J.C. HEESTERMAN

VEDA AND SOCIETY

Some remarks apropos of the film "Altar of Fire"*

The film "Altar of Fire" will have failed in its purpose if you react to it with an appreciative "quite interesting", or something equally non-committal. If, on the other hand, you heaved a sigh of relief when the film, relatively short as it is, was over, you may be nearer to a true appreciation. This may sound somewhat uncouth and, all told, ungrateful, but the point is that what is shown by this film is strange, very strange indeed. It raises more questions than it even starts to answer. What to think of an utterly complicated ritual that has maintained itself with all its intricacies unchanged for over two thousand years? Or of the reciters and chanters who do not know the meaning of the texts they know by heart and recite or chant so expertly? What may be the meaning and the purpose of this lengthy and expensive ritual? And so we can go on heaping question upon question without getting much of an answer. Was Frits Staal right after all when he set out his theory on the "Meaninglessness of Ritual"?[1] The more we think about it, the stranger, the more unanswerable the matter becomes. It is, in other words, disturbing. And that is as it should be. If sacrificial ritual is to be anything at all, it cannot be something easily explicable. It should indeed be disturbing and unanswerable. For, if taken seriously as it obviously is here, it deals with the intractable problem of life and death.

Western culture, even though certainly far from being short on all manner of rituals, tends to reject ritual, or to disregard it as a mere side-show. At best we may value it as an interesting but harmless remnant of the past, nicely to be preserved and studied, but certainly not to be taken seriously as a living concern. In fact, this attitude was also very much evident in the present filming and recording venture. The idea was that this performance would in all likelihood to be last hurray of the age-old, impressive tradition of Vedic ritual. We all felt that we had to rush in to preserve at least the record. Even the Nambudiris felt

that way and that was why they allowed, against their exclusivist learnings, the embarrassing intrusion of a bunch of film-makers and assorted Vedic hobbyists.

There were, however, a few notable exceptions: the old vaidikan and a few of his more knowledgeable helpers, such as the venerable *sadasya* officiant. They clearly felt that something more and something different was at stake than a harmless piece of museological preservation. They were right, of course. For in India the Veda and its ritual have never been a matter of indifference. It is not that the Veda and Vedic ritual are unquestionably accepted. On the contrary, within Indian civilization it was and remained a problem and a stone of offence whose disturbing qualities unexpectedly kept cropping up in all sorts of ways during the present performance, too. Although the film does not stress it, the special nature of the ritual reflected itself in the unforeseen and widespread interest it evoked. Tucked away in the countryside some four miles from the nearest metalled road, it became nonetheless a busy tourist attraction - for Indian tourists that is - even though the proceedings the place of sacrifice must have been completely obscure to most of the visitors, for whom, moreover, there were no facilities whatsoever beyond a tea-stall at a safe distance. Nevertheless they came in droves.

More significant, however, were the tensions, emotions and conflicts that erupted during the preparations and the execution of the ritual. The obvious focus of agitation and conflict was, of course, the planned immolation of fourteen animals (goats), enjoined by the rules of the ritual. The waves of emotion, including even threats of violence - some of it not uncomical - ran so high that the police authorities felt moved to ban the whole performance. In the end a compromise was reached. Instead of immolating the fourteen animals, the sacrificial acts were performed, as we have seen, on an equal number of leaf-wrapped packages of vegetarian food. However, the trouble does not seem to have been just a matter of immolating animal victims. After all this is done regularly all over India in folk festivals where goats or buffaloes are sacrificed every year without anybody being overly concerned. Clearly the pivotal point was that in this case the hallowed Veda was at stake. The important message that came through all the commotion was that the Veda and its ritual are not just a harmless survival, but a living and disturbing issue - an issue that cannot be easily disregarded or put in museological cold storage.

