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CHAPTER

3 The Chronotopic and Sonotopic Work of Ritual 🔓

Kristina Wirtz

Abstract

Ritual is a good category with which to think about the spatiotemporal structuring of social action, because chronotopic work is required to enact (some aspect of) macrocosmic order in the microcosm of the interactional event. Chronotopic regimentation is evident in major ceremonies and brief moments of ritualized action alike. Three dimensions of chronotopic regimentation are: producing the ritual itself as an event, situating the ritual event in interdiscursive relations, and producing a trajectory for ritual performativity. Interplay across the three dimensions constitutes ritual action, which is inevitably tied to reflexivity over ritual *form*, including spatiotemporal frames. Ritual poetics and participation frameworks often are expressed in the distinctive soundscape or sonotope marking ritual time-space. Examples of ritual sonotopes in three distinct domains—politics, education, and religion—demonstrate how sonotopic organization draws reflexive attention to ritual forms and drives ritual's chronotopic work.

Keywords: chronotope, sonotope, metapragmatic regimentation, participation framework, ritual poetics, reflexivity, education, Latin America, United States, Cuba

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(1)

Chief Justice John Roberts:
> I will execute the office of president to the United States faithfully

President Barack Obama:
> I will execute (nods at Roberts)

Roberts: the off—*faithfully*—

Obama: (smiles)

Roberts: the office of president [[to the United States

Obama: [[the office of president to the United States
                                    faithfully

—Excerpt from presidential oath of office outside of Capitol, January 20, 2009

(2)

"I'm sittin' **crisscross applesauce**, **clap**-cla:p **clap**.
I've got my **eyes** on the **teacher** and my **hands** in my **lap**."

—Kindergarten "transition-to-carpet" rhyme recited in unison, led by teacher each
time children gather to sit together on the carpet in front of her, Michigan,
2013–2014 school year

(3)

"Obbi Eleggua, Obbi Eleggua!"
> (Coconut-shell oracle cast: shells land three down and one up)

"Okana. With whom, with Kristina?"
> (Coconut-shell oracle cast: shells land two down and two up)

"Yes."

(to Kristina) "It must have to do with your trip."
(Question is posed whether it has to do with Kristina's upcoming trip)
> (Coconut-shell oracle cast: shells land one down and three up;
> confirmation cast repeats this result)

"Yes."
> —Excerpt from coconut divination performed by a ritual specialist to close a
> drumming ceremony, Santiago de Cuba, May 10, 2000

3.1 Introduction

TO approach ritual as an enactment of (some aspect of) macrocosmic order in the microcosm of the interactional event (see Stasch 2011a) is to highlight the chronotopic or spatiotemporal work of connecting any particular ritual event into a series as a recognizable type and performatively entailing some present or future effect on the world as a result. As the opening epigraphs suggest, ritual action may be momentous or mundane, complex or spare. It often produces a distinctive sonic order, evident in ritual poetics and in participant orientations to listening, even when the performative effects of a given ritual may not always be obvious to or agreed upon by all participants. Sometimes, too, ritual action fails. Regardless, spatiotemporal regimentation is evident in how a ritual unfolds, giving form to the ritual time–space itself and pointing beyond its time–space to relevant histories, present realities, and possible futures.

Rituals emerge into eventfulness through this simultaneously "retrospective and prospective" poetic and metapragmatic process (Senft and Basso 2009: 1), in which sound is often important in organizing the experience of unfolding ritual time and space. The concept of *sonotope* describes how the regimentation of sound, in its production and perception, contributes to ritual chronotopes. In considering examples of ritual in political, educational, and religious domains, I attend to three dimensions of chronotopic regimentation through ritual action, including ritual sonotope: producing the ritual itself as an event, making the ritual event recognizable and evaluating it by situating it in interdiscursive relations, and producing some kind of trajectory of the ritual's impact beyond the event, often recognizable as itself a chronotope. While

chronotopic regimentation is hardly unique to ritual, it mobilizes heightened reflexivity in ritual, such that, as Stasch (2011a: 159) succinctly puts it, "ritual seems to be action about the organization of action itself."

To understand ritual as "action about the organization of action" that dynamically figures macrocosmic order in its own (grand or minute) microcosm, it is necessary to consider how rituals unfold as events, shaping (and sounding) their time-spaces, and how they index times and locations beyond themselves. These indexical cues draw reflexive attention to interdiscursive comparisons that, in turn, drive the recognition of ritual events, their boundaries, norms, and exceptions. Ritual metapragmatic regimentation thus foments metadiscourses about rituals, in which interdiscursive comparisons drive evaluations of a given instance and, too, of its relation to genre.[1] Consider, for example, how the ↳ US presidential oath of office (an excerpt of which appears in epigraph 1) is prescribed in Article 2, Section 1 of the US Constitution, the last paragraph of which specifies:

> Before he enter on the Execution of his Office, he shall take the following Oath or Affirmation:—"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will faithfully execute the Office of President of the United States, and will to the best of my Ability, preserve, protect and defend the Constitution of the United States."

The emphasis is on the exact wording of the oath, allowing variance only in selecting between "swear" or "affirm," while apparently leaving all other aspects of the oath's administration uncommented on. It is understandable, then, that President Obama hesitated when Chief Justice Roberts departed from the Constitution's wording by moving the word "faithfully" to the end of a clause. Indeed, the entire short but highly public ritual was judged doubtful enough that Obama and Roberts repeated it the following day at the White House.[2] Obama's Chief Counsel Greg Craig issued a statement read by the White House press secretary to the press assembled to witness the event (itself a ritualized preamble to the oath-taking ritual):

> We believe that the oath of office was administered effectively and that the President was sworn in appropriately yesterday. But the oath appears in the Constitution itself. And out of an abundance of caution, because there was one word out of sequence, Chief Justice Roberts administered the oath a second time.

