New Alignments in Ritual, Ceremony and Celebration

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Synopsis

New alignments in ritual, ceremony and celebration

Increasingly, cultural workers and artists from many disciplines are finding themselves involved in the creation of public and private rituals, ceremonies and celebrations. Focusing on ritual and celebration in Australian contexts, this thesis posits a new categorisation of the types of event that might be encountered, grouping and examining them according to their action upon participants with the aim of enabling a more practical methodology of design in contemporary societal conditions. Existing categories, which have defined these age-old activities in terms of anthropological observation or social intention, must now be regarded as obsolete because they take no account of rapid and widespread changes in degrees of adherence to traditional belief systems, in social orientation and in Western cultural practices. There is a need to reappraise why individuals and communities might continue to hold rituals and celebrations, and how these can be designed, managed and operated most effectively.

The thesis identifies four major categories of ritual: Transformation, Reinforcement, Transcendence and Catharsis. It argues that, by recognising the differences between how each category operates for participants and also certain commonalities across categories, effectiveness of design is facilitated. In developing parameters for each category and giving examples of contemporary praxis, the writer stresses the importance of understanding traditional ceremonies so that elements of a rich repertoire of techniques developed over long periods can be planned into new rituals for contemporary application, despite the dissipation of shared, coherent belief systems in a highly secularised culture.

This impels consideration of questions of cultural sensitivity, raises the need for close community involvement in design, and requires exploration of managing the challenges of multiple signification. Contemporary cultural contexts for ritual and celebratory events are marked by plurality, multi-vocalism and multicultural experience. Designers thus need to achieve, out of difference, an event that produces coherence, deep effects

for each participant and a sense of shared experience. The thesis demonstrates means to this end through informed praxis, that is, by practitioners ensuring that theory and practice are working together in these complex contexts that involve the well being of individuals and communities.

The categories have been identified through investigations into the literature of myth, ritual and celebration, helpful frameworks developed in cognitive science, and extensive research provided by thirty years of practice in the field. As a designer and director of rituals and celebrations, the writer seeks both to confirm the importance of the artist within the process and to demonstrate a new, practical, ethically located and effective approach for the education of intending practitioners.

No claim is made that the four categories are definitive or mutually exclusive of one another. It is accepted that in many situations the categories might coalesce, be added to and/or fragment. However, the categorisation provides a fresh vantage point from which to view the potentially powerful effects of ritual experience, an effective tool of construction for the use of artists and cultural activists working in this field, and an informed basis for praxis.

In developing this new categorisation the writer argues an ongoing need for rituals and celebrations to clarify and enrich the lives of individuals and the community while stressing the importance of careful and appropriate design of such events.

Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously written or published by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

Signature of Candidate ……………………………………….

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1	Graeme Batterbury	'The Ark' at Woodford Folk Festival Fire Event	2001	Neil and Faridah Cameron	Faridah Cameron
2	Unknown	Melbourne International Festival	2001	Neil and Faridah Cameron	Faridah Cameron
3	Graeme Batterbury	Initiation procession at Woodford Folk Festival Fire Event	2002	Neil Cameron	n/a
4	Graeme Batterbury	Choral procession at Woodford Folk Federation Fire Event	2000	Neil Cameron	n/a
5	Donna Larkham	Monster Puppet at Woodford Folk Festival Fire Event	2000	Faridah Cameron and Emma Pryce	Emma Pryce
6	Graeme Batterbury	'Circle of Life' at Maleny Folk Festival Fire Event	1995	Neil Cameron, Faridah Cameron and Paul Lawler	Faridah Cameron
7	Jeff Wright	Tree of Life sculpture at Woodford Folk Festival, New Year	1997	Faridah Cameron and Paul Lawler	Faridah Cameron
8	Graeme Batterbury	Choir at Woodford Folk Festival Fire event	2000	Neil Cameron	n/a
9	Graeme Batterbury	'Altar of Precious' Things at Woodford Folk Festival Fire Event	1999	Neil and Faridah Cameron	Faridah Cameron
10	Graeme Batterbury	'Pillars of Wisdom' at Fire Event at Woodford Folk Festival	2002	Various	Various
11	Serge Grimaitre	'The Dream Maker' at Fire Event at Woodford Folk Festival	1996	Neil Cameron	Neil Cameron

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Neil Cameron

January, 2004

NEW ALIGNMENTS IN RITUAL, CEREMONY AND CELEBRATION[1]

Illustration 1 – Public Celebration

> I think we are seeking the experience of being alive, so that our life's experience on a purely physical plane will have resonance within our own innermost being and reality, so we actually feel the rapture of being alive. That's what it is all finally about, and that's what these clues help us find within ourselves. (Campbell, 1988: 5)

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[1] Although ceremony, ritual and celebrations occur at a private level with birthdays, spontaneous and informal events, individual rituals, private ceremonies, these are not within the scope of this dissertation. We are concerned with ceremony, ritual and celebrations that involve the individual in the public and community domain.

Foreword: Ubiquitous inscriptions

All peoples from all epochs and all cultures have staged rituals and celebrations. The need to name children, initiate young people, marry and observe death rites, to celebrate the Gods, the hunt, the harvest, tell stories and dance together is ubiquitous. Regardless of their degree of isolation or the nature of their environment human beings have come together in formalised gatherings. The world is enriched and textured by these events: every religion or belief system, every tribe, every city has its own versions and variations; it is common to all peoples; it is characteristic human behaviour. In western industrialised cultures the need to stage rituals and celebrations remains ubiquitous but we often find a sense of what could be authentic amid the blur of cultural input that we experience in contemporary society. We put out our hand to touch inscriptions of handprints on the walls of ancient caves made by Indigenous Australians many thousands of years ago, searching for clues. We watch with deep interest as documentaries describing the wedding rituals of Solomon Islanders unfold in their richness and vitality. And many of us ask ourselves how our rituals and celebrations can find more meaning and effectiveness, how we can recover the feeling of empowerment that accompanies these acts when they retain rich layers of cultural significance.

In Australia today some artists have made their practice in this field. Perhaps it has ever been so. Artists have long been part of the glue that surrounds ritual and celebration: they make sacred space, play music and song, construct images, tell stories. But in spite of their roles in other cultures and at other times, it is in the here and now that they must function, and artists who become involved in contemporary ritual and celebration can feel that the way ahead is confused and unclear.

Studies by Frazer, Levi-Strauss, Campbell, and many more recent scholars have given us much insight into the ritual, ceremonial and celebratory practices and habits of cultures all over the world, but they remain quiet on what we can do to better organise ourselves in relation to this important and rewarding pursuit in current Western societies. There is much comment on how our rituals and celebrations are diluted, emaciated and disempowered but few commentators address how this can be remedied. Where, then, do artists look to find guidelines and directions in this complex field? I believe the first step to enrich and empower our rituals and celebrations in Australia

now is to understand how rituals and celebrations work and what structures are being employed in cultures where practices are still intact. This is not to say that we need to engage in acts of appropriation, which would be neither culturally acceptable nor effective. It is a question, rather, of understanding more about the dynamics of rituals and celebrations. From there one can begin to design more meaningful experiences based on an understanding of their dynamics in contemporary society. We need to renegotiate the traditional categories that usually prescribe rituals and events in Australia and, while using the experience of other cultures to better understand how ritual and celebrations work, start to define an Australian context for these significant events.

Prior to the social revolution of the sixties, it was very unusual for artists of different disciplines to be involved in modern ritual and celebrational events, but then groups of artists started once again to enter the field of public events. The work of Welfare State in Britain and Bread and Puppet Theatre in the US had an enormous influence on this field in the late sixties. When artists left the purpose built environments of galleries, theatres and concert halls to take their work (back) into the wider society they found a myriad of different social situations in which to involve themselves. Ritual and celebration together constituted one of those newly entered fields.

My own role as a theatre director was challenged in Australia when emerging social needs placed theatre and accompanying art forms into ritual and celebratory environments. There was a demand for theatre to fill a ritual vacuum left by organised religion as well as for devising mechanisms for public celebration. I found myself producing theatre in ritual and celebratory contexts (festivals, private rituals, social focus points, celebration of community) which were certainly out of line with the more formal theatre traditions, which used scripts, actors, theatres and scenery. To discover ways of coping with such new environments it was necessary to reappraise traditional theatre structures and develop new languages that would succeed in this new role.

The work seemed to leave traditional arts domains and engage in realms of therapy, social development, new political alignments, deprived communities, private and public ritual expression and festivals of all types. Australian ritual and celebration found itself in radically new environments as people sought ways that felt appropriate for their

changing social and cultural contexts to mark important stages and events in their personal and community lives.

Given increasing secularisation, christenings became much less common, leaving no way to celebrate the birth of a child; church and even registry office marriages became less popular and informal secular structures moved in to replace them; initiation structures became confused; and death rites increasingly moved out of the formal rites of churches to become the province of relatively standardised ‘funeral homes’. Festivals with a traditional basis related to the land and cycles of the year were replaced by specialty and boutique experiences that were sometimes motivated by commercial considerations. In the course of these changes, it was frequently the case that the symbolic languages of ceremony and ritual lost their original, deeper connections and became detached and confused.

Although the needs were still there, meaningful vehicles in which to hold them were often usurped by agendas such as tourism and other commercial forces. The commodification of ritual and celebration is commonplace with the effect that where people expect to find enrichment and a rewarding experience they can find themselves wrecked on shores of commercialism.

It seemed to me vital to recognise that there was one group of people who could work closely with ritual and festival to reclaim and renegotiate a sense of integrity and richness for these oldest of human expressions, and that group was artists. I set out to learn how to design rituals and celebrations that I hoped would have a resonance within the community and the individual, and in some ways offset what I felt to be a degrading of these processes that had led to dissatisfying experiences for participants.

I emphasise well-designed pathways because it is possible to create situations which fast track individuals into special states which are manipulative and inevitably sterile. To create an ‘excited crowd’ is relatively easy. Various techniques can often be observed being used at large public events – chanting in staccato rhythms, loud rock and roll music, pumped up commentary – but these are frequently part of spectacle without substance, spectacle which usually also has predominantly commercial aims.

To reach a state of celebration that meets the expressed needs of certain communities requires different techniques clearly based on a deep understanding of the processes that

participants go through in various situations. There is a great deal of tension in the interface in Australia between commercial and state concerns who use ritual and celebratory techniques to further sub-agendas such as tourism, financial gain, political or nationalistic aims, and others who try to create events with no other aim than to genuinely achieve the experience of shared ritual and celebration around a shared concern. Often commercial and state interests have little or no idea of the cultural erosion effects that manipulation of important events have on a society. Without a careful understanding of the significance and societal uses of ritual and celebration, business and government can sometimes transform the genuine into the simulacral, diluting, degrading, until our festivals are impoverished, only there to meet commercial objectives; a level of impoverishment at which we have no mechanics for our rites and gatherings, and where our ability to express our community values becomes thwarted because those community values have gone or have been reshaped beyond recognition.

This dissertation revisits and develops my exploration of contemporary ways to engage with ritual and celebration. Based in a methodology of critical analysis, synthesis and evaluation, it presents a means of considering and categorising rituals and celebrations which I hope might establish a new language and understanding of ritual and celebration in Australia today. This approach aims to: provide some frameworks for artists who are involved in working with communities to develop ritual and celebratory events; be an aid to conceptualising such events; bring a fresh opportunity for meaning into attempts to express ourselves in these areas; and also, through developing knowledge, act as protection against misuse, either intentional or unintentional.

Whereas in traditional cultures as well as in the Christian churches and other religions, the shamans, priests, and other officials are carefully trained in management of ritual and ceremony by more experienced practitioners, often artists in contemporary secular contexts are invited to play pivotal roles in such events when their training has been in arts practice or arts management, not processes of ritual. My study seeks to open out discussion of this burgeoning field and to provide frameworks for those who work in it. To do this I focus on sites where indigenous peoples have evolved ritual and celebration and try to discover the underlying forms that are often found in these events. With these forms as a guide, I develop a set of concepts which I apply to various examples of practical work spanning the last twenty years, thus demonstrating the ‘new’ forms and

illuminating the ‘new’ categories. My study sets out to provide practitioners involved in the design and implementation of such events with a set of tools to work with, conceptually and contextually.

Given that what I am concerned to explore is a creative practice – a practice of designing new kinds of rituals, ceremonies and celebrations – I have sought ways of understanding this practice that are themselves creative. That is, just as the kinds of events I will describe give themselves permission to range across cultural signs, symbol systems, community beliefs and social settings, so I have given myself permission, as a researcher, to seek out ways of understanding and working with such events which do not tie themselves down to particular disciplinary concerns or theoretical debates. Since my aim is to provide practitioners with useful means to work reflectively and reflexively in designing or participating in such events, I have sought out conceptual frameworks that will provide insights into purposes, modes, structures and affects. But I have avoided establishing these in terms that might settle into rigidity, binarise or require specialist knowledge. New ritual and celebratory expressions in the Australian context are culturally dynamic. The modes of thinking about them, with them, in them and through them that I have developed are therefore flexible, open to different engagements by different practitioners working in diverse contexts, yet posited with a sufficient sense of ‘category’ and ‘process’ to enable ready application.

Chapter One: The Dynamics of Ritual

Ritual metalanguage

> Men and women, of a given group or culture, wholly attending, in privileged moments, to their own existential situation. (Turner in MacAloon ed., 1984: 23)

The context referred to by Turner can be complex. We can be talking about indigenous peoples, belief systems or postmodern society, however we cannot escape the function of 'attendance'. We construct privileged moments to pay attention to ourselves as much now as ever we did regardless of where we have come from and regardless of where we live. Ritual, ceremony and celebration create these privileged moments where we enact our 'social dramas' (Turner in MacAloon ed., 1984: 20) and enter special states where the normal is disrupted and the individual plays out another form of social behaviour. These states, these privileged moments, are often described as 'liminal' or 'threshold zones'. Liminal comes from the Latin 'limen' and means both lintel and the step or threshold of a door affording entrance to a house (Partridge, 1958: 358). In contemporary cultural theory, 'liminal' tends to refer to 'in between' sites, states or zones into which traces of other sites, states or zones may slip, leak or stray; they are at once 'unique' and 'becoming other' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987; Diprose and Ferrell eds., 1991; Broadhurst, 1999; Grosz, 1994, 1995).[2] The liminal states of ritual, celebration and ceremony move individuals and communities from one state to another, through a 'threshold zone', and the image of a doorway connecting and giving access to different spaces is therefore apt in this context.

> They are occasions in which as a culture or society we reflect upon and define ourselves, dramatise our collective myths and history, present ourselves with alternatives, and eventually change in some ways while remaining the same in others. (MacAloon, 1984: 1)

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[2] The *OED* gives for liminal: '1 Of, pertaining to, or constituting a transitional or initial stage of a process. Also, marginal, incidental, insignificant… 2 Of, pertaining to, or situated at a limen; occupying a position on, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold.'

In Australia the mysteries of this reflexivity produce layers of intensity. Indigenous people, colonists, immigrants and refugees try to find privileged moments to attend wholly to themselves, to enter a liminal state in safety and to gain the insight such an experience brings. The noise of the contemporary world is loud, at times deafening, and it makes attention difficult. For some the metalanguages of belief can still cope with the challenge but even they can be hard pressed to keep their attention. Where then can we turn to find the structures we need to attend, to wholly attend, to ourselves? How can we leave our normally stable world and enter that most 'holy' of states, the virtual world of metaphor and myth, ritual and celebration? How can we negotiate the unstable gateways to self-knowledge and enter 'modes of existence and realisation' (Dell Hymes cited in MacAloon ed., 1984: 2) that reveal an 'inner world'? Where are the pathways, the road signs and the maps that can lead us forward? Where are the rituals, ceremonies and celebrations by means of which we can access the liminal states necessary for such experiences? What needs do we have for such experiences in contemporary culture and how do we understand them? These overarching questions have driven this work and will be explored in various contexts throughout.

In traditional indigenous societies the structure that holds ritual, ceremony and celebration is culturally integrated. For older Western culture, what Francis Huxley calls the 'way of the sacred' (Huxley, 1994: 1) lay parallel to the way of carnival, and both were able to sustain a structure capable of holding a society's needs for celebratory expression. But with the diminished importance of the church in Australia and the confusion that attends much of popular culture, many struggle for a new way forward to convene meaningful reflexive[3] experiences. The degrading of these experiences can be impoverishing for we must not undervalue the importance of such avenues of expression.

> Ritual is a form by which culture presents itself to itself. In ritual, not only are particular messages delivered, but ritual also creates a world in which culture can appear. Further, ritual creates a setting in which persons can appear, by appearing in their culture, by devising a reality in which they

[3] Reflexive is used here as 'arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves'. (Turner, 1982: 75). That is, we can reflect on – or think about – an experience, and we can also be reflexive by acknowledgement of the effect of our own presence on and in the experience, as a participant, a researcher or a practitioner.

> may stand as part. In their rituals, we see persons dramatizing self and culture at once, each made by the other. (Kuper in MacAloon ed., 1984: 155)

Turner states that ritual in tribal society has 'an immense orchestration of genres in all available sensory codes' (in MacAloon ed., 1984: 25). The integration of life and belief provides robust frameworks to organise reflexive events that contain what Turner has described as metalanguages (in Manning ed., 1983: 188). These traditional integrated structures have become increasingly unavailable to us in the West as our cultural ritual meta-patterns, which were largely found in organised religion, have come under severe stress. All too often the need for meaningful experience is being widely misunderstood by government, institutions, commercial forces and at times by the community itself. This misunderstanding is contained in a complex paradox. To achieve liminal situations, as individuals and as communities, we must enter states of dislocation and disruption. Yet the very structures responsible for organising and funding significant events are understood to have overall responsibilities to stabilise and regulate experiences for society (Manning ed., 1983: 23). Barbara Myerhoff states that ritual has a grammar which is 'not of the everyday world', and that 'the order of things is dislocated and everything becomes full of emotion, allusive, symbolic and representational' (in MacAloon ed., 1984: 237). The tension between stability and instability puts many of the structures that organise major celebrations into conflict. Those charged with managing such events, and the structures they work with/within, are resistant to the state of 'antistructure' (Turner in MacAloon ed., 1984: 26) that is needed in celebration, yet they understand the value of such cultural activities. This produces conflicting agendas that lead to confused outcomes.

I have found myself in many situations where the design of an event is deeply compromised by various other forces: advertising hanging within theatre environments; sponsors needs over the participants; requests to 'popularise' the content; different aims and objectives by the organisers; television needs and media manipulation. Some of our festivals are under threat by commercial interests which are invasive, corrupting the community purpose and usefulness of events. J. M. Caballero Bonald says in *Festivals and Rituals of Spain*:

> Amongst the most common source of changes are private interests in the community…that have altered the celebration of a festival in favour of a

> more spectacular display in order to satisfy the demands of tourism. In some cases they have added only the superficial decorations, but in others they have systematically weakened and diluted the nature of celebration. (1992: 13)

Can artists help identify and design new directions and yet escape this paradoxical tension between the needs of commerce (albeit often seen as community economic development), and the needs of culture? For me, the answer to this lies in the ways in which the event itself incorporates certain 'meta' elements which can enable it to have the symbolic coherence to negotiate complex socio-cultural settings without losing the capacity to work for communities.

Clearly artists, in spite of the above difficulties, will be attracted to ritual and celebration, especially when we note Manning's description: 'celebration is a "text", a vivid aesthetic creation that reflexively depicts, interprets and informs social context' (1983: 6). To retain the integrity of ritual and celebration artists must, as Turner states, develop 'other languages or metalanguages, non verbal as well as verbal…particularly when societies advance in scale and complexity' (in Manning ed., 1984: 26).

The challenge in the contemporary context is how to produce such a metalanguage of myth, symbol and representation when the extent of shared cultural meaning seems to be so much less than it was, yet when the abundance of cultural symbolism and representations is so overwhelming. For the designer of new rituals, ceremonies and celebrations, there is a need to recognise that in fact a considerable range of symbol and opportunity for mythic representations remains available but that what has broken down are many of the richly coherent cultural narratives that used to provide a context for them. That is, the problem for designers is not so much a loss of symbolic material but a loss of textual frameworks to carry that material. What I have increasingly developed is a practice which draws on the body of myth, symbol and archetype that remains recognisable, but weaves those elements into other textual forms. These forms do not try to replicate the coherent, integrated past narratives from which the symbolic elements come, rather they carry new expressions of still familiar symbols and representations in new formations, or assemblages, that are able to speak to the communities for whom the event is designed. I will deal with how this can be managed in the context of practice later in the dissertation.

New rituals, ceremonies and celebrations are constantly being developed in new social environments created by social change (Manning, 1983: 23). We have witnessed over the last two or three decades a significant increase in community based or government sponsored events that have taken the place of previous practices as a means of expressing community focus and reflexive exploration. The increase in festivals of all types in Australia has been nothing short of phenomenal. In effect, as individuals and communities struggle to redefine ritual and celebration in the cultural space left by a decline in formal religions and the rise of commercial pressures, artists have increasingly been invited to 'fill the gap' left by earlier ritual practitioners, such as priests, in designing events.

The cultural aesthetic which many artists inhabit is poorly equipped discursively to handle the community interface needed to create new and effective rituals that can work in the community at large. The discourses of postmodernism tend to privilege poststructuralist theory, and particularly deconstructive approaches. However, postructuralist and postmodern discourses do not easily translate into situations in which the central concern is to communicate with communities. This does not mean that postmodern/postructuralist theoretical insights and procedures of practice are not useful to the practitioner who works with communities, but practitioners will need to concentrate on the communities' discourses, and not expect communities to accommodate themselves to the discourses of contemporary cultural theory.

If artists want to be able to gain access to the creation of appropriate rituals within communities, clearly they must begin by developing a deep understanding of what happens to the individual within the context of ritual and celebration. The biggest problem faced by serious designers of new ritual, ceremony and celebration is to understand that the participants are not actors who will learn a part, but real individuals who will respond deeply to the experience they are having. Ritual, celebration and ceremony are powerful vehicles for human expression and as such should be taken very seriously.

Many projects I have been involved with are concerned with trauma of various kinds. The people are in crisis and mistakes in the process can have disastrous personal repercussions. In such situations the artist embraces a heavy responsibility. For example we have worked with Canteen (an organisation for the support of young people with cancer) at a national conference where the teenagers wanted to hold a remembrance service for friends who had died. The artist/community interface was complex and had

little space for error. We designed the event in close consultation with the young people (and those who work with them) and checked the design at every stage. Such young people are not only facing a life threatening disease but are also suffering from personal loss and their fragile state can be damaged by unskilled and clumsy work methods.

But traumatic contexts are not the only situations needing great sensitivity and a strong methodology. Almost all ritual and celebratory events with which I have been involved have potentially volatile interfaces with the community. These include weddings, public events, initiations, naming ceremonies, greeting and farewell events, festival rituals and state ceremonies, all of which can have consequences for the participants that most arts events do not. Mental anguish, public embarrassment, psychological damage, strained relationships, political and social alienation are only some of the consequences of rituals and celebrations going wrong. We need to identify positive experiences and adapt traditional categorisations into new alignments, with new languages that make sense to both practitioners and participants, thus avoiding damaging social and personal effects.

It is vital within such a new synthesis between artist and community that artists are cognisant of the complexities involved in this sort of artistic pursuit. There are a range of existing guidelines that can inform this emerging form of artistic expression and assist in the pedagogical framework. As observed earlier, traditional rituals cannot be readily translated by the metalanguages of contemporary western society. However, we can gain great insight through studying them and examining their structures. They have evolved from individual and societal needs spanning epochs and have built in protective apparatus for participants and also observers; they have evoked symbolic landscapes to accompany psychological and social change and have established patterns, rhythms and structures that fulfil major tasks of ritual and celebration in community. By understanding their templates, artists can enrich their own practice and the communities with whom they engage. The lengthy experience and the accompanying knowledges of Western and non-Western ritual traditions can help us design our own ceremonies responsibly and minimise risk for participants and observers.

Understanding of the liminal aspect of ritual can be greatly increased if we consider the importance of research into life science and cognitive studies. Ritual marks the threshold between communal, cultural structures and personal psycho-physiological processes. Cognitive science contributes to our understanding of how the individual and

the collective interact and the means by which the many levels of change initiated and structured by rituals are integrated. Designers of new rituals must learn to recognise how ritual changes the people involved on a physiological/psychological level and thereby design effective and responsible rituals that are no longer supported by unquestioned traditions and histories.

> Notwithstanding the reality that learning and culture alter the expression of emotions and give emotions new meanings, emotions are biologically determined processes, depending on innately set brain devices, laid down by a long evolutionary history. (Damasio, 1999: 51)

By working with some insights provided by science and with traditional understandings, artists who want to develop work in this realm can develop a 'language' that brings together old knowledge with new. Such a synthesis will produce for the practitioner an understanding of liminal experiences for individuals and groups involved in ritualised events.

> A public celebration is a rope bridge of knotted symbols strung across an abyss. We make our crossing hoping the chasm will echo our festival sounds for a moment, as the bridge begins to sway from the rhythm of our dance. (Grimes cited in Cohen, 1991: 104)

The new language and ideas for structuring ritual, ceremony and celebration that I develop here are designed to strengthen the bridge, allowing it to sway to the rhythm of the dance and, I hope, prevent the long fall into the abyss.

But to do this, we need to understand ways in which contemporary Australians respond to various ritual and celebratory situations. Ethnographic and anthropological categorisations of ritual can be misleading. They are often focused on the rites of indigenous societies with traditional rituals whose metalanguage is completely different from that with which we are familiar. Apart from the obvious dangers of culturally insensitive appropriation, confusion – even, in extreme cases, personal or production disasters – can occur if artists attempt to restage rites in inappropriate contexts.

To demonstrate the importance of being alert to changing categorical relationships we might take an example of death rites. When we examine traditional death rites we might

view them as rites of passage[4]. There is a belief structure in place that allows the participants to see the dead as negotiating a transition between life and an after life. The deceased is seen to be going through a rite of passage. When this belief system is not in place and the death ritual becomes a secular experience it is no longer a rite of passage but a cathartic experience for the mourners, usually designed to celebrate and accept the person's passing. Many secular funeral rites are now designed for the living and not the dead. Therefore the design of the death rite in the contemporary West is going through changes of semiology and the death rite is re-categorising itself along with its symbols, procedures, and associated activities – which should be deeply responsive to the state of the participants (and often are not). The artist who does not understand the subtle changes of emphasis within such rites can experience great difficulty in developing appropriate forms.

How then can we set up a helpful new categorisation that will inform contemporary practice? Rituals and celebrations are structured to achieve a 'special state of mind' within the individual[5] and this study will seek to establish a system of categories based on these 'special states of mind' rather than on societal function. I will examine these 'states of mind' in detail but must first develop terms that can help us better to describe what is happening cognitively during these experiences. To do that I draw on scholarship concerning cognitive function.

I approach this aspect of my work cautiously, given that the disciplinary locus for cognition is the sciences, and my disciplinary locus is the arts. Yet if we are to understand new rituals and celebrations and be able to design meaningful ceremonies and rituals, it has become clear to me in the course of my research that we must familiarise ourselves with current perspectives about cognition. We can also develop a 'working language' for categorising the special states of mind experienced during ritual and celebration.

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[4] Turner (1984: 21) followed Arnold van Gennep, quite rightly in a specific anthropological context they were engaged in, to categorise death rituals as a rite of passage for traditional societies.

[5] 'By organizing and managing the passage of persons from one set of normative positions, roles, rules and social states to another, ritual serves social order and continuity' (MacAloon ed., 1984: 1)

Bisociative and multisociative processes

> The chaos of infinite possibilities can become a world of meaning only through the institutions of these specific forms and structures. (Martin, 1981: 9)

In the last forty years we have learnt a great deal about how the individual functions at a cognitive level. The mind and how it functions remains to a considerable extent 'the great mystery' but the work of various sciences has shed a clearer light on our 'inner workings'. Science is developing new languages to express these discoveries which are beginning to influence many other domains and bodies of knowledge and can help us understand ritual, ceremony and celebration in a fresh light. We can see that ritual, ceremony and celebration have structures designed to encourage certain cognitive changes within the individual – to remove them from 'normal' day-to-day behaviour and create environments that can bring them into special cognitive states.

> We create then a special place where the routines of the daily world are broken and where it is possible to observe, discuss, or criticize the real world seen standing on its head. (Myerhoff in MacAloon ed., 1984: 237)

Ideas of bisociative process were introduced by the critic, scientist and writer Arthur Koestler in the nineteen sixties. Koestler was one of the pioneers of cognitive study and science has since greatly added to, adapted and developed his original ideas, but aspects of his work can provide a means of focusing the processes involved in the frameworks developed here. He coined the term 'bisociative thought' in his book *The Act of Creation* written in 1964, and although many may now prefer to describe cognitive processes in other terms, it still presents a very useful starting point in the context of this study.