But what is it then that, against all likelihood, gives the Veda this extraordinary place in Hindu thought and feeling? Or, more simply, why should a group of brahmins go to such lengths of trouble and expense to keep alive over the generations an obscure ritual of tiresome complexity and unclear meaning? Surely there are, to put it mildly, more pressing needs. What, then, is its place in society? On the face of it, one might view it as an incontrovertible demonstration that man does not live by bread alone, a triumph of mind over matter, of imagination over nature. There is certainly something to that, but, unfortunately, the matter is not so neat and simple.

First let us briefly look back on the film we saw. What we saw was essentially an utterly flat, perfectly undramatic, succession of standardized liturgical acts accompanied by mantras, recitations, chants and punctuated by an all but endless series of burnt oblations, all telescoped into the small compass of the sacrificial area. Some diversion was created by the building of the brick altar. But the only dramatic point was the huge conflagration - a miniature *pralaya*, as it were - at the end, when the pandal and sheds went up in flames - a scene that fittingly attracted thousands of spectators. But exactly this spectacular feature was condemned by the Vedicists from Poona, who indignantly pointed out that there was no scriptural authority for this spectacle and would have liked it, together with a few other local Nambudiri features, to be expunged from the film.

Let us be frank, the ritual is boringly repetitious, flat and undramatic. It has its impressive moments, especially in the chants and recitations which also seem to be the main attraction for the Nambudiri executants and spectators. But, generally speaking, it lacks expressive bite. It is not even particularly beautiful, nor is it meant to be. All pomp and pageant have been eliminated or, by means of identifications, reduced to a strictly circumscribed range of ever-recurring standard elements centred on the fire and the burnt oblation. All acts, chants and recitations lead up to, accompany, or form the aftermath of the burnt oblations which follow each other in almost endless but strictly regulated order.

For instance, the explanations in the Brāhmaṇa texts are replete with references to the war and racing chariot, the *ratha*. In a few cases we even get a glimpse of the chariot itself in the ritual. But otherwise the *ratha* has been identified with and replaced by standard liturgical elements such as the *rathantara* chant. The actual use of the chariot in the ritual

has clearly become a source of embarrassment because, for one thing, driving a chariot would mean that one would have to leave the closed, self-contained world of the sacrificial area - in other words, a breach in the excessively regulated order of the ritual. In this case the typical solution is to place the chariot on the border of the ritual area; the sacrificer steps on the chariot with, of course, the relevant mantras, and then laconically steps down again. This procedure, according to the text[2], amounts to driving a chariot and at the same time not driving it. In other words: the ritual equivalent of squaring the circle. This is just a minor instance of the Vedic ritualists' ingeniousness in creating their sovereign universe of the mind open only to him "who knows thus", *ya evaṃ veda*[3]. But it does not make for colourful pageantry. On the contrary, all that was consiciously eliminated.

The essential feature of Vedic ritual is the all but obsessive precision in the execution of the standardized liturgical acts and their fitting together into an unbroken concatenation. It is to this exacting precision that all the ritual effort is directed. That is why the word for truth, *satya*, in the ritual context simply means precision, exactitude[4]. The rigorous precision of the ritual act exhausts its meaning. In this sense, I think, we should understand Staal's theory of the "meaninglessness of ritual"[5]. That is: all possibilities for a richly variegated complex of deeply layered meaning have been willfully reduced in favour of an utterly regulated world of the mind, a sovereign universe, and therefore divorced from the confusing realities of the mundane world and its contingencies. This, it would seem, sets the Vedic *śrauta* ritual apart from rituals as we generally understand them, tied up with the life of the community in a comprehensive, many-stranded web of meaning.