It is evident that reflexive attention—anxiety, even—over the intertextual fidelity of the ritual-as-event to its constitutional model generates additional vectors reaching out indexically to create spatial and temporal relations: to the accreted tradition of presidential oath-taking, to the scope of allowable innovations and their entailments, and to possible consequences of performative success—or failure. Conservative Fox News anchor Chris Wallace was gleeful in "wondering whether or not Barack Obama in fact is the president of the United States" ("Obama retakes oath of office after Roberts' mistake" 2009). Various commentators also pondered who to blame for the "flub," whether it was intentional or at least symptomatic of political antagonism, and how Obama's or Roberts's public images would be affected—all in the context of "Birther" attacks on President Obama's legitimacy.[3] In the same article, CNN reported a *New York Post* headline characterizing the event with reference to its principals (presumably Roberts and Obama): "Oafs of Office." Rather than concentrating only on Roberts's word out of sequence, some commentators pointed out that the oath-taking had started out rough, with Obama and Roberts briefly talking over each other instead of alternating in repeating each phrase: ↳

(4)   Roberts: I, Barack Hussein Obama   [[do solemnly swear
           Obama: [[I, Barack (nod)
                        I, Barack Hussein Obama do solemnly swear

The ritual at this moment sounded of disorder instead of orderly turn-taking. The ritual form—both its denotational fidelity to the original and its poetics of orderly dyadic repetition—was implicated in

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discussions over its efficacy, the tradition itself, and evaluations of the chief justice, the new president, and their political relationship. Four years later, President Obama's oath-taking with Chief Justice Roberts for his second term again involved a ceremony "in private" at the White House and repeated "in public" on the steps of the Capitol (albeit for different reasons) and generated considerable comparisons with the 2009 events in the news media and on social media—as did Roberts's subsequent, apparently smooth, administration of the presidential oath to Presidents Trump and Biden.

This and my other examples, previewed in the chapter epigraphs, illustrate how ritual action provokes a metapragmatic focus on *form* as what drives performative efficacy, and in particular how ritual actions dynamically figure spatiotemporal orders. In all three cases, key aspects of ritual poetics emerge in the ritually produced sonotope or temporally unfolding sound-space. In this chapter I will use *sonotope* to refer not just to the organization of sounds, such as the alternation versus overlap of two voices in the oath-taking or of categories such as noise and silence, but also the participation framework of listening to and reporting on those sounds—and expressive silences. I suggest that sonotope is an important manifestation of ritual form that mobilizes ongoing reflexivity, including metadiscourses, about the performative work of ritual (in general, as well as of *particular* rituals).[4]

In this chapter, I work across examples of rituals in three distinct domains to show how the chronotopic and sonotopic regimentation of ritual forms produces a variety of performative effects emphasizing both fidelity to form and possibilities for innovation. I give special attention to the sonic form of rituals, in how they organize the production of sound and forms of listening that have regimenting effects in and beyond the ritual as time-space. My political example concerns how anxieties over oaths of office provoke debate about ritual efficacy centered on the key role of witnessing (as a moral evaluative listening role). President Obama's "do-over" in 2009 creatively adapted the ritual in the name of fidelity to tradition. Oaths of political office have also been invoked in recent controversies over patriotic duty versus sedition in the US Congressional January 6th Committee hearings. My classroom examples derive from my research in dual-language classrooms, in which teachers taught students to participate in numerous short interaction rituals as part of socializing them to be quiet, attentive listeners. These rituals gave a routinized sonic and embodied, physical structure to the school day through inculcating highly reflexive attention to proper forms of participation, as evidenced by children's playful and socially strategic reinterpretation of some

classroom rituals in games, such ↳ as "the quiet game." My religious examples come from my research on divination rituals in Cuban Santería (Regla de Ocha), in which obsessive attention to proper form is what affords the world-changing potential of divination to solve pressing personal problems through spiritual intervention. Listening to the spirits and deities involves transducing divination results into utterances that report their "speech."

I have briefly discussed my political example in the introduction. I introduce my education example in the next section on ritual poetics and my religious example in a following section on chronotope. The rest of the chapter revisits each example in more detail. In all three cases, reflexive attention to ritual forms drives the tripartite chronotopic work of entextualizing and contextualizing rituals as "events" that cite previous ritual events, thereby creating frameworks of expectation, and performatively entailing the impact of a ritual microcosm on the broader macrocosm.

3.2 Ritual Poetics and Dynamic Figuration

Although ritual can be used as a noun (including here), I am less interested in reifying the category than in emphasizing its adjectival function, in describing emergent processual qualities of some kinds of actions and interactions, even when these are brief moments of ritualization rather than full-blown ceremonial occasions (see Tavárez 2014). So what qualities does ritual-as-adjective foreground? Much has been said about the poetic density that characterizes unfolding ritual action (Senft and Basso 2009; Stasch 2011a; Tomlinson 2014; Tavárez 2014; Yelle 2013). Formal poetic features, including parallelism and the use of marked, contrastive registers, combine with pragmatic structures, including shifts in voicing, bodily movements and postures, and in participation roles and frameworks, to set some stretch of activity apart, in contrast to other activity in which it is embedded. Concatenations of features, typically involving multiple semiotic modalities and often implicating distinctive spatiotemporalities, sensory regimes, and participation frameworks, can serve as metapragmatic cues that "something" (a ritual event) is happening. Tomlinson (2014) describes that "something" as ritual motion, giving shape to the event and its trajectories beyond itself. Metapragmatic framing not only accompanies but can precede and follow what thereby emerges as an event of ritual. As Silverstein (2009) argues, these processes of entextualization not only make unfolding ritual action recognizable as a self-contained event, but aid in its iterability, its reportability, and its "nomic" character as ontically apart, on the plane of myth or universal law.