Koestler's idea of 'bisociation' might be seen in the following way. When we think, we are using what he calls 'matrices[6] of thought' (1964: 38). He suggests that our cognitive functions consist of thought clusters which have their own rules, frames of reference, associative contexts, types of logic, codes of behaviour and universes of discourse. 'The

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[6] 'Matrix is derived from the Latin for womb and is figuratively used for any pattern or mould in which things are shaped or developed, or type is cast…they can be subject to transformations without losing

matrix…is flexible: it can be adapted to environmental conditions; but the rules of code must be observed and set a limit to flexibility' (1964: 38). In Koestler's model, matrix systems make connections in various ways. In other words, rather than having rigid modes of thinking we have highly variable sets of interrelating matrices which can be rearranged into new configurations.

> All coherent thinking and behaviour is subject to some specific code of rules to which its character of coherence is due – even though the code functions partly or entirely on subconscious levels… (Koestler, 1964: 42)

To function as ordinary human beings, to be able to apply ourselves to life, we need *many* systems or matrices of thought. Koestler uses the word 'matrix' to describe any ability, habit, or skill, any pattern of ordered behaviour governed by a 'code' of fixed rules.

> We learn by assimilating experiences and grouping them into ordered schema, into stable patterns of unity in variety. They enable us to cope with events and situations by applying the rules of the game appropriate to them. The matrices which pattern our perceptions, thoughts and activities are condensations of learning into habit. The process starts in infancy and continues into senility; the hierarchy of flexible matrixes with fixed codes – from those that govern the breathing of his cells, to those which determine the pattern of his signature, constituting a creature of many layered habits… (Koestler, 1964: 44)

It is important to note, however, that these implicit codes can be reformed into new alignments which break habits of thought. He suggests that in science various matrices of thought combine together to form new knowledge whereas in the creative realm they break up and merge into new alignments. The merging of matrices is the way, he suggests, that we create new intellectual syntheses. The break up and reforming of matrices can be seen as the 'creative process' or, to put it another way, the formation of new thoughts and alignments.

> [The creative act] does not create something out of nothing; it uncovers, selects, reshuffles, combines, synthesises already existing facts, ideas, faculties, skills. (Koestler, 1964: 22)

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their identity, i.e. they are both flexible and stable. Also, matrixes have a constant attached to them called their determinant which remains unaffected by any of these transformations'. (Koestler, 1964: 50)

Koestler describes this sociative process as bisociative and as such suggests only two matrix domains coming together to merge or clash. He is discussing the acts of creation which negotiate changes within just two determinates to create the new. Holyoak and Thagard give this description of Koestler's idea of matrix interrelationships: '…interlocking two domains of knowledge previously seen as unrelated or even incompatible' (1995: 12) However, Koestler admits that the operation of matrix control is 'governed by certain rules which I am unable to name'. In the light of increased understanding of cognitive processes we might now describe the process as multisociative. We have complex matrix relationships both in the vertical, or hierarchical, sense and in the horizontal, or emergent, sense. Matrix assemblages are able to split up, merge and develop negotiated borders: '…there are virtues not only to distribute but also insulation, that is mechanisms that keep processes apart' (Varela, 1991: 106).

This process is sometimes known as 'syncretic thought' and is understood by Ladislas Segy as the

> …unconscious mental ability to unite harmoniously several manifold, originally different, often simultaneously occurring, overlapping, diverging, sometimes inconsistent, concepts, relationships between things, actions and emotions. (Segy, 1976: 53)

Such matrices can negotiate new alignments, move into and out of new territories, dissolve into external conditions and also reclaim themselves again. We can recognise by our lived experience that at times our thoughts are following familiar combinations of matrices which stabilise cognitive function and preserve the known while at other times matrices are in a changing mode, readjusting, destabilising, creating the new. 'Every voyage is intensive, and occurs in relation to thresholds of intensity between which it evolves or that it crosses' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 54). Francisco Varela describes cognitive systems thus:

> Theories and models no longer begin with abstract symbolic descriptions but with a whole army of neurallike [sic], simple, unintelligent components, which when appropriately connected have interesting global properties. These global properties embody and express the cognitive capacities being sought. (Varela, 1991: 87)

Explaining the process, Varela continues:

> The strategy, as we have said, is to build a cognitive system not by starting with symbols and rules but by starting with simple components that would dramatically connect to each other in dense ways…Today people prefer to speak of emergent or global properties, network dynamics, non linear networks, complex systems or even synergies. (Varela, 1991: 88)

If we can accept that our mental architecture is made up not of large, unified, stable concrete systems but rather matrices combining together in aggregates which are able to adjust to various conditions, forming 'societies in the mind' (Varela, 1991) then we can better see how various cognitive tasks are carried out and, what is vital to this study, how they are aligned. Deleuze and Guattari talk about the 'negotiation' between these (matrix) states which territorialise, deterritorialise and reterritorialise in different ways and at different speeds or intensities. 'Everywhere there arise simultaneous accelerations and blockages, comparative speeds, differences in deterritorialization creating relative fields of reterritorialization' (1987: 55).

We not only bring into zones of intensity matrices that are directly useful but also matrices that *might* be useful. We are constantly moving the attention of the mind, or the 'protoself'[7] as Damasio (1999) calls it, into unknown territory and must be ready for any contingency. If we are to talk about 'intensity' (Deleuze and Guattari, 1987: 54), we need to be able to combine many complex variations at any given moment. These matrix movements have borders to negotiate, mechanics for mixing and staying apart, liminal thresholds and archways of access.

> Those different parts [of the brain] are coordinated in terms of their circuits such that the dormant and implicit records can turn into explicit…images, rapidly and in close proximity. The availability of all those images allows us, in turn, to create verbal description of the entity and that serves as a base for definition. (Damasio, 1999: 221)

In Saussure's model of the signifier and the signified, it is almost as if the signifier not only brings up the concept of itself but it is surrounded with many other matrix systems. These might be called upon depending on the context of the signified, the interpretation of its context, the emotional level of its interaction – informational and experiential

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[7] Damasio describes 'protoself' as 'a coherent collection of neural patterns which map, moment by moment, the state of the physical structure of organisms in its many dimensions' (1999: 154).

units which might be needed to move the signifier in any way it might be needed. We see an assembly of matrices not just concerned with the direct use of words but also in countless other contexts. Bateson described this as imagining an encounter between A and B, two ideas meeting in the mind.

> Thus there comes into existence another class of information, which B must assimilate, to tell B about the coding of messages or indications coming from A. Messages of this class will be, not about A or B, but about the coding of the messages. They will form a different logical type. I will call them metamessages. (Bateson, 1979: 114)

Again, for our purposes the apparent binary 'A and B' needs to be replaced with a notion of 'multisociative', but the idea of the 'metamessage' is very useful.

The structures used within ritual, ceremony and celebration have evolved to encourage matrix realignment from the normal to the 'special'– to create conditions in the self (and in the community) that will allow the loosening of the normal alignment which is so important to ordinary daily survival, and produce the new forms of assemblages needed to fulfil less ordinary personal and societal needs. The individual and the group cannot bring about receptive and special states spontaneously at any given moment. A rational appeal to the intellect is not always effective in changing alignments and it could be said that the intellect sometimes prevents radical change. Varela's idea of 'cognitivism' can clarify ritual function in this regard.

> There is a difference, however, between what we usually mean by the 'subconscious' and the sense in which mental processes are said to be unconscious in cognitivism: we usually suppose that whatever is in the subconscious can be brought to consciousness – if not through self conscious reflection, then through disciplined procedures such as psychoanalysis. Cognitivism, on the other hand, postulates processes that are mental but cannot be brought to consciousness at all… Indeed, it is typically noted that if such cognitive processes could be made conscious, then they could not be fast and automatic and so could not function properly. In one formulation these cognitive processes are to be considered 'modular' (to comprise of subsystems that cannot be penetrated by conscious, mental activity). (Varela, 1991: 49)

In other words ritual, ceremony and celebration change our matrix assemblages by processes that often bypass our logical intellect. We cannot 'think' our way into these special states of mind. The main function of ritual structures is to bypass the 'normal' logic of everyday life and allow change to occur, either on a temporary or permanent

level, without necessarily engaging the intellect in any usual way. Matrix assemblages cannot be changed at will into desired configurations without guidance and stimulus. This is where the forms of ritual, ceremony and celebration have a strong role to play. To achieve desired states potent techniques have been developed by cultures throughout the world which encourage matrix assemblages to change in specific ways. Ritual, ceremony and celebration also have another cognitive role to play and that is to provide structures of protection that can facilitate these changes and negotiate liminal moments with safety. Again, we cannot think out the safety structures with ordinary logic but need to be given structures that are 'modular' (to use Varela's phrase) and that work almost without the intellect being involved.

However, not only the brain is concerned in achieving special states. The whole body is involved. In ritual and celebration the external stimulus carried through the senses is critical to cognitive alignment. Koestler describes this as follows:

> …at moments of intense aesthetic experience we see not only with our eyes but with our whole body. The eyes scan, the cortex thinks, there are muscular stresses, innervating of the organs of touch, sensations of weight and temperature, visceral reactions, feelings of rhythm and motion – all sucked into one integrated vortex. (1964: 371)

The anthropologist Barbara Myerhoff explains the ritual process as 'step[ping] out of our usual conscious, critical mentality', as 'losing oneself' (in MacAloon ed., 1984: 173). I am suggesting, using Koestler's metaphor, that we can understand ritual, ceremony and celebrations as mechanisms by means of which we can achieve special alignments in our matrix assemblages – that is, experiences involving a 'metamatrix', beyond familiar or habitual modes of assembling ourselves. The point is not to turn artists into cognitive scientists, but to recognise that since artists work with metaphor, the language of cognitive science thus explained can assist the development of a set of understandings to assist artists working on new ritual and ceremony.

It is now possible to attempt a definition, or at least a map, of the ritual and celebratory pathways by which matrix alignments suitable for such activities are approached. We will be able to identify many matrix alignments within all events of these kinds, but we are searching for the *primary* or *major* dynamic in each.

Alignment processes

> The point in examining other people's rites is not to steal from them or even borrow from them but to evoke a more fruitful thinking about our own. (Grimes, 2000: 8)

Although I recognise that these are in some ways arbitrary, I have established four alignment processes that could be used by artists in contemporary ritual and ceremonial practice. Others might choose other lines of axis and define the experiences in other ways but the following categories have provided design criteria which have proved robust within my practice over the past twenty years. My approaches are based, as Grimes suggests, on consideration of my practice contexts and my practices in relation to contexts in which traditional patterns of ritual and ceremony continue to serve their communities effectively. In examining my praxis I realised that in designing these types of events I was aiming to achieve an emotional pathway for the participants that created the 'special states' mentioned above. These special states could not be arrived at without carefully constructed procedures in place and an understanding of how they operated. I also realised that the special states differed and their pathways reflected that difference.

In other words I had to understand the particular context, design pathways to suit the most effective liminal situation and provide structure to enter and retreat from the consequent 'special state'. The criteria for design I used were based in careful analysis of what type of experience the participants wanted to have (a celebration, a wedding, a death rite, a memorial rite) so that I could structure the alignment processes appropriately. The needs, intentions and desired outcomes of these contexts differ greatly and it was vital to understand what sort of procedures led to what sort of results. The following categories helped me understand the pathways that might be constructed to allow people to reach the ritual and celebratory states that they wanted. Detailed examination of them follows in Chapters Two–Five, with reference to traditional practice, exploration of issues for contemporary practitioners and examples from my own practice.

It is important to note that there are other secondary matrix alignment processes in almost all ritual and celebratory experiences and in fact all the categories summarised below can be found at different times, in different combinations within ritual and

celebration. But for the purposes of this study we will concentrate on the primary or major function: the main central alignment objective of the event.

Transformation

These rituals encourage participants to change their metamatrix assemblages in major and permanent ways. Transformational rituals encourage realignments within the participant that form new orientations and allow radical change to be managed successfully. Transformational experiences are by their nature one-way systems and because of this are surrounded by fear and instability. Forms for ritual must therefore reflect these tensions. The Oxford English Dictionary defines transformation as 'The action of changing in form, shape, or appearance; metamorphosis… A changed form; person or thing transforming.' 'Metamorphosis' perhaps best describes this process. The participant is changed or transformed permanently by the ritual, but is at the same time protected and steered through the experience of change to emerge ready to experience the future.

Reinforcement

The participant in reinforcement rituals and celebrations wants to enter a particular state of mind and uses already existing frameworks or prescribed forms to reach this state. Again the Oxford English Dictionary can help: '…the act of strengthening or increasing in any way'. These external 'concrete' forms allow the participant to align matrix assemblages by means of frameworks or templates. The realignment is intended to be temporary, and afterwards the participant can return to 'normal' alignments again. This is in stark contrast to permanent transformational alignment processes described above.

Transcendence

The participant is encouraged to enter special states of mind that can be called 'oceanic' (Koestler, 1964: 88). 'Transcendence: the action or fact of transcending, surmounting or rising above' (Oxford English Dictionary). These rituals and celebrations have similar qualities to reinforcement in that they are temporary states of alignment, but they differ greatly from reinforcement in that they do not have firm frameworks that can hold the matrix assemblages. Rather, they encourage a relaxation of the tensions between matrix

alignments. By this means, usual assemblages are released, allowing the participant to enter a state of *communitas* (Turner in Manning ed., 1983: 190).

Catharsis

Cathartic experiences resemble transformation in that change is intended to be one-way and permanent. These rituals are often used when the participants have experienced a crisis or trauma which has upset their matrix alignments. Cathartic rituals provide a formal structure by means of which the participant can realign and make appropriate adjustments to their experienced reality.

Chapter Two: Transformation

Illustration 2 – River Event

> Last season's fruit is eaten
> And the fulfilled beast shall kick the empty pail.
> For last year's words belong to last year's language
> And next year's words await another voice.
> (T.S. Eliot, 1944: 55)

This first classification can be seen operating in many situations but most strongly in rites of passage which have a strong transformational content and as such are powerful tools for steering participants through times of change, of transforming from one state to another. A detailed examination of existing traditional rites of passage reveals structures and methodologies useful to the design of modern rituals that are concerned with transformation – changes that bring about permanent realignment.

Transformation in rites of passage

> … a face still forming
> (T.S. Eliot, 1944: 53)

Rites of passage are held at key moments in life. There are formal moments linked with age transitions such as birthdays, initiation, marriage and death, and also informal moments concerned with more social changes such as school and university graduations, new jobs, retirements and even divorces. We might think of these, in the terms I have developed above, as times when the individual needs radically to alter matrix alignments and move from one self-identity to another. It is characteristic of a rite of passage that it is understood as a one-way process whereby the participant will be permanently changed. Such rites are particularly significant as they are recognised, usually publicly as well as privately, as marking *and facilitating* change within the life of a person and/or a community.

> It is good to remember the rites of passage that mark the end of who we were and the beginning of who we will become, and the images that support us in our crossing. (Woodman cited in Cohen, 1991: 112)

These changes, transformations, 'crossings' are seen as socially and regeneratively important to healthy development within a wide range of cultures. For a rite of passage that is celebrated ritually to be really effective, to achieve its culturally transformative purpose, the participant must realign meta-assemblages in important and dynamic ways. The world is changing for the participant and rituals give an excellent opportunity for people and communities to process that change.

Participants who are going through transformational experiences on a physical or social level need accompanying rituals that will facilitate a realignment of their lives. This process hopefully allows participants to go into their future lives feeling comfortable about their new role thereby producing a balanced situation free from trauma. One of the important factors about ritual function in these situations is not so much that there is some magical change in the person within the ritual/rituals but that the guidance that operates within these structures is preparing the initiate to enter a different state in life with all of its new and unfamiliar complexities. The ritual itself provides the focus for the change but it is the structural support within the system that is vitally important.

Marriage and initiation rites for example are transformational experiences. In both of these cases participants cannot just change instantaneously but need structures which encourage change in meta-matrix systems while providing a stable protective framework at a time of vulnerability. Participants at all times of change can become more vulnerable. As the sense of self is undergoing great change the subject's ability to protect his or her 'personal identity' can become more fragile and even break down as the subject tries to step into the new identity defined by the expectations of the society. The function of these types of transformational rituals is to protect and guide the individual through such times and to provide a symbolic focal point where the change is formalised in such a way that a person's subjectivity is aligned more readily with the new social role marked by the event.

Damasio comments:

> The entire biological edifice, from cells, tissues, and organs to systems and images, is held alive by the constant execution of constructive plans, always on the brink of partial or complete collapse should the process of rebuilding and renewal break down. The construction plans are all woven around the need to stay away from the brink. (1999: 145)

Rites of passage require powerful techniques of realignment if actual transformation is to be achieved. Ronald Grimes, a leading authority on contemporary ritual, emphasises the seriousness of these changes: '[a] transformation is not just any sort of change but a metamorphosis, a moment after which one is never the same again' (Grimes, 2000: 6). Transformational experiences are fraught with psychological danger, and 'the function of ritual is to pitch you out, not to wrap you back in where you have been all the time' (Campbell, 1988: 84). This means that the designer of such rituals must properly understand the pressures and difficulties felt by the participant if unwanted consequences are to be avoided.

> Since the threshold zone is a no man's land, it is dangerous, full of symbolic meaning, and guarded. A rite of passage is a set of symbol-laden actions by means of which one passes through a dangerous zone, negotiating safely and memorably. (Grimes, 2000: 6)

The techniques to bring about 'transformation realignments' have to be effective and protective, yet to achieve permanent change in the consciousness of the subject/s, the

structures that operate must sometimes be extreme. Therefore strong safeguards must be built into these situations.

Initiation of Young People

Illustration 3 – Initiation Ceremony

> What we call the beginning is often the end
> And to make an end is to make a beginning. (T.S. Eliot, 1944: 58)

In many traditional societies young people go through various rites to signal their change of status in the community but these rites must be effective in transforming their consciousness as well. In talking about initiation rites Bill Moyers sees these experiences as a rebirth: 'all children have to be twice born, to learn how to function rationally in the present world' (cited in Campbell, 1988: 8). The first is the real birth and the second the ritual birth into adult life. If we look at traditional initiations we can learn a great deal about their structures that can inform new ritual practice. For example, the !Kung people of Botswana initiate their young women by a process of isolation and preparation.

> …coming of age is treated as a time for celebration. At the onset of the first menstrual period, the young woman is taken to a special shelter away from the camp. Here women and old men gather to sing special songs and

> perform a dance. The dance is performed by the women and two old men who attach twigs to their heads to imitate the horns of the eland. (Ingpen and Wilkenson, 1994: 68)

Boys too go through threshold assemblages in most cultures. In Quilici's studies of Papua New Guinea's traditional village cultures he found various rites and although he does not define which particular village we might take the following as a common example:

> Boys who must submit to the initiation ordeal sit terrified on the ground (painted with ash, the symbol of death) waiting to be "devoured" by the monster which is set up in the middle of the village once a year. At the culmination of the ceremony, several men grab the boys and throw them, almost flying, through the open mouth of the monster: as he passes through the monster's mouth each boy dies and is reborn as man. (Quilici, 1980: 234)

I have observed boys from the Walpiri people of the central desert leave for initiation as cheerful, carefree children and then, after many weeks with their elders, return as sombre, serious young men who seemed totally transformed from their former childhood selves[8]. Strong measures are needed to transform a child into an adult, because 'on the brink of illumination the old ways are very seductive and liable to pull us back' (Ramakrishna cited in Osbon, 1991: 114). For any child to leave his or her past life, 'put away childish things' (I Corinthians 13: v. 11) and adopt a new orientation with adult responsibilities is a delicate transition that must be handled carefully by the adults in that child's community.

In examining the structures of many rites of passage ceremonies we can immediately notice a sequence of deterritorialising and reterritorialising. Different techniques are used at different points in the sequence. Rites of passage display three distinct phases – the *preparation* before the actual event, the *focal moment* of transformation and the *release*, the celebration of achievement. French ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep (cited in Turner in MacAloon ed., 1984: 21) positioned the three stages as 'separation, transition and reincorporating', which provides a useful way of conceptualising the processes involved. In terms of the notion of matrices, we can observe that the

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[8] Journey to Alice Springs 1985 made by writer to work on an arts programs for young men from the Walpiri People.

preparation phase is concerned with slowly loosening the metamatrix assemblages that hold childhood in place and preparing the young person to negotiate new alignments. The *focal moment* is the formal moment of change with new assemblages being introduced and able to be taken on. The *release* is the celebration that cements into place the new alignments, enforcing that new orientation by large-scale community approval. Obviously these apparently neat separations do not necessarily occur in practical situations. Where different transitional points occur, the distinctions between them can be blurred, but the model is useful in conveying the overall process, its aims and built-in protections, and to observe the techniques that are employed to achieve these transitions.

Let us look at the methodology of ritual. In the first stage of preparation young people might experience a number of processes which might include isolation from their normal lives, pain being inflicted, deprivation of food and sleep, and enforced fear of the unknown. All of these factors can provoke massive disorientation. In traditional ritualised rites of passage, it is almost always the case that a young person is subjected to psychical and/or physical isolation and/or hardship to a sufficient extent that the orientation towards childhood is left behind. The following is an extreme example:

> Young men…had hung themselves up from poles by thongs attached to their bodies through slits made in their chest or back muscles; others trailed behind them bison skulls tied with holes through their calves. Such deeds were much more than bravery and endurance; they were offerings of personal suffering to the Gods. (Burland, 1965: 73)

Yet in such rituals, whether gentle or extreme, protective structures are in place to substitute new adult feelings and to shepherd the young person through this difficult time. Clearly, if a girl was separated from her family to be placed in an isolated hut or a boy was tortured without clear reason, the experience would have long lasting traumatic effects. But in the context for a !Kung girl, the separation is because she has 'become a woman', she will be with other girls experiencing the same, and the event is culturally acknowledged. For the boys in the above examples, the suffering takes place in the context of proving their bravery, the idea of becoming a man, the experience happening alongside others in similar pain, with elders to monitor the process. In these ways the desired transformation can occur. Other methods operate in a similar way. Circumcision is found in the initiation rites of some Koori and Murri people (Burland, 1965: 26) as is

scarification, and scarring by sharp stones also takes place in some African tribes (Cohen, 1991: 92). These are possible methods of realignment if the ritual surrounding the young people is supportive both ideologically and emotionally. As Grimes puts it, 'while the short term tactical consequences are negative, the long term strategies are constructive' (2000: 137).

Transformation is easier and has strong protective qualities when there are strong belief systems in place to make sense of the process. Young people understand culturally what is happening to them and they see the cultural context of their transformation as being important to them. Rational reasons for the transformation ritual can be constructed to make sense of something that might, without these rationales, be frightening and confusing.

> The ritual as a spontaneous outburst or release of inner stress took place first, and only afterwards was the conceptual (mostly religious) framework created to justify the act itself. (Segy, 1976: 9)

The next stage of the ritual is implementing the moment of transition: the focal moment. The climax has arrived and the young person is taken through this pivotal moment fully prepared for the change. Sometimes these moments only formalise what has gone before but sometimes the formal moment is dramatic. The young man will jump off the high platform (Cohen, 1991: 87), kill a special animal (Muller, Klaud and Muller, 1999: 40) or leap a special sacred stone (Macintyre, 1980: 19) to shed the past assemblages and embrace the new. These moments are not private but take place in front of peers and senior people, putting pressure on the participants to perform well and show their adult behaviour. This further encourages realignment. The gateway is passed through offering a metaphoric portal of the transformation. This is followed by the final stage, the reincorporation into the group. The young man or woman is welcomed back into the group with special songs, food and celebration and treated as a young adult rather than a child. Participants have hopefully been transformed in their consciousness by the whole experience and are now accepted as adults by the community.

> The assimilation starts up again…[the] postulants…are cleaned, fed or covered with strengthening, nutritious foods (e.g. grains or flour), painted red, given new clothes and often a new name, and, having come back to life, they return to their society. (Konemann, 1999: 494)

Another factor that is important within the rituals associated with rites of passage (and will be explored more deeply later) is the use of symbol, analogy and metaphor which surrounds such experiences. In traditional settings, these occur within cohesive belief systems where powerful symbolic and interrelative language has been built up. Symbols and metaphors provide not only a rationale for the experience within the belief structure but also act as powerful reinforcement for the senses. Using what Turner refers to as 'social drama' (in MacAloon ed., 1984: 20), masks, music, costume, movement, makeup, etc (the 'theatre' of the ritual) also acts as reinforcement for the young person and provides a rich textual environment for change within many layers of assemblages.

Having sketched out some form of pattern for initiations for young people in traditional structures we might now turn our attention to initiation in contemporary society. We are currently faced with real problems in achieving these transitional moments. The young people are going through enormous changes – sexual awakening with all of its contemporary dangers; new responsibilities at complex levels in their schooling and family life; the development of ethical and behavioural choices relating to political decisions and emotional landscapes; dealing with the problems of drug and alcohol use; as well as finding a pathway through the maze of exploitative forces that surround them (they are a major target for large scale commercial systems which affect everything from their diets to their clothes, from their self-identify to their interaction within youth culture). They are under great pressure to make decisions within a complex and sometimes dangerous or oppressive environment. We, as a society, do little to temper commercial forces that operate in powerful and insidious ways to manipulate the young, although we attempt to counterbalance these forces through our educational system and parental guidance. One of the complex aspects of this situation is that there are many levels to a young person's entry into the adult world, each one negotiated at a different time in the teenage years. In our society there can no longer be just one moment, as there are so many levels to the initiation of young people into the contemporary world of adults. Not only are there many levels and times to the passage but also different needs thrown up by these different situations. In other words, the young people are transforming at different speeds and intensities, at different levels and within different cultural milieus.

Although in contemporary Australian society non-Indigenous formal initiation ceremonies for young people are now mostly painless and are contained in religious services such as confirmation or Bar Mitzvah, or in legal thresholds such as the drinking and voting age, many feel that young people are unable to transform into adults in a productive manner. They enter adulthood through 'rights of passage' rather than rites of passage. Without some form of dramatic psychological and social process it can be difficult to make key transformations at important moments.

We can see lack of understanding of the needs of young people in this context with the phenomenon of 'Schoolies'. This is a period of a week in Australia when young people celebrate leaving school. It is a very important moment when young people leave a way of life they have experienced since the age of five and enter the responsibilities of leaving home to undertake university, jobs, and other new experiences. We could have no clearer situation for a rite of passage. But instead of an authentic rite which encompasses the transition from school life into the adult world, the celebration turns into a week of massive drinking and partying, heavy use of drugs and in some cases violence and bloodshed. Young people (many under eighteen) are exploited at many levels, having little experience in coping with this sort of situation. The situation has become so serious in the Gold Coast area that the Queensland Government has instigated a review to try to curb abuse.

Let us examine the three stages of traditional initiation mentioned above in the light of the Schoolies experience. The preparation for the ritual is non-existent. While we provide 'public education' material, we do not communally structure any preparation phase that would equip the young people to protect themselves throughout the ritual. The second phase of the focal and symbolic moment of transformation is also ignored. It is only the third section of celebration that is fully engaged but is more 'party' than a genuine celebration of transformation. Our society fails to realise the true nature of the ritual event and the results can be catastrophic. The young people are justified in their feelings – they want to celebrate this key moment in their lives – but when left to their own devices they have little cultural guidance as to how to behave. We have not provided the structures that allow transformation to occur. If we are to learn from traditional forms, Schoolies rituals must be couched in appropriate adult forms, as adulthood is the state that the young people will enter. The solution is not to remove

from young people the capacity and choice to devise their own celebrations of change, but to provide, within the frameworks of their families and various communities, rites that precede their self-directed celebrations. That is, acknowledgement of transformation and initiation into adult forms of responsibility could be put in place in familiar contexts before the young people engage in celebration in unfamiliar contexts shot through with the excesses of consumer capitalism.

Later I will address festivals of misrule (wild festivals of anti-structure) which are categorised under Transcendence. In the case of Schoolies, the young people engaging in the event, and those who gain commercially from it, have applied the structures of misrule rather than the structures of initiation. This encourages the wild behaviour of the young people.

The older structures of speech nights and 'formals' do have clear traditions within initiation structures. They do build in appropriate preparation, formal moments, adult recognition, serious intention and parties afterwards to celebrate. But these forms have often failed to engage in current cultural signification and, where we should be contemporising initiation rites with applicable structures, we stay in inappropriate modes that alienate the young people. Many commercial and governmental agencies are all too ready to take advantage of this lack by advertising the party week in their area.