Those who may have seen other, anthropological, films by Robert Gardner — e.g. "Rivers of Sand" or "Dead Birds" — will immediately perceive the difference. In such films all manner of rituals appear organic parts of the community's life. With "Altar of Fire", however, he had to force his work into the straight-jacket of willful artificiality imposed by a ritual that wants no part in society but proudly stands apart in the self-created universe of the ritual area. To some extent this may be true of all ritual, but then there are linkages, complementarities, intermediate zones, which connect the ritual and its sacred area with the profane world. All of that, however, is lacking in our case. Vedic *śrauta* ritual is simply separate, unrelated to anything outside itself.[6]

There is still another and rather telling difference, which brings out the unique nature of Vedic ritual. The communities and their rituals previously studied and filmed by Gardner and others belong to a vanishing world. In the case of "Rivers of Sand" the community itself has tragically died in the Sahel catastrophe, its last remnants withering away in refugee camps. The *śrauta* ritual, however, is still there, independent from and untouched by the vagaries and changes in Indian society and culture. If anything, modern developments may even have strengthened its presence. Even if the Nambudiri community, or any other brahmin community that still holds on to it, should lose its Vedic tradition - as they themselves fear they will - the Veda and its ritual will not necessarily vanish. For the Veda is not tied up with the fortunes of a particular community. It is, and expressly wants to be, outside society. To that end the Vedic ritualists, who created the classical system of ritual, consciously cut it loose from its social moorings and meanings.

Let me try to illustrate this point, which gives the ritual of *śrauta* sacrifice its unique quality. For this purpose I shall take the sacrificial meal as an example. Now sacrifice is not just a matter of gift-giving. It is in the deepest sense a matter of life and death. Its primary material is what sustains life, that is: food. But food - its acquisition, preparation and consumption - equally involves death. Part of the food, therefore, even if it is only an infinitely small part, has to be destroyed. For the gift to the gods is not just a gift, but at the same time a destruction, albeit in most cases a token destruction[7]. It is only then, after this symbolic act of destruction by the sacrificial fire, that the remainder of the food - in fact the bulk - is freed from the burden of death and converted into the gift of life - a gift that must be distributed so as to set life circulating as widely as possible.

If then the burnt offering is essential to the sacrifice, the distribution of food and gifts is the central part of the sacrificial ritual. This is the creative, cosmogonic moment of sacrifice, when the food of life, won out of death and destruction, is distributed and consumed by the community of worshippers. Incidentally, that is why we constantly hear about the gods performing sacrifices themselves, which would be nonsense if sacrifice were only a gift to the gods. Moreover, if the gods are really gods, possessing transcendent powers, they could hardly be interested in man's piddling gifts. What they are interested in is the life-creating,

cosmogonic potential of sacrifice. Here we need not go into the mystique of sacrifice as cosmogony, which is a standard theme in Vedic literature[8].

For our purpose we may limit the discussion to the sacrificial meal. Now the *śrauta* ritual does indeed contain this central feature albeit in a somewhat disguised and strangely de-emphasized form. This is the *iḍā* ceremony. The *hotṛ* officiant invokes the *iḍā*, the deified food. In this invocation, the *iḍopāhvāna*, not only is the *iḍā* called, but a whole range of cosmic entities, including the sacrificer and his officiants, are invited to share in the *iḍā* food. In fact the pattern of the litany suggests a series of reciprocal invitations: "called hither is So-and-So, may So-and-So call me". Such reciprocal invitations are still to be seen in the drinking of the Soma beverage, when sacrificer and officiants call upon each other to drink from each other's cups. And it is reminiscent of the practice of the gods who are said to have offered at their sacrifice the food in each other's mouths[9].

The proper procedure, then, is to invite each other to share the food. And so, after the invocation, the *iḍā* - that is: the small slices cut off from the sacrificial food - is eaten by the participants. Thus it is prescribed in the case of a vegetal sacrifice or *iṣṭi*, where four officiants are employed: "they eat, with the sacrificer as the fifth (participant), the *iḍā*". This rule clearly aims at a communal meal[10]. Significantly the *iḍā* ceremony is also the time for the distribution of the *dakṣiṇā* gifts to the officiants. We may expect, therefore, an impressive, perhaps even boisterous, banquet. However, our texts do not tell us anything of the kind, but pass over the whole episode with a simple *prāśnanti*, "they eat", namely the small *iḍā* slices, nor do they seem to intend eating together.