From the perspective of participants and analysts alike, ritual events (and ritual as a descriptor of action) remain subject to ongoing, and even contradictory interpretations regarding what constitutes efficacious form, according to diverse ideological fields and sociohistorical contexts. On the one hand, ritual can be approached as heightening reflexive attention and even being creative in producing social transformations,

p. 66 and on ↳ the other hand, ritual can be understood as repetition or even routinization that stifles reflection, produces discipline, inculcates habits, and even enacts social control. These are, ultimately, issues of ritual's chronotopic work as an event reaching beyond itself. In one famous debate, Stanley Tambiah (1979) emphasizes ritual's open-ended performativity, whereas Maurice Bloch (1974) emphasizes ritual's coercive power. More recent scholarship has nuanced these admittedly polarized interpretations (Sutton 2004; Senft and Basso 2009). For example, Urban (2001) suggests that different metacultural frames, whether of tradition or innovation, shape the work a given ritual can accomplish, Shoaps (2002) traces the impact of differing ideologies on the tropes for entextualizing ritual speech, and Wilf (2012) describes "rituals of creativity" in modern jazz education to critique the assumption that repetition and imitation stifle creativity.

Consider now a small but significant classroom interactional ritual (epigraph 2), one I observed almost every time I visited a particular kindergarten teacher's classroom during the 2013–2014 academic year. The teacher taught the class the rhyme early in the school year to guide the class's transition from sitting at tables around the room to sitting together, facing her, on a small carpet laid out in the front of the classroom. She would initiate reciting the rhyme in an animated, almost chanting voice, sometimes slowing down and heightening the intonational contour of the initial "I::'m:: si::ttin:: … " as an invitation for students to join in what would become a loud, enthusiastic unisonance (see Silverstein 2009: 274). Most children would generally join in at least for the three quick, syncopated handclaps. The effect was to drown out all the other noises of children scraping back chairs, moving across the room, chatting, and negotiating where on the carpet to sit. Recited as or after children sat on the carpet, the rhyme described the bodily attitude to assume: crossed legs, clapping hands then folded onto laps, body in alignment with all the other students, facing toward the teacher.

Even such a simple ditty demonstrates a certain poetic density that sets it apart from other classroom activities: laminations of iambic rhythm and parallelism of the couplet's lines ending in "clap" and "lap," along with the loud, song-like voice quality, the clapping, and the alignment of denotation, sound, and

bodily action (saying "clap" while clapping; actually sitting "crisscross applesauce," etc.). Inculcated as a daily classroom routine through explicit teaching and frequent repetition, the ritual did have a remarkable, immediate performative effect: as it concluded (usually with a second round), children who moments earlier had been scattered noisily around the room would (mostly) be seated with crossed legs on the carpet, grinning with pleasure, and looking expectantly up at the teacher. The interactional ritual, one of many I observed teachers to use, is catchy: numerous online videos present variations. In its small but important way, it changes the world by modeling in the ritual microcosm a broader aspect of student socialization to school, which is to perform silent collective attentiveness to the teacher on command.

Silverstein (2004, 2014) describes this kind of interactional modeling of social relations as *dynamic figuration*, where a figure is a compound representation constructed out of multiple sign relations and offering a reflexive interpretation of itself as socially meaningful. A figure can be a particular person or

social type or something more ↳ abstract and relational, such as a kin relationship or cosmological principle. To speak of *figuration* instead of its product, *figures*, is to highlight its unfolding, open-ended, dynamic quality. By participating in the classroom transition ritual, students enact what the teacher wishes to instill as a classroom norm for proper student bodily comportment during teacher-centered instruction on the carpet. Being seated cross-legged, hands in lap in unison with all the other students is a dynamic figuration of a well-controlled classroom whose students are "ready to learn," at least according to a widespread ideology of learning as filling willing receptacles with knowledge. Enacting the ritual produces (or at a minimum is directed toward producing) particular figurations of the student body (as an individual and collective entity) in relation to the teacher and the goals of school. Dynamic figuration is how rituals enact "a picture made real in the here-and-now—of that which it accomplishes" (Silverstein 2004: 627). That "picture" can of course involve sound and other sensory modalities, usually in relation to each other, as with lyrics that parallel bodily comportment. The production of a ritual sonotope is particularly evident in my examples and so dynamic figuration through sound is my particular focus.

To illustrate with another example, the ritual of administering the presidential oath of office is a dynamic figuration of how a duly elected individual "faithfully" assumes the executive powers of president in a peaceful, democratic transfer of power. Notice that the figures in this ritual include not only the oath-administrator (the chief justice of the Supreme Court) and oath-taker (the incoming elected president) but also the US Constitution which is expressly referred to in the oath and which provides the exact, required text of the oath.

An additional participation role entailed by the ritual as a "public" event is that of "witness," which turns out to be a complex and compound role, as figured by the ritual itself. Witnessing is a relational vector that extends the spatiotemporal reach of a ritual, as it implies a future retrospective from which to report on and evaluate the ritual's world-changing efficacy. The gathered multitudes witnessed the presidential oath via broadcast, if not in person. Even the oath-taking ceremonies in the White House invited the press corps to stand in for the public and to record and broadcast the event. The resulting photographs and videos show VIP witnesses (family members, political figures) closely monitoring the ritual each time, while modeling the (smiling, proud, attentive) "witness" role for the broader viewing public.

When this solemn promise is taken as an "oath" (as opposed to an "affirmation"), God is hailed as an omniscient witness akin perhaps to witnessing entities such as the American public, the global viewing public, and even "history" itself. Obama chose to take the oath on a Bible (the first time in 2009 and both times in 2013) and to add the optional "So help me God" at the end of the oath each time, thereby expressly invoking God's witnessing presence—and producing additional indexical cascades pointing beyond the ritual event itself, to its historical and (quasi-)religious significance. Each time, Obama selected a Bible with historical significance: the Bible President Lincoln had sworn his oath of office on; a Bible Martin Luther King Jr. had carried when traveling; his wife Michelle Obama's family Bible, materializing family

connections back ↳ into the times of slavery and thus the unique achievement of his election. These choices

underscore Obama's presidential oath-taking as a historic moment standing out in the tradition it continued and adding poignancy to the 2009 gaffe.

