The Ritual Space Transformations Between
A discourse between traditional African, Pacific Island, and Native American ritual art and contemporary interpretations.
The Space Between: Ritual Transformations
A discourse between traditional African, Pacific Island, and Native American ritual art and contemporary interpretations

This book was published on the occasion of an exhibition of traditional African, Pacific Island, and Native American art from the SANA Art Foundation in conjunction with contemporary artistic interpretations of ritual. The exhibition was first shown in the Everett Gee Jackson Gallery at San Diego State University. This traveling exhibition was curated and designed by students from the Spring 2006 Art and Ritual Seminar in SDSU’s School of Art, Design and Art History, under the direction of Dr. Teri L. Sowell.

Opening Spring 2006
SANA Art Foundation

Students of the Spring 2006 Art and Ritual Seminar, SDSU
Jennifer Barron
Ryan Claytor Publications Chair
Rebecca Goodman Art Chair
Julie Hendrickson
Andrea Koer
Haibo Li
Shannon M. Lieberman Co-Curatorial Chair
Kristy McCloskey Exhibition Design Chair
Sandee McGee Photography Chair
Laura Pietro-Velasco
Lauren Ross Co-Curatorial Chair
Nicole Rossi
Elizabeth C. Tallman
Pamela Theis
Naomi Wiegand
Vannessa Williams
Jenny Yoshida

Contents

Introduction
xi Preface and Acknowledgements
Teri L. Sowell
1 The Ritual Compass: Navigating and Negotiating The Space Between
Shannon M. Lieberman
9 Yup’ik Masks: Assuring Bonds and Balance with the Sacred Realm
Jennifer Robbins
11 Iron Staff of Osanyin
Vannessa Williams
13 Image of the Twice Born: Ere Ibeji
Lauren Ross
15 Palapa
Vannessa Williams
16 Julie Hendrickson Artist’s Statement
18 Elizabeth C. Tallman Artist’s Statement
20 Nicole Rossi Artist’s Statement
22 Forging Memory and Community Through Ritual Exchange: Barkcloth in Polynesia
Andrea Koer
25 Chilkat
Jennifer Robbins
26 Pamela Theis Artist’s Statement
28 Rebecca Goodman Artist’s Statement
30 Naomi Wiegand Artist’s Statement
32 Ancestral Guidance: The Pwo Masquerade in Cultural Transition
Jennifer Robbins
33 Laura Pietro-Velasco Artist’s Statement
37 Haibo Li Artist’s Statement
39 Sandee McGee Artist’s Statement

Section 1 Sacred and Profane

Section 2 Community

Section 3 Rites of Passage

Copyright © 2006
SANA Art Foundation
131 South Orange Street
Escondido, CA 92025
760.737.2903
Artfoundations@hotmail.com
www.SANAArtFoundation.com

SANA Press
P.O. Box 314
Rancho Santa Fe, CA 92067

Catalogue design by Jenny Yoshida and Ryan Claytor
Cover Image: Jenny Yoshida
Printed by Streeter Printing
Edition of 1000
Photography by Sandee McGee,
with the following exceptions: *****

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publisher.

ISBN 0-9779950-0-3

Sponsored by the Maurice J. Masserini Charitable Trust
Wells Fargo Bank, Trustee

Preface and Acknowledgements
Teri L. Sowell
The Ritual Compass: Navigating and Negotiating The Space Between
Shannon M. Lieberman
Yup’ik Masks: Assuring Bonds and Balance with the Sacred Realm
Jennifer Robbins
Iron Staff of Osanyin
Vannessa Williams
Image of the Twice Born: Ere Ibeji
Lauren Ross
Palapa
Vannessa Williams
Julie Hendrickson Artist’s Statement
Elizabeth C. Tallman Artist’s Statement
Nicole Rossi Artist’s Statement
Forging Memory and Community Through Ritual Exchange: Barkcloth in Polynesia
Andrea Koer
Chilkat
Jennifer Robbins
Pamela Theis Artist’s Statement
Rebecca Goodman Artist’s Statement
Naomi Wiegand Artist’s Statement
Ancient Guidance: The Pwo Masquerade in Cultural Transition
Jennifer Robbins
Laura Pietro-Velasco Artist’s Statement
Haibo Li Artist’s Statement
Sandee McGee Artist’s Statement

Introduction

Section 1 Sacred and Profane

Section 2 Community

Section 3 Rites of Passage

Preface and Acknowledgements
Teri L. Sowell
The Ritual Compass: Navigating and Negotiating The Space Between
Shannon M. Lieberman
Yup’ik Masks: Assuring Bonds and Balance with the Sacred Realm
Jennifer Robbins
Iron Staff of Osanyin
Vannessa Williams
Image of the Twice Born: Ere Ibeji
Lauren Ross
Palapa
Vannessa Williams
Julie Hendrickson Artist’s Statement
Elizabeth C. Tallman Artist’s Statement
Nicole Rossi Artist’s Statement
Forging Memory and Community Through Ritual Exchange: Barkcloth in Polynesia
Andrea Koer
Chilkat
Jennifer Robbins
Pamela Theis Artist’s Statement
Rebecca Goodman Artist’s Statement
Naomi Wiegand Artist’s Statement
Ancient Guidance: The Pwo Masquerade in Cultural Transition
Jennifer Robbins
Laura Pietro-Velasco Artist’s Statement
Haibo Li Artist’s Statement
Sandee McGee Artist’s Statement
The Space Between: Ritual Transformations is the second in a series of curatorial projects involving San Diego State University graduate and advanced undergraduate students working with the SANA Art Foundation. The Space Between follows the success of Asking for Eyes: The Visual Voice of Southeast Africa, a project in which SDSU students handled all aspects of mounting a traveling exhibition and producing a catalogue. For the second project, I decided to more actively engage the artists in the course. Since I had been teaching a Ritual Studies class for several years, I decided to try and bridge the art and art history gap through the subject of ritual. The class, after spending several weeks reading and discussing ritual theory, decided on a curatorial direction:

Ritual activity creates “the space between” that allows for personal, social or spiritual transformations. Ritual theory suggests that as people move from one state of being or relationship to another, there is a critical period of transition. This transition phase has been described as liminal, neither here nor there, as between and between. When people participate in ritual, or when artists create, they enter the liminal space. Rituals and artistic acts allow participants to reconsider previous relations and to create or restructure new ones. This exhibition investigates the dynamic relationship between people and objects, while exploring the transformative potential of ritual and art.

Once the curatorial statement was developed, art historians selected ritual objects from the SANA Art Foundation to form the core of curatorial projects involving San Diego State University graduate and advanced undergraduate students working with the SANA Art Foundation. The Space Between follows the success of Asking for Eyes: The Visual Voice of Southeast Africa, a project in which SDSU students handled all aspects of mounting a traveling exhibition and producing a catalogue. For the second project, I decided to more actively engage the artists in the course. Since I had been teaching a Ritual Studies class for several years, I decided to try and bridge the art and art history gap through the subject of ritual. The class, after spending several weeks reading and discussing ritual theory, decided on a curatorial direction:

Ritual activity creates “the space between” that allows for personal, social or spiritual transformations. Ritual theory suggests that as people move from one state of being or relationship to another, there is a critical period of transition. This transition phase has been described as liminal, neither here nor there, as between and between. When people participate in ritual, or when artists create, they enter the liminal space. Rituals and artistic acts allow participants to reconsider previous relations and to create or restructure new ones. This exhibition investigates the dynamic relationship between people and objects, while exploring the transformative potential of ritual and art.

Ritual activity creates “the space between” that allows for personal, social or spiritual transformations. Ritual theory suggests that as people move from one state of being or relationship to another, there is a critical period of transition. This transition phase has been described as liminal, neither here nor there, as between and between. When people participate in ritual, or when artists create, they enter the liminal space. Rituals and artistic acts allow participants to reconsider previous relations and to create or restructure new ones. This exhibition investigates the dynamic relationship between people and objects, while exploring the transformative potential of ritual and art.

I would be remiss not to acknowledge the talents of the members of this seminar. I must begin with Ryan Clayton who helped to recruit the best artists in the department. While many students were initially reluctant, Ryan somehow convinced them to get on this roller coaster ride. Ryan also brought in Jenny Yoshida and together they produced this wonderful catalogue and all of our graphic materials. Kristy McGlokey, an interior design major, took on the position of exhibition designer with fantastic results. In addition to creating art for the show, Sandee McGee photographed all of the objects for the catalogue. The dialogue between the artists in the seminar was very engaging at times, with Rebecca Goodman and Pamela Thesis anchoring the bow and stern of some lively discussions. Libby Tallman always propelled us forward with incredible enthusiasm and determination, while Nicole Rossi quietly gave her heart to the project. Along with the rest of the artists, Julie Hendrickson, Haibo Li, Laura Prieto-Vesaco and Naomi Wiegard created profound pieces that spoke directly to the ritual experience.