But apart from the *iḍā* there still remains the bulk of the offering substance. This is divided into equal parts, each part being assigned to one of the participants, but it is not clear whether these parts are eaten at the same time as the *iḍā* or only assigned and eaten later after the ritual is over. However, this procedure refers only to one of the vegetal offering cakes (*puroḍāśa*)[11]. So the question what is to be done with the other offerings - cakes, porridges and most notably meat - has still to be answered. They are removed from the place of sacrifice, to

the north of it, to be eaten afterwards.[12] This might even include the parts of the cake that have already been assigned. The matter of the eating not only lacks clarity, there is clearly some confusion or rather embarrassment.

But this is not the end of it. To make matters still more complicated there is, apart from the *iḍā*, the assigned parts of the cake and the remainder of the other offering substances, still another item of sacrificial food, namely a special rice mess, the *anvāhārya*, destined for the officiants[13]. This rice mess is also brought up and divided at the time of the *iḍā* ceremony, but again it is not yet eaten. After division it is likewise removed to the north of the sacrificial area and that is the last we hear about. Finally, when the ritual is completed and everything is over, it is ruled that unspecified brahmins should be fed,[14] probably at the same time that the participants in the ritual itself have their festive meal of sacrificial food.

The result of all this intricacy is that the festive sacrificial meal that was clearly intended to be the central part of the ritual was split up in different ways - *iḍā*, division of part of the offerings, the undivided remainder of the other offerings, the *anvāhārya* rice mess, the feedings of brahmins not involved in the ritual itself. Having been broken up into various pieces, which are dealt with separately, the festive meal - or rather its disassembled pieces - was eliminated from the ritual with the exception of the insignificant *iḍā*. The sacrificial food is removed from the place of sacrifice, while its eating is postponed till the ritual is over. The communal character of the meal is, moreover, equally broken up. Notwithstanding the apparently old rule which says that the participants should eat at least the *iḍā* portions, with the sacrificer as the fifth member of the company, the sacrificer does not eat at all till the ritual is completed. As the food for the meal has been disassembled and brought under different rules, so also the company of participants in the meal is split up. Even if we assume that at least afterwards there is something of a communal meal, we can only do so by piecing together various dispersed statements. But nothing is directly said about it, and anyway whatever may be done in the way of a festive banquet is effectively removed from the *śrauta* ritual.

The break-up of the festive communal meal and its piecemeal removal outside the spatial and temporal confines of the *śrauta* ritual stand out

even clearer when we look at instances where an abundant meal still forms part of the sacrificial ritual. Such an instance is the rice mess offering to the Marut gods, which is part of the autumnal *sākamedha* sacrifice[15]. After the burnt offerings there is an abundant banquet of rice dishes as well as beef, at which not only brahmins are regaled but all dependents of the sacrificer and also the neighbours - that is, practically, the whole community - are literally gorged with food[16]. This Marut sacrifice is not an isolated case. It belongs to a widespread group of ceremonies, which focus on the preparation and eating of a rice mess (*odana*), often combined with abundant meat. To this group, it would seem, belongs the already mentioned *anvāhārya* food. Clearer still is the rice mess (*brahmaudana*) prepared and eaten, together with or instead of cow's meat, at the ceremonial setting up of the sacrificial fires[17].

