempt at demonstrating parallels between the lives of individuals and the developmental process of the group that they belong to. In view of the prominent place of collectivism in the Hutterian culture, this concentration on the interplay between the self and the group makes good sense. So does the central claim that a careful analysis of Hutterite ritual reveals the structure of that interplay. This is nicely summed up in the way in which *rebirth* is articulated in the institution of adult baptism and the fis-

sion of colonies which have grown too large for their own good. Dr. Stephenson claims to have identified a correlation between the baptismal and the fission cycle whereby, in agreement with the collectivist ethos, the former is determined by the latter. This implies that candidates for baptism are dependent in their quest for individual (ritual) rebirth on the achievement of collective rebirth through the splitting up of their colony, and thus the satisfaction of the social needs of its members.

Unfortunately, this interesting argument does not come across very well. Dr. Stephenson proves in one clearly and warmly written "people chapter" (chap. 4) that he knows what constitutes good prose. But this is undone in the bulk of the text which is marred by excessively technical language. The model chosen to explain the role of ritual in the Hutterian culture, described as a combination of "systems perspective" with "cybernetics perspective," draws heavily on the natural sciences, and this does not help the clarity of the argument. Lost between graphs and diagrams, overshadowed by "holons," "equifinality," "self-simplification," "synergy" and *Forskalia tholoides*, the Hutterites themselves fade into the background, as if to underline the wisdom of the author's own warning that "numbers are the shadows which events cast, they are not the events themselves, nor should they play a part in the mystification of social life" (p. 202).

It is not for a reviewer to condemn an author for choosing a particular theoretical framework. But, in this case, where the theory does not help the reader, one wishes that Dr. Stephenson had tested some other anthropological approaches to ritual (and evolution) which have been employed since the mid-1970s, the period which seems to have engendered this particular model.

A Response to Scheffel

Respondent: Peter H. Stephenson
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In David Scheffel's review there are several comments to which I object. Scheffel suggests that I know how to write what he calls "good prose" illustrated by a "warmly written 'people chapter,'" but chides me for using graphs, diagrams and technical language in "the bulk of the text." That prose is characterized as "difficult," and Scheffel suggests the book is "marred" by it. Actually, until Chapter 5 (of an eight-chapter book), there is no technical language. In chapters on economy, demography and a proxemic analysis of ritual there are numbers and diagrams. It is hard to imagine adequately addressing these topics without resorting to a few charts, graphs and figures.

Scheffel also uses my own words to condemn the use of analytical prose and numbers ("numbers are the shadows which events cast, they are not the events themselves, nor should they play a part in the mystification of social life" [p. 202]). I am not opposed to using numbers or figures to understand complex events. The decontextualized quotation was meant to clarify my position on the debate between a Platonic conception of numbers as a priori logical categories and an approach which interprets numbers as a feature of cognition and culture—e.g., as symbolic for both researchers and their subjects (see Thomas Crump, *The Anthropology of Numbers* [Cambridge University Press, 1990]). That I favour the latter view implies much of how I hope demographers might interpret my work and it was "by way of warning off extreme