The art historical crew, including Vanessa Williams, also came on strong in addition to writing wonderful essays. Andrea Koer took on the difficult task of compiling our bibliography, while Jenn Barron took charge of our checklist and labels. As the editor of this catalogue, I must convey my profound gratitude to Shannon Lieberman who wrote an impressive introductory essay that sheds light onto the complexities of ritual theory. Shannon also spent countless hours proofreading the text for this publication. She made us all look good.

And finally, this project could not have happened without the generous support of the SANA Art Foundation, Mina and Edward Smith, and the Maurice J. Masserini Charitable Trust. Thank you for believing in us.

Teri L. Sowell, Ph.D.
Project Director
way of acting that distinguishes itself from other ways of acting in the very way it does what it does, moreover, it makes this distinction for specific purposes" (88). Bell hints at an unspecified difference that separates ritual "from other ways of acting," while Victor Turner’s definition of ritual as "prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers" (ibid) limits ritual to those instances dealing specifically with intangible forces (Genet of Symbol, 19). From Ritual to Theatre (9). Each of these attempts is problematic, being either so broad as to deny ritual as a specific entity that is different from other forms of repetitive action and behavior, or so narrow as to impose rigid criteria on something that is too fluid and multivalent to universally fit within narrow parameters. Although defying concrete description, two characteristics of ritual, action, and meaning, provide a platform for discussing how ritual works and what it does or aims to do.

Determining how ritual works is not without its difficulties, either, owing in part to the fact that not everything about how a ritual works is directly observable. Ritual is a liminal activity, meaning that it takes place in the vague, abstruse space between the sacred and the profane, between two individuals or groups, or between life stages. Arnold van Gennep defines liminality as a state between shedding an old identity and assuming a new one, being on the threshold but being neither inside nor outside (Rites of Passage, 1911, 19-23). Building upon van Gennep’s ideas, anthropologist Victor Turner describes beings within the liminal sphere as “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between” (Ritual Process 1977: 95). Because ritual happens in this “necessarily ambiguous” space, ritual is itself liminal and ambiguous (ibid). Turner explains the way that ritual functions both inside and outside of society in his use of the terms “structure” and “anti-structure.” He uses structure to refer to the dominant social order of the everyday world. One’s class, race, and gender are defined by and occupy a certain place in this social structure. Ritual, on the other hand, is characterized by anti-structure, or the breaking down of the barriers and classification system of the dominant social order. Yet what Turner describes is not structure versus chaos, but structure versus anti-structure, an important semantic distinction establishing that chaos and anti-structure are not the same thing. As theologian Tom Driver explains:

[ritualized liminality is] by no means the complete absence of any and all structure, but, in fact, it could not exist. On the contrary... rituals are concerned with their own ordering as well as with the ordering of the world. Ritualized liminality, then, employs structures of its own, but these are different from the structure of society, and they are often utilized to emphasize homogeneity, equality, anonymity, and foolishness when compared with the heterogeneous, status-marked, name-conscious intelligence of the social order. (198-199, Driver’s emphasis)

Ritual anti-structure is relative to structure, just as human beings order and understand the world in terms of binary oppositions. Ritual anti-structure is defined not only by what it is, but also by what it is not. Ritual feels like a free, more loosely organized entity precisely because it is different from the rigidity and constraint of social structure.

The opposite of social structure, ritual anti-structure, is characterized by egalitarianism. Society is stratified and even sub-stratified in ways that compartmentalize identity, but ritual breaks down these barriers, effectively acting as a unifying agent precisely because it is different from the rigidity and constraint of social structure.

We are presented, in such rites, with a “moment in and out of time,” and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition in (symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to exist and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. (Ritual Process 1977: 96)

People come together during ritual to assert unity and to work toward a common goal. Turner suggests that the relationship between social order and ritual is “a dialectic” in which “the immediacy of communities gives way to the mediacity of structure, while, in rites of passage, men [and women] are released from structure into communities only to return to structure revitalized by their experience of community.” (Ritual Process, 1977: 129. Turner’s emphasis). Furthermore, Turner contends “that no society can function adequately without this dialectic” (ibid). The ritual compass thus serves as a vital navigational tool in which people can move back and forth between structure and anti-structure, social order and communities.

Beyond navigation, ritual is also a means of negotiation, by which participants organize and re-organize social relationships. Embedded within this idea of negotiation is the potential use of ritual as a means of challenging the social order with the aim of transforming it. As Bobby Alexander explains, ritual can allow people “to break free temporarily of social structure in order to transcend its existential limitations and reconfigure it along communitarian lines” (Alexander, 27, emphasis added). As a tool for negotiation, the ritual compass serves as a means of generating, supporting, or restructuring social order.

Challenging Western stereotypes of ritual as arbitrary, irrational, and “primitive,” some scholars have recently described ritual as a useful technology or a practical tool for life (Alexander 34, 40-41; Crossley 31-50; Driver 93-71; Ladelle 52). McWhorter changes Van Gennep’s notion of rites of passage to the active “rites of passing” to express a view of ritual as “transformation without an ultimate telos,” meaning an ongoing evolution without a definite goal (84, McWhorter’s emphasis). McWhorter further argues that the flexibility and continuity of perpetual transformation could constitute “a practice of freedom” (84). In terms of the ritual compass, McWhorter’s view of ritual characterizes it as an ongoing personal journey requiring continual navigation and renegotiation. Dick Crossley also views ritual as an active tool, calling it “a form of embodied practical reason” (31). Crossley’s point is that rituals are dependent upon bodily action such as clapping, dancing, beating a drum, walking down an aisle, kneeling, or praying, and that these actions are both voluntarily and instinctive, both cultural and bio-psychological (37). Building off the work of Marcel Mauss, Crossley effectively argues that the body is a tool of ritual because it has been trained in ways that accommodate the ritual.

Oftentimes ritual entails not only what is done, but also that it is done in a highly specific way, by means of quite specific gestures and movements. Participants in a ritual know, because they have learned precisely how to, for example, bow in this ritual or clap their hands or hold the objects and instruments used in the ritual (33, Crossley’s emphasis). Crossley indicates that eventually, a person implicitly understands how and when to perform certain ritual actions, citing the handshake as a common Western example (38). Bohler cites this argument by reminding the reader that “speech is an acquired use of the body, a cultural-corporeal competence” that one learns, develops, and begins to use intuitively or instinctively (36). Ritual knowledge becomes naturalized, although it is in fact part of a sophisticated system for physically and metaphorically navigating the world.

Expounding upon the idea that ritual is a practical form of knowledge, Bobby Alexander has also described ritual as a space of discovery and generation. Drawing upon his field work among a group of Pentecostals in Brooklyn, New York, Alexander writes that the sense of community and democratic achievement by performing actions that are non-standard in everyday contemporary life, such as possession and ecstatic display, “[entroduces] into everyday life the alternative, communitarian relations that are generated in ritual liminality, if only on a temporary basis” (35). The idea is that what happens during the ritual is not necessarily confined to the ritual sphere, but can actually bridge the space between and serve as a tool for renegotiating the social structure. The African-American Pentecostal group Alexander studied was politically active and
ceremony as being nothing more than

19-20; Turner


Introduction

156). In

service he observed in Haiti,


“the drums are not sacred objects. There is magic in their use

Tom Driver writes about a

As both Alexander’s and Crossley’s examples demonstrate, the

symbolic role within the context of the ritual, and this meaning

solidifying their group and their goal of fighting the status quo

Gennep’s notion of “the pivoting of the sacred”: “Sacredness

used the sense of community, as well as the implied protest

words become more than just words when they constitute

of the space between prescribed form and creative innovation, struc-

Art is communicative and powerful, conveying important messages. In this regard, works of art can be
described in the same language Turner used when writing about
ritual symbols: “They are...a set of evocative devices for rousing,
channeling, and domesticating powerful emotions, such as hate,
fear, affection, and grief” (Ritual Process 1977: 44). Art functions as a tool for the
reinvent meanings, values, and relationships.

The ritual compass serves as a means of harnessing poten-
tial and channeling it into ritual transformation. Ritual fashions
potential and energy into something “real” in the sense that it
creates powerful meaning for its participants that can spill over
into their daily lives, bridging the space between the sacred
and profane. The ritual compass is an active, practical, and mean-
ingful tool that remains relevant and appropriate to the naviga-
tion of the complexities of life, even in contemporary Western
society. The space between worlds is not empty, but rather full
of energy, community, sound, action, and objects. It is a space
where people gather and enact their embedded knowledge,
affecting transformation through action, song, chant, invoca-
tion, and music. Far from being simple ceremony, these rituals
mean something to their participants, as they belong to part of
a larger worldview; “The power of rituals...and symbols is that
they can change the experience we have of the world and
its worth” (Myerhoff 41). The ritual compass is both a bodily
and ideological tool through which people navigate and nego-
tiate their existence in a purposeful way that meets individual
and collective needs. }

used the sense of community, as well as the implied protest

involved in performing non-standard activities, as a means of
solidifying their group and their goal of fighting the status quo
of racism in contemporary America.