For four consecutive years I was asked to design a 'ritual' for young people on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland to try to provide a serious transformational experience in their school leaving ritual.[9] We worked with theatre structures, using parades, poetry, music and song with symbols of gateways, bridges, fire images and birds (flight). We involved the young people in the process by encouraging them to write wishing flags for the future, we made videos in which they recorded their aspirations, and we invited them to help prepare the celebration. Each year, in spite of the good intentions of the organisers and many participants, the alcohol-free evening was swamped with drunken teenagers, many of them under age, and there were a lot of drugs present. The music being offered was pop music played at high volume with DJ's suggesting that everyone party. In spite of these difficulties the young people responded to the ritual and there

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[9] 1997-2000 Schoolies Week on the Sunshine Coast run by Community Solutions

were moments when their responses indicated that they realised the crossing they were making. But the momentary atmosphere of deeper recognition was quickly lost in the party that followed.

We can see that a better understanding of the dynamics of rites of passage can help us to better identify the ways in which we can solve the problems we experience in situations of this kind. The challenge is to design events that incorporate the symbols and practices important to youth culture yet at the same time achieve the structures and effects of transformation which might encourage more lasting recognition of the import of change and less dangerous behaviours in celebrating it in contexts of their own choosing.

It is worth noting here that when there are no 'official' initiations young people will sometimes attempt to instigate them themselves, without senior guidance, sometimes with tragic results. Young boys test their bravery in uncontrolled conditions such as riding on the top of trains (Cohen, 1991: 86) or taking on other wild dares in which they can be badly injured. Cars and motorbikes, drug and drinking experiences provide ample dangerous scope for proofs of bravery associated with manhood. The adolescent phase is often very confused and deeply problematic but can also be life threatening. Australia's high male teenage suicide rate might also indicate alienation felt during these vulnerable teenage years.

Many people have striven to introduce more meaningful rites again in a secular context. Ronald Grimes:

> The past two decades have witnessed a resurrection of interest in the construction of rites of passage…without constant re-invention we court disorientation. Without rites that engage our imagination, communities, and bodies, we lose touch with the rhythms of human life course… (Grimes 1999: 91)

Paul Hill, national director of the Rites of Passage Institute, which works with young people in this area, explains his organisation's goals in terms of an intersection of the social and the personal:

> It is based on the multi-cultural premise that a group must recognise and affirm itself before it is able to share and appreciate the differences of others. Rites of Passage as a process also recognise that entry into adult life involves the realisation of social obligations and the assumption of responsibility for meeting them. What initiation does is to set a time on

> the journey for bringing the individuals into formal and explicit relation with their kindred. It also confronts them with some of their basic social ties, reaffirms them and thus makes patent to them their status against the days when they will have to adopt them in earnest. Rites of Passage as a developmental and transformational process will not only provide self-development and cultural awareness, but will foster a sense of belonging; adolescents and adults will become part of community life – not persons alone, lacking support, sanction, and purpose. (Hill, Internet site www.rites of passage.org/passage1.htm]

Three factors emerge from a consideration of initiation rites in today's secular settings. Firstly, the structures of traditional rituals with the three phases carefully and fully supervised can help the young people realise a genuine transformational experience. Secondly, they must have a supporting ontology that reinforces the journey being made with symbol and metaphor. Thirdly, a deeper understanding of the psychology of transformation and its processes can help us design appropriate events and might help us avoid errors. These three points will be important in the design of new transformational rituals. Although they take place in very different circumstances, the same factors are visible in the next example of transformation.

Rites of Marriage

> Let no man put asunder. (The Solemnisation of Marriage, Book of Common Prayer)

There are many forms of marriage found throughout the world but they all share some essential common factors. Two people go through a ritual that is usually legally binding, in which they commit to forming a permanent relationship with each other that is subject to certain social and cultural rules. These social rules vary but usually involve agreements about fidelity, care of children and property sharing. The ceremony often involves a public statement, the formal acceptance of the conditions within a legal/lore structure and has witnesses (witnesses are often a legal requirement). 'The web of marriage is made from propinquity' (Lindberg cited in Cohen, 1991: 134) and not only binds the bride and groom but re-orientates the relationships between family and friends, and transforms the pre-existing familial arrangements. In these ways, the marriage ceremony is certainly transformational. In the Christian marriage rite, a few words by the couple (and a priest or minister) change their legal situation, their relationships with family, their status and their relationship to each other. In

Christianity, they also commit themselves to monogamy, giving up the right to have relationships with others outside of the marriage. (In some cultures there are systems of polygamy but the rules outside of the relationships are still in place.) The ceremony is not only transformational for the bride and groom but for many of those in attendance as well. When couples get married they activate a wide range of associated societal links that involve many people and, in many cases, inheritance alignments, family allegiances, belief and cultural enforcement, property sharing and status issues. It is a major step and the traditional ritual of marriage has built into its structure forms and techniques that encourage feelings of transformation for the participants and for the community supporting the rite.

The drive to procreate and the desire to provide nurturing structures for the young remains a central preoccupation in human societies and where it is strongly acculturated it produces powerful reactions within the psyche. Marriage rituals provide a metaphoric melding, a dynamic process and a safe procedure for transformational changes to happen. They formally cement new relationships and can provide public acknowledgement and expression to private feelings of love.

Here I will concentrate on the ways in which transformation is brought about within marriage ceremonies. Although one can see large differences in the way that different cultures design their ceremonies to bring about transformation, the two factors identified in initiation – staged change and symbolic framework – are clearly in operation. This is obvious when rites of marriage are considered in terms of the model of preparation, focal point and release. Grimes observes that 'both the preparation and aftermath of a wedding are ritualized, patterned like filings dancing around a magnet, pulled into orbit by the force of ceremony and celebration' (2000: 157).

The preparation for realignment can be long and complex depending on cultural pressures. (Marriage rites, like initiation rites, vary in their intensity, and thereby in potency to transform.) Couples go through a period of adjustment during the 'betrothal' and/or 'engagement' process that prepares them for the change. There can be a build up of excitement and tension around this and the planning of the actual ceremony. Paths that will be taken through this transformational state are negotiated and agreed upon, and often involve the parents, friends and representatives of supporting belief structures (the priest, the imam, the rabbi, the shaman, the celebrant) to bring about a feeling of

confidence. Assemblages of cultural beliefs accompany this process with concepts of duty, commitment, family obligations and sharing acting as bonds between the two people. The planning of the clothes that will be worn, the food and drink that will be eaten, the place where the ceremony will be held, the music, the processions, the formal words that will be spoken, are all discussed and decided. The preparation and loosening of matrix assemblages in readiness for the new alignments of marriage are commonly culturally elaborate, and can be extreme as can be seen in Bali where girls have their teeth filed (Cohen, 1991: 132).

The wedding itself produces the focus of change. In a typical western marriage the rites are enforced as an important 'special moment' with special clothes; the use of a sacred space, a specially chosen secular space, or a designated legal space; legal papers to be signed; blessings; pre-organised formal movement and many other factors which include the two participants formally accepting each other in front of their community or witnesses taken to represent the community. This formal transitional moment is released into a period of intense celebration: bells are rung, triumphal marches played, or other musical accompaniments used in more secular settings; rice or confetti is thrown; and the occasion is, in contemporary settings, documented with photographs and videos. The final stage is reached and the couple is shown the approval of the society with an unrestrained party helped often by special foods, speeches, drink and dancing. The honeymoon follows to allow consolidation and when the couple returns their community treats them in a different way, enforcing the new alignment.

As well as the three phases of staged change, the second factor of rites of passage is also present with strong symbolic structures enforcing the ritual. What Turner positions as 'social drama' unfolds with music, dance, metaphor, symbolic movement, exchange of symbolic gifts that enforce an acknowledged physiological change. Looking at familiar Australian wedding structures we can clearly see symbolic pathways. Hearts and flowers, wearing white, the father giving away the bride, best man, rings, wedding marches, horseshoes, confetti and rice, garters, ribald jokes, cake cutting, toasts, tin cans on cars, are just some of the social drama which is enacted with a wide array of symbolic props.

Although in Australia marriage ceremonies have gone through significant changes and religious structures are not being used as routinely to organise these transformative

processes, many people still follow traditional patterns, at least in form. New conditions are being placed on marriage ceremonies. People are marrying for a second time and second marriages can include the children of the first marriage. There are same sex weddings and marriages between people of different cultures and beliefs. This brings new aspects into the procedures. Yet in many cases the same transformational structures are being used in spite of the different social configurations. Strong ceremonial structures will enforce a feeling of unity, bring confidence to the decision, provide witness protocols, strengthen new ties and provide a ceremonial environment that fits the emotional and psychological requirements for a change in consciousness and in social role. A build up of tension as the couple is being prepared, a concentrated point of change in the service and a celebration of release afterwards can be found in new style weddings as well as old.

As a designer of new rituals I have been asked, on occasion, to design weddings. I have lent heavily on the three stages outlined above and have in no way tampered with what I call the rhythm or traditional structure of the wedding – preparation, focal point and celebration. Close consultation over many months, fully involving the main participants, a specially constructed focal moment and a celebration to follow, seem good guides to the structure. But in the style of the wedding I depart greatly from the usual traditional marriage. Couples wanting a new ritual to celebrate their union seek to understand and have control of their process and to inhabit the ceremony with a symbolism and meaning that aligns with their lives. They are not trained nor experienced in staging these events but are sure that they want the ceremony to 'make sense' to them at every level. I used basic elements from the traditional western wedding and adapted them to the situation, and also used non-western elements in some cases.

What follows is the design for a wedding that I organised and the reasons for certain decisions.

Close friends and family arrived at a beautiful spot, a beach, early in the morning and worked all day to construct the event. The guests arrived during the last hour of the day and at sundown separated into two groups – male and female. The female guests joined the bride on a small, rocky outcrop overlooking the beach. They made a small campfire to which they added incense, sang (pre-organised) songs led by professional singers and musicians, and talked among themselves. The men, meanwhile, gathered at a distance

up the beach and made another focal group with drummers, flags, songs and images made earlier in the day. The idea of isolating the sexes immediately created a dynamic. The men were boisterous and full of energy and the women more centred and cohesive; they were apart, but knew they would soon come together as a unified group. Wedding guests were now reflecting the situation of the bride and groom, if somewhat less intently – they were apart and would soon be unified. This design also provided moral support and a feeling of intensity for the bride and groom. As the sun set (the end of a day and the end of an era) the men made their way down the beach towards the women, beating drums, lighting fire torches, flares and smoke effects while the women stood and encouraged the men onward.

The men now stopped about thirty meters from the base of the rocks. The women challenged the groom to answer questions (he could consult with his male friends as to the correct answers) and the men could advance ever closer if the bride (and her female friends) felt the answers were 'up to par'. Neither the groom nor the men knew what the questions would be. While all this was done in good spirits and in an atmosphere of fun, the questioning served other functions. It provided a strong participatory role for the guests – they were helping the couple 'get together'; it replaced tension and anxiety with a more informal atmosphere without abandoning form; and it allowed a poetic element into the proceedings. The mechanism provided the guests and the couple with a mode of expression that allowed them to express what they felt. The questions were sometimes serious – 'What must you abandon to further the journey?'; and some were amusing – 'where's your white horse?' Sometimes the men were allowed to advance if they got a particular answer just right and at other times were forced to retreat with cries of derision. After about ten questions the groom was allowed to climb the rocks to join the bride. Then all processed to the next phase of the ceremony.

This is the formal phase, the focal point officiated by a legal celebrant, and a marriage in the eyes of the law. It is very important in this phase to recognise the dynamic of formalisation. An important agreement or action is about to take place. There is no room for ambiguity, confusion, haphazard action, anarchy or any dissembling. It is a time to be clear and to follow agreed form. Witnessing is also a crucial aspect to consider. The guests are there to hear a public declaration of two people's love and to also witness the legal situation. The design of this section must take account of these

factors. The vows or promises can take many shapes, but jokes and insincerity are not appropriate.

Music can be used as well as visual symbols to enforce the meaning of the event. The vows themselves are now commonly adjusted to the feelings of the couple but I still included the lines 'I, … take you, … to be my husband/wife'. I believe this concentrates the formal moment. In particular cases when both participants might have children, the young people might be asked to 'give away' or 'present' their parent and accept the new marriage. This is a case of adaptation from an old tradition. In traditional weddings a father must 'give away' his daughter and formally recognise the new arrangement. In this new wedding the tradition is used but in another context.

This formal section now gives way to the wedding feast. In this example, the guests helped by bringing food cooked during the day. The food was especially decorated. There were songs, informal speeches, choral works, eating, drinking and dancing, all lit by firelight. In this case music was provided by family and friends, many of whom were professional artists, but it is interesting to note that most of the budget for a wedding might be spent on professional artists from different disciplines to give artistic quality to the event. At this wedding, the artists present had no formal training in organising weddings but were experts in music, leading choral singing, making visual images and organising dance. A good ritual designer will coordinate this interface as seamlessly as possible.

The above example demonstrates the adaptation of older traditions that have worked psychologically for millennia, changing them to meet new community needs and provide meaning for the participants.

Symbolism in new transformation rituals

> Artists have no motive for deceit or concealment, but strive to find perfect expressive form for their experience. (Turner, 1982: 15)

In both of the examples above (youth initiation and weddings) we have seen strong structures that are used in traditional cultures being adapted for contemporary society. When artists are working within contemporary transformational rituals in Australia it is

of crucial significance that the symbolic language being used is relevant to the participants.

> The fact is that in former times men did not reflect upon their symbols; they lived them and were unconsciously animated by their meaning. (Jung, 1964: 22)

When rituals are detached from traditional structures, the symbolic language must change. But to what? How can a symbolic language be established for settings which are no longer replete with commonly agreed cultural values and symbols based in shared belief systems? How can a holistically structured assemblage be created to accompany new rituals?

These are complex and important questions and there are no easy answers. When deep structures found in established belief systems lose relevance or fall from use in a culture, the symbolic landscape becomes fragmented. This does not mean that previous cultural symbols are completely erased. But it does mean that they have been loosened from the belief structures that gave them coherent significance in terms of ceremony or ritual. The signifiers of belief and ritual have to a considerable extent become floating signifiers in contemporary Australian culture, disconnected from a signifying system. For example, some parts of a previously monocultural, Christian symbolic landscape have been carried into secular versions of Christian ceremonies, such as civil weddings, others have been lost, yet most continue to carry redolences of symbolic import without established structures. The culture tends to produce new symbolic usage – such as the relatively recent appearance of a practice of placing crosses at sites of road accidents. In this instance the central Christian symbol has attached itself to a highly contemporary circumstance to mark and recall tragedy, but for those familiar with older signifying systems the recent practice evokes European roadside shrines, a practice never transported to the Australian expression of Christianity. In these ways, symbols acquire new purposes but they are not completely severed from their traditional structures.

We can see clearly in Australia that symbolic language is appropriated and used not only out of context, driving the meaning of the symbol into new and sometimes inappropriate contexts, but also removing the symbol from its historic evolution and recontextualising it. Rock groups use the world's symbolic languages with little information as to 'meaning'; fashion acquires any symbol it finds can be put to new and

exciting use; and the commercial world is continuously appropriating symbolic contexts to sell products. The colonisation of symbolic languages is so widespread that not only have coherent links between symbolic languages largely broken down, but the links to their previous narrative contexts as well.

This makes it difficult to establish a symbolic language able to carry a ritual succinctly without semiological confusion. At a wedding, hearts might symbolise love for one couple and sentimental kitsch for another. Peter Watson, in his book about European ideas in the twentieth century (*A Terrible Beauty*), explains how the sociologist Daniel Bell describes this dilemma using the notion of 'designer' culture (Watson, 2000: 594). Bell suggests that today humans enter a kind of supermarket of beliefs and plug in whole systems, parts of systems and even systems unrelated to belief, thereby forming lifestyle combinations that suit the individual but have difficulty translating into whole systems of unified meaning. He sees modern belief almost as a 'fashion accessory'.

> [Contemporary society] implies the rejection of any naturally ascribed or divinely ordained order, of external authority, and of collective authority in favour of the self as the sole point of action. (Bell cited in Watson, 2000: 594)

We are faced with personal and social symbolic worlds where not only does the semiology operate in fragments that have little previous relationship to each other but they also differ in their referents from one person to the next. In terms of the focus of this study, the production of coherent cultural events involving ritual and ceremony, parts of specific cultural forms cannot be lifted out of context and freely mixed, willy-nilly so to speak, with any real hope of success. Yet to ignore the language of symbols would be to lose a defining characteristic of effective transformational ritual.

When I design events, I address this sensitive problem in the following way. I do not presume that either the participants or any audience have in place a metastructure to hold a common set of symbols. This is particularly true in Australia, where the metastructural frameworks are less stable than in older cultures. (I do not include Indigenous Australians here, as the use of their symbolic language would be inappropriate without their explicit presence in the event). The widespread nature of multicultural input, the erosion of a strong unifying belief structure, the breakdown of symbolic meaning through popular culture and the adoption of personal symbolic

design are all factors in this fragility. However, although the meaning that surrounds symbolic signifiers is more fluid, it can be made to work in powerful ways by 'packing' around the symbols a context that informs the symbol. It is almost a process of inventing a symbolic language with its own landscape which only holds true to the moment and operates within its own context. This 'forces' meaning into the ritual at different levels yet allows free interpretation without trying to capture some central notion of a fixed truth. So then, how is this realised in practice?

The first step is involving the participants in deciding the symbolic language that will be used. This can be done in groups or individually, but it is vital to establish a landscape that will provide unity. To take a simple example: I am asked to stage a transformation ritual and I choose to use the journey across a river as a narrative element for enactment of transformation.

The river has strong mythological roots as well as a symbolic history that can operate at a simple or complex level. Groups are formed to each create a boat that will symbolically sail across the water from one state of being to another. Each individual in the group creates her or his own personal symbolic language by making designs on the boat that convey feelings about transformation. The boat is then carried in the ritual by the group which made it. Symbolic unity is held by the boats and their journey, but personal symbolism which has important meaning for the participant is allowed to function. A landscape is created to be inhabited by personal expression which might or might not be recognised by the audience. Ritual provides meaning where the audience is not asked to understand a metanarrative (some sort of central truth) but rather that the boats may mean many things, and each person brings his or her own meaning to the event.

On the next level one might ask the whole audience to participate. They might be invited to write on small white ribbons their hopes for the transformational situation and these ribbons are used to decorate the boats. Perhaps no one but the writer knows what is on a particular ribbon, but when they see a thousand other ribbons they know that it is the ribbon not the message that becomes the ritual object.

A further step is to install other lines of symbolic richness. The crossing of the symbolic river in transformational terms means that there is no return. There might then be a

symbolic bonfire which burns the boats in an atmosphere of celebration. Just as Caesar in 49BC crossed the Rubicon and burned his boats so that the 13th Legion could have no retreat from the ensuing civil war, in transformation ceremonies one is encouraging a permanent way forward with no retreat. Fire is a powerful symbol of transformation which literally destroys what is there, establishing the drama of things to come. The use of fire very aptly demonstrates the relationship between our cultural expression and our physiological relationship to environment. Fire is not only a cultural symbol which involves our feelings about transformation and change, it also involves a physical response which triggers many historical relationships as well as the actuality of warmth and light. Its strength as a symbol is that it operates on so many levels involving not only intellectual reading but also unconscious understandings.

Such uses of symbols, and many others, can work together, multiplying the meaning. The theme remains constant, but the multi-layered approach provides a wide range of symbolic language. I work very hard on research in any project to provide as many links as possible. The aim is to create a dense cultural environment which allows each member of the audience to take out of it what s/he will at whatever level. However, it is vital that the event makes overall symbolic sense to the artistic team and, although participants and audience may not determine a symbolic cohesion, there is a central group that does. This is vital to the integrity of the whole experience. The symbolism must not be thrown together haphazardly without a careful interlocking, and this is especially true when using the symbols of other cultures.

We have examined two examples of transformational rituals in order to demonstrate the methodology, structures and guidelines which will help in designing new transformation rituals of many different kinds: birth and naming ceremonies, significant birthdays, retirements, legal procedures, major civic moments (e.g. South African Independence, or the bringing down of the Berlin wall) and many others. I want to stress here that although the above examples vary greatly, the underlying objective is always transformation and in understanding the dynamics of transformation in general we can begin to understand the common transformational links that run through a wide range of experiences. We have been guided by traditional transformational structures and discussed the potential for new and meaningful symbolic pathways that the artist and others might use to design new ritual which will transform and protect the participants

as they go through important liminal situations. With such frameworks in mind, designers, those commissioning events and communities more generally can guard against these same structures being used inappropriately.

Chapter Three: Reinforcement

Illustration 4 – Community Ritual

> Knowing myself yet being someone other.
> (T.S. Eliot, 1944: 53)

Reinforcement rituals and celebrations can be found in situations when the participant wants to bring into alignment certain existing feelings and/or beliefs – certain matrix assemblages in a certain order. The ritual system is designed to take the participant through previously learnt routines or understood methodologies to align assemblages in desired ways. The participant wants to evoke a state of mind and body that brings around itself various elements such as support, comfort, stimulation, refreshment, clarity and calmness. A system must be employed to bring these elements into alignment. To use a simple example: a Christian prayer of thanks is a reinforcement ritual. The participant goes through a particular physical and mental system already prescribed to bring about a certain alignment that allows access to, in this case, an outlet for thanks. Catholics, for instance, reinforce feelings of faith through the weekly

services. Participants go through a learnt process which starts with entering the church – the wearing of appropriate clothes, genuflecting, holy water, lighting candles and so on. The symbolic environment enforces all aspects of Catholic belief – an altar, statues, pictures, spoken prayer are examples of the objects and actions contained here. After the service, participants go through a reverse process (final blessing, final hymn, genuflection, leaving the church) until they are back in the external world with their beliefs reinforced within the continuation of their normal lives.

There are many types of reinforcement rituals and celebrations in Australia. These are activated when a community or individual wants to have a 'special' experience that reflects and strengthens the feelings and values that they find important. It might be the annual anniversary of a town where the denizens want to hold a special event to mark their community feelings about the place where they live. It might be an Italian community that has organised a festival to celebrate their culture. It might be the opening of Parliament. Reinforcement is by far the most common form of ritual and celebration, and is found in a very wide range of situations.

Reinforcement rituals vary from transformation structures in three major ways. The most obvious is that reinforcement rituals are structured to move participants from the normal to the 'special' and back again without the dramatic, permanent change of alignments, 'destruction and reconstruction' (Turner, 1982: 84), found in transformation rituals. That is, reinforcement rituals are not designed to realign major matrix systems into new forms but to allow temporary alignment changes which, although at times moving and powerful, simply return the participant to normal life enriched. The second difference is that reinforcement rituals have an already existing, familiar frame of reference. In other words, to reinforce a set of feelings and ideas there must be set of feelings and ideas there in a stable form in the first place. (In transformation rituals the participants move into a new set of feelings and ideas to which, before the ritual, they had no access.) The third major difference is that reinforcement ritual procedures do not follow Gennep's three-phase model of separation/preparation, transition and reincorporation/celebration. The speeds of entrance and exit, the diffused focal points, the varied contexts, make for a very different rhythmic system. In fact one might say that there is such a variety of different rhythms with multiple focal points that there can be no phasal model to guide the designer. Instead, in contrast to transformational events,

these rituals must develop new criteria altogether. They are much more concerned with creating pathways, environments, or systems which act as a key to accessing already existing landscapes of feelings and ideas.

As noted, reinforcement rituals and celebrations cover a wide spectrum of human activity and can be found in many forms. To understand the dynamics of this category we must examine the way in which temporary alignment pathways are activated and deactivated without permanent and massive change. I will concentrate on two examples to illustrate this.

The Altar

Entering *mundo entero*.

Altars are most interesting tools for use in the process of reinforcement. We inscribe our ideas into objects laid out in special ways: 'the structure and apparatus of the altar appeal to our psyche because they give form to the formless' (Linn, 1999: 18). Our relationship with this external configuration is very varied. Ordinary objects can be imbued with meaning (for example flowers, lights, shells, special fabric) or on the other hand they might carry important iconic assemblages both personal (for example photographs, memorabilia, household objects) and 'universal' (for example, pictures and sculptures of Buddha or Christ). Ritual action surrounding altars might also carry special meaning (Zen bells, lighting of incense and candles, for example) which brings the space 'to life'. The altar has the power to align a collection of beliefs or feelings (certain desired states) by a prescribed interaction with objects and actions. Altars have various foci. They can hold the idea of god, of the dead, of magic, of the divine or of the past found in ancestor worship or remembrance. They can be found within spectacularly designed holy buildings or in a more humble aspect in ordinary homes. They can provide an in-house personal worship kit or be used for massive community gatherings. They can be found in almost every type of belief system and in many secular settings. They are interactive and often attract ritual movement around them. They have perceived protective properties and can constitute focus for prayer.

All altars have symbolic meaning local to individual cultures. Dana Salvo, an artist interested in altars, travelled in Mexico, where he observed:

> Animalistic symbolism, Christian imagery, crucifixes, family mementos, faded photographs, votive candles, blinking lights, balloons, fruits, an occasional TV, dolls, images of popular culture, the flag… (Salvo cited in Gutierrez, 1997: 1)

We can see that these Mexican altars are not significantly different from the altars found in the home of, say, a Buddhist family in Singapore which might contain a candle or lights, a picture or sculpture of Buddha, a picture of the family, flowers and some food and drink. Altars can even be detached from established belief altogether. In fact many people have 'informal' secular altars in their homes, with an agreeable set of objects put in a certain place in a certain order that reflects and evokes a certain set of feelings important to them.

Altars need not necessarily be objects placed in a special space within a building. The Kuthso Bushmen of the Kalahari Desert formalise a ritual altar by forming a circle on the ground: '… the hunters throw short arrows at the skull of a gazelle lying in the middle of a magic circle' (Quilici 1980: 116). This ritual interaction with the animals they hunt will, they believe, bring about successful hunting. The sand paintings of the Navajo are used to bring 'cures' to the ill and can also be described as a kind of altar:

> The sand-pictures are made in this wise; upon the floor of the Hogan is spread fresh sand smoothed flat; then upon this background the medicine man and his assistants make symbolic figures, by sifting through thumb and finger coloured powders from mineral and charcoal. (Curtis, 1907: 367).

Indigenous Australians in a wide range of regions similarly use sand paintings and the marking out of temporary ceremonial grounds in other ways, with certain rocks, marks in the earth, feathers and tree branches, for example.

Altars, then, are collections of objects given 'special' meaning and laid out in a certain order in a designated space. That there is an interactive process involved is significant. The participant actually goes through a set of movements that activate the altar's use. The participant is allowing the ritual arrangement and/or movement and the symbolic nature of the objects to cause a certain state of mind, linking the person to a set of feelings and thoughts that they want to achieve. Further, certain ritual procedures can be reversed and lead the participant back to a normal state – 'The way forward is the way back' as T.S. Eliot wrote (1944: 41).

Altars can also be used for 'black magic' and fetish worship. Here the objects found on the altar are imbued with powerful and even malevolent force – these are very different to the more benign and widespread altars evoking 'the heavens, the sun, the moon, and the stars' (Gutierrez, 1997: 19) mentioned above. Investigations into magic practices have shown that sacred objects can have such an effect as to bring about the death of a tribal member by the psychology of the act alone. In a range of Australian Indigenous contexts, a kadaitcha can 'point the bone' to cause illness or death. In others, the shaman's collection of sacred objects can be laid out in special ways to bring harm to an individual. In many traditional cultures it is accepted that 'Witches…can transfer their power to any object…calabash, seashell, pearl, an amulet or a piece of cloth' (Muller and Muller, 1999: 138). Regardless of the processes, if there is shared belief in their efficacy the impacts on individuals or groups of such practices using objects to 'cast spells' or 'lay curses' can be extraordinarily dramatic. It follows that reinforcement processes through the use of objects arranged as altars can produce other kinds of strong effects for participants.

Reinforcement takes place through the juxtaposition of a certain set of components. Thus it can be seen that the altar objects and their ritual use could attract a set of matrices into a special pattern in the consciousness of participants. If the participant has built the altar or is very familiar with the iconography of the altar and goes through familiar and well-known procedures, certain learnt matrix systems will form. In the discussion of matrix formation above we saw that matrix forms were flexible, moveable and that their edges could be negotiated and changed. The objects on the altar animate a certain set of matrices into a practised pattern of orientation. They deterritorialise the 'normal' and reterritorialise the 'special' in a prescribed or at least familiar way. This might be found within an all-embracing religion or at a micro level with pictures of the family, but *the main function of objects on the altar is to align matrices into desired patterns in order to produce particular effects/affects*. Each time the same procedure is undertaken, the process is strengthened.

