

## Rituals and Established Order

The two readings show how urban expressive practices can demonstrate some of the aspects of ritual which Graeber and Wengrow describe. The “free culture” activists in Madrid are subverting established order by speaking out against patent and copyright law. It is less clear whether the people participating in Yangsheng are asserting established order, but they clearly are not subverting it, and since their actions “cooperate with state discourses” (Farquhar and Zhang, 323). Another feature that some types of rituals can have is allowing participants to be politically self-conscious (Graeber and Wengrow, 117). This is very much visible in the work that the activists in Madrid do. They are using art and other forms of performance to show that we do not need to live in a world of patents and surveillance. They are promoting the same type of freedom that many of the Native Americans had. The Yangsheng performers are being somewhat the opposite of politically self-conscious since they are using Yangsheng to help tolerate the political system which they are in instead of looking for alternatives.

The example that Farquhar and Zhang give of Yangsheng shows how an expressive practice can enhance people’s lives without being overt resistance or any kind of political protest. They directly say that “Yangsheng is not about freedom or overt political power” (Zhang and Farquhar, 321). So, Yangsheng does not meet the aspect of a ritual of subverting established power. It is also not directly asserting the established order, however, it does have its origins in trying to imitate how the lords were treated. Zhang and Farquhar note that: “the power that is mobilized in Yangsheng practice is not a domination from above or resistance from below” (Zhang and Farquhar 321). It is instead about creating a space apart from the monotony of

everyday life to focus on your body. In this way, it *enables* the established order since it allows the government to continue to hold the power it does while the people can remain happy and not protest. They describe how studying Yangsheng does not show resistance or political protest, but instead shows “modern penetrations of power into every detail of mundane activity” (Zhang and Farquhar, 320). Yangsheng shows the power of the established order in China, but it does not assert it.

The role that the “free culture” activists play concerning resistance and the established order is more complex. They are resisting the culture of patents and information secrecy, but they are not actively protesting any given thing. Resistance just means refusing to comply, while a political protest is typically an organized group of people speaking out or demonstrating against a specific politician, a political regime, or a political system. Jimenez and Estalella describe how the decentralized nature of the free culture activists makes them much harder to study from an ethnographic perspective. This also means that it is harder to characterize them as a political protest. Some of the events which free culture activists hold could be considered a protest, but more are acts of resistance and the rituals are not characterized by the political protest. Magdalen’s Gallery also describes itself as “non-invasive” since they work at “vacant and derelict sites” (Jimenez and Estalella, 847). A protest would typically be more active than this. This group's goal is to “liberate hidden material and sympathetic energies in the city” (Jimenez and Estalella, 847). This is resistance and is subverting established orders. They use their rituals to raise awareness of what they believe is a flaw in the established order.

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