Nick Crossley’s examination of protest rituals is a similar
example of how action that occurs during ritual spills over into
daily life, affecting it and changing it as a means of achieving a
goal. Crossley writes:

As much of the literature in this area suggests, mobiliz-
ing and maintaining commitment is one of the hardest
tasks facing both individual protestors and collective
movement communities. Rituals are one of the key
tools available to protestors for these purposes. (49)

As both Alexander’s and Crossley’s examples demonstrate, the
ritual compass is not a stagnant tool, but rather one that facili-
tates motion and enables individuals and groups to carry the
communities and will to transform from the ritual sphere to the
quotidian.

Just as ritual action constitutes a type of knowledge, so too
does the creation and use of ritual objects. In Laboratory Rites,
Tom Driver writes about a voudou service he observed in Haiti,
noting the importance of drumming in the ritual. He remarks
that the ritual use of the drums engendered their importance:
“the drums are not sacred objects. There is magic in their use
during a service, but otherwise they are just drums with names” (53, Driver’s emphasis). It is within the liminal space of the
ritual that ordinary objects and entities become imbued with special meaning and power. If the ritual compass is a tool
for navigating the world, then ritual objects and symbolic
entities are the essential components of the compass itself.
The meaning and power of ritual objects comes from their
symbolic role within the context of the ritual, and this meaning
can shift, just as rituals are open to change and difference
from one occurrence to the next (Grimes Beginnings 156).
In this regard, ritual objects can be characterized by Arnold van
Gennep’s notion of “the pivoting of the sacred”: “Sacredness
as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the
nature of particular situations” (12). Just as Driver described the
drums in the voudou ceremony as being nothing more than
drums—as objects that are profane in and of themselves—they
take on a different resonance in ritual, in which they are neces-
sary objects producing sacred sound. They are also reliant on
action, on Crossley’s “embodied practical reason,” to produce
this sound and add to the ritual. And while we can detect the
pivoting of the sacred in this instance, it is not the drums them-

Verses form subjective interpretations of works of art; their interpreta-
tions are informed by learned values and symbols generated by
their cultural background. Art is communicative and powerful, conveying
important messages. In this regard, works of art can be
described in the same language Turner used when writing about
ritual symbols: “They are...a set of evocative devices for rousing,
channeling, and domesticating powerful emotions, such as hate,
fear, affection, and grief” (Ritual Process 1977: 44). Art functions as a tool for the
negotiation or transformation to achieve their purpose.
Sacred and Profane

Sacredness as an attribute is not absolute; it is brought into play by the nature of particular situations.
—Arnold van Gennep, Rites of Passage

Ritual engages with the sacred (spiritual) and the profane (the everyday) via objects and ritual action. Through the power of ritual action and beliefs, entities become sacred. However, sacred objects can become profane when they are removed from or no longer necessary in their ritualistic roles. The concepts of sacred and profane are defined in relation to one another. Notions of the sacred and the profane are subjective, meaning that what one individual or group values as sacred might be ordinary to another individual or group.

Section One

Sacred and Profane

Traditional Hawaiian society was structured around genealogical position, with those of the highest ranks (ali‘i) able to trace their lineage back to divine origins. In order to proclaim, protect, and enhance their elevated position, both male and female members of this chiefly class wore a symbolic hook-shaped pendant called a palaoa. According to Victor Turner, symbols have three levels of meaning that include the indigenous interpretation, the operational meaning, and the positional meaning (Forest of Symbols, 1996: 526). The indigenous interpretation consists of what the symbol means to ritual participants (what they say about it), while the operational meaning provides additional significance by examining how the symbol operates (how they use it), and finally, the positional meaning explores meanings derived from its relationship to other symbols. To understand the significance of the palaoa as symbol, all three levels must be contemplated.

The indigenous interpretation of the palaoa legitimized a relationship between the chiefly class and the divine, as expressed in the material and form of the hook pendant. The ivory used to create a palaoa came primarily from beached whales. Ivory was viewed as a gift from the gods and thus linked the chiefly class with the divine through the ritual of gift giving. To honor this gift, the spiritually potent ivory was fashioned into an abstracted head of a god, with the tip of the hook representing a protruding tongue. Most wooden images of Hawaiian gods portray a tongue or full open mouth to emphasize the importance of oration for the chiefly class, who were required to recite long genealogical chants linking their lineage back to divine origin to justify their elevated position. Thus in both form and material, the palaoa was symbolic of chiefly authority and status derived directly from the gods (Young 74).

In operational terms, the palaoa was a visual proclamation of status and power when worn during ritual occasions including battle. As an element of ceremonial dress, the palaoa served as material proof of one’s chiefly identity in the public arena. Wearing a palaoa, the embodiment of a god, around the neck...
served to protect and empower the wearer during crucial junctures. The palaoa was meant to intimidate enemies by asserting the source of the wearer’s power—the gods themselves. When a chief was killed during battle, it was important for the opposition to attain the palaoa and its spiritual power, since it was part of an operational system that held key symbolic meaning and provided power and protection to the wearer.

The positional meaning of the palaoa refers to its relationships to other symbols. The hook-shaped palaoa pendant was primarily worn as a necklace (leí) strung on strands of human hair. Human hair was extremely powerful because it emerged from the most sacred part of the body. The hair on which the palaoa is strung came from members of the chiefly class, and there is some suggestion that the hair came from women who had just given birth; thus those strands contained the regenerative powers of pregnancy and the process of childbirth, adding an additional layer of spiritual potency (Sowell, Ritual Hair 192-93). As hair was prepared for the necklace by specialized artist/priests (kahuna), genealogical chants and prayers were recited and metaphorically entwined within them (Kappler 94-96). Thus prepared hair became a visual manifestation of protective genealogical chants. When contact and trade with the Western world increased in the nineteenth century, Hawaiians began to incorporate beads into the necklace, as the leí palaoa eventually turned into a symbol of royalty rather than a symbol of spiritual power.

As important carriers of meaning, ritual symbols are authoritative statements that reflect and transform crucial values and behaviors of the community (Deflem 5). When examined in terms of indigenous interpretation, operational meaning, and positional meaning, the palaoa served as a symbol of divine lineage and status for the members of the chiefly class. In its indigenous interpretation, it represented the head of a god through its material and form, and legitimized the elite’s relationship to a divine source of authority and power. As a visual display encircling the neck, the palaoa operated in ceremonial use to pronounce, protect, and enhance the elevated position of the wearer. By combining the palaoa with human hair, the meaning was augmented through positional relationships. In traditional Hawaiian society, the chiefly class maintained their position through complex symbolic systems that articulated their relationship with the divine.

The Yup’ik, a branch of the Inuit in southern Alaska, use masks as a channel to connect the human and spiritual worlds and to create a unique community bound together by ritual actions. As a representative piece, the mask in the exhibition likely depicts Isanuk, the walrus spirit who drives animals towards the shore for hunters (Fienup-Riordan, Passages 301). The painted circles on the lower portion of the mask may represent physical (ice) and spiritual (sky) passages through which walruses both in earthly and spiritual incarnations move to interact with humans. The four hands surrounding the mask may indicate the shaman’s soul in flight, maneuvering through the spiritual realm to gain wisdom, guidance, and understanding, while creating spiritual alliances (Kaplan 198). Masks are a tool through which the Yup’ik people navigate the space between the physical world and the divine, seeking to create bonds that facilitate social and spiritual balance.

In the harsh, frozen tundra, existence is challenging. Since human survival is dependant on the proliferation of animal resources, it is necessary for the Yup’ik to contact celestial beings that dispense animal spirits into the world and to persuade those animal spirits to share themselves with humans. Ritual-activated art brings these groups of beings together to acknowledge, honor, and strengthen mutual respect and interdependence. As a result, Yup’ik rituals “become bearers of community, which is a spirit of unity and mutual belonging” (Driver 164), as well as the impetus for evolutionary growth and change (Turner, “Liminality and Community” 5-16).

One manifestation of communis is the spiritual cohesion of the community. This coalescence is greatly aided by the use of masks, which signal a sacred ritual of transformation. Victor

---

2. Necklace (Lei Niho Palaoa) Hawaii 19th century

Yup’ik Masks: Assuring Bonds and Balance with the Sacred Realm
Jennifer A. Robbins
Turner regards this aspect of communitas as a "communion of equal individuals who submit together, to the general authority of the ritual elders" (ibid 513). In this case, the ritual elder is a shaman specially authorized to handle the potentially dangerous arena of supernatural exchange. This highly charged and critical event of communion between humans and spirits occurs inside the qasgiq, or men’s house, where rituals facilitate the interaction between heavenly and earthly realms. During ritual events, shamans dance in prayer to help ensure the abundance of animals such as seals, walruses, and whales, which will provide sustenance for the community’s survival. Shamans put on the appropriate mask in order to unite with the creature’s yua. Yua refers to a communal essence or soul, as well as the distinct divine spirit, of each species on earth (Fienup-Riordan, The Living Tradition 59). The ritual’s observers place their faith in the shaman’s ability to fuse their yua with that of the desired animal spirit to create a channel of communication to the sacred realm.