> We are seldom dealing with separate symbols but with clusters of made up objects, actions, sounds, states, orders, contracts, each unit, act or thing, at once itself and standing for more than itself, the ensemble making more than the sum of its parts. (Turner, cited by Beazley in Gutierrez, 1997: 101)

The introduction of a physical procedure (lighting candles or incense, ringing bells, singing a song, putting the hands together, prostrating the body, entering a 'special' space) reinforces the matrix alignments by including the body in the process. 'Senses paint by metaphor', as Wallace Stevens put it (www.wesleyan.edu/edu/wstevens/morn-poem.html).

> On holy ground and in places particularly invested with the sacred, men and women of every faith surround themselves with objects they deem to be particularly potent loci of the holy to periodically ritualize their relationship. (Gutierrez, 1997: 37)

Ritual objects on an altar relate to each other by further accelerating the impact of reinforcement. The picture of a son killed in a war will be placed next to a picture of the Passion, which will nestle beside flowers and an old medal awarded to the father, which sits on top of a box with Napoleon on the lid. Indeed, we might be able to conclude that it is in the very juxtapositioning of the objects, each opening its own symbolic meaning, that the matrix alignment is achieved. The picture of the dead boy brings with it a matrix of mourning, but its position beside Christ allows two territories to be implicated in one another; 'Jesus died but was saved' lies beside 'our son is dead and he too is saved'. The father's medal was won 'saving his country' therefore 'our son's life was not wasted' and the picture of Napoleon enforces heroic myth in the whole assemblage. The flowers bring with them feelings of renewal and love. Even on formal public altars (within churches or temples) we can find the juxtaposition of objects reinforcing each other by symbolic association. The Christian altar for example: the flowers, the white cloth, the cross, the chalice, the picture of a dove or a lamb, all link into other powerful symbolic systems enforcing the central message. The altar's capacity through its objects to reterritorialise a wide range of matrices in a known 'comfort' assemblage is powerful. Each ritual object is able to lose its own direct meaning and merge into the pattern of the whole, or recapture its own associations again if the participant needs to refocus on it individually.

A concept of altars can be extended to include war memorials, art installations, graveyards, memorial spaces, and the mobile altars found in the processions of a deity and the venerated dead – wherever people need to re-establish a spiritual and/or community stability through the use of prescribed objects. When an individual needs to find an external formal procedure, a physical system to align various assemblages, s/he

will be able to utilise reinforcement forms and systems that bring about desired matrices. An example might be an Anzac day event. The soldiers and their families march to a prescribed place uniquely designed to bring about a feeling of remembrance and to reinforce what the soldiers believe their friends died for. There is the journey that slowly prepares the participants for the experience. People walk in formation, at a slow pace, drums beating in a formal mode with a solemn atmosphere. They assemble at the cenotaph that has a particular design. It has a perimeter that forms a ritual space, crossing which encourages alignment. It has steps which further process the way into the space. There are the names of the dead shining in reflective metal against dark grey stone that suggests endurance and formality. There is an eternal flame to mark the life force and perhaps a statue on the top depicting a hero in action. The participants approach the sacred place with wreaths that reflect the headgear worn by victorious Roman generals and with bunches of flowers full of the symbolism of regeneration. The system is very precise and enables the participants to restructure their remembrance of fallen comrades and the community to understand the nature of the sacrifice involved.

People often use altars to contain important ideas that can be used when necessary. This is especially true in the case of tragedy or need. It is a pathway, a physical metaphor, a code that can access the strengths found in certain thoughts, feelings and ideas. Everyone uses them to a certain extent to bring about reassurance and newfound strength. The young girl who lays out pictures of movie stars in a certain way to represent her yearnings for a wonderful relationship; a dinner party layout with crystal, candles and glass; the painter laying out certain objects in certain ways; or a child organising toys as her friends. 'Altar' practices are found in little things and in large-scale operations but all are systems to bring about affirmation.

We might ask why we feel reassured by going through a reinforcement experience. The model I am using for cognitive assemblages is useful here. Tony Buzan, who developed the mental processing techniques of mind mapping, puts forward a simple but effective model for the way we learn and hold feeling and ideas.

> Every time we have a thought, the biochemical/electromagnetic resistance along the pathway carrying the thought is reduced. It is like trying to clear a path through a forest. The first time you struggle because you have to fight your way through the undergrowth. The second time you travel that way will be easier because of the clearing you did on your first journey.

> The more times you travel on that path, the less resistance there will be, until, after many repetitions, you have a wide, smooth track that requires little to no clearing. A similar function occurs in the brain: the more you repeat patterns or maps of thought, the less resistance there is to them. Therefore, and of greater significance, *repetition in itself increases the probability of repetition*. In other words, the more times a mental event happens, the more likely it is to happen again. (Buzan, 1993: 29)

We can see that when reinforcement rituals are activated they often bring into alignment polished pathways already well used and well trodden. These pathways lead to assemblages that manifest safe atmospheres, warm memories, connections to belief systems that provide strength, intellectual buttresses, emotional reassurances and a host of other experiences, which in turn provide comfort and assurances that the world is under some sort of personal control. We lay out all sorts of assemblages that reassure us and make sense not only of the changing world around us but also of our role in that world. We can assess these assemblages, which are sometimes unavailable to us in day-to-day thought, by going through ritual systems. In other words, the assemblages are already established and can be reached through already existing pathways.

When I am asked to design events that have strong elements of reinforcement, I often use altars as a vehicle that will carry certain aligned meanings. (It is no accident that the Catholic Church uses portable altars in religious parades. These act as a focus in the confusion of movement and concentrate the belief towards a central object which acts as a symbolic pathway to wider, connected systems.) I work with the community to build all sorts of secular altars, both mobile and static. They need to be formally laid out, each object representing what is important to the participants, each object further enforcing the meaning of the next. We use candles for illumination to represent the energy of the life force; we ask for full participation from the community involved to select the objects; we make the theme specific to provide cohesion; the altars are built to tower over an audience in a parade or form intimate concentration spots in small venues. An example might be that a fishing community wants to have a festival. We might construct altars by placing within real wooden rowing boats objects that have special significance to the fishermen. Each object has a candle beside it. Each boat is carried through the streets by its crew and placed in a special place on the beach.

In altars and their associated rituals and accoutrements we can see processes of reinforcement in operation with objects. This can be extended to certain places as well.

Sacred mountains

> Realms of harmony and joy. (Tao poem)

Simply to enter and interact with a special space can also involve a reinforcement process, but instead of revered objects laid out in special ways we have a designated place being imbued with these same dynamics, with the effect that 'to live in sacred space is to live in a symbolic environment' (Osbon, 1991: 184). These spaces can be completely constructed by humans, often producing buildings of great beauty; Chartres Cathedral is testimony to this. But they can also be found in natural settings of all kinds. Powerful natural environments can allow the participant in ritual to embody into themselves symbolic attributes of the natural world. I want to concentrate on one type of natural space by way of an example – the mountain. These have strong dynamics that illustrate well the reinforcement process[10].

> Mountains have been used as sacred spaces for as long as history is recorded. The power of such a mountain is so great and yet so subtle that, without compulsion, people are drawn to it from near and far, as by the force of an invisible magnet; and they will undergo huge hardships and privations in their inexplicable urge to approach and worship the centre of this sacred power. Nobody has conferred the title of sacredness on this mountain, and yet everybody recognises it; nobody has to defend its claim, because nobody doubts; nobody has to organise its worship, because people are overwhelmed by the mere presence of such a mountain and cannot express their feelings other than by worship. (Lama Anagrika Govinda cited in Bernbaum, 1997: xiii)

The inaccessibility and remoteness of sacred mountains contribute to their connection with spiritual and natural significance and they have a set of symbolic values before they are even approached.

> The ethereal rise of a ridge in the mist, a glint of moonlight on an icy face, a flare of gold on a distant peak – such glimpses of transcendent beauty can reveal our world as a place of unimaginable mystery and splendour. (Bernbaum, 1997: xiii)

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[10] Unadulterated natural environments have no codes and signals *within themselves* and therefore the feedback systems are non-negotiable and lack certain ambiguities. It is human narrative that introduces potential for multiple meaning to such sites.

It can be a profound experience, travelling into a dangerous environment, experiencing hardships and ascending towards the sky. The symbolic objects we embrace within the reinforcement process are in this circumstance the result of nature at its most spectacular and not the result of human contrivance. The arrangements that go into operation are rather of concepts. There are links here with mythologies of an epic nature that can include ascension to bliss or heaven, the heroic journey, ascetic wisdom and the divine. Mountains can provide a rich symbolic environment to inspire human thought: Dante's Purgatory, Jesus' temptation, Black Elk's vision, the magic perfection of Shangri La, the home of Greek gods at Mount Olympus and a vehicle for the visions of Buddha. We can embody the experience by actually getting physically involved, by leaving the 'normal' world as we know it and ascending into the unknown. By facing the ever-increasing risks as we climb higher and eventually reach the summit, seeing the world laid out before us, we can physically 'live' the sacred journey. The secular experience can be powerful also. The British climber Eric Shipton, who climbed the heights of Nanda Devi in the Himalayas, describes this feeling:

> We were now in the inner sanctuary of the Nanda Devi basin and at each step I experienced that subtle thrill which anyone of imagination must feel when treading into unexplored country. Each corner held some thrilling secret to be revealed for the trouble of looking. (Bernbaum, 1997: 17)

Mountains as special sites go back to the beginning of recorded history. In Exodus, for example, believers are exhorted to 'Set bounds around the mount and sanctify it'. Some mountains are used for religious pilgrimages, for example during the festival of Fatima in Portugal, and the pilgrimage destinations of Croagh Patrick in Ireland and Mount Fuji in Japan. Others have a spiritual taboo that states that they *cannot* be climbed: Machapuchare in Nepal, T'ai Shan in China and Uluru in Australia. Volcanic sites are surrounded by myth and legend, Gunung Agung in Bali for example, while others have become centres of habitation and refuge such as Machupicchu in Peru. Some are strongly connected to belief and history (Mount Arrarat and Mount Parnassus for example) and some are revered for their sheer physical height, beauty and prominence (Everest, Mont Blanc and Annapurna). The mountain may reinforce by association with mythological narrative, historical precedent, or symbol (height, prominence, ascension), but in each case the mountain – the sight of it or the act of climbing it – provides an environment which has all the symbolic attributes needed for a sacred space. Mountains

obviously have a deep significance to humans and allow us to embrace their physical nature in ceremony, ritual and celebration. Why do mountains produce such powerful responses?

Certainly mountains have, by their very nature, the ability to provide dramatic physical environments that can contain a symbolic journey and a satisfying resolving moment – the reaching of the summit. They also provide a slow disengagement, a sort of spiritual decompression procedure, which allows the participant to return to the normal state. Therefore they provide an excellent physical procedure accompanied by suitable symbolic environments that allow matrix assemblages to change into highly charged special states and then allow them to return to normal without harm. The 'compulsion to resolve' is a strong urge; the human condition needs stabilising after disruption, and cultural practices acknowledge and further this urge in many ways. A ritual must allow the resolution process to occur or the participant will feel unresolved and unsatisfied, as if they have not completed the circle. We know that when there is a breakdown of matrix stability we need strong guidance structures if we are to be able to reconstitute our matrices again with any efficiency. Mountains, like altars, produce a stable landmark for the deterritorialising process, providing a symbolic environment as consciousness is rearranged. They also provide a return path for the reterritorialisation process, to stability.

We might note here that the engagement of the body as well as the mind in this kind of ritual is very significant. The climbing of mountains is a physical process that lends itself to intensifying the matrix alignments of the symbolic journey: the overcoming of difficulties, showing courage and at last arriving at a 'heightened' completion. Matrix intensities are resolved at a physical and metaphorical climax. For the religious pilgrim this difficult process of climbing and arrival brings into alignment a metamatrix of belief by the physicality of the mountain on one hand and its symbolic form on the other. For non-religious travellers, mountains still carry the capacity to embody symbol and therefore can invoke secular experiences of intensity and completion.

Reinforcement of the realignment process can be brought about through the length of the walk and/or climb. Struggling through difficult environments for many hours, days or weeks, allowing a slow but rhythmically steady process towards the arrival at a sacred space, gives the reinforcement ritual time to develop in rich ways and impels a

powerful conclusion to the experience. As the pilgrims walk along they are free from the usual diversions of life. A walker is unable to read or watch television. A climber is concentrated on the physical challenge.

I have mentioned when discussing altars that certain associated actions (bells, drums, incense, etc) will assist and focus reinforcement journeys. In the case of sacred mountains the act of walking and climbing provides similar functions.

> Everyday norms of social status, hierarchy and interaction are ideally abandoned in favour of development of spontaneous association and shared experiences. (Coleman and Elsner, 1995: 201)

Many pilgrims climbing Croagh Patrick on Reek Sunday in Ireland walk in their bare feet, cutting and injuring themselves. This intense experience (we have discussed pain as an enforcer of matrix realignment in initiations) powerfully drives the participant from the normal to the special state, reinforcing belief. The more the physical journey challenges the pilgrim, the more the symbolic journey towards a sacred space is focused, the more able participants are to align meaningful assemblages to the idea of the belief system that underpins the act they are undertaking.

> Ritual knowledge is rendered unforgettable only if it makes serious demands on individuals and communities. (Grimes, 2000: 7)

For a person who understands a journey up and down a mountain as part of a mythic structure, or simply as a significant symbolic structure in secular terms, the encounter with the mountain takes on the qualities of ritual whether or not the occasion is formally ritualised. That is, the person's pre-existing notion of what realignments, what feelings, they can expect to experience during their encounter with the mountain, will contribute to the nature of the actual felt experience. At the same time, the actions undertaken will begin to adopt a 'sense of ritual', a 'sense of being special' as they are gone through and after they are over. In these ways the encounter with the mountain reinforces the system of signification to which particular subjects believe such encounters relate. They genuinely feel moments of trial, elation, reflection, insight and resolution. In the great majority of cases they will return to 'normal life' with their belief systems affirmed and the 'sense of self' enriched.

If mountains are not available, or the concept of them has become central to regular practice of belief, then we tend to build representations of them. Art historian Vincent Scully has observed that in pre-historic times people constructed sacred buildings to resemble mountains. He demonstrates his point with the pre-Columbian temples of Mexico:

> …the temple imitates the shape, intensifies it, clarifies it, geometricizes it, and therefore makes it potent, as if to draw water down from the mountain to the fields below. (Wilson, 1998: 220)

We need look no further than the Gothic spire to find a Christian physical manifestation of the sacred mountain.

Mountains are not the only natural symbol that acts as an environment for reinforcement. We could examine the power of rivers, caves, trees, lakes, seas and many other natural phenomena to invoke particular dynamics that people might use to bring about reinforcement. What is important here is that they have a particular commonality. They are able to provide a physical landscape that allows matrix associations to configure in certain ways that bring about intensities of meaning. That is, matrix alignments can be established by means of objects on an altar or objects found in nature. What is important here is the capacity for external objects or places to act as agents of 'internal' realignment.

Within belief systems we have already built churches and temples that hold sacred space, but what about the design of sacred space within secular surroundings? How do artists create sacred space or, as we might term them, physical systems of symbolic function able to induce reinforcement?

In my experience there are two types of sacred space. The first is described in detail above and that is a natural space with special attributes. I therefore try to locate reinforcement rituals and celebrations within these spaces whenever possible. We have staged events in the desert, on islands, beside rivers, in gorges, on beaches and in a wide selection of powerful environments. As I have commented when discussing mountains, it is often an accelerating factor when the space has a symbolic resonance that connects with the culture involved – a river space perhaps when reinforcing a river community or a beach with a seafaring group. The second type of sacred space is artificial

environments made by humans. They can be purpose built (cathedrals for example) or can be adapted to be used as a sacred space (an old mill, house or a warehouse with the appropriate atmosphere). They can also be spaces preselected by the community, which have no sense of the sacred about them in any way. This is where an artist, using as much creative understanding as possible, must create the atmosphere and symbolic apparatus that encourages reinforcement. This can be difficult. A town square with heavy traffic can be chosen by the Town Council for their anniversary celebrations but can be totally unsuited to the objectives of reinforcement of what is important to the townsfolk. Cutting off traffic temporarily, doing the event at night with special lights, enclosure of space to make it discrete, the use of the old town hall with its bell tower as a stage, beautiful sound and visual images can all help turn the normal into a system that will create a 'sacred space' so important to the ritual system.

These examples, altars and natural or built spaces, illustrate how reinforcement systems work in different situations. I will now discuss certain dynamics found in new reinforcement rituals and celebrations.

Belief and culture in new reinforcement rituals

> The most beautiful and profound emotion we can experience is the sensation of the mystical. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists…the feeling is at the centre of true religiousness. (Einstein cited in Segy, 1976: 19)

As reinforcement rituals and celebrations are environments that restate and focus what is important, we can see clearly why belief systems use them heavily. This is where the word ritual may have acquired its common usage as something repeated again and again. A capacity to capture, territorialise and colonise domains of meaning and consequently operate as a holistic system is fundamental to many belief systems (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, indigenous belief groups for example). Such systems can provide a rationale for creation, birth, life, death and the meaning of the world, and will manifest themselves in initiations, death rites, marriages and most of the other ceremonies we have discussed. A holistic belief system also provides a symbolic language for altars, sacred places, pilgrimages and other form of reinforcement. An individual's matrix assemblages are aligned in ways that seem to remain consistent with

others in the group and thereby sense is made of the world and manifested through ritual and celebration. As Jung observed:

> The unconscious was contained and held dormant in Christian Theology. The *Weltanschauung* that resulted was universal, absolutely uniform – without a room for doubt. (Jung cited in McGuire and Hull, 1977: 96)

When one is involved in the interface between existing belief systems and notions of new ritual, the greatest tact and caution must be used. As mentioned above, established belief systems are large cohesive assembly systems which often find reterritorialisation (in the ritual and celebratory sense) problematic.

I was asked to stage a new ritual in one of Australia's cathedrals within an event organised by the church. I adopted the story of Jonah as a theme. We reconfigured the pews to face each other with a long pathway in between. We staged the story as a shadow puppet play. We wore bare feet, staged a lantern parade through the darkened space and staged personal rituals that picked up a secular view of the story. Although we showed the greatest respect for the belief system and kept well within their guidelines, many of the church going congregation were scandalised. We had tampered with the ritual that a portion of the regular churchgoers were used to and employed their ritual objects in different ways. We had cut off their familiar pathways to reach their desired special state and they felt dislocated. (Many others, I should add, really enjoyed the event).

Before designing new rituals and events that include participants who are operating in strong belief systems, it is important to understand that there can be appropriation or conflict issues not only around different value systems but also with the very way ritual is organised. I have been subjected to many complaints from specialist Christian communities who see new ritual, even when it is positioned in a completely secular setting, as somehow usurping their own way of worship. The word 'pagan' is often used, as if new ritual in a secular setting was operating as a belief system itself rather than serving as a community artistic expression. In my own work there is no metaphysical or religious context for the event and I avoid any activation of a religious context. But for some, the redolences of symbols and forms carry whole 'other' belief systems with which they may not be at all familiar yet which they consequently over-determine.

The contemporary western culture that we have observed to be secularised and replete with many fragmented residual signs and few cohesive narratives also has sections that can operate in tightly controlled assemblages or systems. People can react negatively if new rituals and celebrations do not treat their part of the culture sensitively in the terms that they feel it 'should'. In Australia we live in a multicultural society and this means that we are dealing with the sensibilities of a wide spectrum of cultures. Appropriation becomes a difficult issue and the mixing of cultures leaves much room for symbolic and metaphorical confusion. This is because symbols and metaphors continue to carry the traces of the belief systems in which they were developed.

> A large number of such metaphors guide our understanding of ordinary life and speech… The metaphoric correspondences are not fundamentally between words, but rather between systems of concepts. (Holyoak and Thagard, 1995: 230)

Careful research, constant consultation and feedback, and a sharing of ideas is essential, but it still leaves gaps which the designer of new ritual must try to circumvent, not always with complete success as the example above suggests. There are also many projects in which I have shared design of events with Indigenous Australians that stretched methodology to the limit.

I find there are two strategies which can provide structures for reinforcement and can at least ameliorate the differences between people. One is to search for story frameworks that can be common to the human condition and these can be found in myth and archetype, which will be discussed shortly. The other is theatre which, if carefully used, can bring people together and operate as a pathway to reinforcement of community values.

Theatre in new reinforcement ritual and celebration

Illustration 5 – Monster puppet

> Prove the natural world magical and the magical world natural.
> (Ovid cited in Hirsch, 1999: 131)

As previously stated, reinforcement rituals and celebrations are structures that participants can use to access what is important to them. In the secular settings of festivals and community events where there is no one operating metasystem of belief, there are few guides as to form. The designer needs to be able to provide temporary systems that 'make sense' of the event being planned and this means providing the event with a story, or perhaps a more accurate way of expressing it would be a symbolic narrative, which can transcend normal differences and communicate to all in some way.

> Ritual is not simply the culmination of memory; it requires the imagination. Even when a rite commemorates the past – somehow transporting participants back into mystic time or transporting mythical origins into the present – imagination constructs the bridge. Ritualising is an imaginatively suffused act. (Grimes, 2000: 60)

A framework to carry the symbolic narrative can be found in theatre, which is a particularly useful medium, but there are many others that can be used in any

combination or on their own – music, dance, writings, multimedia, storytelling, poetry, photographs, voice, visual arts, sound, lights, parades, festivals, walks, sculpture and performance art. The value of thinking new ritual and celebration in terms of theatre is that not only can theatre make use of these other forms, but it has a highly developed set of understandings and techniques in relation to matters such as spatiality, time, movement, blocking, sequencing and so on – the elements that frame narratives and provide the momentum and rhythm of events.

Theatre processes within ritual, ceremony and celebration have a long history and fulfil many functions (story telling, enactment of belief, social comment, visualisation of ideas among others) and have a strong role to play in reinforcement processes.

> Once literacy and a rich vocabulary of visual, aural and dramatic expressions exist, then society has a permanently available, 'liminoid' resource in which all tabooed, fantastic, possible and impossible dreams of humanity can be explored in blueprint. (Martin, 1981: 51)

I might take one stream of theatre, masks, to demonstrate theatre's interaction with ritual and celebration.

There is a wealth of information about the use of mask in indigenous ceremonies, especially in the embodiment of animals. Sometimes animals are imitated in the hunting process – !Kung 'become' deer with huge antlers, Native North American dancers wear, for example, huge buffalo heads, Inuit peoples wear bone masks depicting sea animals.

> …there are grounds for believing in making the link between himself and what he ate and depended upon, *primate* man became animal. He shed his humanity in order to possess the animal spirit and for its spirits to possess him…In 'rehearsing' its movements and behaviour the hunters must learn more about their prey… [as] the group pursued animals made human, the hunter would develop his own responses and intuition. It was a necessary magic. These animals were the early hunters' sustained life force, and their instinct was to become at one with that life force. (Harwood, 1984: 18)

Whether by 'instinct' or by design, certain types of embodiment allow the hunter to 'become' the prey and establish the links needed to understand the animal and therefore tighten the hunting relationship with it. But hunting is not the only relationship that is important in this mimesis. The mask is used to represent certain animal characteristics

which, in an anthropomorphic process, act as a range of symbolic forces in various ceremonies.

> In Cuzco, Peru, men wearing Puma costumes appeared at the end of the ceremony to initiate the sons of noble families into manhood. Jaguar and puma were said to represent the animals into which the Incas' ancestors had been transformed. (Mack ed., 1994: 86)

Animal masks are worn for many ritual reasons. In some beliefs they hold the power to bring rain (e.g. the bush cow masks of the Guli in the Ivory Coast intercede with Goli, the great Sky Goddess who controls rain [Segy, 1976: 71]); they can represent the dead (e.g. Congolese Luba Initiation Dance [Quilici, 1980: 61]); or they can battle with evil (e.g. monkey masks of Oruro, Bolivia [Mack ed., 1994: 100]). Masks can embody a type of synthesis between the animal itself and the symbolic world of the culture: 'to speak not just to the other, but also from its vantage point, is to harness something of its numinous, primitive power' (Hirsch, 1999: 131).

But masks are not confined to representations of animals. They can also represent many facets of belief that play parts in the ceremonies and story telling of indigenous peoples. Although varied in style, masks symbolise concepts that are universal: gods, good and evil, death, creation, fertility, natural forces and societal organisation. They represent for many belief systems 'man's intuitive reaction to the mysteries of life' (Segy, 1976: 9). While we need to acknowledge that they are culturally constructed rather than 'intuitive', masks in this context are very serious and often are not only emblematic but believed by participants to contain actual spirits. The performer wearing the mask is 'filled' with the spirit of the depiction. Cesare Poppi writes in his essay 'The Other Within':

> [masks] create fixed types, giving definite form to otherwise imprecise symbolic and dramatic characters. In this sense masks simplify mutable individual mood and status by providing permanent identities. They allow a structured, predictable…dramatic narrative to unfold recurrent events. The role-playing that the masker takes on…is no simple celebration of freedom and creativity, but formalizes action; the behaviour of masks is expected and even prescribed. (Poppi in Mack ed., 1994: 194)

The flow between the belief icon and the individual 'playing' of a part is strongly activated through the mask ceremony until a full synthesis can be created – each is embodied in the other. There are many cases of 'possession' where the 'actors' have

totally lost themselves in a deep trance and feel 'possessed' by iconic forces. The embodiment is fully engaged – reinforcement and belief have become one. Mask is not confined to images covering the face; ochre, ash and clay can be used to cover the face and body, and these can be further enforced by elaborate costumes or simple wrist and ankle objects – feathers, leaves, shells.

In the West there is much evidence that masks were used in ancient times in much the same way we have seen above – the Celtic deer rites of Northern Europe or Dionysiac practices of ancient Greece are famous examples and many others have been recorded. But mask is less common in contemporary Western religious practice and in these contexts it is used in a 'ceremonial' manner rather than an embodiment process (the Masks of the Inquisition used in many Spanish festivals for example). It is interesting that there is a renewed interest in masks in various more informal spiritual and self-development groups. The use of mask within traditional folk festivals carried on from generation to generation awakens the symbolic 'language' of ancient belief with symbolic figures of 'green men' who represent fertility, 'bear people' conjuring fear and giants manifesting the mythical. Masks are now found in our rituals and celebrations mainly in the theatre and dance mode.

In the East mask has also been used in theatre. In Japanese Noh plays for example:

> The actor gives up his individuality when he puts on the mask, and his interpretation of the part he plays is completely governed by the mask he has chosen. In other words each mask has its own kurai-dori – this is 'position' or level of quality. (Nakamura, 1971: 158)

In my own practice, which is strongly based in the theatre mode, masks can be very useful in reinforcement processes. They can transcend the normal and allow an immediate transference into suspended disbelief. This is especially true when working with a community. Without denying that good mask work in performance needs a strong training base it can be taken on by community members in ritual and celebration to good effect. The ability of the mask to transform the participant and produce a meta-theatre language is very potent. In Hastings we designed a ritual and celebration with environmental groups who wanted to reinforce the feeling of care for the sea within their community. We used masks of sea creatures in a parade which was able to animate the plural aspects of representing the animals, putting them into a theatre setting,

providing an embodiment process that made the fish display emotional qualities and at the same time convey the damage they were suffering due to local pollution levels without turning the event into an expression of political didacticism.

We have explored mask as an example of theatre within the specialised confines of ritual and celebration but there are many other aspects of theatre that operate as a powerful tool for the reinforcement of belief, both religious and secular. Theatre's capacity to 'bring to life' aspects of human thought and its ability to form strong matrix structures that provide models for reinforcement has obviously been recognised and utilised since ancient times.

Theatre not only provides an imaginative landscape but is often accompanied by physical activities that *destabilise* the normal matrix alignments and allow potential movement into special states. Music, sound, movement, dance, rhythm, visual stimulus and various other methods are powerful tools in this regard.

> The dancing performer with his stamping, swaying, stooping movements made a stronger, more instantaneous sensory impact than the idea for which he stood. The music of different drums and the singing and the clapping, often shrieking of the participants did more than create a communal bond; it released unknown individual tensions. (Segy, 1976: 12)

The form of events that I design for reinforcement rituals has similarities to conventional theatre but is, in fact, a different cultural product, placing itself more within the traditions of folk or community events than 'works of art' in contemporary theatrical settings. Conventional theatre has writers, actors, props, costumes, sets, light and sound systems, tickets, publicity and all the other accoutrements of a cultural product set within the structures of the arts. It is a work of art to be judged as such and consumed at a level of art appreciation and quality entertainment. Ritual and celebratory theatre, by contrast, uses many theatre techniques and relationships (it usually has, for example, an audience who have come to watch the event). It has, however, a different cultural placement. It is not a theatre product but rather a community process of expression – as long as it fulfils its major task of reinforcement then it has succeeded. That is, it operates from a different position in terms of aesthetics and performance values as much as it operates from different positions in relation to cultural settings.