Witnessing, as one example of dynamic figuration through ritual participation frameworks, can take on varied interdiscursive importance in other kinds of rituals. For example, Silverstein (2009) describes private rituals that are not directly reportable, such as the Kiksht "vision quest" and Worora naming events, but which can be indirectly referred to by the single individual who experiences them; in such cases, judgments of ritual efficacy are more clearly a product of interdiscursive relations involving that single witness, rather than emerging in witnessing the ritual event itself. These limiting cases make the more general point that ritual poetics and dynamic figuration, including in participation frameworks and sonotopic effects, can extend beyond the event of ritual itself and thus contribute to its chronotopic work. Notice that in Silverstein's examples a ritual's only sonic traces reside in indirect discourse about it. In contrast, my three examples foreground the sonotope that marks each ritual event as it happens, as well as echoing in the ritual's interdiscursive framing and performative entailments. It is the attention to form, including sonotopic form, that these aspects of ritual (and talk about ritual) require that undergirds the chronotopic work of ritual.

3.3 Chronotopic Work

M. M. Bakhtin coined the concept of chronotope, or time-space, to describe how literary texts create distinctive configurations of time and space that organize the worlds in which characters interact, the perspectives on their actions, and their possible trajectories.[5] Calling his approach a "historical poetics," he identified characteristic chronotopes to define stylistic periods across the history of the novel, always working between literary texts and the broader sociohistorical concerns they express (Bakhtin 1981: 84; see also Holquist 2002: 108). For example, he traced a self-consciously modernist chronotope focused on an interplay of perspectives on psychological interiorities and their development—a chronotope characterized by experiments with, for example, how the speech and thoughts of others are reported. Although much of Bakhtin's effort went into describing literary chronotopic motifs—"the road," "the castle," "the salon"— he also showed how chronotopes dialogically interact with one another within and across texts and between text and reader, in keeping with his situated and dialogical approach to language.

p. 69 Subsequent linguistic anthropological work on chronotope has demonstrated how chronotopes emerge in all kinds of discourse, including in ritual events and the social interactions in which they are embedded, through interactional processes and resulting dynamic figurations like those described in the previous section.[6] The building blocks of chronotope are the indexical function inherent in all signs and especially apparent in the interplay of deictic markers of place, time, entity, and relation that create, contextually anchor, and connect moments of unfolding social action (Pritzker and Perrino 2021). Chronotopic work produces entextualized chunks of social life that can be examined as events, compared to other events and event-types, and evaluated and thereby calibrated to one another (Nakassis 2018, 2020; Silverstein 2005; Wirtz 2014: 18–22). Chronotopes accomplish such calibrations through their dialogical interactions, including chronotopic juxtapositions, alignments, shifts, and scaling relationships such as embedding (Agha 2007; Blommaert 2015, 2017; Perrino 2007; Wirtz 2016). Chronotopes, in short, organize space and time together as the "ground essential for the showing-forth, the representability of events" (Bakhtin 1981: 250). Chronotopes holistically ground our experience such that "time, as it were, thickens, takes on flesh, becomes visible; likewise, space becomes charged and responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history" (Bakhtin 1981: 84).

To illustrate how dialogical interactions across chronotopes include but exceed simple relationships of past-present-future, consider rituals in the religious domain of my third epigraph, which is Cuban Santería

(Regla de Ocha). "Ocha" and "oricha" refer to the deities (also called *santos*) to whom practitioners are dedicated and with whom they must communicate. Divinations are essential religious work in Ocha, both as standalone rituals and as embedded in other ritual work in order for the orichas to advise and direct their devotees. Divination tools, whether coconut shells, cowries, or the tools for the Ifá divination, are referred to as the "mouth" of the oricha. The simplest divination method, called the *Obbi*, uses five rounded pieces of coconut shell: four pieces are cast while one sits as "witness." The coconut-shell witness mirrors the important participatory role of human witnesses, priests who watch the proceedings, who may contribute to interpreting the divination results, and who can later attest to proper ritual protocols and to divination results as reportable speech.

Once preparatory prayers and invocations are complete, the divination itself unfolds in dyadic turns, in which the Ocha priest poses a yes/no question then casts the four coconut shells to respond in their pattern of falling shell-up or shell-down, permitting five possible responses. The responses canonically represent "yes," "no," "maybe yes," "good fortune," and "bad fortune/the grave is open." The priest conducting the divination, alone or in consultation with other participants, recites the necessary prayers and commands in

an esoteric ritual register called Lucumí, understood to be the "tongue ↳ of the oricha." The priest poses the actual question in Spanish, calls out the resulting pattern of shells by its Lucumí name (for example, *okana* for three shells facing down), then interprets this result into a fuller "answer" that can subsequently be verified by asking the oricha, "Is this correct?" and reading the resulting pattern of shells.

In its dyadic question-and-answer format and its use of Lucumí, a coconut-shell divination produces a ritual chronotope of human-deity co-presence, in which Ocha priests call the orichas to speak, and the orichas answer their devotees in the course of the interaction. Practitioners might say that the orichas—and more generally, the spirits who saturate the living world—are *always* potentially present, but divination rituals hail them as immediate conversational participants whose utterances can be witnessed and verified (and who, in turn, witness and hold us responsible for our actions). The Obbi is associated with the oricha Eleggua (hailed in the first line of my excerpt), but other orichas can be hailed through Eleggua, so that the divination sometimes sounds like hearing one side of a family phone call (akin to "can you put Mom on now?"), as the divining priest may call out to a particular oricha who is to answer a question *through* Eleggua and the Obbi.[7]

My brief summary illustrates the first of three aspects of the chronotopic work of ritual more generally: how rituals set themselves apart from surrounding action as distinct *kinds* of events, their poetics marking a chronotopic shift toward the nomic that contrasts with the surrounding, everyday chronotope of lived reality, while also invoking and providing a model for lived reality. The divination ritual manifests the co-presence of humans, orichas, and spirits as tangible, dyadic conversation, mediated by the divination tools and interpretations of results. The spirits and orichas may always be immanent in the world, as the divination demonstrates by "sounding" their voices. At the same time, the divination priest's use of Lucumí, as the deities' preferred language, and of the coconut-shell oracle cast in its special place before an altar as audible materializations of their speech, distinguishes the ritual chronotope through its sonotope, or regimentation of sounds and silences. The dense and distinctive ritual poetics of the divination ritual, in its metapragmatic framing of divination results as oricha "speech" (see Wirtz 2018), produces a distinctive chronotope beyond what is evident in the kindergarten transition ritual. In doing so the divination ritual can help us distinguish the sonotopic set-apartness accomplished in the kindergarten ritual too, in which word and world are brought briefly into alignment as children chant themselves into cross-legged "quiet bodies" oriented toward the teacher.