Moments of transformation occur when a shaman puts on a mask in the men’s house, and in the process enters liminality, or a space of uncertainty between two realities. This event provides the second manifestation of communitas, which is reaffirming and stabilizing community. Masks are revered as extremely powerful instruments that should only be handled by shamans within strict ritual circumstances. Having a clear set of prohibitions regarding ritual participation keeps the rest of the community safe from unseen and possibly harmful forces, insulating them from the inherent instability of liminality. The threat of anti-structure is overcome by its institutionalization.

A third facet of communitas is based on Turner’s idea regarding the “powers of the weak,” in this case, shamans working in conjunction with art and ritual to enable navigation between worlds (ibid 516). Shamans are community members chosen to handle important matters, yet they tend to be unsuited or incapable of other core responsibilities such as hunting. In Yup’ik society, shamans are generally men or women who are viewed as vulnerable and physically weak (Fienup-Riordan, The Living Tradition 63). Through masking the shaman is given the power to access the divine realm, a respected ability that is vital for the community’s survival. This tendency to empower the marginal members of society can be seen as a subversion of absolute social hierarchy. Providing an honorable position in society for this seemingly inferior person symbolizes a moral drive for human equality, which is at the core of communitas (Turner, “Liminality and Communitas” 516).

The Yup’ik mask is a powerful tool for creating pathways between the spiritual realm and the human realm. Once this ritual mask has opened that channel, the shaman and the animal yua transform into a state of coexistence resulting in an exchange that ensures the continued fruition of the Yup’ik people. During the performance of these masking rites, a ritual transformation occurs, and in crossing the boundaries between the divine and earthly realms, humans can affect the course of their destiny. Masking rituals are vital tools for shamans, facilitating both the apparent request for supreme intervention and the less obvious manifestation of communitas. The underlying effects of the shaman’s role in society, creating spiritual bonds, neutralizing cultural ambiguity, and encouraging equality, ensure that the Yup’ik achieve communitas.
For centuries, cultures around the world have used decorated doorways and entrances as markers of passage. The ornate fifteenth century bronze doors of the Florence Cathedral, Arc de Triomphe in Paris, decorated interiors of Maa' meetinghouses in New Zealand, and the precisely carved wooden doors of the Swahili in East Africa are just a few examples. Passing through doorways can metaphorically symbolize the state of liminality experienced by people engaging in territorial rites of passage.

All societies participate in ritual activities that allow partici- pants to move from one state or status to another. These rites of passage preserve and reinforce social values and cultural norms, while protecting the individual during these important and potentially dangerous transformations. Arnold van Gennep (1960) suggests that during this transitional phase, a means of negotiation is required which is liminal in nature. According to van Gennep’s concept of the life cycle, society transitions from period to period or from status to status. The rites of passage are the intermediate state that allows the person to move from one state to another and to welcome the new state. During these phases, people are first displaced from a previous state of being, then pass through a transitional phase where their old identity is removed, and are then reincorporated into society with a new status.

During these phases, people are first displaced from a previous state of being, then pass through a transitional phase where their old identity is removed, and are then reincorporated into society with a new status. A range of political, spiritual, legal, and economic formalities and protocols accompany these passages, which can range from formal gatherings, graduations, or milestones on a bordered piece of earth, that space within which can range from engagements, graduations, and initiations to meltdowns or tears to flow. Perhaps we do not think of textiles as a protective layer, a “second skin” that transforms and protects the individual during these important life transitions. Ritual wrappings can also be placed on forms other than the body, such as architectural elements, to designate sacred areas and to bring spiritual powers into the earthly realm. Although ritual wrappings and sacred wear may vary between cultures, there are common threads of significance that include empowerment, communication and transformation.

Gennep writes, “to cross the threshold is to unite oneself with a higher power and to enter the other world” (van Gennep, Rites of Passage 1960: 20). By touching, lifting open, and peering into the open door space, we visually cross over the threshold and exercise a territorial rite of passage. At an early age we begin to recognize the nuances of our home culture through the foods we eat, the languages we hear and assimilate, and even through the specialized clothing we wear. For instance, a minister’s collar will promote a sense of reverence and contemplation, a judge’s black robe will command attention and respect, while a white bridal gown will cause our hearts to melt and maybe tears to flow. Perhaps we do not think of the activities and dress associated with a legal judge, a religious leader, or a young woman on her wedding day as rituals, but in essence they are. Having come to recognize the transformative and ritual aspects of textiles from around the world, I was led to explore the conceptual underpinnings of ritualistic “wrappings” and to create Conceptual Casing.

Rituals associated with textiles suggest a range of powerful meanings and cultural significance. Textiles can express the wearer’s status, family line, or wealth, and even contain spiritual power (Schneider and Weiner 1990). In addition, the wrapping of textiles can be protective, creating a “second skin” that transforms and empowers the wearer due to its material, form, decoration, and history (Gell 89). Ritual wrappings can also be placed on forms other than the body, such as architectural elements, to designate sacred areas and to bring spiritual powers into the earthly realm. Although ritual wrappings and sacred wear may vary between cultures, there are common threads of significance that include empowerment, communication and transformation.

Conceptual Casing is an exploration of the concepts associated with the rituals of wrapping and the wearing of textiles to create a “second skin.” At first glance, Conceptual Casing seems to involve crossing over and through physical boundaries, barriers, and zones. When ritual participants ceremonially fix landmarks or milestones on a bordered piece of earth, that space within becomes sacred (van Gennep, Rites of Passage 1960: 16). In many societies the installation of a formal decorated doorway creates a boundary symbolizing the division of sacred and profane space, and when accompanied by ceremonial activity (prayer, sacrifice, donation), the act of passage becomes spiritual as well as spatial (van Gennep, Rites of Passage 1960: 22). In this context, doorways symbolize liminal portals that transform ritual participants, preparing them for their new state of being. The rich decoration lavished on doorways and entrance architecture, particularly among the Swahili of East Africa, illuminates the importance of the doorway as a threshold.

Influenced by the blending of Arabian, Persian, and Indian design elements, Swahili doors represent an edecic aesthetic tradition. Doorways leading into opulent mosques and well-built stone houses, known as jumbas, are marked by elegant and luxurious decoration to represent wealth and power, guarantee health and fertility, and ensure the continuity of lineages. For patrician elders, the wooden doors built for their jumba entrances include extensive planning and decoration, with ritual tradition mandating the construction of the entry door prior to the remainder of the house. This type of doorway entrance incorporates detailed patterning known as chip-carving, in which the background is chipped away to create a raised design. The same patterning technique is used to fashion sacred storage niches called zidaka. Decorative elements on doorways include repeated triangular or lozenge-shaped designs, rope and chain imagery, and organic motifs referencing stylized flowers, fish, and plants. These design elements share aspects with those found in the decorative borders of the Qur’an and are used as protective imagery. Interior and entry doors point north toward Mecca to reinforce this direction and respect, while a white bridal gown will cause our hearts to melt and maybe tears to flow. Perhaps we do not think of textiles as protective, creating a “second skin” that transforms and empowers the wearer due to its material, form, decoration, and history (Gell 89). Ritual wrappings can also be placed on forms other than the body, such as architectural elements, to designate sacred areas and to bring spiritual powers into the earthly realm. Although ritual wrappings and sacred wear may vary between cultures, there are common threads of significance that include empowerment, communication and transformation.

Conceptual Casing is an exploration of the concepts associated with the rituals of wrapping and the wearing of textiles to create a “second skin.” At first glance, Conceptual Casing seems to
The space between the sacred and the profane is not delineated by hard lines. Instead, it is a constantly shifting space or state, redrawing itself as people navigate through stages of life and attempt to gain a greater understanding of their world. To facilitate physical and spiritual growth and to better understand the fluidity of the sacred and the profane, people all over the world turn to ritual. By participating in rites of purification and cleansing, groups or individuals on the cusp of transition prepare to experience the sacred by shedding the profane.

The act of ritual washing symbolizes the cleansing of the spirit and the readiness of the individual to experience growth, change, and transformation. This can be applied to the viewing of art in a museum or gallery setting in which ritual participants (viewers) wear special garments (appropriate dress) and follow general ritual rules (proper behavior such as quiet demeanor and no touching of the art). This washtub was created to prepare an individual to better experience the gallery in which it is situated. The form of the piece represents both growth and the stage of liminality. The basins are organic and bud-like in shape, and the whole rests on separated branches, representing the idea of spiritual and territorial passage. Ritual participants should dip their fingers into the water and let the excess fall into the sand in the larger basin, representing the cleansing of the spirit and the absorption of the profane into the earth. This rite of purification performed before entering the exhibition space prepares the viewer for ritual transformation, as it is hoped they will leave the gallery with a renewed sense of growth, change, and greater understanding.

artist’s statement
Julie Hendrickson

The space between the sacred and the profane is not delineated by hard lines. Instead, it is a constantly shifting space or state, redrawing itself as people navigate through stages of life and attempt to gain a greater understanding of their world. To facilitate physical and spiritual growth and to better understand the fluidity of the sacred and the profane, people all over the world turn to ritual. By participating in rites of purification and cleansing, groups or individuals on the cusp of transition prepare to experience the sacred by shedding the profane.