The participant within a reinforcement event that uses ritual theatre as a pathway is not 'acting' in the normal sense of the word, s/he is not 'staging a play' but rather going through a process which is personally important. The participants do not develop a character, they do not 'pretend' to be someone else, they have a different relationship to the visual images, music and movement sections than an actor would. They are asked to be themselves and, although theatre practice is utilised and a performance environment is produced, they are asked to behave in this landscape in ritual and celebratory modes. It is my job as an event designer to bring about conditions, which encourage this state.

I ask each participant to help make the visual images they might use for the event. This encourages a personal involvement in the ritual. Participants are free to place their own personal symbolism onto these ritual objects. All participants will wear the same clothes, thereby breaking down the feeling that there are 'stars'. It is vital that all participants feel at the same level within these experiences. Although the participants learn what they have to do there is no formal 'full dress rehearsal' and this means that the ritual is only executed once. Participants may be singing in the event and although the songs might be well prepared musically before the event they are not rehearsed within the ritual until the actual event. These and many other techniques guarantee that the participant will go through an authentic ritual experience, freed from having to produce a cultural product with an expectation of artistic excellence. They are free to feel what they want and to express these feelings as they want within the prescribed limits of the ritual. This demonstrates the differences in the performance process the participant goes through, but how does it produce a feeling of reinforcement?

We can see that the participant is lifted from the 'normal' in this experience and enters special zones. The normal assemblages that hold the self in place are loosened and the new world created in a landscape which has only one central function and that is to present the participant with an environment symbolic of what they wish to affirm. This is achieved by careful consultation with the community that is involved. One cannot enter into a community with predetermined views and ideas. It is vital to interact carefully and design an event that the community wants. Ron Grimes describes the role of the ritual 'diviner' within new rituals:

> Circumspection and allusion are of the essence to this model. Yes, you want results, but you know that too conscious a fixation on them will get

> you the opposite – some contrived, self-conscious piece of bad poetry. So you wait, attend, contemplate, watch, see what emerges. You follow impulses like a scout sniffing the wind. You watch for a raised eyebrow, a hesitation, a sneeze that has the ring of a song. Attuned, you snatch it deftly and edit minimally. Your aim is to find, "to define", the right tone. (2000: 12)

Each ritual differs depending on the subject matter that is to be reinforced. If it is a project where a group of women want to go through a reinforcement ritual and celebration about being a woman, the songs, images, masks, clothes, poems, statements, visual images, props, movement, dances, symbols, myths, archetypes would be worked on by the groups of women creating their own ritual landscape.

Myth and archetype in new reinforcement rituals

Illustration 6 – Fire sculpture using wheel as symbol

> They always repeat certain forms which can be studied down the ages amongst all peoples. (Jung, 1977: 415)

While there is clearly debate as to whether Jung's notions of universal myth structures and archetypes can be sustained, there is no question that myth has a strong role to play in new ritual and celebrations, and that the structures and symbols drawn upon will often blend the localised with parts of a shared heritage of international narratives from many cultures. Participants can not only reinforce their values and feelings in a local context, but the event can be deeply enriched by utilising strong symbolic stories from inherited knowledge that may or may not remain widely familiar. How this can take place in contemporary Australian contexts will be described subsequently, but first it is necessary to examine the dynamics of myth.

The word 'myth' has mixed contextualised meanings operating in general usage and it is important that the usage for the purposes of this study is positioned carefully. News media and others use the word 'myth' to describe a lie or misapprehension – the myth of a 'politician's statement' or the myth of 'the unemployment figures' for example. However the use of the word myth in the context of this study is in its traditional sense – a 'meta story' (Barthes, 1969) carrying elements concerned with cultural meaning and aspects of shared human experience, such as we find in the Greek myths or the Arthurian cycle, for example, or in the Gallipoli and Ned Kelly stories:

> …as a total of linguistic signs, the naming of myth has its own value, it belongs to a history...meaning is already complete, it postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions. (Barthes, 1969: 117)

There is a direct functional relationship between belief and myth: the myth often carries the archaeological bones of a belief system. The ancient Greek myths once constituted part of a complex belief system by which the Greeks made sense of their world and expressed their understanding of the metaphysical. But a culture's holistic belief system can slowly transform itself into a mythology as the beliefs are eroded. The Greek myths are not understood as belief systems today but as stories full of rich texture and poetry, meta-stories which have retained important human wisdom and continued to remain potent on a deep textual level. When belief systems lose their grip as holistic socio-cultural apparatus and either diminish or die, the poetics, a certain commonality of understanding that is left in the ongoing mythic narrative, can continue to contribute

greatly to how humans interpret experience. We might not believe that the journey of Ulysses was true; it is no longer a belief system, but its power to concentrate and formalise a widely recognised 'story model' is of great significance. One culture's belief system is often another's mythology.[11]

Myth's ability to capture and crystallise a model distilled from a belief system makes it a perfect mould for ritual and celebration. Myths not only carry stories about the human state through time and culture but also carry characterisations of the psyche, of the way we behave and understand the world.

> It's wonderful the way these things [myths] recur…It's a pictorial script, and rearranging the forms rearranges the order of the experience, the depth of the experience… (Campbell, 1990: 196)

These characteristics allow myth to be a consistently potent force within ceremony, ritual and celebration and to express shared understanding long after the belief systems out of which they came have stopped operating. In this way, myth can provide a relatively consistent 'thought mould', a seemingly constant structure, which has the potential to carry inherited world knowledge into new rituals. The poetics and shared insights of myth mean that its structures, even when they are traces, can be carried with substantial elements 'intact' into new knowledge systems. That is, while contemporary knowledge has destabilised holistic belief systems, the mythic aspects of those belief systems continue to produce meanings that capture redolences of belief, and can therefore introduce a sense of continuity and stability to communities using new rituals to address the effects of the destabilisation of previous belief systems.

We might take creation stories as an example.

Each belief system provides us with an explanation of our beginnings. The Bible tells us that before the moment of creation 'the earth was without form and void'. In the following Hindu poem the same idea is developed:

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[11] There can be a great deal of confusion about this point. One culture can refer to another's belief system as a 'myth'. In Australia the 'dreamtime' stories which constitute the Aboriginal belief system are referred to by some non-Aboriginal people as 'myths' yet Christians would be upset if the term 'myth' was used to describe their own belief system. These issues are very sensitive in contemporary cultural interaction.

> Was neither Being nor non-being then,
> Neither air nor Space beyond.
> What was it, forcibly stirring? Where? In whose keeping?
> (Rig Veda X. 129, cited in Maclagan, 1977: 32)

The void is filled in most creation stories by gods who mate to give birth to creation (the Sun and the Moon, for example, found within the Sumerian belief system and many others); a father god who fashions the world over a period of time, like the seven days of Genesis ('In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth'); or a mother god who becomes the earth (e.g. the Hopi people's Corn Mother). Frequently the world is spoken into being: 'And God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light'. The poetics of each story are different and beautiful, expressing the images and understandings of the people who created them. I want to examine one creation story and try to explore the enduring, dynamic nature of the myth contained therein. I have chosen Adam and Eve as the example but almost all myths can be tracked in this way.

A quick examination of the story: after God creates the world, he creates Adam out of earth by breathing into his nostrils and Eve is made from one of Adam's ribs. They are placed in the Garden of Eden but told by God not to eat the fruit of the 'Tree of the knowledge of good and evil'. Eve is persuaded to eat the fruit (usually represented as an apple) by a serpent and she in turn hands the fruit on to Adam. They gain the knowledge of good and evil and so gain knowledge of their nakedness. God is angry and they are evicted, and sent into the world to suffer pain and death.

> The garden is a place of unity, of nonduality of the male and female, good and evil, God and humans. You eat duality, but you are on the way out. (Campbell, 1988: 106)

It is a powerful allegory which, in a few short lines written several thousand years ago, has permeated our imagery and imagination in countless forms. What is it about this story that provides a myth of such enduring power? It is typical in form of many creation stories which 'explained' the way the world was formed, in this case to the early Jewish peoples. It has all the hallmarks of a creation story: a void, a god, the making of a man and a woman from clay and the inheritance of knowledge. This story was taken literally by the parent belief system at a time when the Jewish people were evolving their culture and it has carried through as part of the Bible to recent times.

Although it is still held as truth by some, knowledge of evolution has placed it into the category of myth for most people in the western world.

But the story can still 'hold true' in a mythological sense. Let us look at the dynamics. The world did come from space and we are, in our evolutionary and historical profile, the inheritors and carriers of knowledge. The banishment from Paradise is a poetic and powerful image that carries a deep psychological resonance about our consciousness emerging from the natural, instinctual world and our realisation of pain and death. The myth can carry today new meaning within its fixed structure – our eviction from the Garden of Eden echoes environmental concerns about the destruction of the earth or the plight of the poor in the United States symbolised in Steinbeck's *East of Eden*. Imagery abounds from this simple story: take Apple computers for example, whose name carries a promise of working effectively with knowledge but also of entering a technological 'paradise' where the interface with complex machines is 'trouble free'.

The myth of Adam and Eve and the Garden of Perfection can be seen in many ceremonies, rituals and celebrations. It is not necessarily that the story is played out in full but we can see that the mythological idea has great potency. We can tap the resonances within the human psyche held in this story and express feelings of modern concern within its borders. It has become a host myth, a metalanguage, able to contain itself, capable of fragmentation in dislocated sites and capable of holding ideas totally unrelated to its original intention.

When I was asked to design a reinforcement ceremony in an Australia city, the event was deeply informed by the Adam and Eve story. The story itself was not told. Few people attending the event would have recognised the source of the theme, but the myth's internal symbolic dynamics were certainly utilised. It was a community celebration of a new park that had been built by the local council but with enormous input from the local people. They had been involved at every stage of planning and building and the feeling around the space was very positive and energised. The local people wanted to mark their involvement by holding a ceremony. I designed the project with the local people as a return to Eden. Using the Adam and Eve story, they quickly saw that the universal story of the human eviction from paradise could be staged in reverse with the people returning to their own land that they communally cared for and creating a new paradise. A gate was then built which people would pass through to enter

the park, each one bringing with them symbols (which they had built themselves) of what they considered to be important to the life of the park – community, friendship, and environmental care. The deep resonance of the original myth of expulsion from paradise was utilised by a *return* to paradise – the local community felt that if they observed various community and environmental precepts they could have a better relationship with their common land and with each other.

We can see in thousands of world myths similar dynamics at work providing structure, models, analogies, thought moulds and matrix assemblages which can be territorialised, deterritorialised or reterritorialised but tend to retain their deep structure. They can be understood as cognitive maps that continue to guide us into symbolic worlds that can be adapted time and time again in new ways. As Campbell sees it, 'by participating in ritual, you are actually experiencing a mythological life' (1988: 182).

The usefulness of the many mythic narratives with which I work is that they open themselves to interpretations that differ for each community and each individual involved as participant or audience – everyone develops his/her individual interpretation of the stories and symbols drawn upon. My work is never the same from one event to the next. I am interested in opening myths out to as wide a range of readings as possible without losing the original strength to be found within them.

Archetype too has the capacity to hold concentrated knowledge through into strong analogical models which can be used within ritual and ceremony and it is therefore able to reinforce feelings and concepts about human behaviour. Archetypes provide extremely powerful assemblage paradigms that are fluid, translatable between contexts and open to being drawn on in diverse cultural frames. The figures are easily identifiable and as such, can carry messages within an event. In Jung's terms, 'emotional manifestations, to which such thought patterns belong, are recognisably the same all over the earth' (1964: 75). They can seem 'built into our very system', as Bateson describes it (1997: 14). Of course, as with the earlier example of the Tree of Life, the levels of complexity or degrees of subtlety involved in their effects from culture to culture will vary greatly.

Archetypes are particularly useful in ritual because they often attract certain acknowledged meanings without explanational narrative. An elderly woman wearing

long white clothes, walking together with ritual participants and carrying their wishes can signify at once the wise woman – a fit person to carry such objects of importance to a community – and wisdom itself. A young man and woman carried by the community on a decorated palanquin of flowers represent the future hopes of the group. Death can be represented by a skeleton on fire.

I have brought together various factors that make up reinforcement rituals and celebrations and drawn into the discussion factors that might be helpful in the design of such events. It can be seen that the most important aspect of reinforcement is ensuring that the individuals and communities involved are able to feel personal, symbolic and narrative investment in an event that has as its central concern ritual attention to matters to which those individuals and communities wish to attend.

Methodological transparency

Multidisciplinary, plurivocal involvement of community members with artists, working through important values in symbolic narratives, raises the issue of transparency of methodology and subject matter between the designer/s and participants, not only in reinforcement events but other types of new rituals and celebrations.

The postmodern condition is marked by a breaking down of the grand narratives that used to inform rituals and celebrations most of which discouraged/avoided community examination of the processes involved and prevented the expression of personal subject matter within the event. New rituals and celebrations strive to enable a deeper involvement of participants in the design and development of individual modes of receptivity and expression within larger events. But the act of involving communities is not in itself productive of transparency for participants. Transparency of aim and method, of content and process, is an issue that needs to be thought through by designers if they are to produce rituals and ceremonies that take place in a context of understanding.

Rituals staged as secular experiences, rather than governed by coherent, shared belief structures, have produced a new dynamic in the relationship between participants and designers of ritual and celebrational events. The subject matter – which used to orientate the participant towards metanarratives, of which many examples can be found within

Christian churches, for instance – now tends to centre on questions of exploration of self and community. This impels not only transparency concerning the methodologies of rituals and celebrations in the sense of exposing the inner workings and structures of events, even within performance, but also a transparency of the *relationships of meaning* between participants and the event. The demythologisation of old ritual and celebratory traditions does not disable the potential of the event to 'work within the individual' but rather moves the subject of the event from a relatively unreflective relationship to an informed reflexive experience. Such a dynamic, without losing the magic and power of the experience, allows participants to understand at deeper levels how they think and relate to symbol, to narrative, to their communities, to their own feelings and thoughts.

If the focus of old ritual is the experience that makes a particular belief concrete, the focus of new ritual is the recognition of how one produces, co-constructs or makes belief or 'shared meaning' happen. Process enters content at this level. The experience is not diminished by this, only the totality to which it owes allegiance (it escapes a grand narrative of purpose). The transparency, and therefore the effectiveness, of new ritual actually benefits from strategies that expose, indeed celebrate, that the focus of the ritual is the interaction between individual and communal construction of meaning and experience. Participants are invited to be active not only in the planning and construction of objects, story, performance, but in the construction of communal meanings from individual experience, and individual meanings from communal experiences (as opposed to in some sense partaking in 'a slice of an authentic experience' which they are given or are conditioned to access). Thus, the question of transparency is played through in a field that is volatile, dynamic, and productive in process.

Consideration of this aspect of transparency of methodology highlights a significant way in which new ritual and celebration provides a response to what is often characterised, both in popular commentary and in some branches of postmodern theory, as a Western culture 'emptied of agreed meaning' (or 'coherent values') by its very proliferation of signs, values, information. In recognising transparent meaning construction in new ritual and celebration, we also go some of the way to explaining the marked upsurge of these kinds of events in the contemporary West. That is, we might notice that communities are actively seeking new means of making meaning. If designers working with communities

do not render transparent the processes and responsibilities of meaning construction in rituals and celebrations, they will fail to provide communities with an invaluable aspect of what they (knowingly or not) seek from such events.

Illustration 7 – Sculpture of Tree of Life

To demonstrate this point more fully it is useful to examine in detail an example of ritual and celebration design in the field. The sculpture illustrated above was built by Faridah Cameron as part of an event intended to convey the idea that we can understand the growth of life by using the symbol of a tree – with deep roots to gather sustenance for growth and withstand turbulence, a sturdy trunk to carry the weight of the expanded

life and a canopy which symbolises diversity and the spreading of ideas where one leads to another in an interrelated symbiosis. The flowering of the tree can convey the idea of celebration of the growth of those ideas and the fruit the future growth that detaches from the tree and spreads more widely. The idea within the ritual was to represent symbolically the way in which the human life can be expanded though exploration and the gaining of wisdom.

It was a New Year event at the Woodford Festival in 1997 which was dedicated to exploring and reinforcing the idea of the exploration of self and the community. A tree was chosen as probably the most effective way to represent this idea quite simply because it has done so over such a long time in so many cultures (Persian rugs, stained glass windows, its symbolic use in story and paintings, signs, pottery and so on). But in contemporary society a simple rendition of a tree does not in fact convey the idea we wanted to produce – a sense of knowledge gained and disseminated. If the symbolic use of the tree was realised with no semiological linkage to other metanarratives it seemed insipid and diluted and certainly did not realise the reinforcement apparatus of the gaining of wisdom.

'Tree of Life' carpets made in the Kashan area in Iran are generally referred to as Meditation Carpets because the owner can contemplate the inner meanings of the image within an old and established religious language. The symbol of the tree simply does not have that affect in Australian society today and its use as an image will not bring about a movement from the 'normal' to the 'special'. It is here that we must understand that the symbol must be exposed as a mechanism and the process of interaction observed and then converted into images that carry contemporary meaning. In making more transparent the workings of the Tree of Life symbol, far from subduing the power of the symbol to produce the magic of illumination, instead actually allows the symbol to start to work again in contemporary society in new and meaningful ways. The participants, in their exploration to find their own meanings in the Tree of Life symbol, also explored how meaning works within symbolic languages. The subject 'Tree of Life' is converted from a traditional symbol to the participant's *relationship* to the Tree of Life as a symbolic text and how then the Tree of Life is working as a symbol within that exploration.

But how is this achieved in praxis? If the representation of a tree and even its universality as a symbol is not available to us (redolent of metanarratives) in anything but a highly diluted form, how then do we go about expressing the idea of the Tree of Life in a community context of new ritual design? The participants worked with many ideas that explored the history of the symbol, its strengths and weaknesses in being able to capture and hold concepts of life's exploration and its application, and also explored the symbol's capacity to express each participant's life in this context. The symbol was 'road tested' in its effectiveness to act as a conveyer of the participants' feelings toward the subject of their relationships to 'life's journey' and their desired knowledge paths. In general the tree did stand the test of symbolic use in describing the participants' feelings in these areas despite many other ideas and concepts which were suggested. There was for example a suggestion that the event explore Guattari and Deleuze's rhizomes (which, of course, they pose against 'tree thought' as more useful by virtue of not being burdened with 'root and branch' thinking). But the long and multifarious symbolic history and present of the tree, as it emerged, proved more amenable and accessible in and for a community.

The job of the artists and participants was now to build a ritual that described that exploration. Artist Faridah Cameron spent many weeks investigating what the tree symbol meant to her and many of the participants. From those conversations and research and many aspects of the resulting information she constructed a 'Tree of Life' to be used in a contemporary ritual and celebration. In older rituals the Tree of Life might have manifested itself as a representational figure of a tree with various sub symbols painted upon it. But because of the process of new ritual she and a team of participants produced a pentagonal pyramid (about ten metres high) filigreed with Tree of Life imagery (based on Australian flora and fauna) which opened like a flower to reveal wishing flags attached to a central stamen-like column. The flags had been written on small lengths of cotton fabric by thousands of people during the five-day festival and expressed the festival goers' feelings towards the subject matter of the ritual. At the climax of the ritual performance fireworks showered like pollen into the night sky before the pyramid closed again to be consumed by the bonfire within, which was held up by a tree trunk. In a vast parade of light, hundreds of lantern images of flora and fauna built as emblems of each participant's personal expression of the theme circled the structure, carried by those who had made them.

This Tree of Life was not expressing the symbology of inherited mega-structural narrative and had no ambition to do so, even though it drew on a range of older metanarratives in development. The process was much more concerned with how the symbolic machinery worked and building of that exploration into the ritual. A pyramid is not the same shape as a tree; its structural strength comes from a different dynamic far removed from a tree. Yet the structure holds the idea of the Tree of Life on its surface and in its opening to shower the ritual with new ideas is redolent of a flower opening up and dispersing its seeds. (This is especially true in the Australian context where fire is often needed to generate new plant life.) The disparate ideas work together towards a 'new' understanding.

In Koestler's terms this aspect of the sculpture's structure would be a perfect example of bisociation – two ideas (matrixes) which are released from their normal alignment to join together in a new form, forcing both a questioning of the disintegration of the normal held by each one, and new meaning that is made from their synthesis: 'amongst chosen combinations the most fertile will often be those formed of elements drawn from domains which are far apart…' (Poincare cited in Koestler, 1964: 164). But the sculpture and its ritual usage are also, through artistic research and participant involvement, an outcome of multisociative processes. This sculpture had not been created in isolation as an artistic work but in the process of ritual invention. In the deconstruction of the Tree of Life as a symbol and its reconstruction in the form of a pyramid, a journey of reinvention was undertaken by the participants who, in a series of multiple movements, had provided a dialogue which 'opened' the text of the symbol and also reconstituted a symbol, forcing a reassessment of the interaction of the individual and the group with the symbolic object. Thus this 'journey' in process was potentially much more rich than the passive consumption of symbol used in some more traditional ritual contexts. If we can extrapolate from this one example to general principles we can see how allowing and facilitating access and interaction with the process, new ritual in turn makes the exploration and its expression the ritual subject matter.

This process also to a considerable degree protects the ritual from the conscious and unconscious agendas of both artists and participants because it consistently examines and expresses the process rather than surface content. Exclusionary, racist, xenophobic,

fascist, misogynist tendencies can be at work in the conscious and unconscious lives of communities and may be a part of the structure they desire in the rituals they request. I stress here the unconscious aspects as they are often the most difficult to detect and are by their very nature subversive of shared events. For example, it is often true in communities that various factions assert dominance in spite of the community's best efforts to resist this process. (Children are seen as troublesome, disabled people are forgotten, deviance is treated with suspicion, etc). New ritual structures afford protection in this area because they address these issues directly, as a part of the process, as a part of the subject matter. Transparency also protects the community from the unconscious actions of the designer. Because the designer is the 'expert' and is 'in control', nothing really prevents the designer from 'knowing better' and implementing the conditions of an experience which is in keeping with the community's desire but injects connections and ideas that reflect his/her own personal cognitive process and history. Such a process is unlikely to provide a solution/resolution for the community. An open and cooperative methodology in the *making* of symbol and meaning can reveal these leanings from both the community and the artist's point of view. Oppressive agendas, however unconscious, are difficult to sustain when they are subject to the examination of function.

It should also be said that within this interaction, the reconstitution and expression of such a process can demonstrate that the real 'magic' of symbols and of rituals involving symbols does not lie in a metaphysical domain. Rather, it lies in the symbol's power to illuminate understandings in operation in the ritual and understandings being invited by the ritual. That is, the liberating and life-enhancing aspects of ritual and celebration are to found in the various aspects of the process of producing and experiencing it.

Chapter Four: Transcendence

Illustration 8 – Choral parade

> Florescence of celebration…
>
> (Manning ed., 1983: 4)

Transcendence has a strong relationship to reinforcement in that the participant is taken from a normal state to a special state, but whereas reinforcement has prescribed and expected forms, transcendence has not. The participant moves into a formless structure, closely associated with feelings of release and joy – an 'oceanic' affect as Koestler called it (1964: 273). The usual conditions that control the ego, the sense of 'I', are loosened and the participants find themselves in a type of 'free flight' where they

experience a feeling of participation, identification or belonging; in other words, the self is experienced as being part of a larger whole, a ‘higher unity’ (Koestler, 1964: 54). This ‘participation mystique’, as Joseph Campbell described it (1990: 1), is found in many kinds of rituals and celebrations.

Arthur Koestler elaborates on the sense of a ‘larger whole’ or ‘higher unity’ that he sees as the ‘common denominator of these heterogeneous emotions’, noting that it:

> …may be Nature, God, Mankind, Universal Order, or the *Anima Mundi*; it may be an abstract idea, or a human bond with persons living, dead, or imagined. I propose to call the common element in these emotions the *participatory* or *self-transcending* tendencies. (1964: 54)

Ceremony, ritual and celebration give structure to such a process when control over ‘self’ becomes unstable in these types of social situations. Transcendence is a particular human trait and in some ways most mysterious. Perhaps it can be related to instinctual responses towards community protection where the normal feelings of self protection are bypassed, allowing powerful feelings of group identity which, in turn, produce acts of selflessness and sacrifice. Or perhaps it reflects times when our relationship with the external world becomes imbued with meaning and we transcend the tendency towards feelings of separation and isolation. Koestler gives examples of such experiences in ordinary life:

> Listening to the organ in a cathedral, looking at a majestic landscape…observing an infant…being in love – any of these experiences may cause a welling up of emotion, a moistening or overflow of the eyes, while the body is becalmed and drained of tension. A few steps higher on the intensity scale and the ‘I’ seems to no longer exist…awareness becomes de-personalised and expands into the oceanic feeling of limitless extension and oneness with the universe. (1964: 273)

But this ‘oceanic feeling’ is not always brought on by passive mental and physical experiences. As Alexander Orloff expresses it in *Carnival – Myth and Cult*:

> Mesmerised, reeling in a trance, dancing wildly to the deafening drums, bells, cymbals and flutes, our spirits soar. Briefly abandoning oneself to the irresistible call we surface spontaneously, liberated, like millions of possessed souls we burst into the blinding brilliance of ecstasy, joy, floating on the intoxicating effervescence of free form madness. (1985: n.p.)

Transcendence and the arts in ceremony, ritual and celebration

> You must become ignorant again
> And see the sun again with an ignorant eye
> And see it clearly in the idea of it.
> (Wallace Stevens in Ryan, 1993: 114)

There is no doubt about the capacity of the arts to bring about transcendence. One might say that one of the functions of art is to provide an abstract environment wherein the individual can experience integration into the wider world. Keats called this function 'negative capability' where 'man is capable of being in uncertainties, mysteries and doubts, without any irritable reaching after fact or reason' (Letter to brother December 21, 1817, cited in Hirsch 1999: 131). The arts can provide a psychic 'language' and in so doing create new perspectives and understandings.

Choral singing, for example, in one form or another, is used in ceremony, ritual and celebration throughout the world. Here is an extract from Amanda Lohrey's short story 'The Clear Voice Suddenly Singing' in which a woman observes a local choir in Hobart:

> I think they open up a part of themselves that they have pretty well kept closed for years. Somehow through singing they are rediscovering in themselves those parts of themselves that gave them great joy when they were a child, and letting them go again, but in the company of others. In order to let it go at all they have to go very calmly and deeply inside themselves…(Lohrey, 1997: 11)

Later in the story there is the comment that:

> The liberation of singing in groups is that it is an art form where I don't have to be the best, where my ego is not involved…[I can] experience the music rather than my ego through music. That's the most amazing liberation. (Lohrey 1997: 243).

It seems as if the human voice is able to unhinge usual individual matrix alignments and allow a free flow of transcendent feeling to attach to the 'universal', or at least unified and plurivocal, feelings of the group. The music and the act of singing together provide a conduit through which this happens. In the case of a choir this is further enhanced by the lyrics which are often deeply emotionally affecting.

I use choral singing often in events where transcendence is an objective. Australia is particularly rich in choirs of all types. There has been a significant increase in the number of choirs formed in community settings all around the country. We usually associate choirs with belief systems, for example choral music found in traditional churches. But the secularisation of the society and the influence of multiculturalism have produced a plurality of approach which liberates this singing form into a multiplicity of styles and attitudes. Within the repertoire of a single community choir one might be able to hear classical Christian anthems, African lullabies, West Indian reggae, gospel, British and Bulgarian folk songs and the Beatles. Given that they are not established as an adjunct to religious rites or official state functions, these choirs have been formed for the feeling of pleasure that they give the participants (transcendence, in other words) and are positioned well to be involved in ritual and celebration. We have often brought together a choir of around four hundred people who, in a surprisingly short time, sing together and express community vision.

Music of all types is able to 'transport' the individual into transcendent states, or in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, 'music has always sent out lines of flight, like so many transformation multiplicities' (1987: 11). The use of drums in indigenous rites, chanting within religious structures, hymns at a remembrance service, singing at a festival can all serve to 'move' ego-based matrix assemblages into transcendent states. Dance, too, can activate this process. We can see this operate in the dancing of the dervishes, Scottish Highland dancers and in indigenous ceremonies:

> So he dances through life as though he wanted to dance till he collapses, and thereby discovers that he is able, through his rhythmic dancing, to develop at the same time a second spirit. (Marrett cited in Huxley, 1974: 156)

Visual arts are also able to inspire feeling and encourage transcendence. Mask, altars, costumes, icon, image, painting, sculpture, decoration, fetish, all offer visual signifiers, semiological mappings which guide, enforce and symbolise transcendence. Similarly, poetry and story contribute; words taken out of normal configurations and placed in powerful new combinations force new alignments and allow new understandings that can transcend the ordinary.