The second aspect of chronotopic work in ritual is how rituals interdiscursively index their situatedness in longer sequences that entail "types": a given ritual stands in some kind of relation as "token" to (or instance of) that type. This is a comparative "chronotopic envelope" (per Silverstein 2005) that historically

contextualizes a ritual event, permitting reflexivity about, for example, its relative fidelity to tradition or ↳

innovativeness—as well as setting up expectations about what its performative effect should be. Silverstein (1993; see also elaboration in Nakassis 2020) identifies two kinds of interdiscursive calibration, reportive and nomic calibration, as key to interdiscursive chronotopic work. Reportive calibration describes the metapragmatic framing of relationships between instances of discourse and reports (quotes, cites, repetitions) of them, including as evidenced in how given rituals provoke (and respond to) metadiscourses about them—for example, in the media frenzy over mistakes in administering the presidential oath of office and the subsequent press communiqué explaining the redo. And the poetic structuring of divination results (shells facing up or down) interpreted into utterances, an example of reportive calibration within the ritual event, also reaches out beyond the event, as retrospective reports of "what the orichas said." In my excerpt, one priest, with whom I worked closely, interpreted a negative result as related to my upcoming travel, a suggestion confirmed by the subsequent casting of the oracle (and reported as "yes"). When, a week later, I did indeed encounter unexpected problems with my travel plans, that same priest was quick to remind me that the orichas had warned me in the divination.

My examples thus far also demonstrate nomic calibration, meaning that the event of ritual is metapragmatically framed as corresponding to an ideal type transcending the trappings of any given instance and instead invoking a universal or mythic frame—"some other ontic realm," as Silverstein says (see Silverstein 1993: 52–53). The nomic calibration of rituals promotes an understanding of their necessary performative effects: to swear the oath of office is to take on that office; to carry out a divination is to receive divine communications; to participate in the kindergarten transition rhyme is to make the transition. Individual instances of these rituals may be judged (from at least some perspectives) to have failed without calling the ideal into question.

Finally, the third aspect of chronotopic work in rituals is how they produce trajectories toward future action, effecting transformation beyond the ritual event itself. That is, a chronotope is produced out of the indexical iconicities between ritual microcosm and social macrocosm. This chronotope emerges in relation to the chronotopes characterizing the ritual as an event and in relation to its interdiscursive situatedness. For example, to describe what divination rituals performatively accomplish, at the most abstract level, we might understand Martin Holbraad's (2012) concept of *motility* as a chronotope produced by divinations in the intertwined religious field of Cuban Ifá (his case) and Ocha (mine). Holbraad proposes motility, open-ended motion, as an alternative to revelation, where (an already existing) truth is revealed. Instead, the divinatory regimentation of reality is one of truth-*making*, in which divination creates the future through an alchemy of imaginative possibility made forceful through spiritual energy. The operative semiotic ideology of performativity means that the orichas' communications, once uttered, become forces shaping the world. It was not so much that the orichas were warning me of future travel problems as that they were putting me on notice that evading my ritual responsibilities to them (as delineated in a subsequent part of the coconut

divination ritual) would have consequences. In this logic, my response to the ↳ divination result (future actions taken or not, subsequent to the ritual) is what produced my canceled flight out of Cuba, as a chronotopic trajectory mobilized by the ritual.

Although analytically distinguishable, these three dimensions of chronotopic work in and through ritual are not functionally separate; the same kinds of semiotic processes produce them in relation to one another. In my examples, and doubtless many other cases, multisensorial aural semiosis (audition in relation to other senses; see Connor 2004; Howes 2019) is key to ritual chronotopic work. Sonotopes and other sensory modalities contribute to chronotopes in their immersive shaping of spatiotemporal experience, in "thickening" time and "charging" space through participation in and poetics of sounding, silencing, and listening (Feld 1982; Ochoa Gautier 2014; Samuels et al. 2010).

In the next three sections, I briefly revisit each of my three examples to trace how the dynamic figurations enacted in ritual action regiment spatiotemporal relations to produce performative effects. In doing so, ritual action draws reflexive attention to its poetic and participatory forms, including what I have referred

to as sonotopes, the multisensory-aural manifestations of ritual poetics and participation. Sonotopes thus help realize the chronotopic work of ritual.

3.4 "Oafs" of Office

The constitutionally mandated presidential oath of office illustrates ritual "action about the organization of action," in which the oath-taking models a peaceful post-election transfer of office to the duly elected office-holder, whose inaugural act as president is (indeed, must be) to take the oath. I suggest that oath-taking produces a chronotopic motif of orderly progression across all three dimensions of its chronotopic work: the event itself models orderly progression, as does the historical progression of successive presidential oaths of office invoked every time a new presidential term begins. And the performative effect of the ritual, enacted through a participation framework of witnessing, is to project that orderly progression forward, such that the formal taking of office in effect seals off the office-holder from any counterclaims against his (it has thus far always been *his*) legitimacy in holding that office, despite the political and legal battles of the moment. Chronotopes do not emerge in splendid isolation, but rather through dialogical processes, juxtaposing multiple chronotopic possibilities. In this case, the chronotopic motif of orderly progression works against its alter, a chronotope of uncertainty born of disorder. This chronotope hovers, specter-like, as an interdiscursive "shadow" (Irvine 1996; Das 2021) that requires the ongoing dynamic figuration of orderly progression to stave it off.