The act of ritual washing symbolizes the cleansing of the spirit and the readiness of the individual to experience growth, change, and transformation. This can be applied to the viewing of art in a museum or gallery setting in which ritual participants (viewers) wear special garments (appropriate dress) and follow general ritual rules (proper behavior such as quiet demeanor and no touching of the art). This washtub was created to prepare an individual to better experience the gallery in which it is situated. The form of the piece represents both growth and the stage of liminality. The basins are organic and bud-like in shape, and the whole rests on separated branches, representing the idea of spiritual and territorial passage. Ritual participants should dip their fingers into the water and let the excess fall into the sand in the larger basin, representing the cleansing of the spirit and the absorption of the profane into the earth. This rite of purification performed before entering the exhibition space prepares the viewer for ritual transformation, as it is hoped they will leave the gallery with a renewed sense of growth, change, and greater understanding.

artist’s statement
Julie Hendrickson

The space between the sacred and the profane is not delineated by hard lines. Instead, it is a constantly shifting space or state, redrawing itself as people navigate through stages of life and attempt to gain a greater understanding of their world. To facilitate physical and spiritual growth and to better understand the fluidity of the sacred and the profane, people all over the world turn to ritual. By participating in rites of purification and cleansing, groups or individuals on the cusp of transition prepare to experience the sacred by shedding the profane.

The act of ritual washing symbolizes the cleansing of the spirit and the readiness of the individual to experience growth, change, and transformation. This can be applied to the viewing of art in a museum or gallery setting in which ritual participants (viewers) wear special garments (appropriate dress) and follow general ritual rules (proper behavior such as quiet demeanor and no touching of the art). This washtub was created to prepare an individual to better experience the gallery in which it is situated. The form of the piece represents both growth and the stage of liminality. The basins are organic and bud-like in shape, and the whole rests on separated branches, representing the idea of spiritual and territorial passage. Ritual participants should dip their fingers into the water and let the excess fall into the sand in the larger basin, representing the cleansing of the spirit and the absorption of the profane into the earth. This rite of purification performed before entering the exhibition space prepares the viewer for ritual transformation, as it is hoped they will leave the gallery with a renewed sense of growth, change, and greater understanding.
Rituals are tools for creating community. Individuals interact during ritual for social, religious, and celebratory occasions, forging common bonds, communal identity, and collective memory. Objects play an important role in ritual, calling members of a community together, functioning as symbols for the group or for their beliefs, and serving as a stable central element around which spontaneous ritual action can occur.

—Tom Driver, *Liberating Rites*

The rich tradition of decorated barkcloth in Polynesia acts as a sort of container or vessel for retaining individual and collective memories that are created, restored, embellished, and made available for the benefit of the community. The production and ritual exchange of barkcloth in Polynesia was and is an important avenue for the forging of cultural identity and the creation of community. It is the symbolic use of barkcloth that permits these concepts to be manifested. Symbols, intangible concepts materialized, have the ability to coalesce individuals and communities, while turning the abstract concept of community into a tangible and understandable reality (Salamone 424). Utilizing symbols in ritual releases certain energies or powers that serve to transform all who engage in that ritual (Deflem 5). Barkcloth allows cultural communities to navigate the space between past and present, it is the symbolic bridge that facilitates the communion between contemporary Polynesians and their ancestors. The display and circulation of barkcloth during ritual exchange helps to build and maintain a collective as well as personal memory, one in which members of the community can engage and participate. Individuals create symbols for memory through the production, ritual exchange, and preservation of barkcloth that ultimately results in the formation of community.

Barkcloth bridges the space between memories and people, and in doing so grounds them so that they can be tied to the past and subsequently "replanted" in order to provide for the future (Pule and Thomas 19). In Polynesia, barkcloth was often presented in a rolled up fashion only to be unrolled before the recipient of the gift, symbolizing the unfolding of memory and evoking the metaphor of history and lineage (Tcherkézoff 53). The introduction of one's memories to another establishes a communion between giver and receiver, thus bridging the space between. Samoan barkcloth (*siapo*) provides a strong example of how one can forge and strengthen this relationship through ritual exchange. During funerals, weddings, and births, community members engage in the exchange and presentation of *siapo*. Because memories are woven into the very fibers of the cloth, they too are presented and exchanged (Neich and Pendergrast 21). This transaction provides for the sharing and discussion of histories, memories, and lineages amongst community members, thereby tightening the social fabric of that community.
Barkcloth establishes a discourse between contemporary Polynesian cultures and traditional Polynesian cultures by navigating between traditional, colonial, and contemporary spheres. It is symbolic of a cultural narrative, serving to tie together stories from the past and present while making way for those yet to be realized. During ritual, barkcloth recalls cultural as well as individual memory manifested in collective ideas (Bodrogi 7). Symbols in ritual have the capability of procuring a desired outcome and can achieve this by acting as a tool or compass which contemporary society uses to better comprehend the past (Deflem 11).

According to Turner “ritual symbols are referential” (Ndembu 1996: 521). Barkcloths thus refer to the past and restores memory and then becomes “shelves for storing memory” (Pule and Thomas 19). Through ritual use these memories are extracted from the liminal sphere being “neither fully recalled nor entirely forgotten” (Mageo 3). Just as the West stores its memories in written form, Polynesians look to the painted fibers of barkcloth.

Community is also created through the production of barkcloth, as Polynesians of all ages come together to create the very product that will soon house memories of their own. Barkcloth production is one of the many avenues for passing down oral histories, which are essentially memories. Elders often share memories with the younger generations in hopes that there will be a long-lasting connection between past, present, and future. Barkcloth’s purpose of “keeping social ties viable” is an important factor in its preservation as well as resurrection (Salamone 424).

For Polynesians, notions of community expressed without the symbolic use of barkcloth remain fragmentary and illusory. With the onset of colonialism, the production and use of barkcloth went into sharp decline. Colonialism touched all parts of Polynesia, contributing to the misplacement of cultural memory as many pieces of barkcloth found their way into the dark, lifeless drawers of Western museums. Barkcloths stored in museums are decontextualized and separated from the very communities that gave them meaning, memory, and life. Without community, which is the bond that barkcloth creates between individuals through ritual exchange, the barkcloth is devoid of meaning, and can no longer act as the vehicle for remembrance. Removed from its context as a ritual symbol, barkcloth cannot rouse, channel, or domesticate powerful emotions like it once had (Deflem 11).

The island of Niue was greatly affected by Western conquest. According to Nicholas Thomas, much of Niue’s history has been lost or remains unknown as a result of colonization, and it is through barkcloth or hiapo that historians, Niueans, and the rest of the world might begin to understand and retrieve these lost memories and histories (57). Because large amounts of cloth were exported from the island, Niueans are unable to use it as a form of communication with the past. It is only through the remaining samples found in Western museums, private collections, and Niue itself that Niuean memory can be recollected. These remaining samples constitute one of the few tangible links between contemporary Niue and its past. The reintroduction of hiapo to Niue is perhaps the only way in which this lost and forgotten memory may resurface. Through the study of hiapo, past and present can be bridged and connections to lineage, land, and community can be restored through the presence of the cloth (Pule and Thomas 70).

Symbols are a core element of ritual, and the use of barkcloth as ritual symbol allows individuals to recollect memory, unite communities, and strengthen ties to the past while building bridges to the future (Draper 125). It is the communion between past, present, and future that allows members of a community to navigate the space between, to explore the intangible, to create relationships, and to open the doors to memory. The continued production, display, and exchange of barkcloth remains a crucial part of ritual life for many Pacific Islanders.
The Chilkat Blanket: Structuring Community Through Ritual Symbolism

Jennifer A. Robbins

For the Chilkat people, who inhabit the Pacific Coast of North America from Vancouver Island to Prince William Sound, family is extremely important. Such a strong familial cultural system gives its people a sense of cohesion and stability that is affirmed through ritual transformation. This transformation occurs during the Headdress Dance, wherein a member of the chiefly class and sponsor clan wraps himself in a crest animal blanket. Through this ceremonial event the dancer becomes invested with the extraordinary abilities of the crest animal, which is articulated by culturally recognized symbols woven into the blanket. The symbols contained within a Chilkat blanket depict specific crest animals, which are exclusive to individual clans and represent ideal traits of the clan members (Emmons 347). Crests are complex compositions that include visual imagery as well as accompanying songs, stories, and dances. Inherited through family lines, crests recall histories shared between humans, animals, and supernatural beings that reach deep into the mythological past. By properly displaying a crest and its related stories in ritual performances, families claim rights to specific lands and resources and convey what each chiefly family group sees as their rightful status as elite or chiefly (Samuel 32). Victor Turner, a prominent ritual theorist suggests that “rituals are storehouses of meaningful symbols by which information is revealed and regarded as authoritative, as dealing with the crucial values of the community,” defining those symbols that are used broadly within the ritual activities of the community, yet consistently retain their unique meaning, as “dominant” (Drums of Affliction 2; Forest of Symbols 31-32). An examination of the visual aspects of this Chilkat blanket illustrates these concepts and reveals the blanket as an effective vehicle for dissemination of dominant ritual symbolism.