> Poetry protects us from this automatization, from the rust that threatens our formulation of love, hate, revolt and reconciliation, faith and negation. (Kristeva, 1981: 32)

Poetry also provides a clue to the way rhythm works in the alignment process. Hirsch puts it as follows:

> It is a combination in English of stressed and unstressed syllables that creates a feeling of flux, of surprise and inevitability. Rhythm is all about recurrence and change. It is poetry's way of charging the depths, hitting the fathomless. It is oceanic. (1999: 21)

Perhaps the arts in this context provide an external focus that can act as a unifying element for transcendent feeling. Singing in a choir, for example, forces listening: we must concentrate on the external and bring our internal world into a harmony with it, thereby loosening our hold on self and 'mainlining' an intense interaction with the outside world. Visual arts channel our 'seeing' in the same way. Cezanne expressed this idea in relation to paintings when he commented that 'painting…gives concrete shape to sensations and perceptions' (cited in Barrow, 1995: 11). We become realigned through powerful associations with signification that allows us to move into the 'external' in special ways. Ceremony, ritual and celebration are forms that provide particular pathways for this movement.

As Barrow puts it in relation to dance:

> The whole community seems larger than the aggregates of its parts; the individual becomes part of a larger dynamic movement that is bound by solidarity to the group…[The dances] instil order and mutual reliance. They sweep aside insecurities and hesitations that introversion engenders; but above all they offer plausible initial conditions from which some of the rich diversity of civilization can blossom and grow. (Barrow, 1995: 188)

Transcendence in festivals

> Exultation is the going
> of an inland soul to the sea.
> (Emily Dickenson cited in Linscott, 1959: 53)

There is no better environment in which to discuss the processes of transcendence than the world of festivals. Festivals are very diverse in type, ranging from the sacred to the

profane. Although there are many types of festivals, for convenience I will concentrate on four main groupings and it must be noted that in many situations these categories overlap and merge:

- Festivals of belief (sacred festivals)
- Cyclical festivals (times and seasons of the year)
- Festivals of misrule (Mardi Gras, etc)
- Community festivals (civic, special interest groups, etc)

Festivals of belief can be found in almost every culture in the world. We need look no further than charismatic Christianity or Balinese fertility rites to see that the individual within these events can experience transcendence. Music, visual stimulus, rhythmic movement, singing and chanting are often used to bring about a state of euphoria where the deity is celebrated. A strong culture of belief provides a safe structure in which to experience such feelings. The participants carrying the enormously heavy figure of the Madonna in the Pilgrimage of the Virgin of La Cabeza (Baballero Bonald, 1992: 126) are in a highly charged emotional situation but the formality of the church and the known ritual framework protect the celebrants from hysteria. We must make no mistake about the dangers that can manifest themselves in these situations: people can be become hysterical and 'mindless', so the celebratory and ritual structures that are put in place are of vital importance. I witnessed a Balinese funeral where two hundred men carried an eight tonne, twenty metre high funeral tower through the streets and the slightest mistake would have resulted in death[12]. And in some extreme situations people *are* killed, as can be witnessed in the running of the bulls in Pamplona (Caballero Bonald, 1992: 215). However, most festivals of belief are not so dangerous and pass peacefully enough with gentle experiences of transcendence found in procession, music, dancing and various ritual activities. In fact many transcendent experiences can be quiet and reflective. As noted earlier, in contemporary Australia meta-structures of belief have weakened and there has been a narrowing of opportunity for people to share in this type of belief experience.

Cyclical festivals are celebrations to note particular times in the yearly cycle and can include events related to seasonal food gathering, solstice and equinox dates, civic remembrance, holidays and other events. There seems to be a need to 'mark' our yearly trip around the Sun. In ancient societies where food gathering was completely dependent on an understanding of the rhythms of nature we can appreciate the importance of noting these times, and the celebration of sowing, harvest and so on continued long into the agricultural period. There also seems to be a need to create milestones that measure our community history and deepen our sense of communal identification. However in contemporary Australia these cyclical festivals can suffer crisis in identification; a spring festival of renewal can turn into the Fosters Melbourne Cup.

Cyclical festivals related to agrarian societies and food gathering struggle for identity in contemporary contexts. The celebration of the harvest or the coming of Spring seems to have little relevance in an urban supermarket culture where all types of food are to be had at any time of the year. An added complication has dampened these rhythmic gatherings in Australia. We have inherited, in the main, European semiotic systems which are inappropriate in the Southern Hemisphere. Winter festivals are held in the summer and visa versa. We receive cards with snow and reindeer on them; we put up Christmas trees (which symbolise the turning of the year at the Winter Solstice and the immanent return of spring); we serve traditional foods designed for winter gatherings, in hot Australian summers. These practices and rituals are symbolically inappropriate. Such symbolic confusion dilutes the enriching nature of festival and diminishes the capacity for transcendence. We could gain greatly from re-orientating our cyclical festivals to the right season of the year and/or surrounding them with a more contextualised symbolic environment. Used appropriately, familiar symbols take on new meaning. Victor Turner quotes Indian scholar M. N. Srinivas:

> We see it with new eyes. The commonplace has become marvellous. (Turner, 1982: 8)

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[12] Visit to Bali in 2000

The capacity for ceremonies of transcendence to link us with enriched understandings of our world is great and it is a loss to a culture when they malfunction due to colonial inheritance.

Let us now turn to the third type of festival, which has very different aims and still has a potent presence in Australia. Festivals of misrule transgress normal societal constraints, and free the participant from the shackles of normal behaviour; they subvert the usual rules and allow the individual and the community to 'let off steam'. Our day-to-day world is full of worries and tensions, and transcendence releases the participant from a build up of pressure. Frazer describes this release of pressure in the celebrations of the Hos people of Northern India when they have brought in the harvest:

> They have a strange notion at this period, men and women are so overcharged with vicious propensities, that it is absolutely necessary for the safety of the person to let off steam by allowing for a time full vent to the passions. (Frazer, 1993: 556)

This release of pressure can also inspire a feeling of transcendence and consequent joy.

> To fill the body of the sun and moon, to speak to the wind and to hear the wind talking back to you, through you, is to project psychic life into animate and inanimate nature alike. (Hirsch, 1999: 131)

Festivals of misrule allow suppressed emotion to surface and express itself – 'the reverse of their daily selves' (Turner, 1982: 103). We can see this at South American Mardi Gras celebrations or in some European festivals where normally 'well-behaved' citizens break out of their day-to-day world to behave in ways that would not usually be acceptable. At the same time, structures of dominance can 'safely' be ridiculed:

> The inanity and absurdity of our mundane reality, our fanatical preoccupation with power, money, war, weapons, political structures and appearances reduces us to laughter. With scornful derision we dismiss the lies, tear down the veil of pretence, expose the venality and hypocrisy of our civil tyrants, and mock their oppressive authority. We ridicule the politicians who sell us illusion and who enslave us in their industrial paradise. We collectively vent our hostility and suspicion, scorning their twentieth century gods: science, technology and money. (Gabriel Garcia Marquez cited in Cohen, 1991: 12)

One example of this is the 'Festival of Married Women' held in Las Aguedas in Spain in which women are given complete license to express their day-to-day frustrations in a

few days of excessive behaviour. Unfaithful husbands are burnt in effigy; the drinking and carousing reaches such intensity that the men are forced to hide in lofts and cellars. When the festival is over the women return to normal life; and the wild behaviour exhibited at the festival is not mentioned again (Caballero Bonald, 1992: 69).

Festivals of misrule also allow politically and culturally repressed minority groups to have a period of 'freedom'. Partly, this is because

> Only in rites,
> can we renounce our oddities
> and be truly entired.
> (Auden cited in Martin, 1981: 27)

But of course, allowing minority communities to vent their feelings is politically expedient if authorities are to prevent a 'pressure cooker' syndrome building up to explosion point.

> Ludic and metaphorical celebrations enjoy their greatest vitality amongst those who are marginal not only to the cultural mainstream of modernisation, but also to political power. (Manning, 1983: 28)

Festivals of misrule go back to the beginnings of recorded history. We can read about them in the Dionysiac rites of the ancient Greeks (in which only women held secret and wild ceremonies) and Saturnalia in Rome (in which the slaves and under classes would take over the city for seven days of wild dancing and drinking). The Festival of Fools held in Europe in the Middle Ages elected a 'king' and the thieves, prostitutes and beggars would take over the town in a wild orgy of license and misrule. In all these celebrations the usual laws of restraint were cast aside and mayhem abounded. Even church clerics sang parodies of the holy mass in mock services while the common folk dressed as nuns and priests and behaved in licentious ways. By the nineteenth century Northern Europe, through the combined efforts of the churches and industrialism, had completely suppressed any such activity. The Festivals of misrule started to lose their meaning and much of their original energy. Cities like Cologne, Basel and Venice held more formal carnivals and, although splendid and spectacular, these were tame imitations of the past.

Today we can still find the wild energy of the ancient festivals of misrule in South America, where the Mardi Gras produces a week of elaborate costume, wild dancing,

drinking and licentious behaviour. 'Mardi Gras' or 'Fat Tuesday' is the day before Lent and the last chance for feasting before the Catholic season of denial.

In Rio de Janeiro the whole city participates in a true carnival of misrule. (The word carnival comes from the Latin *carne vale* or 'farewell meat'). Normal work is suspended as the population dances in tens of thousands to the beat of the rumba. In other places (San Francisco and Sydney for example) the gay community has taken up the Mardi Gras theme. A frequently oppressed minority can temporarily cast off its usual status and 'come out' for a night of wild music, parties and parades, but it can also express issues of deep concern such as HIV/AIDS and discrimination. As Turner notes of carnival, 'the messages it delivers are often serious beneath the outward trappings of absurdity, fantasy and ribaldry' (Turner, 1982: 104).

The wearing of masks by an entire group (masked balls, parades, festivals) also disguises identity and allows special behaviour.

> The individual who disguises himself becomes that "other" who he dare not be in normal circumstances. Hence, the therapeutic meaning of carnival, its cathartic condition, derives from that alteration, that change of identity. (Caballero Bonald, 1992: 35)

We could reasonably say that the mask is at its most potent when the image corresponds closely to the symbolic and imaginative world of the individual and brings together closely associated matrix systems of signifying relevance. The mask is an object of magic because of its efficient capacity for cognitive assemblage. If the participant is wearing a mask, his or her 'normal' personality can change, s/he is disguised, s/he has taken on external attributes. This process allows the wearer to 'fill' the external matrix assemblages that the mask contains and move from the 'normal' into desired states.

> These moments are, above all else, rituals of horizontal integration, fragments of brotherly equality snatched out of the divided reality of status and role differences… At its most intense such a moment confers ecstasy, and at the minimum it lifts the normal limits, controls and structures in favour of unbuttoned relaxation. The masks go with the freedom because they conceal our social and role-bound selves, thus allowing an escape from such inhibiting structures as hierarchy, responsibility and decorum. The selves underneath the masks cannot be called to account tomorrow for the activities of tonight: normal rules are suspended. (Martin, 1981: 14)

The social function of festivals of misrule is clear, but why is the experience of transcendence important to individual participants? I have referred above to the tension and stress that build up within us in our day-to-day life and the release of these pressures within festivals. Matrix alignments are taken out of 'holding' alignments and merge in 'playful' ways in a temporary situation which brings with it feelings of delight.

> …human life is a precarious and wondrous balance between what Levi Strauss (1966) called the "classificatory urge" – the penchant for logical structuring and regulating the cosmos – and what Peckham (1965) terms "man's rage for chaos" – a mischievous, sensual delight with irregularity and misrule. Encompassing order and disorder, celebration resonates powerfully with the polarities of the human condition. (Manning, 1983: 4)

Whether we understand these 'polarities' as part of 'the human condition' in an apparently essentialist reading, or recognise, as Levi Strauss did, that they are discursively constructed, this 'playful' condition is more than just a safety valve. It also provides a creative mechanism for thinking. Nietzsche remarked, 'I know of no other manner of dealing with great tasks than as play; this…is the essential prerequisite' (cited by Babcock in MacAloon ed., 1984: 108). To be 'creative' we must allow times when the matrix systems are permitted to interact in new ways that might allow new possibilities and future directions. Making spaces that invite creativity is essential to psychological health as well as cultural survival.

> Antonin Artaud understood at least this: that without a theatre of mask and trance, of simulation and vertigo, the people perish – and this is true of the most complex and large scale society as it is the most obscure [tribal] band. (Turner in Manning ed., 1984: 110)

It also encourages reflexivity, which is important to self-understanding. Matrix systems are relaxed during transcendence experiences, but there is always the reflexive self which is able to observe. 'Celebration is a "text", a vivid aesthetic creation that reflexively depicts, interrupts and informs its social context' (Manning ed., 1983: 6). Not only do festival structures provide overt ways to observe the self but also in the expression of creativity perhaps they reveal for us aspects of self we might not otherwise encounter: 'One might even say that the masks, disguises and other fictions of some forms of play are devices to make visible what has been hidden, even unconscious…' (Turner in Manning ed., 1984: 106).

We can see that it is of value to the participants to be able to view the world in a new way and in doing so understand it better. Avoiding the pitfalls of 'polarities', Turner positions transcendence and celebration carefully in terms of the multiple experiences of subjects in culture, in liminal states *and* in the everyday:

> I have used the term "antistructure"…to describe both liminal and what I have called "communitas".[13] I meant by it not a structural reversal, a mirror imaging of the "profane" workaday socioeconomic structure, or a fantasy rejection of structural "necessities", but the liberation of human capacities of cognition, affect, volition, creativity, etc., from the normative constraints incumbent upon occupying a sequence of social statuses, enacting a multiplicity of social roles and being acutely conscious of membership in some corporate group…or the affiliation of some persuasive social category. (1982: 44)

A sense of entering a liminal state is often shared with others in the community.

> Is there any of us who has not known this moment when compatible people – friends, congeners – obtain a flash of lucid mutual understanding on the existential level, when they feel that all problems, not just their problems, could be resolved, whether emotional or cognitive, if only the group…could sustain its intersubjective illumination? (Turner, 1982: 48)

In other words, when celebratory structures allow participants to reach special states, many important societal and individual experiences can be played out. Nietzsche described it as a 'freedom above things' (cited by Babcock in MacAloon ed., 1984: 115). As Bernice Martin writes, 'ritual is always a paradoxical combination: a taste of transcendence and an experience of belonging at the same time' (1981: 49).

The fourth type of festival is the community festival. Most festivals involve a community of people; however this category is driven by its identification with community. A brief description will suffice. Community festivals range from small street events to national, high profile experiences. The community can be defined for example by geographical means (town, suburb, etc.), by area of interest (jazz or folk music, etc), by age and sex (youth, women, etc.) or by experiential groupings (veterans, single parents, etc). What is important is that the design of the event reflects the

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[13] 'In communitas we find an inversion of structured situations of everyday reality' (Maria Goldwasser cited in Turner, 1982: 117)

interests, culture and identification of the community involved. This can be more difficult than it seems with variant aims and objectives producing differing symbolic markers and codes. In the context of transcendence, the differences that are likely to cause disjunctions must be analysed and, if possible, circumvented to achieve a community identification and celebration. It is important to determine what feelings and ideas are commonly held amongst the group, the criteria by which they define themselves as a group, and how the values thus represented are translating into festival. Festival is a concentrated symbolic operating system which brings these factors into focus, emphasises these common values and celebrates them.

Artificial and/or oppressive avenues of transcendence

> Pure liminality…is just a fleeting point of transition, and an attempt to turn all life into liminal ecstasy is doomed from the start. (Martin, 1981: 118)

We have examined the role of the arts and festivals in transcendent experiences but I would like to touch on the use of artificial stimulants to achieve these aims. Drugs break down the matrices that organise normal perception and can bring about profound experiences as well as 'bad trips'. Drugs have been taken in ceremonies in many cultures and for some indigenous peoples are deeply related to 'spiritual' experience. These experiences are organised by the community's elders who are experienced in the effects. The use of the drugs is explained to the individual in spiritual and cultural terms. The use of marijuana in parts of India or peyote in Mexico can be cited as examples. Alcohol is another transcendent agent used very commonly in festivals. The wine drunk in Spain, the beer at Munich or the Guinness at folk festivals acts as a 'matrix shifter,' allowing people to loosen accustomed controls and inhibitions in order to sing, dance and transcend into community feeling. Matrix alignments are deeply affected by artificial stimulants and they can thus impart a feeling of transcendence. However there are clearly dangers which I will now discuss.

The dangers of transcendence in ritual and celebration

> Of things ill done and done to others harm.
> (T.S. Eliot, 1944: 54)

Of the four categories of experience, transcendence is the one most open to abuse. As explained above, the 'abandonment' of usual control can place the participant in uncontrolled conditions that can be harmful to themselves and to others. Transcendence can 'blind [us] to reality' (Gallanter, 1999: 38) and drive crowds into behaving as hysterical mobs. Soccer is to some people a harmless social ritual but for others it constitutes feelings 'akin to drug addiction or religious rapture, or both' (Trifonas, 2001: 41). The fans are famous for their unruly, unpredictable and at times violent behaviours. These effects are well documented, and have been variously characterised as 'symbolic war' (Morris, 1988: 8) or 'recreational waste' (Eco cited in Trifonas, 2001: 52). It is clear that in such 'mob' situations, forces of transcendence are (advertently or inadvertently) being brought into powerful focus and driving people (often from socially deprived or marginalised groups) into emotional states that can become uncontrollable, with outcomes ranging from isolated vandalism and violence to widespread rioting.

'Unhealthy' social aggregates can use ritual and celebratory structures to brainwash vulnerable people to oppressive/repressive causes. These techniques can be used to bring about within the individual a state that can result in negative and even destructive consequences such as terrorism, fanaticism, extremism. For example, Marc Gallanter, in *Cults*, describes how emotionally vulnerable people can be controlled and often exploited by unscrupulous or misguided fanatics:

> Such changes in subjective experience (or alterations in consciousness) can undermine the psychological matrix in which our views are rooted so we lose track of internal signposts. They may also introduce a feeling of mystery, or a sense that forces beyond our control are operating. Thus, they can prime us to accept unaccustomed explanations for our experiences and adopt new attitudes implied in these explanations. (Gallanter, 1999: 60)

Political systems, religious systems, social systems and even criminal systems can take advantage of these structures to affect the individual and/or the community. We need only look to Nazi rallies of the nineteen-thirties for proof of this. These gatherings used music, symbol, fire, drumming, movement, spectacle, oratory, chanting and light to bring about a feeling of communitas and feelings of cohesive oneness – the very methods that are used in an Olympic Opening. We can see that structures which

encourage transcendence can be used by *any* individual or group to bring about these states.

The ethics of engagement in transcendence

The question arises: who judges what is a *healthy* transcendence and what is an *unhealthy* transcendence? Where is the arbitration between one culture and another, one group and another? For example, the mass might be for Catholics a moment of communitas, wonder and individual freedom. But in the light of a considerable array of oppressive values and historical effects, many non-Catholics might see the mass as the means the church uses to brainwash the faithful. The same argument can be put in relation to charismatic, fundamentalist Protestant and Islamic organisations. It might also, therefore, be argued that we need to distrust the whole process of transcendence, claiming that individuals and groups should not lose 'control' of their normal assemblages.

I would like to make two points here. The first is that there can be no doubt that the more understanding we gain of how this process works, the more choices we can make as participants and event organisers. We can choose to ignore the process, believing that transcendence is undesirable or not appropriate. We can choose what sort of participation we might want to have and at what level we want to have it. We can use our critical judgement as to the integrity and potentials of the event. The onus is on the practitioner to exercise very careful reflexivity about these matters. While they may engage with the many cultural experiences that can be discovered through transcendence, they remain fully in command of their decision-making processes.

The second point is that designers of new ritual and celebration who might be very conversant with techniques of transcendence must use their judgement and experience in examining who is putting forward the event and for what reasons. A careful appraisal of the motives and aims of the host organisation is vital. The feelings of communitas and celebration, the moment when the community members are in a vulnerable state of trust, can be used by those with vested interests to promote their own aims. Instead of the community planning an event that is promoting the cultural life of the people, the event can be hijacked by individuals and organisations devoted to financial profit or other types of exploitative activity. It is crucial that genuine attempts to celebrate

community and shared interest based in a majority sense of what is appropriate for that community are not undermined by parties for their own gain. As noted earlier, one important means to avoid these effects is to ensure transparent participant involvement in processes of meaning making such that in reflecting on the developing design, the relative positions of participants reveal themselves. Nevertheless, in the context of rituals of transcendence, there is a particular onus on the designer to be alert to the potential for misuse of the context.

We might ask at this point: how does one determine what is a genuine attempt at celebration? Ros Derrett in a study of four NSW festivals defines the objectives as follows:

> It is important to define what is a sense of community… It is useful to assess all key factors that contribute to making effective festivals and how a community's sense of itself and its place emerge as major elements. It is evident that a historical perspective allows for a strong narrative to emerge, which in turn demonstrates the values, interests and aspirations of the host community…This core of culture includes a shared environment that is maintained by the members of the community; a way of life and sets of beliefs that have intergenerational implications and have a major influence on everyone living within that culture. (Derrett, 2003: 38)

and

> Festivals and events demonstrate the popular definitions of a sense of community through offering connections, belonging, support, empowerment, participation and safety. The sort of informed participation afforded by festivals and events provides residents with a sound overall view of their community. (Derrett: 2003: 38)

So where are the guidelines when deciding upon an event of this sort? Organisers must use their own judgment and make their own ethical decisions, but the aims and decisions of the event designer must be made clear to the participants and they must be given a real picture of not only *what* will happen but *why* it is going to happen. The community participating in rituals or celebrations involving transcendence must be fully informed as to the aim and directions of the organisers; and those participating in the actual event must be involved in transparent processes of meaning making.

As a 'rule of thumb' the following questions might be asked at the outset. In the view of the invited designer, is the host organisation made up of people of integrity who are

genuinely attempting to hold an event for cultural, social or educational enrichment? Is the host organisation trying to pursue an agenda that is unknown to the participants? Does the host organisation have a fixed ideological position that it wants to promote? If so, is that position one with which the designer is ethically comfortable and is the designer convinced that the potential participants share that position? Does the host organisation aim to produce a relevant community event for the good of the participants and does it have no aims to exploit them either ideologically or commercially? It is very difficult to draw lines, as it is in many professions. This dissertation determines no strict position in relation to these matters, but I would like to make it clear that many grey areas exist within this situation and that, finally, an artist who is invited to design events will need to make a series of reflexive, subtle, careful ethical decisions both before agreeing to involvement and consistently during involvement.

I have discussed the use of alcohol and drugs in traditional festivals but the abuse of this nexus to ecstasy is widespread. Turner's 'antistructure' can become negative in uncontrolled situations of excess. Violence and bad behaviour from overuse of alcohol and from drug taking can occur when the 'party' culture finds itself detached from community festive aims. The occasional excess found in festivals of misrule can become habitual and regular, and in some cases the antistructure becomes the everyday. We can clearly see this in the difference between taking drugs for illumination within spiritual celebratory contexts and taking drugs as a leisure activity. Given the break down of traditional safeguards in contemporary contexts, and given the law, it would be most unwise for a designer to make such activity part of a community event. Of course, communities will themselves introduce such elements to their celebrations and while a designer might anticipate that, s/he cannot in most situations prevent it. Obviously, however, there are implicit dangers in achieving special states by the use of artificial stimuli. An example might be the Australian celebration of New Year.

It is traditional to celebrate New Year with drinking and wild celebration. Apart from local folk traditions there might be psychological reasons for New Year celebrations. Communities and individuals might need a milestone at which to review their lives and even attempt to change them (New Year resolutions). The New Year, representing a new beginning, focuses this particular energy. Drinking (the release of the normal assemblages), discussion of the past (reviewing the past year) and the celebration of

change (a new start) might all contribute to this process. In Scotland there is a firm community structure based in the folk tradition[14] that controls the situation culturally – people gather at certain places, share feelings of communitas, sing and dance, go into each others' houses and exchange presents. No one could deny that the drinking is excessive, but the family community atmosphere and the positive spin on the evening puts restraints on destructive behaviour. Members of the community experience transcendence within traditionally prescribed structures.

In Australia the culture does not have many of these traditional structures in place and consequently for many people New Year can become a drunken party with few aims other than getting inebriated.

The Woodford Folk Festival in Queensland has brought to bear structures that echo those found in older communities where New Year is a time of significance. In spite of the drinking and extremely large crowds there are very few examples of violence or other destructive/unpleasant behaviour at this festival. Music-making and dancing are encouraged in the festival precinct, providing a positive outlet of energy and good feeling. Families with children are encouraged to attend, putting some societal restraints on behaviour. A one-minute silence for people who have died during the year is held just before midnight, giving a feeling of seriousness to the occasion. Fireworks, singing, hugging, dancing and good wishes for the New Year are shared at midnight, encouraging transcendent celebration within a positive structured setting. The understanding of structure and the dynamics of transcendence can turn a potentially negative situation of random drunkenness into a more positive feeling of celebration.

Transcendence in new rituals and celebrations

> The celebrants' hope…is that the rhythm of performance will find an echo in life, if only for a moment. (Manning, 1983: 30)

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[14] This tradition has a long history. The old Celtic New Year was held on 31st October and the community believed that the dead would return to their homes. If they could cross the doorstep before midnight they could stay in the house for the coming year. To stop the ghosts from doing this they were sent away with presents and gifts. All this coincided with the harvest and the last excesses before the winter privations. At midnight the dead returned to the underworld and the community could celebrate. When the Roman's moved to the present New Year many traditions were carried over with the change of date. First footing and other community celebrations are held to this day.

Ceremony, ritual and celebration give a safe and symbolic behavioural structure for transcendence experiences and it is equally important to provide a methodology for bringing participants back to their normal day-to-day life. In cognitive terms healthy, structured transcendence encourages a weakening of the border regions that protect stable assemblages and allow a merging process to occur. Some sacred, rhythmic and community festivals can have quiet, reflective and reflexive atmospheres where the participant gives way to a calm and dense feeling of transcendence – a community parade for example, or a cultural experience shared. These celebrations usually have structures and take place in settings in which the participant is in little danger of any real disruption. A wooden instrument-making workshop at a festival holds a concert with a small but knowledgeable audience. There is a rich feeling of communitas and strong feelings of transcendence but the quiet, gentle nature of the event throws up no disruption to the audience or the structure that supports it. These types of transcendent experience are also stable in their cultural context and their symbolic and semiological language is kept intact.

Designers of these events of transcendence must use sensitivity and skill to capture the essence but this can be achieved with care and good management. The individual becomes very vulnerable, however, in festivals and events which allow the forces of misrule to operate. The normal matrix has been destabilised, therefore the celebrational structure must be robust. Designers of new ritual and ceremony need to be very aware of the dangers inherent in this form of experience. Turner makes the point that 'it takes a good deal of structure to produce antistructure' (cited by Manning ed., 1983: 14). He writes:

> It takes a great amount of order to produce 'a sweet disorder', a great deal of structuring to create a sacred play-space and time for antistructure. If "flowing" – communitas is "shared flow" – denotes the holistic sensation when we act with total involvement, when action and awareness are one (one ceases to flow if one becomes aware that one is doing it) then, just as a river needs banks to flow, so do people need framing and structural rules to do their type of flowing. (Turner, 1983: 118)

If structure is too insistent then the spontaneous nature of transcendence is gone and if there is too little structure then chaos and confusion can emerge. It is a delicate situation when proven traditional structures well tested by time evaporate and our culture is left marooned, unable to mobilise situations of celebration effectively.

In reinforcement and transformation rituals the symbolic can be seen as essential, but there is an irony operating in the world of misrule: meaning is thrown into disorder because, frequently, the symbolic order is 'turned upside down', disorganised, disarrayed.

> As both Turner and Wallace argue, the factors of one's culture are learnt by experiencing them confused, inverted, rearranged. But more than simply reinforcing traditional relationships and structures, such displacements and contradictions prompt speculation about, reflection on and reconsideration of the order of things. (Babcock in MacAloon ed., 1984: 122)

Of course, rather than provide illumination, refreshment and elucidation, disorder can produce confusion and frustration. This is where the designer of new rituals must consider the practice paradox of structuring disorder, organising disorganisation, which is a necessary element in transcendence celebrations. Where do the signposts lie? How does one control the uncontrollable? If, as Turner says, 'Carnival engulfs all its categories in a dynamic, many levelled domain of multi-framed antistructure and spontaneous communitas' (in Manning ed., 1983: 124) then how can we provide for this without suppressing the very forces that make it happen?