The latter rice mess festivity is also in another way important for our purpose. I shall not go into its intricate details. The point I want to single out is that it is cooked on a fire directly taken from the domestic hearth. After the rice mess has been cooked and eaten the *brahmaudanika* fire is kept going during the night, but then is left to die down. Only after it is extinguished, the first of the fires for the *śrauta* ritual, the *gārhapatya* fire, is made by churning it anew with the fire drill. There is, then, an intentional gap between the domestic fire and the *śrauta* fire, which although called *gārhapatya* or householder's fire is completely separated from its domestic counterpart. In this way a clear-cut dichotomy has been created between the domestic, or *gṛhya*, sphere of social and communal life on the one hand, and the totally separate sphere of the *śrauta* ritual on the other. The *brahmaudana* meal belongs to the former and therefore takes place before the *śrauta* fires are set up on the next day. The latter sphere, characterized by the newly churned fire and the burnt oblation, has no place anymore for the festive communal meal. Here the sacrificer has left the community behind him to perform the ritual under the exclusive authority of the *śruti*, the transcendent injunction that has its being beyond society in a sovereign universe of its own.

The Vedic ritualists, then, who created the classical system of ritual as we know it from the authoritative texts, broke up the old sacrificial complex. This complex tied together both the ultramundane concern of

sacrifice proper - marked by destruction of the offering in the sacrificial fire - and the mundane, social sphere that becomes manifest in the exchange or sharing of food at the communal meal. By piecing together the vestiges it has left in variously dispersed rules and statements we can, to a considerable extent, reconstruct the "pre-classical" state of affairs. However, this "pre-classical" complex is not uniquely Indian or even Vedic. We may expect to find it anywhere, whether in India or elsewhere. The uniqueness of Vedic ritual resides in the way the ritualists broke up the old complex and restructured its disassembled elements into the classical system of ritual. The essential feature of the restructured system is the rigorous split between the world of social or communal life, represented by the *gṛhya* ritual on the one hand and the transcendent world ruled by the ultramundane *śrauta* ritual.

At this point it may well be asked why this complicated dichotomy was brought about. The answer can, in part, be found in an unassuming statement of the Mānava Dharmaśāstra: a large company at a solemn occasion fatally impairs its purity and propriety[18]. The point - a point I have elaborated, if not belabored, elsewhere [19] - is that communal ceremonies were not just a nice and comforting expression of mutual support and togetherness. Rather such ceremonies provided the arena for competition, conflict and even violence. That the pre-classical complex of sacrifice was replete with conflict and violence can still be seen in the frozen, ritualized remnants of contests, such as, for instance, the gambling episode at the setting-up of the *śrauta* fires and the royal unction, verbal contests where originally the loser might literally lose his head as well unless he offered his submission in time, or chariot races and raids with equally high stakes.

Or again there is the fetching of the clay for the fireport (*ukhā*) and the altar bricks. After seeing what the ritualists made of it, it may come as a shock that this harmless episode can be shown originally to have been not unlike a head-hunting raid, namely for the head to be buried under the brick altar[20]. Also the ritual explanations in the Brāhmaṇa texts repeatedly refer to the battle between gods and demons, or to the killing of the Vṛtra monster of primordeal chaos. When we look, however, at the actual ritual there is no sign of any such violent activities. Vṛtra has long been definitively conquered by the victorious Indra, the last demon has been subdued and no adversary, even if often

mentioned, comes in sight anymore. In this way we can also understand the embarrassment that the last vestiges of the war chariot and its uses caused to the ritualists. For the *śrauta* ritual was created as a separate, transcendent world beyond conflict and violence, where the sacrificer, by-passing both enemies and allies, could strike out on his own.

The conception behind the infinite detail of the *śrauta* ritual may be absurd - and it certainly did not go unchallenged -, but it is also indubitably sublime. The lasting attraction of the Veda is the promise it holds out of a world free from mundane imperfection. It offers, in a way, instant transcendence. But by the same token the Vedic *śruti* is divorced from mundane reality. There is no common measure between the Veda and the social world, no connection between *śruti* and *dharma*. Indeed the constantly repeated notion that the *dharma* rests on or is contained in the *śruti* is an obvious, though necessary, fiction - necessary because otherwise the *dharma* would lack authoritative moorings, but a fiction all the same [21].