The Chilkat blanket is consistent with the first property of a dominant ritual symbol, that a single definitive symbol signifies many different people and their actions (Deflem 6). According to an interpretation by George T. Emmons, one of the first ethnographers to study Chilkat artistic expression, the general design of this blanket illustrates a diving whale, a common crest element (377). The crest animal in each of its various incarnations stands for one particular clan, one emblem of glorification. Just one widely understood image represents all of the individuals of the clan: Just as individuals make up the clan as a cohesive entity, individual designs are compiled to create the crest animal as a distinguished expression. A clan’s crest animal is identified through the depiction of unified distinct elements, leading us to the second feature of dominant symbol theory—a synthesis of unique elements depicted in a similar manner, the meaning of which is determined by culturally formed perceptions of crest animal association (Deflem 6). The unique style of this region favors the splitting and rearranging of human and animal forms, as well as the exaggeration of certain features such as wings, ears, claws, and eyes, as artists visually recreate a variety of beings to define the social relationships that make up crest histories. The affiliation with these specific animal crests helps to determine and empower the clan’s position in society.

One of the aspects that make the crest symbolism of the Chilkat blanket so powerful and evocative is that it possesses the third aspect of a dominant ritual symbol, the ability to remind its audience of the polarities of social structure and natural phenomena (Deflem 6). The depiction of a killer whale or another predominant animal in the Chilkat repertory arouses a sensory response of a purely instinctual nature. At the same time, the association of this crest animal to a specific clan reminds the viewer of the social hierarchy delineated by a class system. This dominant symbol speaks to both the civilizing effects of culture and the awareness of nature that is fundamental for survival. The inclusion of clan symbolism on a Chilkat blanket imbues this object with the spiritual power of the family’s crest animal. When this object is used in ritual performance, it transmits dominant symbolism, affirming cultural cohesion and social ordering. This idea is affirmed by Turner; “ritual involves the handling of symbols that constitute the smallest units of ritual activity; symbols in themselves are carriers of meaning” (Deflem 7). As a symbol functioning in a ritual sphere, the Chilkat blanket plays an integral role in illustrating, guiding, and asserting social structure.
As a result of being completely enamored with our technologies and engulfed by our daily routines, our society has become increasingly desensitized to the world around us. Consequently, we have lost sight of what is truly important: time spent with our friends, families, and loved ones. Rituals temporarily release people from ordered social structures, thus enabling self-reflection of behaviors in relationship to values (Turner “Dramatic Ritual” 87). During this ambiguous transformative state, i.e. the space between, growth and awareness occur no matter how fleeting the moment. That moment can be as simple as dinner with family or drinking bourbon with a friend. Rituals performed among individuals or groups play a significant role in the development of bonds within our communities.

Victor Turner (1969) describes the role of ritual in terms of structure and anti-structure. Structure refers to boundaries and divisions within the social order of the everyday, such as race, class, and gender. Rituals, or anti-structure, on the other hand, work to not only dissolve those boundaries, even if only temporarily, but also to unite individuals. Turner calls this process of unification communitas:

We are presented, in such rites, with a “moment in and out of time,” and in and out of secular social structure, which reveals, however fleetingly, some recognition (in symbol if not always in language) of a generalized social bond that has ceased to be and has simultaneously yet to be fragmented into a multiplicity of structural ties. (Turner, Ritual Process 1969: 96).

This description of communitas explains how a simple ritual like the sharing of an alcoholic beverage can reveal and strengthen the fragmented social ties that humanize us and bind us together, thus minimizing, at least temporarily, the space between us. This bourbon set was created to facilitate and enhance fleeting moments of communitas by encouraging social and ritual interaction.

Both the form and surface of the bourbon set commemorate this notion of communitas. Rich earthy orange tones evoke a sense of warmth, reminding us of time spent drinking with friends. The form is constructed of small, individual, pod-like shapes coming together to create a larger group or community. Plants, more specifically succulents, inspire these forms. Succulents can be seen as a microcosmic representation of our society. Individual segments cluster together to form a community while remaining independent. There is an appearance of conformity; however, upon closer inspection the individuals vary in size, shape, texture and color. This bourbon set symbolizes the result of the ritual experience, which is communitas.

Due to the prevalence of rigid structure in our society, a deterioration of bonds among individuals and groups occurs. My work is a quiet rebellion against overwhelming artificial stimulation experienced in contemporary living. It strives to strengthen social ties through the ritualization of activities that call attention to the moment, such as the drinking of alcoholic beverages among friends. Through communitas, our lives are enriched, lessening the gap or space between individuals and community.
Whether to call, dear, celebrate, or mourn, bells have an irresistible power over everyone in earshot. The "strange, wild, music of quivering metal" that Satis N. Coleman describes in *The Book of Bells* has affected people for thousands of years in all cultures. But how is it that the vibrations produced by striking an object elicit such a visceral response? The sound of a ring may be deep, solemn, and sonorous or clear, bright, and tinkling. The casual tones of chimes blowing in the wind have a very different effect than the large gong that banishes bad performers from the stage.

Bells have developed over thousands of years and have spoken to people in various ways since their inception, yet their ability to command attention and response has not wavered. Are we like Pavlov’s dog, responding to these sounds out of habit, conditioned to know the messages different peals express, or is there a more primal reaction occurring?

The earliest bells were the most basic of idiophones, musical instruments which create sound by the vibration of the instrument itself, as opposed to the vibration of strings or membranes. Rocks or long pieces of wood were suspended and struck, producing different sounds based on the size and material of the object. Later, tintinabulates were created from a myriad of materials including ceramics and glass, as well as less refined components like old vases and bottles, silverware, brass or iron tubing, auto parts, nails and other hardware, tools, and even animal bones. The Chinese are believed to have created the first metal bells over 3,500 years ago. Cast bronze *zhongs* are capable of producing two distinct tones depending upon where they are struck. People in ancient Greece, Egypt, Assyria, and Rome used formed metal bells during religious rituals to fend off malevolent spirits and to call the attention of the gods (Coleman *Bells* 22-24). For each of these civilizations the ethereal ring and hum of these instruments evoked feelings associated with the otherworld.

Further developments in bronze technology allowed for a clearer and more resonant tone, spurring innovations in shape, style, and sound. Today, bells can be heard around the world every Sunday morning, calling parishioners to church, and all week long they announce the time every changing hour. Because they can produce very rich and specific tones, bells are often played in groups known as carillons and can be tuned to create precise melodies. This harmonic style, common in the West, is very different from that of Russia and East Asia, where bells are used more as percussive instruments with various tones providing similar effects to those of a snare or bass drum. Regardless of the dissimilarities, both of these styles of bells continue to call people together and to create praise music that is an integral part of worship ceremonies.

Pacific Island cultures have also developed unique idiophones. *Lali*, also known as slit-gongs, are large, hollowed out tree trunks which when struck produce a deep and far reaching tone that can be heard for up to fifteen miles. Vertically oriented “tree bells” can also be found in the islands of Vanuatu in the Southwest Pacific. These anthropomorphic slit-gongs, carved from breadfruit trees, are placed in “bell groves” that surround the dancing grounds. Used during religious and social events, as well as to communicate between villages through a Morse Code-like system of beats, their rhythms speak a complex yet clearly understood language to autochthonous people.

For many cultures bells are an integral part of ritual, long associated with divinity and creativity. They signify events and alert the surrounding community of dangers and victories. Because bells can be heard at long distances, they are perfect for calling people together for ritual activities, ceremonies, and feasts. During rituals they attract the attention of both the people involved and the gods they wish to commune with. They cleanse and purify space as seen in the practice of Feng Shui, where they are used to channel positive energy or *chi*. Their capacity to ward off danger and misfortune has long been appreciated and respected. Some faiths will even baptize the instruments with...
water and incense and give them the names of saints to increase their power (Coleman Bells 84-95).

Perhaps the most interesting thing about bells is that as ritual objects, although their sound is intangible, their effect on the body is physical. It is the effect of sound vibrations traveling through the air to the ear, the waves affecting the tympanum or eardrum, that allows humans to hear. The power of bells may lie in their ability to sustain a tone for a period of time, the ring or hum concurrently stimulating the air, ear, nerves, and body. The bass of a deep ringing bell may be louder and more easily felt by the rest of the body, perhaps subtly shivering the hairs on one's arm, but the vibrations of all ring types hit the body regardless of how sensitive one is to that particular pitch. While this universal physical effect may be barely perceptible, it surely explains the visceral reaction people have to bells. People tend to associate bells with something otherworldly, something felt but not necessarily seen, recognized, or realized.

Music has a profound way of triggering the ritual response, making people more aware of their surroundings and alerting them that something serious or important is about to happen. To symbolize ritual purification, I have created a bell referencing both Eastern and Western styles of ceremonial bells. The vibrations of my bell are meant to wash over all who can hear or feel it, inviting positive energy and destroying negative. This instrument is also a symbol of community. As people convene for spiritual and social nourishment, they find themselves existing, as Martin Buber says, “no longer side by side (and, one might add, above and below) but with one another of a multitude of persons” (51). In these gatherings social hierarchies are abolished, if only momentarily, in the interest of manifesting the sense of belonging and mutual exchange so important to humankind. The bell serves as a locus, a meeting point, calling people to unite. Buber states, “community is where community happens” (51). If this is true, then community happens where the bell is rung.