> The true carnivals are true to ambiguity. Once they become clearly defined, once they move into the indicative cultural mood of binary oppositions, meditations, and the like, they cease to be true to themselves, to be true to the bared human condition they so signally express and enigmatically represent. The politicisation of the festival spirit of ambiguity and its channelling towards goals approved of by power hierarchies, secular or sacred, destroys this fecund ambiguity and makes of carnivals its own sanctimonious ghost. (Turner in Manning ed., 1983: 188)

and

> If the festival is made to express pure and naked hegemony, it becomes a massive political rally of the type staged under totalitarian political systems. On the other hand, if it is made to express pure opposition, it becomes a political demonstration against the system. In either case it ceases to be carnival. (Cohen cited by Manning ed., 1983: 29)

I believe the answer lies in understanding the dynamics of transcendence. We have noted the effect of the arts in this process and their power to align participants in positive and nourishing ways that invite reconsideration of themselves and 'the world'.

In the context of transcendence celebrations, however, the artist must produce a structure that allows ambiguity; must encourage a flexibility of sign and activity without descent into anarchy and damage or, on the other hand, 'killing' the true moments of transcendence with too much control.

So what guidelines are there to help overcome these problems and produce good and responsible design, which sets out the conditions for transcendence to occur?

As we have found in other types of ritual and transformation, a study of traditional forms practised by folk or indigenous cultures can give us structural information. These methodologies have evolved through long experience and can offer clues to our own events. We have seen how music and dance can provide avenues of transcendence but I would like to take an example from my own practice that might illuminate the approaches to the problem.

The Woodford Folk Festival is one of the biggest music festivals in the western world and gains much energy from three types of festival structure. It is a community festival (a community defined by a common interest in folk music stages the event), it is a cyclical festival (held at New Year) and it is a festival of misrule (singing, dancing and celebration situated 'against the mainstream'). Each year my company and I stage the closing ceremony and aim towards the transcendent experience. We would like the audience and participants to experience through our ritual the psychological benefits of a 'new start' felt at New Year, to lose their ordinary day-to-day reality to share in feelings of uplift and communitas, and to be able to enjoy the experience of transcendence without resorting to hysteria and mob rule. To do this we look to an ancient element of ritual and celebration practised by peoples since the beginning of culture – fire.

Even without going through the extensive history of the use of fire in ritual we can see that it has great potency. One has only to examine the cremation ceremonies of Bali or the effect of the Olympic flame to see that it is able to hold a certain power for a wide variety of people in almost all cultural contexts. Perhaps the deep resonance that fire holds can be found in its importance not only in our present world but throughout human history. It has practical applications: it warms us, cooks our food, provides power for our electricity, cauterises wounds, provides light, disposes of refuse, acts as a

catalyst, cremates bodies and has many other uses. It has, as mentioned earlier (in relation to transformation), great symbolic power and appears in countless myths, stories and cultural events, from Prometheus to Cathy Freeman's circle of fire at the Sydney Olympics.

Steven J. Pyne in his account of the history of fire in Australia comments:

> …fire is inextinguishably tied to life. Where ice reduces, removes, and buries, fire enhances, multiplies, stimulates, recycles, and animates, a plural not a singular process, massaging a varied, subtle biota. It is above all vital – at times awesome but also playful. Always associated with life. Life made fire possible – and fire, in return, dramatised Australia's life. Its history, natural or cultural, could not be understood without it. To invoke the lands that evolved from Old Australia is to conjure up a burning bush. (1991: 11)

The Woodford Fire Event has come to represent something of this natural and mythic power for many thousands of Australians who may attend once, or who may return year after year. It was the final event in the international Millennium Broadcast. To explicate the process of staging a large event of transcendence such as this, I would like to take the three objectives stated above (the new start, the feelings of communitas and prevention of loss of control) and examine them separately.

The event takes place in a large natural amphitheatre that holds 16,000 people sitting on grass in a bush setting. The event has a central fire sculpture approximately 15 metres tall and a large stage to one side with musicians and a choir. Before the ritual starts we have a commentary describing the general themes. The performance itself is split into four sections – a procession, a ritual, fireworks and the burning of the fire sculpture. The event takes up to one and a half hours and has over one thousand participants. It is a ritual of antistructure; it takes the participant out of the day to day and places them into a radically different world where fire destroys the beautiful in a reversal of the ordinary rules of preservation and order.

We might take an example of one year. In 1999 we built the Altar of Precious Things. As people arrived at the site the altar, which took the form of a tower (see Illustration 9 below), held the centre of the performance ground, and they could explore its plurality of symbolism while waiting for the event to commence. The first aim of our New Year rituals is to produce a feeling in participants and audience of a 'new start', of a time to

close the past and move forward into the future with renewed energy; a time when transcendent feelings produce a motivation to accept the passing of the particular section of our lives represented in the yearly cycle and to be able to enter the new phase with as much understanding as possible. This particular performance also suggested that by identifying what was important and precious to the individual and the community those aspects could be taken into the New Year.

Illustration 9 – Fire sculpture, ‘The Altar of Precious Things’

The ritual focuses the participants’ and audience’s attention on their individual and shared important and precious matters, producing an awareness of what might be valuable in their lives. It then celebrates, therefore also reinforcing, these knowledges. The culminating moment of the setting alight of the towering fire sculpture really represents the past year, and in its dramatic burning the old year is metaphorically

destroyed. But in the life giving symbolism of the fire a phoenix-like effect, a feeling of renewal, pervades. The old year is gone but the new one is here for us to embrace. Audiences 'go with this' strongly, and the moment is always accompanied by thousands of cheering voices, howls and whoopings, keenings and trills, vocalising the pluralities of the witnesses. The voices and applause rise and fall with the stages of the blaze, as different elements of the sculpture are reached by the flames. It might seem that 'destroying' the past, or even, more simply, the destruction of the beauty of the sculpture, might produce in an audience a feeling of great sadness. But in seeing what is important being 'lost' in the fire, its importance is made dense, and of course it is not really lost, it is only a metaphor. The participants still have their precious things but now their importance has been magnified. Without an actual feeling of loss there can be no transcendence to the future.

It might also be supposed that this feeling of concentration on important things passing would be difficult to reverse as the flames grow higher and finally consume the image, but nothing could be further from the case. The large bonfire that follows, when the wooden and bamboo frame that held the images collapses onto itself, seems to have a quality of renewal which is enforced by choral singing and a large circle folk dance executed by the whole performing group of four hundred people. Fireworks also herald in the New Year, producing further feelings of celebration.

The second aim of our New Year events is to create a feeling of communitas through transcendent feelings. Apart from the transcendent feelings that accompany the shared witnessing and communal involvement described above, the fire produces an enormous amount of light and heat which transform the large audience, who have been sitting in the dark, into a consolidated group. They are now warmed by the fire and can see and communicate with each other. The subject matter of the event is never didactic but remains an open text with which all ages and types of peoples can identify. In 1999 the participants and the audience were invited to work with concepts of what was precious to them. There was no judgment as to what that was and people could decide their own way of interpreting this. But the cumulative imagery and individual expression in the long stages of the ritual performance that preceded the burning of the tower produced a strong feeling of community expression.

The third aim is to allow transcendence without loss of control – antistructure with structure. Without careful planning and the establishment of phases of build up and release, the audience can easily become discontented and frustrated. The feelings of communitas and enrichment produced by the fire could just as easily have been impatient chants to destroy and burn the sculpture. The sculpture must therefore be carefully placed in a context of respect to prevent it becoming the object of destruction. For example, in the 1999 event parades of children carrying lanterns were accompanied by music that was especially chosen for its expression of beauty and calm. These were followed by rituals of struggle and emergence, also accompanied by various smaller elements of fire. All of this preceded the bonfire. Careful preparation of the performers adds to this context of respect. Before the actual lighting of the fire there is a parade into the area of the 'firelighter', who is dressed in black and wearing special decorative signs, carrying the flame that will ignite the final huge blaze. This has a very central function in keeping a sense of 'order' and 'respect' in the proceedings. The role is one that would in former times have belonged to a priest or shaman – a figure who demonstrates that the forces being utilised in the ceremony are powerful and deserving of respect through being 'managed' by someone who, through frequent use, understands them and their significance more than the rest of the participants can. In the Woodford events, the figure has been me (the designer/director). Although most in the audience would not be aware of that, the hundreds of participants in the event are aware.

The 1999 procession was slow and the firelighter went through a ritual, which signalled emergence. This section illustrates the crucial design function of 'structure in antistructure' and the use of symbols and symbolic acts that 'contain' the event within manageable limits despite the many, many thousands involved and the apparently uncontrolled nature of a large fire. The participants also contributed to this feeling by positioning themselves and the objects they carried in various arrangements that constituted a circle around the tower. The performers' bodies were turned towards the tower, not towards the audience, so producing a sense of attentiveness rather than an invitation to 'go crazy now because a big destruction is going to happen'. In such events, all of these factors contribute to allow the audience and participants to experience transcendent feelings in a calm way and without a loss of inner or communal control.

So we can see how careful consideration of design, and the informed structuring of ritual performance to ensure that important stages are passed through, enable an extremely large and potentially 'out of control' situation such as the Woodford Fire Event to achieve its aims. Anecdotally, most people, participants and audience, seem to leave the event with a warm sense of community and feelings of private insight, joy or healing. On the simplest level, they have shared in something special, and they take from it what seems most special to them. For some, we hope the experience is profoundly moving, causing genuine reassessment of their lives and/or their sense of themselves in relation to others in the context of New Year.

But however large or small an event, the responsibility of the creative team, and in particular the designer, is to be mindful of how transcendence ceremonies need to have open textuality that leaves room for individual interpretations while containing some capacity for shared myth and symbol, and structures that encourage communitas. This means paying careful attention to every element of the event in terms of its sequencing, processes, representations, performance, spatiality and rhythms for without this structure transcendence can become negative and unruly.

Chapter Five: Catharsis

Illustration 10 – Cathartic experience

> I woke to find myself in a dark wood
> Where the right road was wholly gone.
> (Dante, 1971: 71)

Catharsis has a form not unrelated to transformation. It is a one-way process from one state to another, but it commonly suggests going from a state of crisis to a stronger position. There are various types and levels of cathartic experiences. Some are very mild, some sudden and dramatic, some happen in the context of crisis. It is a process that realigns matrix systems that have already been destabilised by external factors.

Ritual and celebration provide structures for this specialised transformation to happen – 'catharsis is a necessary condition for therapeutic change' (Scheff, 1979: 13). In times of crisis, metaphorically, a Dantesque journey to the centre of hell allows us to move from 'the dark wood' to 'behold the stars' again; by embracing our fears it seems we can 'move through them': 'effecting the proper purgation of these emotions' as Aristotle put it (*Poetics*, VI). Freud's theories, and a range of psychoanalytical views developed since Freud, would suggest that someone in crisis can recover from emotional trauma by examining the problem they are suppressing.

At a community level, ritual and ceremony can provide a 'safe' structure for this to happen. Ritual and ceremony can be designed to meet the needs of an individual or a community in crisis and by formally acknowledging the situation be able to transform feelings of negativity and fear into attitudes of positive realignment. This is not to posit some 'miracle cure' for people in times of crisis, but ritual and celebration, as we have seen in our other examples, can be powerful and restorative forces if carefully structured.

However, catharsis need not always be at times of crisis and can happen in gentler circumstances when participants need structures to express emotions and feelings which are important to them. It can be found, then, in rituals and celebrations that leave the participant feeling enriched, comforted, refreshed and realigned through having, by one means or another, addressed that which is preventing or hindering the experience of well-being.

Firstly I will discuss how ritual and celebratory cathartic structures can encourage positive change at times of crisis.

Catharsis in death rites

> The Bustle in a House
> The Morning after Death
> Is solemnest of industries
> Enacted on the earth.
> (Emily Dickinson 1959: 174)

When we experience the death of someone close to us, despite the inevitability of death and even when there is time to 'prepare' for it, we will experience degrees of grief.

Sudden and unexpected death can produce serious trauma. Moving on from the loss of someone of importance to us can be extremely difficult. We need to accept that we shall never experience that person's presence again, that they are really gone. We also have a heightened recognition at such times that we ourselves are to make the 'appointed rendezvous' with death, to quote Walt Whitman. The structures of funerals have always helped the bereaved community accept the death, celebrate the deceased and allow movement towards readjustment. A 'rite' comes from the Greek meaning for a 'thing done'. Death rites encourage acknowledgement and acceptance of what has happened; they help realign matrix systems to speed recovery from trauma. A prescribed ceremony can allow us to channel feelings of loss in a psychologically healthy way. Without the formal structure of a ceremony our acceptance of death and recovery from loss can be prolonged. Varela comments:

> Suffering arises quite naturally and then it grows as the mind seeks to avoid its natural grounding in impermanence and a lack of self. (1991: 61)

The ceremony provides a symbolic progression through suffering.

> We all need to tell our story and to understand our story. We need to understand death and cope with death, and we all need help in our passages from birth to life to death. (Moyes cited in Campbell, 1988: 5)

Rites help us because they enforce what has happened but build in apparatuses which contain methodologies for coping with the trauma. In other words we are forced to accept the death: by viewing the body; by the actual burial or cremation; by taking home or scattering cremated remains. There can be no doubt that the person is dead. We must accept the situation, for refusal to face the facts can only lead to delusion and denial. On the other hand, this must be tempered with a structure that promotes support for the bereaved, a celebration of the dead person's life, a procedure of community respect and a graceful and powerful completion. I might also add that legal and social adjustments (wills, personal belongings, social responsibilities etc.) need be attended to and a formalised burial structure allows a completion of this aspect as well.

Obviously, given the significance of death, cultures have developed sophisticated strategies to cope with the process of acceptance of death. Traditional societies have evolved many different structures that work within and for their cultures, developing

over time ceremonies which aptly reflect shared beliefs, both in funerary rites and in whole community rituals.

An example of an annual ritual of catharsis can be found in Mexico on the Day of the Dead. Here the community embraces death and transforms feelings of sorrow and fear into celebration. On the night before All Saints Day (2nd November) all night vigils with the whole family present are held in the graveyards.

> At the Cemetery, the people quietly disperse among the cluttered tombstones. Bright garlands of marigolds ornament the graves. A trail of their golden petals leads back to the village. It is strewn as a beacon, a pathway especially for the souls of *los ninos*, the children, and the little angels. The fragrance of incense mingles with the damp, musty odour of the surrounding jungle. (Begalke, *Dia de los Muertos*: Website)

The whole space is lit with candles and fire, and special parades and ceremonies are held. The next day sweets made as figures of death are eaten, skull masks worn, skeleton costumes paraded and great feasting is held. At night Death is burnt in effigy and fireworks lit. The community transforms the fear of death into a celebration of life.

Our own death rites in Australia, however, are in some disarray. The majority of contemporary death rites are secular packages organised by funeral agencies. These rites are often kept necessarily bland so as not to offend the various religious beliefs of a portion of the participants and at the same time to avoid precipitating extremes of emotion. Further, because of the absence of what was in previous times a fit between community, congregation and priest or minister, ceremonies often reflect no familiarity with the person who has died, and 'many have come out feeling that the funeral did not represent what the person believed in life' (Gill and Fox, 1996: 27). It is my view that most people do not receive the benefit of catharsis from attending rituals such as these because, as Gill and Fox observe:

> The professionals have to focus on the bereaved, since they seldom knew the person who has died. The family and friends…focus on the person who has died. Here there is a potential conflict of interests and confusion around the focus of the funeral. (1996: 26)

We might have some justification in saying that when the ritual becomes impersonal it loses much of its potency to help people. In such circumstances, dissatisfied participants are inclined to follow the funeral with their own rituals – going to the pub and telling

stories about the person; going to a special spot that the person loved and having silence and celebration there of the home-made kind; having a private ritual for scattering of ashes weeks after the actual funeral ceremony; having a concert or party in celebration of the person's life; sewing a square for a quilt and so on.

Precisely because so many people are deeply, or vaguely, dissatisfied with available rites (religious or commercial) they are increasingly taking the rites back into their own hands, having adjunct private and public rituals. Artists are sometimes asked to design such rituals. In *The Dead Good Funeral Book* John Fox and Sue Gill outline ways in which artists and communities can combine to design their own rites. These include painted coffins which represent images of the person's life, special songs and poems which bring comfort, parades and celebrations suited to this kind of event and much legal and management advice which allows family and friends more control of the ceremony.

It is often difficult to find ritual structures for cathartic expression when it is not an individual death but a whole community that is struck by disaster: flood, fire, human atrocity. Christian belief structures can be put under enormous pressure in their attempt to carry meaning at times of deep and sudden crisis in contemporary society. Non-believers can find these rituals and ceremonies not only irrelevant but sometimes even offensive.

> Present day worship involves symbolic complexities that arose from periods of history…[which] reflect in some degree social and psychological conditions which no longer exist. They arose in response to needs that were to some extent specific to their culture and society of the time. How adequate are such symbolic complexities to the expressive needs of people in modern western societies…? …there is reason to believe that much symbolism loses its resonance. That it "wears out" and becomes alienated from the interior religious dispositions of people. Can it be revived or must new symbolic vehicles be discovered? (O'Dea cited in Scheff, 1979: 129)

Within my own practice I have been invited to design community ceremonies. When a gunman shot thirty-five men, women and children in Port Arthur, Tasmania, on Sunday April 28, 1996, the whole community was traumatised. The massacre took place in the historic setting of one of Australia's most brutal early penal settlements. It became international news that shocked the world.

To stage an event in circumstances such as these can be very difficult. Consultation with the community must be conducted with sensitivity and thoroughness. When designing community events we do not hold a public meeting and canvas through the press to attract interest. Rather, we find the community leaders one by one and talk through their feelings and needs. In Port Arthur the local people wanted to do something to facilitate the healing process but did not know exactly what would be most useful and appropriate.

As mentioned earlier, myths and stories can give insights into the human spirit and a strong thematic base from which to proceed. One great recurring theme that seemed appropriate to the situation was the journey into unknown danger, the descent into darkness and the emergence to find new hope. I suggested taking well-known myths and stories that told of human journeys through difficulty towards eventual triumph and emergence from suffering. (Dante, Ulysses, the Inanna myths, as well as folk stories from indigenous America, Africa and Australia). This would hopefully distance the community from the actual event while at the same time demonstrating the capacity of the human spirit to survive pain. With this plan approved by the community, the planning phase began.

The community decided to stage the 'Festival of Journeys' on the site where the massacre had taken place. The Port Arthur Authority could not have been more helpful, providing premises and assistance at every level. Credit, too, must go to the Tasmanian Government, who gave us wholehearted support without knowing whether or not the event would be successful.

Events and festivals have a better chance of success when they are very carefully planned and organised. We ordered the tents, food, sound systems and lights, staging and all the other infrastructure needed to hold a one-day festival. We also started to involve the local people, without whose help and participation this could not possibly succeed. The members of the community who we had first approached were invaluable in establishing further contacts and resources, and were involved in each step.

The churches, the schools, local artists and musicians, organisations and many individuals helped and guided us through the process of preparation. We worked with many school groups on small pieces of theatre depicting the stories chosen; we formed a

local choir, organised a children's lantern parade, built a large lantern boat, practised shadow puppet performances, rehearsed story telling and all sorts of other activities. Many problems emerged which were tackled not so much by us as by the community leaders who, at every turn, tried to alleviate people's fears and worries. It takes courage to walk back into the scene of a disaster and I was constantly aware of the particular bravery displayed by the community.

After the massacre the national and international media attention had been horrific for some local people. Their grief and suffering had been exploited in a multitude of ways. As a result of this they wanted no publicity for the event and did not want any press to attend. Everyone who lived locally knew about the event and, because of the initial consultation process, felt that the event would be 'worth coming to' and had confidence in attending. The involvement of young people through the schools was also a guarantee that the parents would support the project.

The day arrived for the festival and it was beautiful weather. Many people from the community turned up to help us 'rig' the festival and many brought flowers to decorate the space. As darkness descended, two hundred children dressed in white came onto the site carrying candle-lit paper lanterns that they had made. A large lantern ship carried by twelve local adults led the parade. On its side poetry of renewal was written and messages of hope were painted. The boat was placed on a bonfire and ceremonially burnt while the choir sang. The various theatre shows and other performances were presented at various locations within the site. Food and drink were enjoyed around the bonfire. The feeling among the people was strongly emotional, but not negative.

The climax of the evening was a bush dance. I had concerns about this. Would the community want to dance on the very spot where this terrible tragedy happened? Again the local people had been our guides and approved the idea. People danced and sang, people cried and hugged one another; people expressed their grief and community spirit. A feeling of catharsis swept through us all. It ended with large groups of local people standing together with their arms around one another.

People are increasingly designing or seeking their own ways of dealing with important situations, and increasingly calling on the skilled members of their communities to enhance the occasions. So there are all sorts of community events aimed at recovery.

This can be seen in the way the Childers community turned the site of the backpackers' hostel into an instant shrine at which, while leaving flowers and written messages, strangers met with people directly touched by the tragic fire that killed international backpackers. The community found other ways of ritualising what had happened there, such as candlelit vigils. There were community meetings about what should happen to the site and how it should be marked by a monument of some kind and then there was another gathering (ceremony, ritual) in order to 'consecrate' the monument. The ceremonies relating to Bali were staged on a local, national and international scale and we now have televised global ritual moments, such as September 11. Australians as a community are evolving ways to express their responses to shared tragedy and are attempting to bring meaningful pathways to expressing these deep and important feelings.

Catharsis experiences at birth ceremonies

> Before you were conceived
> I wanted you
> Before you were born
> I loved you
> Before you were an hour
> I would die for you
> This is the miracle of life.
> (Maureen Hawkins cited in Cohen, 1993: 32)

Birth ceremonies could easily have been included in this study under the heading of Transformation, but I have placed them here in order to explore the process of catharsis as the need to express intense but pleasurable emotion. Having a baby is certainly an experience of this kind.

When a child is born, rituals can provide formal 'transformational' structures for parents to be realigned to this new situation; adjustments must be made to the matrix assemblages of the partners to create *modus operandi* that will cope with the new phase of life ahead. A ritual provides a structure for the parent to process this radical change. However, while the ceremony can be transformational, it also has another function which is at the heart of catharsis: it gives ritual and celebrational structure to the expression of powerful emotion. New parents experience feelings of awe and wonder, feelings of pride, feelings of thankfulness, all of which need expression. The emotions

surrounding birth are not necessarily less powerful than those experienced in relation to death, they are simply operating in a different domain.

Let us look at some traditional examples of birth rituals.

In certain North American Indian cultures the father will present the baby to the sky for the gods to recognise the birth. In the Blackfoot people an elder will

> …purify himself with burning sweetgrass on an altar of clay and glowing embers. He marks the palm of his hand with red ochre, then paints the baby's face with the sign of the tribe – one horizontal line below the eyes, another above the mouth. Finally the baby is held aloft and shown the sun so that its radiance will follow this new being through the circles of life. "Creation, we acknowledge your gift of this sacred being." (Cohen, 1991: 12)

In some Aboriginal cultures the baby will be smoked to purify the birth, with other members of the community involved – the women in the Northern Kimberly region of Australia for example:

> At this "baby smoking" the mother and grandmother first collect the branches and leaves of the konkerberry bush. They dig a shallow fire pit and draw a spiral in the sand. Twigs, bits of bark and broken konkerberry branches are set in place. They light the fire and toss crushed bark mixed with water onto the flames to produce purifying smoke. As green leaves are spread over the fire the rich smoke rises. The mother hands her child to her mother. Lifting her breast, the mother squeezes milk into the fire… The baby's grandmother waves him through the purifying smoke. (Cohen, 1991: 34-5)

The Christian ceremony of baptism which includes the adoption of 'godparents', anointing the child's head, white clothes, the font, the priest's traditional words, is a well known ritual in Western culture.

> To enter into this font is to plunge into the mythological realm… Symbolically, the infant makes the journey when the water is poured on its head. (Campbell cited in Cohen, 1991: 16)

However as we have found in other situations in our society, once belief structures weaken, our community seems at a loss as to how to proceed. If our death ceremonies have become commercialised/secularised at the risk of loss of cathartic efficacy, our birth ceremonies have all but vanished for those not actively affiliated with a religion,

and there is little outlet for the parents to process their feelings of pride in producing a new member of the family and the community.

Naming ceremonies are sometimes organised by parents to try to bridge this gap. Artists are sometimes involved in designing experiences that have the capacity to suitably channel the feelings of the parents. Discussion with the family to locate personal symbolism, music and songs that have significance, and other ritual and celebratory techniques can be used, but this is not a widespread practice. Cathartic experiences through expressions of thanks, pride and joy in relation to birth are increasingly closed off from 'community', and informally lodged in the private space of a couple's first days with the child at home.

Catharsis in new ritual, ceremony and celebration

> The black moment is the moment when the real message…is going to come. At the darkest moment comes the light. (Campbell, 1988: 37)

In discussing all of the above experiences, where rituals, ceremonies and celebrations act as vehicles for cathartic benefit, we find that in contemporary Australian society it has become difficult to locate continuing, pertinent forms, whereas in traditional societies these avenues are still familiar, open and used to good effect. In western contexts we can no longer assume the capacity to locate an intact semiotic system to carry meaning in relation to birth and death. Thus we can find ourselves sharing the feeling expressed by Roose-Evans: 'I stand baffled and bewildered at my own boundaries, not knowing how or where to cross' (1994: 14). While certain demographics, or communities facing tragedy, may look to each other for participation in a recognised need for 'home made' ritual, many people cannot recognise that they may 'need' to have a ceremony, or they may look for appropriate ceremonies and find impersonal responses or find that organised religion no longer carries sufficiently developed cultural meaning and personal connections for the contexts in which it exists. This is an area that can benefit greatly from the involvement of some artists experienced in the design of ritual and ceremony and familiar with the language of symbols.

As we found in transformation ceremonies, the commonality of structure found in many traditional cultures can provide clues. Transformation ceremonies must move the participants from one stable situation to another situation which is also stable, but new,

and by examining traditional ceremonies, three stages were identified: preparation, focus and acceptance. Unlike transformation ceremonies, ceremonies for catharsis must move the participants from instability to stability. Three levels of engagement are identifiable in such ceremonies, but these must act concurrently rather than sequentially. The three levels are: a means of acceptance, a model for hope and a mode of expression. If we take death rites in traditional societies as an example we can see this categorisation working.

1. A means of acceptance

In traditional death rites we find ways of demonstrating that the person has really died. Scheff notes that 'the positive theory of ritual was suggested by Durkheim – religious beliefs and practices not only create and sustain the fundamental social structure of a society, but maintain the member's sense of reality' (1979: 111). The body is therefore often displayed to the community. Sometimes the person dies again in symbolic form. The body is disposed of in ways that make any 'return' impossible (usually burial or cremation). In some Japanese funerals the bones and ashes are sorted through by the mourners and taken home. After some cremations in this country the family take the ashes and perform their own disposal ceremony. Clearly given the legal constraints on sites and means of burial and cremation, new ritual for this purpose must be developed such that mourners can feel involved regardless of the site in which the central moment of a funeral rite takes place. This first level of acceptance can be very traumatic, so systems must be built into the ritual to offer models for hope.

2. Models for hope

These are often found within the belief system. Where the belief system is weak, however, or not shared by all, new ways must be found. Koestler comments that 'virtually any explanation – valid or not – which commands belief has a calming and cathartic effect' (1964: 327).

The role of artists in this delicate process can be profound. It takes a great deal of experience to organise successful cathartic experiences in such sensitive conditions but the arts can refresh and make meaningful the funeral process. Symbolism can become personal to the participants, and their genuine participation in the planning process can also work to produce meaningful closure. Symbols, Grimes observes, 'are part of a

system of implicit knowledge, and ritual is an improvisation, reconstruction, or anticipation based on that knowledge' (1993: 21).

Sue Gill and John Fox suggest that, far from being a single event taking place in an hour or so, 'a funeral needs to be an extended experience, with several occasions for paying tribute to the dead and marking our leave taking…over the days, weeks and months to come' (1996: 12).

Acceptance of the situation can be helped by providing buttress systems. These are external support systems that not only provide comfort in themselves but also provide infrastructure for a reconstruction of the participants' matrix assemblages during the process of grief. Whereas the inner symbolism and subject matter of traditional rituals might not be appropriate in a secular situation these traditional methodologies can be very useful in providing models of structure in the design of new contemporary rituals. Myth and story inform subject matter when designing a cathartic ceremony. Myths provide prescribed assemblages which carry within them messages of hope, courage and reassurance.