In creating the classical system of ritual the Vedic ritualists snapped the link between the social and the transcendent worlds that originally were connected through sacrifice. In doing so they equally created the intractable problem of linking the two worlds of Veda and society together again, or, in the terms of the nursery rhyme: how to put Humpty-Dumpty together again. And, as we know, all the king's men could not put Humpty-Dumpty together again. Of course, the brahmin should be able to perform this miracle. But the brahmin is barred from being the king's man on pain of losing his purity and thereby his exclusive value, exactly because he should ideally be concerned only with the transcendent. He can only be his own man, performing his ritual in splendid isolation, as we saw him doing at the "Altar of Fire", strenously ignoring the embarrassing crowd around the ritual area. Yet even the brahmin cannot live by transcendence alone. Nor can society dispense with the ultimate authority that the Veda provides, and therefore keeps referring to the Veda as the fons et origo of all order and the measure of all things.

An obvious example is the wide-spread term *jajmān* for the substantial peasant supervising the exploitation of the soil and the sharing-out of the proceeds at harvest time. Ostensibly the word *jajmān* is no other than the technical term for the *śrauta* sacrificer, the *yajamāna*. This

might lead us to view Indian peasant society as based on an ideology of sacrifice. There certainly is something to it, especially if we compare the sharing-out of the harvest with the distribution of *dakṣiṇās*. However, it should be clear that the *śrauta* sacrificer is separated by an unbridgeable chasm from the peasant *jajmān* - a chasm created by the Vedic ritualists in the beginning, when they broke the link between the *śrauta* ritual of sacrifice and the social concerns involved in the domestic or *gṛhya* ritual.

What the *jajmān* supervises is not a *śrauta* sacrifice executed on his behalf by his officiants, but the proper distribution of personalized differential rights in the soil and its productivity - rights that, as the wide-spread phrase has it, are "eaten" by their holders. In that way the *jajmān* ideally organizes and supervises the communal "meal" of rights. But, as we saw, it is exactly this meal that was intentionally cut out and removed from the *śrauta* sacrifice. And the *śrauta* sacrifice, directly based as it is on the transcendent *śruti*, is the only authoritative one. Yet it is significant that, notwithstanding the insurmountable difference, the peasant patron should be invested with a pale semblance of Vedic authority. For, after all, the ultimate authority of the *śruti* is the only one that is directly present. In the centre there is not a set of clear-cut institutions, sacrificial or otherwise, but a wide-open problem - the problem of Hindu society and its ultimate authority in the Veda. The problem cannot be definitively solved, it can only be handled from case to case, from situation to situation, by ever different compromises.

"Altar of Fire" provides us with another, fairly standard example of such compromise. One may wonder how the Nambudiris managed to perform the costly *śrauta* ritual so frequently, keeping alive its tradition in recent times. The answer is: the kings of Trivandrum. Being śūdras they certainly were in need of legitimation through some access to the ultimate authority that only the brahmin and his *śrauta* ritual could dispense. On the other hand they were, like the wordly power in general, debarred from the Veda. The compromise solution was for the king to set aside some substantial properties in an independent foundation whose accumalated proceeds were distributed once every twelve years among those Nambudiris in the area who had performed *śrauta* sacrifices

during the preceeding years. In this way the king, even though rigorously debarred from access, could boast his merit as a benefactor of the Veda and its brahmin exponents. And so it was that at the end of a twelve year period there was a busy clustering of Vedic sacrifices. As witness to the frequency of Vedic ritual activity we even found three successive brick altars in a nearby Nambudiri backyard, the last dating from 1952.

However, there are no more kings of Trivandrum in need of Vedic legitimation. Worse still, the landed foundation came under the new agricultural laws and its proceeds dwindled to piddling sums that will not buy even a single *yāga* of the simplest kind. So the film we have seen may well be the record of the last manifestation of Nambudiri *yāga* (although with the Veda one never knows). But even in the worst case, if the Nambudiris and other brahmin communities will have to let go, it seems more than likely that other agencies will take over. For, during the days of the *yāga*, there was also, discreetly stationed at a distance, a recording van of All-India Radio busily copying the tapes that were being made of the chants and recitations.