Throughout the world people choose to undergo the painful and expensive process of receiving a tattoo. Tattoos transform the physical body, reflect the wearer's perception of self, and alter social status. While the most obvious change is the physical transformation from bare, unmarked skin to marked skin, there is also a revelation of inner characteristics and psychological desires as participants choose motifs that reflect their “inner yearnings, self-concepts, desires, and magical or spiritual beliefs” (Hewitt 68). After the design has been chosen, it is a matter of enduring the physical and emotional trauma associated with the application process. Pain is a major part of the tattoo experience that many people use to demonstrate mental strength and physical prowess (Thomas, Cole, and Douglas186).

In addition to physical and psychological transformations, receiving a tattoo is also a rite of passage that alters social status and relations. There is an instant connection between individuals who have tattoos. As Margo DeMello writes in her book, Bodies of Inscription, “Community occurs whenever tattooed people talk about themselves, about each other and to each other” (18). Kim Hewitt adds, “Marking the body in a cultural ritual changes the position of the individual within the social structure” (39). Arnold van Gennep further asserts this opinion by stating that a tattooed individual “is removed from the common mass of humanity by a rite of separation…which automatically incorporates him into a defined group, since the operation leaves ineradicable traces, the incorporation is permanent” (Rites of Passage, 1960: 72). Moving from a status of unmarked to marked, receiving a tattoo is a rite of passage, as individuals reenter society physically, psychologically, and socially changed.

The complex transformations that occur during the ritualistic process of tattooing are the inspiration for What was...What is. Transformation is not just a physical change, but one that encompass individual and social repercussions. The transformative process of becoming tattooed is depicted in the visual and interactive elements of my piece. The smooth exterior of the vessel serves to represent the smooth, unmarked skin of an individual before receiving a tattoo. As the material is pulled over, it begins to cover the smooth exterior with an image[,] leading to a visual transformation. Once the cloth is pulled to cover the entire vessel, transformation is complete as a new marked vessel is introduced to the viewer. Participation is optional. The viewer may choose to undergo, forge, or reverse the transformation, and to contemplate the formal, psychological, and social implications of tattooed and non-tattooed bodies. 

artist's statement
Naomi Wiegand

13. What was...What is
Naomi Wiegand
2006
Rites of Passage are transitions from one state of being to another. Examples include birth, death, marriage, initiation, and puberty rites. Ritual plays an important role, ensuring safe passage from one identity to another. The objects in this category comment on liminality, an undefined state of existence that is neither here nor there, but in between fixed points.
The **Pwo Masquerade**: Ancestral Guidance in Cultural Transformations

Jennifer A. Robbins

The **mukanda initiation** ritual of the Chokwe peoples in modern-day Angola and the Republic of the Congo addresses the cultural transformation of a young man into a socially obligated husband and father. These rites parallel Arnold van Gennep’s understanding of rites of passage, which he breaks into three stages of transformation: pre-liminal, liminal, and post-liminal. Those in a liminal state are perhaps best defined by ritual theorist Victor Turner as “neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial” (*The Ritual Process* 1969:95). Having determined what they view as the most effective way to facilitate this initiatory movement from childhood to adulthood, the Chokwe have developed a functional ritual compass to navigate this uncertain and potentially dangerous space between.

To begin the initiation process, young men must enter the pre-liminal state, in which the bonds between mother and son are symbolically severed. This correlates to van Gennep’s first stage, wherein a person must detach from their previous position or role in society and prepare for the process of transformation (“Territorial Passages” 530). Initiates are removed from their home and community and placed into a special camp, located outside the village, which becomes a place of learning and transformation while the boys are taught specialized knowledge that includes social responsibility, spiritual understanding, and local moral codes (Jordan 93). The female ancestor spirit Pwo is performed by a male masquerader who dons and activates the knitted fiber costume and wooden mask to ease the transitional phase for the community. It is common throughout Africa for men to wear masks portraying both male and female spiritual beings since the identity of the wearer becomes irrelevant once the mask transforms the dancer. During mukando, she brings ancestral guidance and acts as a mediator between the initiates and the community.

Severe prohibitions prevent contact between the initiatory camp and the village because these young men are about to enter a liminal state characterized by an unfixed social position. The second phase of van Gennep’s description of rites of passage is the liminal state, a dangerous stage of transformation that occurs as the boys leave childhood behind, attempting to move through this ambiguous state to become men (“Territorial Passage” 530). To ease the initiates’ suffering during this period of separation and loss of childhood, the Pwo masquerade provides them with an ancestral connection as well as maternal presence and comfort (Jordan 68). A reminder that their mothers miss them, the scarification marks below the eyes on the Pwo mask represent tears and mimic those worn by Chokwe women (Bastin 79).

In a final directive gesture, Pwo signifies the termination of the initiation period. A person entering the post-liminal, the third and final stage of passage, aggregates into a stable new position with its own responsibilities and privileges (“Territorial Passage” 530). As she visits the village chief assisted by a male masquerader, Pwo speaks on behalf of all of the women in the village and announces the initiates’ success in training and their readiness to reenter the community (Jordan 69). Assisted by Pwo, the ritual participants have safely reached the end of their journey to become men.

The ritual performance of Pwo steers the community through this transformative time, facilitating the rites of passage towards a new, stable, state of existence. Negotiating the boundaries between past, present, and future, as well as the separate worlds of the living and the dead, Pwo operates as an effective tool for cultural continuity. The relational bonds of family, society, and spirituality spanning all states of being and time are ritually reaffirmed. The ritual compass embodied in Pwo guides and directs the Chokwe through these spaces of transformation.
Receiving, giving, giving, receiving, all that lives is twin. Who would cast the spell of death, let him separate the two. (Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons*, xi)

In Yorubaland, a region of western Africa that encompasses some 25,000 square miles including parts of Nigeria and the Republic of Benin, it is believed that the birth of twins heralds good fortune, not only for the parents of the children, but also for the entire community. Twins are perceived as changeable, audacious spirit beings with exceptional abilities. Ibejis bring affluence and security to those who respect them, and adversity to those who do not (Lawal 99). Although twins are physically two people, they are spiritually one (ibid). If a twin dies, it is possible that he/she will call the living twin to the spirit world in order to be complete again. To keep this separated soul content, a statue or *ere ibeji* (ere which translates to “image” and ibeji which means “twin” or “twice born”) is made to anchor the soul of the dead twin and to better maintain the spiritual bonds between it, the living twin, and their family (ibid).

As with the loss of any human life, the death of a twin causes a rupture in the ebb and flow of everyday existence, bringing to the fore issues of mortality and beginning the passage from one cycle of life into another, that of death. Arnold van Gennep suggests that changes in condition, in this case the death of a child, cannot occur without altering the individuals involved, and proposes that rites of passage reduce the detrimental effects caused by such changes (“Territorial Passage” 530). According to van Gennep, rites of passage, such as death, can be divided into three parts: separation, transition and incorporation, also referred to as preliminal, liminal and postliminal rites, respectively (ibid). For the Yoruba and their treatment of deceased twins, the first stage includes three facets: the physical separation of the living twin from his/her other half, the deceased twin’s separation from this world and mortal life, and the separation of the parents from the normal social order through engagement in ritual action.

While the death of a twin begins the ritual passage, the act of visiting a diviner and artist moves the ritual process toward liminality. After the traumatic act of separation (death), the deceased individual enters a liminal—ambiguous and marginal—state of existence and transformation (Turner “Liminality and Communities” 512). To determine what actions will best place the transitional spirit of the dead child, the parents of the deceased twin consult an Ifa divination priest, a highly trained individual who specializes in communicating with the spirit world. The priest will suggest the creation of an *ere ibeji* and will offer advice, specifying which carver to commission for the figure (Lawal 99, Rowland et al. 171). Once the carver has completed the sculpture, he will encourage the *emi* or spirit of the twin to enter it by submerging the sculpture in a powerful concoction of herbal medicines for several days (Rowland et al. 171, 173). It is the artist (carver) who coaxes the soul of the dead twin through the liminal sphere and into the statue, thus anchoring it back to the earthly realm to maintain ties with parents, family, and the community.

The third and final stage of this passage includes rites of incorporation, or postliminal rites. Van Gennep identifies rites of incorporation with “libations, ceremonial visiting…[and] the sharing of a meal” (“Territorial Passage” 533). Before the parents are able to obtain the *ere ibeji*, they will bring a feast to the carver’s compound and celebrate the completion of the *ibej* with the artist and his family (Rowland et al. 173). The mother of the deceased twin will offer a prayer to the *ere ibeji*, and then place the figure within her wrapper and dance and sing in praise of twins. The carver will instruct her to make her way home without looking behind her and talking to no one (ibid). Once she has successfully reached her destination, the mother has completed the final rite of incorporation, as the soul of the twin is reborn into the *ere ibeji*.