> …the first is to retreat from the world scene of secondary effects to those causal zones of the psyche where difficulties really reside, and there to clarify the difficulties, eradicate them…and break through to the undistorted, direct experience and assimilation… (Campbell, 1949: 17)

3. A mode of expression.

The final level contained in a ritual of catharsis gives avenues for the expression of emotion: people can cry, tear their hair, sing, dance and even in some cases become drunk – undertake 'discharges of distress' as Scheff describes it (1979: 115). This level can take various forms depending on the cultural milieu, but the ritual structure is designed to include this function. Within new ritual design various strategies are adopted to allow this legitimate avenue of emotional response. Designers must be aware that people might exhibit strong and distressed emotional responses to the ritual. This means that permission must be allowed within the experience for public displays of grief.

In one case we were asked to stage a ritual event for the families and friends of children murdered through domestic violence.[15] This event had to be held in secret as many of the women were in refuge situations. We had to think through strategies that would allow time and space for the expression of emotion. The event had three sections. The first was a parade with each mother carrying a small seed lantern. The second stage was the placing of these lanterns on a ceremonial structure of solidarity and the third was a small and intimate concert with poetry and songs. The first section with the lanterns was designed symbolically to focus the women's feelings on their loss. Each made her own lantern and inscribed it with messages of love and by joining in a parade they hopefully experienced a sense of solidarity with others who had suffered this abuse. The event was very slow with many gaps for talking and communication. As each woman put her lantern onto the ceremonial structure she had a chance to say something or not depending on her feelings. In the final section the women had a chance to get up on a small stage and read poetry, sing, tell stories or just express their thoughts. If they were uncomfortable with this an actor would read or sing their choice thereby giving them an opportunity to express themselves. They could also join a small choir or write in a book, as well as eat together and communicate their feelings. Designers unaccustomed to experiencing grief must have the confidence to allow feelings to flow and allow channels of expression. One word of warning: this type to event can be very traumatic for the participants and if not properly handled can lead to deep emotional distress of the wrong kind. Guidance from experts in the area of grief and constant consultation with the people taking part is essential.

Happier cathartic situations also benefit from understanding the three levels of the experience. In birth rites we can also see the processes of acceptance, models of hope (in this case for the child's future) and avenues to express powerful and important emotions. We have staged 'naming rituals' which try to bring these levels of experience together.

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[15] On average one child is murdered per month in Queensland. Information from the Department of Family Services.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

Illustration 11 – New Year celebration

> What was it, forcibly stirring? Where? In whose keeping?
> (Rig Veda X.129, cited in Maclagan, 1977: 32)

Overview

Ritual and celebration are complex human activities that reconstitute and reform within different cultures and milieus. In the West we can detect, allied increasing secularisation, patterns of migration and globalisation, a major shift in the underlying design of ritual and celebration. Not only do we see differences in the way these events are formed but also in *who* forms them. There is, significantly, an emergent trend whereby individuals and communities are more frequently recognising a need for ritual and celebration, and seeking assistance in staging them in ways that take account of a wide range of community members and/or individual needs.

Ritual and celebration in the contemporary Australian context are not only marked by a series of new expressions of community, but by a valuing of difference within communities. Artists or cultural workers invited to assist in forming events need to be especially alert to these trends in cultural expression and in community values. In pluralistic contemporary settings there can be no assumption of shared belief structures when artists replace priests or shamans in 'leading' people through a ritual or celebration, but there must be careful attention to shared values, shared stories, shared traces of many previous symbolic frameworks and a deeper understanding of the relationship between organiser and participant, and process and result.

This being the case, designers of new ritual and celebration need to concentrate process and structure, on the 'movement' of the event, adopting and adapting content and its semiotic nuances through an understanding of the appropriate stages of the process for the nature of the event and awareness of cognitive and physiological changes involved. That is, whereas in monocultural settings with intact belief structures ritual and ceremony arrived from generation to generation in neat packages of traditional process, content and symbol, in multicultural, secularised contemporary settings, the process must drive the selection of content and symbol. Thus it is essential for designers/artists to undertake sensitive working through of individuals' and communities' senses of why they want an event and what they hope to achieve through holding it, before deciding on the process and then, consultatively, designing the content.

In this dissertation I have taken the view that ritual and celebration are in fact systems that are organised to align individuals and groups in certain ways and I have utilised

some contemporary knowledge of cognitive response to understand this process. Instead of using the traditional social reasons for holding these activities as guides to understanding the inner dynamics of ritual and celebration I have explored the *individual* response within *communal* experience. I have defined categories of 'transformation' and 'catharsis' which encourage cognitive realignment on a permanent basis, 'reinforcement' processes which concentrate and focus existing feelings and beliefs and 'transcendence' which allows a movement from an awareness which centres upon the self to communal experience. Through this I have provided criteria and examples that should help designers of new ritual and celebration to produce events that are more effective and meaningful in terms of their efficacy for both the community and the individual.

It is hoped too that these categorisations also lend more transparency to the processes and content of ritual and celebration, allowing participants to have more understanding of what is involved and to be able to gain insight and enrichment from the construction of meaning both within the self and in their interaction with the community.

I have also tried to emphasise the importance of these activities not only in societal operation but also in the psychology and physiology of individuals. I hope I have been able to demonstrate how essential these activities are to cultural life, and at the same time suggest that communities are, anyway, increasingly recognising that importance. We have seen how ritual, ceremony and celebration can illuminate individual lives by allowing a venue for reflexivity, can promote community understanding and can enrich contemporary life both artistically and socially.

Issues for practice, policy and training

A crucial issue that emerges as a result of this research is the question of *who sets the agenda* for ritual and celebration. Rites of passage for the individual and the society, our ability to celebrate, our capacity to express feelings and beliefs, our interaction with the search for an understanding of ourselves, our joy in and enrichment of community, and the establishment of shared values are all held (although not exclusively) within the domain of ritual and celebration. These events are, especially in their more massive forms, deeply influential in moulding public opinion, establishing a sense of identity (individual and social) and contributing to the political and social atmosphere. We have

explored the powerful ways in which these systems operate often without the participant being fully aware of the dynamics involved. We have observed how powerful a tool art can be within these processes. In whose keeping, then, do our rituals and celebrations lie? This is a very serious question for in inappropriate, manipulative or careless hands these events can be used not for the edification or benefit of people, but rather to control a subservient society.

> But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence…illusion only is sacred, truth profane. Nay, sacredness is held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that from the higher degree of illusion comes the highest degree of sacredness. (Feuerbach cited in Debord, 1994: 11)

In such a cultural context, ritual and celebration are particularly open to misuse and the motives behind such events must be addressed. We need to be constantly cautious of oppressive political or sectarian aims that undermine ritual and celebratory processes. Have some of our rituals and celebrations been subverted by groups whose object is not community and cultural development, and a free expression of the human condition, but in fact only the generation of income or an undeclared social or political agenda? One might be invited to come to a festival to celebrate one's values and one's community but in fact the organisers are solely interested in extracting profit from one's social inclination to do this. Are we witnessing a widespread corruption of genuine cultural expression in favour of simulacra experiences designed only to make money?

In my many years of experience in the field and in the last four years of research I have seen much evidence that this is too often so. For the professional designer (but perhaps not the participant) it is relatively easy to identify ritual and celebratory events that have commercial motives at their base. Dean MacCannell identified an early glaring example that seems to sum up what has become the widespread plagiarism of traditional systems:

> A 13-storey Fibreglass [sic] statue of Jesus Christ is the centre piece of a new Biblical amusement park called Holy Land, being built near Mobile, Ala. The park…will include visits to heaven and hell, Noah's ark, gladiator fights, the Tower of Babel and the belly of the whale temporarily occupied by Jonah. All this for $6 a ticket. (Tourist brochure cited in MacCannell, 1976: 14)

Just as with this kind of commercialisation in theme parks and media products, when commercial forces design rituals and celebrations for traditional or contemporary community occasions their tendency is clearly to ask few questions about the inner meaning, the form, the history and the *raison d'être*. The subject matter is most often treated superficially and leans towards consumption and passive absorption rather that participation. If there is participation then it is too often heavily weighted towards mass sentimentalised reinforcement of stereotyped, simplified 'values' or towards mass indulgence in 'party culture'. This is not to say that there is not an attempt by some commercial forces to produce a 'good product' that will please their market. The events industry, which has swept Australia, is often involved in manufacturing 'products' providing 'fun' experiences that are apparently good value for money. In some cases the commercial nature of the event is explicit and its promotion contains no pretence that it is anything other than a commercial transaction – a celebratory experience in exchange for money. Festivals abound where the only reason that they are held is for the profit of organisers and sponsors, and consumers are aware of this. Other organisers of ritual and celebration are more sinister in their motives, disguising their real commercial agendas inside of what appears to be a 'real' community event. These are the events about which we need to be concerned, culturally and ethically.

We might ask the question: if commerce produces a good festival, what is wrong with that? The answer might be that nothing is wrong as long as the participant understands the difference between the commercial product, which is essentially designed for fun and commercial profit, and the ritual and celebratory event, which is essentially designed for cultural and community reflexivity.

> The dividing line between structure genuine and spurious is the *realm of the commercial.* Spurious social relations and structural elements can be bought, sold, traded and distributed throughout the world. (MacCannell, 1976: 155)

What might be the difference in these two forms? The commercial event often utilises symbol, cultural expression, semiology, the arts, and tradition in a trajectory which captures the outward potency of these phenomena without understanding their natures, cohesive qualities and significance in cultural terms. The real danger of this is not the event itself but the way in which the utilisation of these cultural tools in careless ways

corrupts the trajectory that contains feelings of self-exploration, meaning making, and enriched communitas.

> It is a source of anxiety that our kind of society has the capacity to develop beyond the point where individuals can continue to have a meaningful place in it. (MacCannell, 1976: 15)

Governments, too, allow financial and sometimes political agendas (especially tourism) to outweigh the human need for community ritual and celebration. Facilities built for tourists on the Gold Coast, for example, are designed for visitors to have 'fun' and are actively forming cultural attitudes in the community and becoming one of the key areas of cultural identity. One can understand the argument put forward that tourism will bring much needed income into the area concerned. And in the case of theme parks, for example, the public construes the site as nothing but a site of consumption, not overlaying it with other community values. However, when something ceases to be transparently designed only for consumption and masquerades as a 'festival', it moves into a more ambiguous cultural role in relation to which communities bring other expectations. This can be seen in some of the many attempts to regulate Schoolies week on the Gold Coast, including the staging of a range of cultural events as part of a 'Schoolies Festival'. Clearly, this was an attempt at harm minimisation, but the parallel provision of 'safe' events did not reduce the proliferation of commercially arranged 'events' that had no such aim, or worse, had only the surface signifiers of such an aim but in fact were sites of large scale commercial exploitation. Further, a 'festival' sounds somehow less dangerous for potential participants than the wholesale consumption of alcohol, party drugs and sex popularly associated with Schoolies Week, but none of the usual activities ceased simply because the event acquired the name 'festival'.

Many agencies are prepared, sometimes quite unconsciously, to create any event that will bring in tourist dollars even if it has the potential to damage the very community it is attempting to help. The cultural agenda, which is so important to the genuine development of any group of people, is abandoned without understanding its value and sometimes even 'sold' as a product. 'Festivals and conventions organise the economic life of entire cities around cultural productions' (MacCannell, 1976: 29). It would be unfair to say there are no attempts by government to understand the deeper motivations of ritual and celebration, as can be seen, for example, in a range of the events staged as part of or alongside the Sydney Olympics, some of the activities funded during the

Centenary of Federation, or the ceremonies organised to commemorate the Bali massacre.

However, such an awareness frequently does not translate into public policy; it is not embedded as an expectation of Australian cultural life. Just as Britain's building of huge housing estates after the war was to utterly transform the cultural life of the people, so too are the sprawling housing developments found in Australia. In Southeast Queensland we can see a very high level of development featuring expansion of large-scale estates with adjacent shopping cities. Hundreds of thousands (soon millions) of people are being housed in a social and community framework which is deeply influenced by consumerism, and thus overlaid with a particular kind of 'monoculture' regardless of the cultural identities of the residents. It is difficult to imagine where the systems will lie that will be able to bring ritual and celebration to these communities with any meaningful text. Will vast sections of our population only experience the simulacrum, the copy, the shallow imitation of ritual and celebration? And if this is so, what might be the consequences? At present we see a tendency towards having no naming ceremonies, having drunken rites of passage, marriages controlled by wedding caterers, meaningless death rites, festivals which only celebrate consumerism, little participation and much consumption. Before we are really aware, the rituals and celebrations which have risen from genuine social need could fade and be replaced entirely by events which exploit, manipulate and degrade. (We only have to think of the commercialisation of Christmas and Easter to see this dynamic in operation.) As Orwell and others have argued, in societies that allow this to happen variety and richness of cultural expression become lost and are replaced by mass, manufactured experience.

> No one knows yet who will inhabit this shell [of industrial capitalism] in the future:…Specialists without spirit, libertines without heart, this nothingness imagines itself to be elevated to a level of humanity never before attained. (Max Weber cited in MacCannell, 1976: 33)

There are urgent questions to be asked about whether we want to live in such a world, where spectacle overtakes meaning.

> The spectacle is the bad dream of modern society in chains, expressing nothing more than its wish to sleep. The spectacle is the guardian of that sleep. (Debord, 1994: 18)

Obviously, we could see a time in the not too distant future where populations are ensnared and subdued not by political forces but by cultural/leisure/fun-based structures through which, in spite of the resources used, the money spent and the creative and inventive drive employed, citizens are not spiritually enriched and empowered but impoverished and culturally disabled. Thirty years ago MacCannell was noticing that there remained a concern with 'reality' and 'truth'.

> The dialectic of authenticity is at the heart of the development of all modern structure. It is manifest in concerns for ecology and front [sic], in attacks on what is phony, pseudo, tacky, in bad taste, mere show, tawdry and gaudy. These concerns conserve a solidarity at the level of the total society, a collective agreement that reality and truth exists somewhere in society, and that we ought to be trying to find them and refine them. (MacCannell, 1976: 156)

While a notion of the 'total society' has become difficult to prosecute in a context of globalisation, and while the parameters of 'solidarity' and 'collectivity' have clearly redrawn themselves in many respects and are likely to manifest in dispersed and plural cultural sites, there is an increasing desire for both intimate and large scale community expressions that deal in more than the 'wow factor'. If that need is to be met, we must understand the importance of ritual and celebration in order to preserve and further their integrity and usefulness. They offer themselves as channels of expression for values to which communities really do aspire. In my own professional experience, there can be little doubt as to the value and enthusiasm felt by individuals and communities who participate in meaningful events. They are a phenomenon worth understanding, worth preserving and/or reinventing.

> Why enact rites at all?…Ritual is one of the oldest forms of human activity we know. It may have been the original multi-media performance – an archaic, unifying activity. It is not only integrated with storytelling, dance and performance, but it also provides the matrix out of which other cultural activities such as arts, medicine, and education gradually emerged, differentiating themselves from one another. (Grimes: 2000: 13)

New agents (artists, celebrants, festival designers, communities, caring organisations and others) are being involved in new methodologies, new approaches and new directions. I have demonstrated that organising new rituals, ceremonies and celebrations requires a deep understanding of the dynamics of these events. This means we must develop new training systems in response to these new needs. To avoid cultural erosion,

we must produce a new kind of artistic activist/cultural facilitator who can understand, stimulate, articulate, design and help to perform ritual and celebration in a way that is meaningful at any level or in any part of society. ‘Culture can continue, via its production, to provide a basis for community...’ (MacCannell, 1976: 32).

To this end, the emergence of a new kind of artist is critical. It is through inventive and creative methods that communities and individuals can develop rituals and celebrations, to express their feelings and ideas in an atmosphere of understanding, appreciation of difference, shared values explored reflexively, and ethical frameworks based in careful thought about a community’s expressed needs and aspirations. ‘Festivals assist in nurturing and sustaining those things that are important to the members of that community’ (Derrett, 2003: 39).

Trained artists and other cultural workers can open new possibilities based on contemporary thinking. Ritual and celebration can provide a bridge that allows a rich flow between the arts world and the world of the community, which are all too often separated. In effect, becoming artistically involved in new ritual and celebration involves working with communities to develop a shared meaningful symbolic language based on the individual’s shared experience within that community. This movement constructs new meanings within the deconstructed condition and develops new ways that can operate with a degree of semiological cohesion in community settings. The postmodern turn has helped break down rigid, inflexible models of community identity which had become redundant. The task of artists working in this field is to use the arts with communities to develop new languages to express their new feelings of communitas, and those feelings will vary from one context to another.

The prevailing discourses being used by community artists moved, some time ago, increasingly away from established modernist social analysis based in Marxist frameworks. They are now moving away from more recent policy driven concerns about ‘professional’ and ‘amateur’, ‘elitist and ‘accessible’ arts, questions of consumption and participation, and discussions of quality. There is at the moment a greater concern with (a return to?) questions concerning the function of art and how is it being used: what does art ‘do’ to us and how does it work? At the same time, community artists are increasingly rethinking communities, apprehending strongly that their working contexts are shot through with difference and plurality, with which they

must engage and from which they must produce work. This transformation is also occurring within ritual and celebration – what function does it have, who is operating it, what does it 'do' to us, how does it work and who does it work with and for?

However, I must say here that within my experience there has never been a time when the languages of cultural development within community settings have been weaker and more impotent. Despite some highly informed voices among those in the field who continue to work with communities, the dominant tone of policy and funding frameworks remains caught in the binaries outlined above, and they do not constitute frameworks that facilitate work that is engaged with communities and driven by communities. 'Community arts' has become a term that even community artists frequently avoid using, in case it positions their work on the side of the binaries to which ever diminishing funding and support are less likely to flow. Yet these are the artists who are most concerned with the question of communities expressing themselves, and who are also most alert to the ways in which communities are being reshaped by contemporary conditions and, more to the point, reshaping themselves in many ways. There are danger signals being activated in such quarters about the apparent public redundancy of meaningful discourse in the area of arts in the community, for there are deep consequences for a society that treats these vital questions with nonchalance or, even worse, contempt. It is easier in every way to facilitate a vital, reflexive culture responsive to change in productive ways than to try to repair deep, widespread cultural damage caused by hegemonics or neglect, as we can clearly see from historical precedent.

Facilitation of community cultural development requires transparency in policy as well as in practice with communities. It also requires that community cultural workers be equipped with knowledge and approaches that enable communities to express themselves, rather than show communities 'what is good for them'.

In the context of this study, this means that artists in the area of ritual and celebration need to be trained. However, that training should not be simply as arts professionals who expect to carry the full responsibility for artistic development and design of their work with communities. It is clear from my work that their role as artists is to open up the text of rituals and celebrations and to enable access not only to the practice of the activity and the design factors that accompany it, but also to their own and their

communities' understanding of the ways in which it functions, how it works. Training establishments must work hard to design and facilitate new languages which expose these understandings and reflect new approaches. We need courses and teaching units based on carefully developed, reflexive, transparent methodologies that will be valuable tools for potential workers in this field.

Through such training and processes individuals and communities can come to further understand the importance of ritual and celebration and why they are efficacious. They can also defend their integrity and protect them from invasion by other interests. In these ways they can experience the full potency of such events to enrich and edify their lives.

In addition to approaches to thinking new communities, what they might be and be becoming, and how they might engage with themselves, it has also been part of this project to explore some of the ways in which cognitive science is transforming understanding of human response.

> While science has enlarged its past horizons beyond order and symmetry to embrace diversity and unpredictability, the humanities have yet to embrace the full force of commonality and pattern as a unifying factor in the interpretation of human creativity. (Barrow, 1995:245)

This knowledge will provide valuable clues about the function of cultural development and the arts which may in turn suggest means to establish the importance of these phenomena in the development of tolerant, sharing, expressive and rich communities. For my work, it has suggested some schema that enabled me to explore the dynamics of my practice and thus develop working categories and frameworks – that is, commonalities and patterns – that can assist in ensuring that ritual and celebratory design takes place with attention to its affects. 'Working through cultural productions, people can communicate emotions and complex meanings across class, group and generational lines' (MacCannell, 1976: 32).

It is important to notice that creative work can carry 'complex meanings', but the primary question for those assisting communities in culturally producing themselves becomes one of understanding how meaningful cultural production takes place in such complex *settings.* In coming to grips with this question in the course of this study, I have found that wide theoretical research empowers praxis. Particularly valuable have

been a range of ideas concerning open text, and the movements of textuality in discursive fields, proposed by philosophers and cultural thinkers quoted in this text and drawn upon in the thinking that informed it. These theoretical frameworks, too often resisted by those working in community arts, help the practitioner to understand the semiological problems and potentials that occur in new ritual and celebration. Similarly, contemporary considerations of subjectivity, difference and identity also help in understanding the manifold values, desires, talents and stories each participant brings to the context of production.

The most important agency for the purposive and culturally productive development of ritual and celebration must lie in the hands of the community itself. In my own practice I can say that people, both individually and communally, have the desire to transform, reinforce, transcend and utilise catharsis within their lives. I resist the claims of some that condemn communities as apathetic and self-interested. I embrace the opportunity for further developing a sense of communitas. I have seen the way in which the arts in these environments can renew and refresh the human spirit, further understanding, produce human expression of great complexity, provide visions and suggest directions for development.

The poetics of new ritual and celebration

> Ambiguity is richness (Borges cited by Martin, 1981: 29)

It is now time to develop a set of new criteria that enables a free flowing, ethical and artistically rich dialogue between artist and community. Deconstruction has been able to dismantle manipulative metanarratives that distanced the community from processes and subject matter but has left us with a problem of how to re-engage in new directions in coherent ways. What follows are some suggested strategies to help us in this regard.

Firstly, the whole process has become more open and transparent and this has allowed a more conscious involvement for both the artist and the community. I have developed a new language, a set of frameworks, which describes this condition, this new relationship, which provides a much better means for community members to hold rituals and celebrations which have meaning that *they* have developed in place of imposed structures from other domains. Drawing on this work, the artist and community

can share a better understanding of *how* these events work – their history, their methodology, their structures, their similarities and their differences; *why* these events are held – social functions, witness, cultural sharing; and *where* these events are held – sense of place, sacred space, cultural environments. Deconstruction produces instability of sign but on the other hand opens up new negotiations of meaning where symbol and sign can be seen to be a moveable expression of meaning and therefore used to full effect when properly understood and renegotiated in a setting of commonality. A deeper understanding of the how, the why and the where can only enrich the structures of design. The process of working out commonality yet accounting for difference can also help focus what is important to the community. In this way, there is expression of value in the process as well as the result.

> It is observed that communities are creating festivals and events to emphasise the value they recognise in feelings of ownership and belonging…' (Derrett, 2003: 38).

A recognition of floating signifiers can locate a new appreciation of the flexibility of meaning that surrounds the sign, which is a valuable pathway in itself. How signs work becomes integrated into the language of ritual and celebration and this produces a dialogue of values which can be extremely useful in the context of design.

> This is so because the symbolic is always characterised by 'double sense'. It is the *raison d'être* of symbolism to disclose the multiplicity of meaning out of the ambiguity of being. (Martin, 1981: 29)

Through careful attention to process, the more esoteric language of some postmodernist theory can readily be retranslated into useful community dialogues of re-evaluated meaning.

Secondly, a developed awareness can be established of the connection between the cultural event and the experience of the individual in/of the event (that is, psycho-physiological interaction). I have demonstrated that rituals and celebrations are not just socio-cultural experiences but dynamic *systems* designed to affect the mind in special ways. I have described and explored four such systems. Such a recognition produces a new discipline within ritual and design practice which allows much more understanding about what is *actually* happening. This transparency in turn produces a certain protection from exploitation, self-seeking sub-agendas and misuse. Transparency is not

a matter of limiting interpretation, engagement or possible meaning, or reducing the 'magic' of the event. It is about a clear and open disclosure of how mystery connects to our life -- the context of mystery. In many cases this means the demythologised answers and purposes of grand narrative are replaced with the mechanism of our own bodies, the relation of our own physiological processes to desires, communal structure and unavoidable transitions and fears. If new ritual is to separate itself from the ability to enact oppressive hidden agendas, then transparency does not spoil the 'magic act' because new ritual no longer presents the 'act' or the symbol as magic/mystery. But the experience remains of special states achieved in the forms I have outlined: reinforcement, transformation, transcendence and catharsis. They are understood as a function of the very mechanism of our life, our body, our concrete relationships to people, our kin and our neighbours as well as the others of Otherness.

> Each new evocation brings about a different reconstruction of old representations, weaves new links amongst them, integrates into the field of symbolism new information brought to it by daily life: the same rituals are enacted, but with new actors; the same myths are told, but in a changing universe, and to individuals whose social position, whose relationship with others and whose experiences have changed. (Sperber cited in Martin, 1981: 32)

The third aspect to this new work is that it invigorates, centres, and empowers the individual's capacity to participate in social rituals and celebrations which are important to experience of the human condition. Naming ceremonies for communities to recognise their new members, rites of passage, marriages, death rituals, festivals of all kinds, civic and community celebrations, parades, communal mourning, expressions of belief, the experience of pilgrimage and sacred space, dancing, singing and telling stories, symbols of private feeling, formal avenues of public feeling, political and social envisioning, an unleashing of the imagination and many other facets of ritual and celebration can all become accessible through a process which becomes meaningful and inclusive of the people participating. It is important that there is an apparatus, a mechanics, to allow access and availability. But this apparatus must contain a certain ambiguity because it must hold what has to be learnt as a mystery. We cannot bite off the knowledge as a piece of information but rather must go through a process which allows access to understanding which in itself is unavailable without the participation.

> …the place where language escapes from itself and us is the place where language comes to itself: it is the place where language is *saying*. (Ricoeur cited in Martin, 1981: 32)

It is this process which must be always available to our society, and artists can become new translators, the facilitators of saying.

The fourth aspect is that new ritual and celebration can produce new art forms which can be enormously rewarding in their own right. The interaction of artists and the community in this area is producing a new avenue of artistic expression which can be moving and beautiful to experience. As the artists give their skills to community voice we are able to experience a form of human expression that is freed from the area of commodification, from the concept that these are cultural products for sale and from the idea that the arts could become a function based on the model of industry. This axis is producing dialogue which puts a new rigour into the role of the arts in community and, while linking with the historical past, is forging potent links with contemporary movements. Giving a mode of expression to the community and the individual to take more control over their cultural expression and to better understand how culture works in this area can produce events which demonstrate integrity and shared values and not only express a local point of view but also truly contribute to the arts canon as valuable expressions of what it might mean to be human.

Whereas it might seem that in the practice I have outlined artists are somehow being disabled as cultural producers – that they might be losing control, and indeed a certain mystique – in fact they are facilitating cultural emergence of great importance. If we are to have confidence that artist and community can furnish the society with rich and vital expression we need look no further than emergence theory:

> …understanding emergence theory has always been about giving up control, letting the system govern itself as much as possible, letting it learn from the footprints. We have come far enough in that understanding to build small-scale systems for our entertainment and edification, and to appreciate more thoroughly the emergent behaviour that already exists at every scale of our lived experience. Are there new scales to conquer, new revolutions that will make the top-down revelations of the industrial age look minor by comparison? (Johnson, 2001: 234)

One last aspect is that participation in the poetics of ritual and celebration gives a particular avenue to myth and archetype which is rich in illuminating many delicate facets of life and produces a mode of expression which articulates that. This exposure with its interactive dynamic brings myth and archetype into focus in rewarding ways as well as model narrative structures that can be used in the design process.

> Its function is to reveal models and, in so doing, to give meaning to the World and to human life…It is through myth…that reality, value, transcendence slowly dawn. Through myth, the World can be apprehended as a perfectly articulated, intelligible, and significant Cosmos. (Eliade cited in Martin, 1981: 42)

Ceremony, ritual and celebration can be found in all cultures, in all geographical locations and in all historical times. It is not unreasonable to suggest that they will remain a part of human behaviour in the future. The deeper the understanding we have of the dynamics of this complex and beautiful form of human expression, the more our ceremonies, rituals and celebrations will reflect the deepest wisdom and understanding our culture has to offer, and the more our shared moments will reflect us, in all our differences.

> When we act in everyday life we do not merely re-act to indicative stimuli, we act in frames we have wrestled from genres of cultural performance. And when we act on stage, whatever stage that might be, we must now, in this reflexive age of psycho-analysis and semiotics as never before, bring into symbolic or fictitious worlds the urgent problems of our reality. We have to go into the subjunctive world of monsters, demons, and clowns, of cruelty and poetry, in order to make sense of our daily lives, earning our daily bread. And when we enter whatever theatre our lives allow us, we have already learnt how strange and many layered everyday life is, how extraordinary the ordinary. We then no longer need in Auden's terms the "endless safety" of ideologies but prize the "needless risk" of acting and interacting. (Turner, 1982: 122)

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