

60th International Astronautical Congress 2009

38th SYMPOSIUM ON THE SEARCH FOR EXTRATERRESTRIAL INTELLIGENCE (SETI) – The
Next Steps (A4.)
SETI II : SETI and Society (2.)

Author: Dr. John Traphagan
University of Texas, Austin, TX, United States, jtraphagan@mail.utexas.edu

CAN RITUAL REPRESENT A FRAMEWORK FOR COMMUNICATION WITH ET?

Abstract

In his book *Liberating Rites*, Tom Driver argues that rituals represent pre-linguistic types of communication expressed in the form of performance as a very specific kind of doing. Ritualization of action represent a type of communication that humans have long used to communicate with both other humans who lack common language and other animals. Furthermore, ritual, or at least ritualized forms of behavior, are found not only among humans, but also among other animals, including chimpanzees, cats, and dogs. Dogs, for example, may engage in ritualized behavior, such as scratching at the door and barking, as a means of attempting to communicate a desire to get out, an action that is understood by a human, despite the fact that we are unable to communicate linguistically. In this paper, I am interested in exploring the potential of ritual performance as a means of communication with non-humans. I argue that the study of ritual and ritualized behavior, understood as a technique for non-linguistic communication about the world, has potential as a framework for thinking about how humans might communicate with an alien with whom we share neither a language, nor a set of symbolic structures.