The new rulers of India, like their predecessors, may not want to dispense completely with the Veda, which, at the very least, will provide interesting fare for radio and television programs as well as long-playing records. These will, however, no longer be based on the various localized traditions tucked away in the countryside. It will be a new all-India tradition based on philologically edited and printed texts that do not allow for local vagaries. The holders of this new tradition are already there, in institutes like the Vaidika Saṃśodhana Maṇḍal of Poona, the Vishveshvarānand Vedic Research Institute of Hoshiarpur and similar institutions. One should not be surprised should there arise out of these scholarly efforts a "Neo-Vedism" on an all-India scale as an indispensable manifestation of India's cultural identity. If this should happen, it would be wrong to judge it as just a marginal quirk. The Veda will then again be a stone of offence giving new form and content to the age-old problem in mundane power and transcendent authority.

Notes

*) *Altar of Fire*, a 16 mm colour film, 45 minutes, # 9647, University of California Extension Media Center, produced by Frits Staal and Robert Gardner, 1975-1976. See *Lifelong Learning* Vol. XLVI, no.43, January 21, 1977; George Baumann, Tonfilme über vedische Rituale, *Zeitschrift der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft* 130:1, 1980 pp.* 21* - * 23*; and Frits Staal, *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, Vol. I, Berkeley, in press. - [Ed.]

1) Staal 1979.

2) Jaiminīya Brāhmaṇa 2.193. Finally, however, the text decides in favour of running the race at the *vājapeya:* the *rathantara* chant gives victory in the divine or heavenly race, but the chariot in the human one. So the old rule of the race is still maintained, but at the price of significant embarrassment on the part of the ritualists. At a performance of the *vājapeya* I witnessed at Poona the race was indeed a great attraction and the occasion for a *melā*-like excitement totally different from the rest of the ritual.

3) This knowledge is not so much an esoteric insight as a matter of formal learning based on identifications of elements of the ritual with those of macro- and microcosmos.

4) Lévi 1898, p. 109.

5) See Staal 1979. Staal's "deconstructivist" view would seem to fit the *śrauta* ritual particularly well. But this ritual takes up a unique position, which, as I shall argue, sets it apart from ritual as it is generally understood.

6) For the *śrauta* ritual's separateness, cf. Heesterman 1978 a, esp. p. 43 f.

7) Cf. Heesterman 1978 a, p. 31 f.

8) As, for instance, in the well-known enigmatically involute phrase: "with sacrifice the gods sacrificed the sacrifice, those were the first institutes". (Ṛgveda 1.164.50; 10.90.16; Atharvaveda 7.5.1.)

9) Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa 5.1.1.1-2; 11.1.8.1-2. In contradistinction to the gods their counterparts, the asuras, offer each in his own mouth (thereby denying reciprocity) and so lose out to the gods.

10) Cf. Āpastamba Śrautasūtra (ĀpŚS)3.2.11. In the animal sacrifice there are apart from the four officiants (*hotṛ, adhvaryu, brahman* and *āgnīdhra*) two more, namely the *maitrāvaruṇa*, who is mentioned as the sixth participant in the *iḍā* of the offering cake, and the *pratiprasthātṛ* who comes in as the seventh at the *iḍā* of the animal offerings. (ĀpŚS 7.23.3 and 26.5). Apparently the sacrificer is all the time included in the first five participants. Nevertheless, at the animal sacrifice he does not share in the *iḍā* of the cake, in contradistinction to *iḍā* of the animal offering (ĀpŚS 7.23.1). One may, of course, suppose that the six who eat the cake-*iḍā* include the *pratiprasthātṛ* instead of the sacrificer, but it is hard to see why the *pratiprasthātṛ* should be explicitly mentioned as the seventh at the animal-*iḍā* but receive no mention as a participant at the preceding occasion of the cake-*iḍā*. It seems reasonable to conclude that there is a conflict here between an old rule on the communal sacrificial meal and the new arrangements. Incidentally, the stress on particular numbers of participants seems to suggest the idea of the full community, numbers being often used to indicate wholeness or completeness.