The chronotopic motif of orderly progression is evident *both* in the aspects of the ritual steeped in what Urban (2001) calls a "metaculture of tradition," in which exact replication is prioritized, *and* in the variations, innovations, and sometimes necessary adaptations over seventy-five instances as of President

Biden's January 20, 2021 oath. ↳ The improvisational quality of some instances—notably, those driven by the death, assassination, or resignation of a sitting president—balances on the knife's edge of the juxtaposed chronotopes of orderly progression and political uncertainty, modeled in ritual poiesis. The image of then-Vice President Lyndon Johnson taking the oath aboard Air Force One to become president in the immediate aftermath of President John F. Kennedy's assassination immediately comes to mind. Its administration by a woman (US District Court Judge Sarah Hughes, as the closest available federal judge) remains unique, equaled, perhaps, by the emergency oath-taking of Calvin Coolidge, administered by his father (a Vermont notary public), upon news of President Warren Harding's death the previous day. In that case, the oath-taking ceremony was repeated a few weeks later with a US federal judge in Washington, DC, because of legal doubts about a state rather than federal official as oath-administrator (Arbelbide 2000). If anything, a historical overview of the seventy-five instances of presidential oath-taking to date heightens an awareness of the stakes of a metaculture of tradition, interdiscursively linking each presidency back to the Constitution so as to preserve the constitutional order despite the stochastic surprises of human life and history. A risk of ritual failure always lurks, in tension with the seeming inevitability of the unfolding ritual event-chronotope itself, dependent as it is on credibly enacting the important details of its poetic and participant structuring.

Metapragmatic attention to form in ritual can as readily provoke anxiety as allay it, even when it boils down to thirty-five words. Just who says these words—and who witnesses their enunciation, in what location—has varied considerably. It was once common for the oath to be posed as a question, as in "do you, [name], solemnly swear …," to which the president would simply reply, "I do" (with or without then invoking God), but the more common form since the broadcast age has been elaborated into a poetics of dialogical intensification (Urban 1988) in which the president repeats back each phrase after it is spoken by the administrator of the oath. When performed well, the oath-taking unfolds as a model of orderly progression. Recall the interactional "hiccups" during the January 20, 2009, oath-taking that necessitated a "do-over": some commentators reported that Obama and Roberts had not shared a plan for phrasing and timing,

leading to the overlapping speech (cast as Obama "interrupting" Roberts) that observers criticized for marring the solemn occasion and perhaps even causing Chief Justice Roberts's gaffe in leaving out "faithfully." While other historical errors in the recitation of the oath have been noted, none seems to have provoked the concern or even derision of this one. And some witnesses were quick to ascribe the interactional imperfections to characterological defects of those involved (recall the *Post*'s "oafs").[8]

While the US Constitution specifies an oath of office for the president only the third clause of Article 4, "The Supreme Law," does state that members of Congress, state legislatures, and "all executive and judicial

Officers, both of the United States and of the ↳ several States, shall be bound by Oath or Affirmation, to support this constitution." Whether oath (a religious pledge before God) or affirmation (a non-religious pledge of honor), it is a legally as well as morally binding ritual. Even as oath-taking cements an individual's role as office-holder, it also anchors retrospective judgments about that individual's performance in upholding their oath. Vice President Mike Pence famously defended his refusal to interrupt the congressional certification of the 2020 election in a letter that invoked the US Constitution numerous times, including his own oath of office, writing: "My oath to support and defend the Constitution constrains me from claiming unilateral authority to determine which electoral votes should be counted and which should not" (Shafer 2021).

Instead, the specter of extreme social disorder and uncertainty was unleashed in the January 6th attack on the Capitol. Against this chaotic backdrop, Pence's words also clearly, if indirectly, critique President Trump's unprecedented challenge to the peaceful transfer of power as a potential violation of his oath of office. The Congressional January 6th Committee's hearings over the summer of 2021 brought renewed attention to the performative legal and moral force of oaths of office. For example, committee witness Matthew Polinger, who had resigned as deputy national security advisor to the President on January 6th to protest the attack and President Trump's role in fomenting it and refusal to intervene to stop it, explained his decision as a moral response to the seriousness of his own oath of office, saying, "we take that oath before God; we take that oath before our families" (Select Committee to Investigate the January 6th Attack on the United States Capitol 2021). In turn, in a closing statement on behalf of the committee, Representative Adam Kinzinger (a Republican representing Illinois's 16th congressional district) concluded that "oaths matter." In each of these invocations, the oath of office stood as a model-in-microcosm of the chronotope of orderly progression reaching back to the Constitution, and thus of American democracy itself, staring into the abyss of political chaos.

Moreover, oath-taking implicates the honor of the oath-taker, staked before the witnesses who matter most (family and God, for Polinger). I have already described witnessing as a silent, attentive listening during the ritual—a key participant role in the sonotope of oath-taking. Witnessing also drives interdiscursive and future-oriented trajectories of the oath-taking ritual by enacting a *witnessing perspective* on the performance, aligning those present at the live event with those at later junctures in the interdiscursive chain of witness reports. The moral force of the oath derives from its having been witnessed, and witnessing thus drives metacultural attention to (and sometimes problematizes) the chronotopic motif of orderly progression.

Clearly, the metadiscursive attention to oaths of office contributes to a public discursive field concerned with challenges to the nomic calibration of the US as a representative democracy and with reasserting its foundations through a dense web of public rituals. The oath of office is just one emblematic node. It serves as an endpoint to the electoral process that begins with ritual acts of voting, continues with ritual acts of vote-counting and vote-count certification, and culminates in the "peaceful transfer of power" through

which office-holders and their political viewpoints may change, but the ↳ overall structure of representation and governance should stand eternal. In this vast, elaborate apparatus, even brief, rote ceremonies such as the oath of office play an essential role as action about the structure of action, forcing

back the chronotope of uncertainty by iterating yet again a chronotope of orderly progression that all can witness.