*Ere ibeji* not only house the soul of the deceased twin, they also symbolize the successful completion of the tripartite ritual journey of separation, transition, and incorporation. The passage from life to death is a transitional process via a liminal condition. Through ritual, and the participation of the community, this potentially dangerous rite of passage is completed with minimal disruption to social and spiritual relationships.
The transformative nature of life events arouses clarity of a full-circle experience. Trials of strength and spirit test the plasticity of individuals enduring this process, and their willingness to be transformed. According to Arnold van Gennep (1960), the ritual process is described as a rite of passage that consists of three stages: separation, margin, and incorporation. A full transformation of mind, body, and spirit prepares the individual to re-enter their community with an enlightened perspective.

When experiencing the transformative process, a series of reductions prepares the individual for a successful incorporation back into his or her community. In order for the transformation to occur, the individual must reach a state of liminality where one may experience feelings of uneasiness, insecurity, and ambiguity: "It is as though they are being reduced or ground down to a uniform condition to be fashioned anew and endowed with additional powers to enable them to cope with their new station in life" (Turner, Ritual Process 1969: 95). In preparation for the transformation, the individual is physically and mentally malleable, giving the rites of passage their inherent capacity to transform the entire experience into ritual.

Undergoing the orthodontic process gave me a glimpse into the powerful effects of a transformative experience. Clearly, I expected the treatment to transform me physically, but I did not consider the subtle yet potent effects it would produce in my mind as well as spirit. Having a foreign metal device installed in my mouth, which is my portal to the outside world, produced drastic changes in everything from my eating habits to the way I approached communication. After two years, I underwent maxillofacial surgery to reposition my jaw. When I woke up in the hospital bed, I experienced the liminal stage first-hand. With my mouth wired shut and swollen, and filled with painkillers, I was reduced to the pulp of a human being. Barely able to breathe and unable to communicate or eat, I was restricted to a marginal state. Existing on faith alone, I was dependent upon members of my immediate community to care for me while I healed. When I had the strength, I would marvel at a reflection that revealed me in a physically and emotionally fragile state. Essentially, my friends and family carried me through the transformative process until I was ready to be re-incorporated into life once again. The day I was scheduled to have my jaw unwired was like passing through the threshold from restriction to freedom.

When I looked in the mirror, my transformed image reflected my internal transformation. The mirror’s surface mediated the space between my experiences of being broken and healed. I chose to create a mirror commemorating the transformative process, while referencing my own understanding of a rite of passage. After experiencing passage into a new mind and body, I view my reflection in an entirely new way, to the extent of it being a small ritual. I place myself within a new context with each glance of the mirror. I view the mirror as a symbol that defines our perception of the world after embarking on a transformative journey. We open doors that beckon us to pass through them, akin to the fern-like iron doors of the mirror I have created. After opening the doors, we encounter a reflection of the way we see things at that moment, renewing our previous perceptions of ourselves in relation to our world.
Rituals provide a framework for society to redefine and renew itself, as people reorganize relationships and maintain balance through ritualistic acts. Ritual is not limited to the performance itself, but also includes the events preceding and following the event. In Rites of Passage, Arnold van Gennep (1969) establishes a chronological system for analyzing rituals in which individuals or groups undergo a life change that transforms their social status. This three-stage sequence includes: separation (persons restricted to a symbolic space outside the social order), transition (the loss of the old identity), and incorporation (reintegration of individual to society with a new identity defined).

Following van Gennep, Victor Turner asserts that the transitional rite is the core of the three stages, the threshold where … entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention…likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wildness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon. (Turner, Ritual Process 1960: 95)

These observations provide an analytical framework that can be applied to a variety of ritual acts including photography, which embraces its own liminal state of transformation. During the photographic process, the transformative results are not clear to the artist until they are revealed underneath the warm glow of a safe light.

On the first day of our photo shoot for this project at the SANA Art Foundation, I was given access to the storeroom. It was there that I came upon numerous sacred objects, integral for various stages of ritual practice. The woodcarvings, fabrics, and bead and metal works were carefully surrounded by bubble wrap and corrugated cardboard. Each piece emitted an aura, which could be felt regardless of its newly acquired safety wrappings. I began to see the addition of bubble wrap as a new layer of meaning and as a transitional stage in the life of these sacred ritual objects. A new physical layer of personal and collective history became apparent. The wrapped pieces became sculptural representations of the process of transformation, which occurs on the journey from one place to another or from one culture to another.

My photographs function as a metaphor for the transitional stage in ritual in which the individual or group (or in this case, the object) is neither here nor there, situated in the space between. This stage represents the space between past and future, sacred and profane, storeroom and museum. The objects are hidden from view, thus suspended in time and place. In this photographic work all points of reference are extracted and the viewer is faced with the power of the objects transforming and existing for a short time with a loss of identity. The images make us bear witness to this stage of transformation, which can be described both as “a stage of reflection” (Turner, Forest of Symbols 1966) and “settings in which new symbols, models and paradigms as the seedbed of cultural creativity” (Turner, On the Edge of the Bush 9). The outcome of this transitional stage contains the potential for new perspectives, growth, and the formation of new social patterns.
Rites of Passage

artist's statement
Haibo Li

Death can be viewed as a rite of passage, as an individual moves from this world to the next. According to Arnold van Gennep (1960), rites of passage involve a three-step process that encompasses separation (in this case physical death), transition (movement from human to ancestor), and incorporation (into a spiritual being). The middle transformative phase is viewed as a liminal state that is “neither here nor there” or “betwixt and between” stages of existence, similar to being in the womb (Turner, Ritual Process 1969: 95). My work, Being in the Womb, is a reflection of the liminal space where ritual transformations occur.

Ritual activity creates liminal spaces that are between states of being, such as the movement and ritual space between life and death. Liminality is often conceived of as a threshold, doorway, or potentially dangerous pathway. In my work, it is also depicted as a broken window. Death is unique among rites of passage since an understanding of the final transformative state remains elusive. Thus, the state of death is ambiguous as well as liminal. By conceptualizing death within a ritual framework, Being in the Womb is meant to capture the process of death and the uncertainties associated with it.

Being in the Womb represents my personal understanding of death, expressing the inner somber darkness that surrounds such a profound event. It depicts a place that is neither here nor there, up nor down, in nor out, real nor imagined. Being in the Womb defines the relationship between life and death, happiness and sadness, public and private, and inside and outside by showing a broken window, open doors, pathways, hallways and a dark room—all metaphors for thresholds and liminal spaces that lead to and contain the ritual participant, who is depicted as a genderless wounded body. The wounds visible on the body signify the permanency of this rite of passage and its uncertain conclusion. Whether we realize it or not, we all encounter liminal spaces from time to time, and we need such places in our lives in order to live, to grow, and to die, allowing us to step out of the ordinary world and delve into the uncertain, ambiguous, and creative state of transformation.

19. Being in the Womb
Haibo Li
2006
Community

1. Bankok (Kapa) Hawai‘i late 18th or early 19th century barkcloth and natural pigments 112 x 74 SANA Art Foundation (PCL-128)

2. Bankok (Hipao) Hawai‘i early 20th century barkcloth and natural pigments 112 x 74 Private Collection

3. Bankok (Sigoe) Hawai‘i early 20th century barkcloth and natural pigments 78 x 74 SANA Art Foundation (PCL-128)

4. Blanket Chilkat Pacific Northwest early 20th century goat hair, cedar bark and natural dye 51 x 67 SANA Art Foundation (SW-041)

5. Bourbon Set Pamela Hess 2006 cone 10 wood, cotton and nylon thread 40 x 23 x 15

6. Lustration Julie Hendrickson 2006 sterling silver, copper, wood, water and sand 12 x 14 x 4

7. Staff of Osumey Yoruba people, Nigeria, Africa 20th century iron 72 x 12 x 16 Private Collection

8. Basket (Tanoa Fai’ava) Samoa 1999 wood, pigment and metal 7 x 12.5 x 12 SANA Art Foundation (PCL-065)

9. Basket (Hiapo) Samoa 1999 wood, pigment and metal 7 x 12.5 x 12 SANA Art Foundation (PCL-065)

10. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

11. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

12. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

13. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

14. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

15. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

16. Basket (Twin Figure) Hawai‘i 19th century whale ivory, human hair and sennit 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

17. Transformation Laura Photo-Welasco 2006 steel, glass mirror and wood 24 x 14 x 3

18. Evidence Sandie McLean 1972 light jet transparency on wooden light box 47 x 6 x 6


* not pictured

Rites of Passage

10. Maqenqueada Costume (Pevol) Chokwe people, Angola and the Republic of Congo 20th century wood, vegetation and natural dye 81 x 76 x 6 Private Collection

11. Twin Figure (Enway) Tsonga people, Mozambique 19th century wood, beads and cowrie shells 10.5 x 35 x 5 Private Collection

12. Twin Figure (Enway) Tsonga people, Mozambique 19th century wood, beads and cowrie shells 10.5 x 35 x 5 Private Collection

13. Twin Figure (Enway) Tsonga people, Mozambique 19th century wood, beads and cowrie shells 10.5 x 35 x 5 Private Collection