11) Cf. Hillebrandt 1880, p. 129; ĀpŚS 3.3.2. The basic form of the *iṣṭi* has two cakes (or one cake and a milk preparation). Only the first cake, the one for Agni, is divided.

12) Cf. Hillebrandt 1880, p. 134. Hillebrandt, like several texts, does not say anything about the eating of these remaining offerings. Where a time is given for this purpose it is after the main part of the ritual, right before the patnīsamyājas (ĀpŚS 3.7.15).
13) The *anvāhārya* rice mess is at the same time the *dakṣiṇā* gift in case no other *dakṣiṇā* is prescribed.
14) Cf. ĀpŚS 4.16.17. According to Vaikhānasa Śrautasūtra 7.14:78.15, ten brahmins are to be regaled after a vegetal sacrifice (*iṣṭi*), a hundred after an animal sacrifice, and a thousand after a Soma sacrifice.
15) Cf. Hillebrandt 1897, p. 117; ĀpŚS 8.9.8-11.15.
16) ĀpŚS 8.11.8-14. Here the banquet is still part of or at least closely connected with the *iḍā* ceremony.
17) In this connection the rice mess offerings of the Atharvaveda ritual, to all appearances originally meant to be abundant banquets, should be mentioned (cf. Gonda 1965, pp. 17-30). The ritual for setting up the sacrificial fires has been the subject of a number of recent studies Krick 1972, in press; T.F. Moody's differently orientated study of the same material is about to be completed as a thesis for MacMaster University, Hamilton; also Heesterman in press).
18) Mānava Dharmaśāstra 3.126.
19) Cf. e.g. Heesterman 1964 and 1978 a.
20) Cf. Heesterman 1972.
21) Cf. Heesterman 1978 b.

References

Gonda, J., 1965. *The Savayajñas*. (Verhandelingen der Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, Afd. Letterkunde, NR 71:2.) Amsterdam.
Heesterman, J.C., 1964. Brahmin, Ritual and Renouncer. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 8, pp. 1-31.
---- , 1972. The Case of the Severed Head. *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Süd- und Ostasiens* 11, pp. 22-44.
----, 1978a. Vedisches Opfer und Transzendenz. G. Oberhammer (ed), *Transzendenzerfahrung, Vollzugshorizont des Heils* (Publications of the De Nobili Research Library, 5), pp. 29-44. Wien.
----, 1978b. Veda and Dharma. W.D. O'Flaherty & J.D.M. Derrett (eds.), *The Concept of Duty in South Asia*, pp. 80-95. London & Delhi.
----, in press. Other Folk's Fire. J.F. Staal (ed.), *Agni: The Vedic Ritual of the Fire Altar*, Vol. 2. Berkeley.
Hillebrandt, A., 1880. *Das altindische Neu- und Vollmondsopfer*. Jena.
----, 1897. *Ritual-Litteratur, vedische Opfer und Zauber*. (Grundriss der Indo-Arischen Philologie und Altertumskunde 3:2.) Strassburg.
Krick, H., 1972. *Das Ritual der Feuergründung (Agnyādheya): Darstellung und Interpretation*. (Ph. D. thesis, University of Vienna.) (Typed copies only, but to be published posthumously by G. Oberhammer.)
Lévi, S., 1898. *La doctrine du sacrifice dans les Brāhmaṇas*. (Bibliothèque de l'École des Hautes Études, Sciences religieuses, 11.) Paris.
Staal, J.F., 1979. The Meaninglessness of Ritual. *Numen* 26:1, pp.1-22.