3.5 The "Quiet Game"

I want to return to the issue of reflexivity in a case quite different from the spotlight of national attention focused on evaluating every aspect of a public ritual like the presidential oath-taking. Ubiquitous classroom interaction rituals such as "crisscross applesauce" might also be described as performatively enacting a chronotope of orderly progression, in transitioning a classroom of squirmy kindergarteners from their desks to sitting together facing the teacher on the carpet. But the very pervasiveness of such rituals might seem more like mind-numbing routine, inculcating habits as part of enacting disciplinary control (per Foucault), when compared to stimulating lively critical discourse reflecting on the state of American democracy and the character of those elected to its offices.

On one occasion during the first week of school in the dual-language public elementary school I was studying, I observed the teacher leading the class through three rounds of "crisscross applesauce" to "settle them down," as I described it in my notes. Here the stakes are not just the immediate need to "control" one's class, but also how such interaction rituals contribute to a long-term socialization shaping children into students. Indeed, short interaction rituals like the "crisscross applesauce" transition-to-carpet rhyme were from the first day of school ubiquitous tools for socializing children to classroom routines and behavioral expectations. I argue that attending to their sonotopic dimensions shows how they stimulate heightened reflexivity to their poiesis among students (as well as the teachers who so strategically deploy them) and through those to the "macrocosm" of relationships between children and adults, students and teachers, into which they are being socialized. I will first describe another common interaction ritual of the school that produces silent attentiveness in its alternations of synchronized noise and expectant silence, and then discuss how this sonotope becomes the focus of metapragmatic play in a kindergarten game.

The central role of listening practices in school communicative ecologies and the ideologies of education they enact is easily taken for granted. Teachers and other school staff dedicated a lot of time and effort, early in the year, to establishing attention-getting routines. From almost the first moments of kindergarten, the teachers directly explained and modeled their expectations for children to attend to them, even (and especially) given that the language each teacher used (Spanish or English, in the school's dual-immersion program) was not familiar to all students. Teachers used a variety of multimodal cues—music and songs, visual material, gesture and bodily comportment, including seating children together on a carpet facing the teacher during direct instruction—to help gain ↳ and maintain their students' attention. The sonic environment of the school was structured by the chime of the office bell indicating fixed start and end times, as well as being punctuated by recess whistles, beeping timers, and interactional routines by which adults sought to capture and direct children's attention. Children's immediate responses to these hailings often had their own distinctive sonic character, and their degree of compliance could be heard in the volume and synchronization of sound or silence. Throughout the year, the teachers policed signs of children's attention or inattention during direct instruction, for example by praising one student for sitting quietly with hands in their lap while calling on students distracting each other to move apart.

Metapragmatic evaluation contrasting "noise" and "quiet" in sonic and bodily signs was thus a key aspect of children's socialization through interactional rituals. One widespread routine, in use from the first day of kindergarten, invited a rhythmic clapped response in a call-and-response routine producing unisonance that amplified the sound demanding attention, in order to produce silent attentiveness as its culmination and goal:

(5)

Notice that this Spanish-language routine works very effectively at a completely pragmatic level, due to its poetic structure, consisting of three "rounds" of verbal command and non-verbal clapped response, with a neat transduction of "uno, dos, tres" into a series of one, two, then three claps. Even English monolinguals could almost immediately participate correctly. It was also clear that children (and adults) participated ↳ enthusiastically in the clapping response, which usually added participants and volume and became more synchronized as the chant progressed from one to three. One less obvious aspect of the poetic structure is how each clapped response drew participants' attention to anticipating the next command, creating a brief silence of anticipation that gave the caller an opportunity to follow the routine with whatever else they wanted to say. The routine modeled the regimentation of silent attentiveness even more dramatically than did "crisscross applesauce."

I did observe rare attempts by students to enact the "dame uno" routine on their own and recruit others to participate, although not particularly successfully. The kindergarteners in one classroom occasionally engaged in a spontaneous game during their breakfast time early in the school year that demonstrated their metapragmatic awareness of multimodal silent attention: a child would call for "the quiet game," ostensibly a competition won by staying quiet the longest. In my observations, the true pleasures of the quiet game consisted of the negotiations over calling out the starting moment and just what constituted being quiet, as children participated via vocal interruptions and making noises other than talking, then arguing about whether these counted as violations of "quiet" and calling for the game to start over. In its essence, the quiet game played with different expressions of quietness and noise, with avid attention to one's own and others' experiments with breaches raising the question of what counted as "quiet." Being noisy, not quiet, marked avid participation by a small number of children in the quiet game, even as most children in the room would continue to quietly eat at their tables (being quiet, perhaps listening, but not playing the quiet game). The quiet game was children's play *and* critical reflection on the regimentation imposed by interactional routines inculcating silent attentiveness. The game's noisy sonotope of negotiations contrasted with the orderly unisonance of the interactional routines, but both teacher-led routines and student-led games heightened the focus on attentive listening in making distinctions between noise and quiet and organizing those distinctions as constitutive of school participation frameworks.

Moreover, negative sanctions could result from ritual failure, whether collective (a whole class refusing to "settle down" despite repeated interactional ritual attempts) or individual. Students who consistently failed to enact silent attentiveness, even during and after these interactional rituals, faced both short- and possible longer-term consequences. Failed ritual participation can be productive, too, but of "bad subjects" (Kulick and Schieffelin 2004).

Considered together, these kinds of interactional routines and the games responding to them helped constitute the developmental chronotope of socialization as students, a process in which children themselves participated, in relation to the demands of teachers and the structure of school, but infusing their own playful, critical perspective via the noisy sonotope of the quiet game. While participation in any given instance of interactional ritual might seem rote, the creative and critical reflexivity of the quiet game demonstrates that even mundane, repetitive ritual activity can stimulate metacultural engagement, as children rework their relationship to sonotopes and corresponding chronotopes of school socialization. While ritual interactions promoted by teachers might dynamically figure a chronotope of orderly transition to attentive students in ↳ their sonotopes of well-ordered alternations of sound and silence, they also invoke a shadow chronotope of motility, a more open-ended and even disorderly negotiation of socialization at school, realized in students' endless creativity in asserting their own perspectives and priorities.

3.6 Shells That Speak

Recall that motility describes a creative process of ritual truth-*making*, in which the well-ordered ritual action of divination does not so much predict the future as performatively shape it. In an earlier section I introduced some key aspects of the sonotope of a coconut-shell divination, through which the orichas (deities) answer questions. There is a poetic alternation between the ritual register of Lucumí, metapragmatically described as "the tongue of the orichas," and Spanish that works together with the transduction of (audible) coconut-shell casts into divination signs (named in Lucumí) and into utterances construed as answers (yes, no, a confirmation, a problem) that the priests and other participants can then discuss to reach interpretations. There is an on-stage/off-stage "hingeing" (Tomlinson 2024) between the direct work with the oracle (posing a clear yes/no question, casting the coconut shells, reporting the result) and the sotto voce conversations among participants deciding what to ask and working out an understanding of each response. The interpretive process often draws on background knowledge from prior conversations, as when a priest turned to me after a negative divination result to comment, almost as an aside, "It must have to do with your trip." That supposition gained force when confirmed by the next toss of the coconut shells, and could later be referred to as a warning from the oricha that, it transpired, I had failed to heed (by performing the requested rituals before my intended departure).

On other occasions, the interpretation of divination results could itself become a performance, albeit one anchored in a reportive frame as "what the oricha said." For example, on the occasion of a ritual offering to the oricha Olokún involving about a dozen people and presided over by a senior priest, several participants needed to have a second purification done, after which the senior priest cast the coconut oracle to confirm each person's results. The senior priest called out the divination signs to his assistant, a priest and godmother to those receiving the purification, who wrote them into a notebook. The divinations complete, the senior priest then sat next to her and had each participant come and sit before them as he considered the recorded divination results. Gazing at the notebook, then off into space while he thought or received inspiration, the priest would then urgently and directly state what each person needed to do, what to avoid, and changes to make in their life. One needed to help their family learn not to go to them for everything, instead of bearing the concerns of everyone on their own shoulders. Another needed to avoid being exploited by anyone, even a foreigner who gave them nice things. Another needed to avoid having every whim catered to, to recognize their own autonomy and potential for achievement. The priest would sometimes ↳ stop to ask them questions as he proceeded, in order to understand how the advice related to their particular situations, but the consultation was loud enough for everyone else gathered for the ritual and the meal afterward to overhear, as witnesses. In this case, the poetics of dyadic interaction with the oracle unfolded less like a conversation with the shells themselves, as in my earlier example, and with more focus on the priest as interpreter, alternating between silent thought and conversation with each client about an already-completed process of consulting the oracle.

What remains constant across both divination examples is a ritual sonotope in which participants witness divination results as the speech of the oricha, and a corresponding chronotopic trajectory of motility, in which that speech impacts the world. The detailed advice the senior priest conveyed to each person might even remind us of the developmental chronotope of socialization evident in the school interactional rituals and the orderly progression of oath-taking modeling democratic governance. In this sense, all three rituals seek to produce an orderly transition toward a better future.

3.7 Conclusion

In working across examples of ritual action in distinct political, educational, and religious domains, I have traced some key aspects of chronotopic work in producing ritual action as an image of the world that can performatively act on the world. Three dimensions of chronotopic work are evident: in producing a ritual event, situating it interdiscursively for comparison and evaluation, and producing a trajectory of impact from ritual microcosm into social macrocosm. These aspects of chronotopic work heighten reflexive attention to ritual form, in particular as a dynamic figuration of its own performative impact. Sonotope is a sonic realization of these dynamic figurations that is particularly salient in some ritual action, such as the three cases I explored. In each, ritual sonotopes modeled chronotopic motifs, such as orderly progression and motility, through an aural poetics. Ritual sonotopes can thus stimulate longer and wider arcs of participation, such as witnessing or quiet attentiveness, thereby advancing the chronotopic work of ritual. Moreover, the examples remind us that chronotopes always emerge in dialogical interaction, such that the chronotopic motifs advanced through ritual action also call forth their "shadows," for example in orderly alternation versus uncertainty, unruliness, or disorder. The ritual chronotope of motility, so evident in the divination ritual, can also serve to describe a contradictory impulse of ritual action more generally, as a recognition of open-endedness as well as world-changing impact through ritual action.

As a final point, notice the constitutive role of ritual failure in the chronotopic work of ritual: I have argued that a chronotope of failure always hovers over ritual, as an alternative to how its success is dynamically figured. Orderly progression is but one possible figuration of success, invoking disorder as a possible consequence of failure. Therefore, rituals can have performative effects whether they are judged (at the time or ↳ retrospectively) to have "succeeded" or "failed," because their chronotopic work keeps its potential to provoke social reflexivity.

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Notes

1   See Silverstein (2005) on kinds of interdiscursivity.
2   Roberts also substituted "to" for "of" in "President *of* the United States," although this preposition swap received less attention.
3   Birtherism was a counterfactual, racist, right-wing claim that Obama had not been born in the US and so was ineligible to be president (Serwer 2020).
4   The concept of sonotope is widely used in acoustic ecology and landscape studies to describe how soundscapes vary according to landscape features and uses and shape ecological niches. I first heard the term in discussant comments given by Richard Bauman (Hedfors 2008; Bauman 2011; Farina 2013).
5   Bakhtin (1981: 84 fn.) reports first hearing the term during a lecture by a Leningrad physiologist in 1925. His work on chronotope dates to 1937–1938.
6   Some key studies include Lemon (2009); Dick (2010); Stasch (2011b); Koven (2013); Divita (2014); De Fina and Perrino (2020); Karimzad and Catedral (2021).

7   I use the metaphor of "family" quite intentionally, since Regla de Ocha mobilizes kinship connections and tropes to organize relations among practitioners and between practitioners and the spirits and deities they work with (see Wirtz 2007).

8   A kind of semiotic circular reasoning involving rhematization, in which signs (of interactional roughness) are icons of characterological dispositions, and dicentization, in which those signs are taken up as indexical of those individuals or types of people (Gal and Irvine 2019: 125–127).