

# **SHIFTING SOUNDS: Music as a ritual of transformation**

Erkki Veltheim

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School of Communication and the Arts  
Faculty of Arts, Education and Human Development  
Victoria University



## Abstract

This project explores music performance as a *ritual*, arguing that its performative form reflects and reinforces a particular worldview and its concomitant social structures and relations. It proposes a definition of a standard Western form of music performance, identifying it to be based on a duality of an active performer and passive audience, and suggests ways in which this form sponsors ‘everyday’ social structures and relations, emphasizing rationality and individuality. It follows this by proposing an alternative form of performance, one of active participation, that is seen to sponsor social structures and relations that emphasize viscosity and community. It draws extensively on the writings of Georges Bataille, particularly his concepts of the sacred, self and community, and the art of Joseph Beuys, particularly his active employment of myth and shamanism, and his concern with the socially transformative potential of art.

Following a survey of the social sciences and performance art, a number of techniques are identified for effecting a transformation of the standard form of performance. They are explored through performance and written components, designed to complement each other. The 90-minute performance is conceived of as a ‘lecture ritual’ followed by a ‘music ritual’. The written component, conceived of as a ‘performance-in-writing’, supports this performance through two exegeses; an imaginary one, distributed as a program note at the performance, and a hermeneutic one, the present document, providing it with an interpretative context.

It was found that these techniques effected an observable change in the participants, who became actively involved in the creation of the soundscape when the form of the performance was transformed to one that encouraged open experimentation with various tools and materials in the performance space. The resulting community clearly demonstrated aspects of Bataille's concept of the sacred; its intrinsic bond with destruction, intimacy, immanence and communication.

## **Master by Research Declaration**

I, Erkki Veltheim, declare that the Master by Research exegesis entitled *SHIFTING SOUNDS: Music as a ritual of transformation* is no more than 60,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This exegesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this exegesis is my own work.

Erkki Veltheim

Melbourne, 21 March 2010

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## 1 Introduction

*Sacrifice burns like the sun that slowly dies of the prodigious radiation whose brilliance our eyes cannot bear, but is never isolated and, in a world of individuals, it calls for the general negation of individuals as such.*

—Bataille 1989 [1973], 52

My aim is to create music that has the potential to act as a transformational social *force*; nonlinguistic, visceral, embodied communication that can rupture our everyday view of the world, of reality, and reveal alternative ways of seeing, of hearing, of being. This is music as a form of *ritual practice* that doesn't attempt to resolve the contradictions raised by this rupture but in fact receives its dynamic energy from the play between 'reality' and 'illusion', beyond the logic of bivalence, of either/or, true/false, and dichotomies of subject/object and mind/matter.

As a point of departure, I am utilizing Christopher Small's view that all music performance can be viewed as a ritual, and as such mirrors the social structures and relations of the participating community (Small 1998). Treating music performance as a ritual practice leads to the privileging of context over content, the latter serving only as a point of departure for the social forces generated by the ritual form. The critical issue is not what the content says but *how* it says it; what kind of social structures and relations it mirrors and sponsors in its very form of communication.

The idea of music as a ritual leads to the domains of philosophy, sociology and anthropology, as well as theatre and performance studies. Whilst grounding my research in the review of these academic fields, I also want to stress the importance of the *active* domain of these concepts, these social forces; the domain of the ritual practice itself. And it is ultimately here, in the *performance* of ritual, of music-as-ritual, of writing-as-performance, that my research situates itself, rather than the field of the social sciences.

My own background in music is as a performer, mainly on the violin and viola, and composer in a wide range of contexts; classical, contemporary, jazz, rock, pop, country and experimental musics, as well as cross-media and performance art. In the 15 years I have been involved in these fields, it has been a rare event that the performer-audience relationship has gone beyond what could be called the standard form of Western music performance practice. This standard form, in my definition, is based on a split between the ritual roles of the active performer and the passive audience, highlighted by the architecture and lighting of the performance space. Such a division is especially prevalent in a performance of classical music in a concert hall, where the musician is most often presented on an elevated, lit stage, while the audience sits in darkness and silence, separated from any interaction with the performers and other audience members.<sup>1</sup>

This split becomes a metaphor for the social relations of this community; the separation of mind and matter, of subject and object, of self and other. Such an irreducible dualism harks back to Descartes, who based his philosophy on the view that the indubitability of the thinking mind is the origin of all subsequent truths (Descartes 1968 [1637]). He thus made a clear distinction between ‘the soul and the body of man’ (Descartes 1968 [1641], 150), the former being essential and indivisible, and superior, to the latter, being contingent and divisible. This laid the foundation for the double canons of reason and scientific objectivity that were to characterize the Age of Enlightenment, an influence that was still felt in 20<sup>th</sup> Century modernist thought (Wokler 2000, xii). According to this rationalist view, summarised in Descartes’ maxim ‘I think, therefore I am’ (Descartes 1968 [1637], 53), the individual self, the ego-subject, is constituted by its consciousness of itself, and this becomes the basis upon which consciousness and knowledge of other things, the objects of the world, is built.

As Paul Hegarty (2007, 144) points out, this Cartesian dualism has been theoretically dismissed, yet remains prevalent in our day to day lives. It thus forms the basis of what I

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<sup>1</sup> I am adapting this definition from Richard Schechner’s view of theatre as an entertaining, aesthetic drama characterized by performer/audience dichotomy, sponsoring a form of performance that emphasizes individual creativity. He contrasted this with ritual, which he sees as effective, participatory social drama emphasizing collective creativity. He saw these two poles to be joined by a continuum of various forms of performance (Schechner 1988, 130).

call our everyday perspective or worldview,<sup>2</sup> embodied in the everyday social structures and relations of modern Western society. The civil society demands the rational mind to control bodily desires in a tyranny of ‘mind over matter’, culture over nature.<sup>3</sup> This chasm is extended across interpersonal relations, the distinction between the individual, private self and the public other being reinforced by the mannered role-playing we undertake each time we partake in a social situation, careful not to make any undue visual or bodily contact with those around us.

Hegarty notes that one strategy for the disruption of the everyday dualism and rationalism is to be found via the very understating of performative elements evident in much noise and psychoacoustic music. The lack of physical action shifts the focus away from the performer and reshapes the listener’s experience into one of desubjectified ecstasy, of collective embodiment through the agency of noise that interrupts any attempt at rational thought (Hegarty 2007, 146–147). I am adopting participation as an alternative strategy for this disruption, attempting to undermine the dualism inherent in the very form of even this noise performance; in the active creation of the work by the performer and its passive reception by the listener.

The standard form of Western music performance works to reinforce this dualism, the separation of our minds and our bodies, our selves and those around us. It sponsors an experience that remains in the realm of our everyday concepts of the self and the world; a subject contemplating an object in the world and responding to it, mind contemplating matter. By being cocooned in our own chair in darkness and appreciating the concert only through our eyes and our ears, we are cut off from more visceral sensory experiences and from active participation in a community. The emphasis seems to be on an individual aesthetic experience that aims for a kind of transcendence; the mind transcending the body, the individual transcending the community. Not only is there a split, there is also a contradiction in the way the homogenous anonymity of the audience hides the highly individual responses to the concert, only to be communicated to one’s

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Worldview’ is Clifford Geertz’s term for the underlying belief system of a community (Bell 1992, 26).

<sup>3</sup> Freud compared the human psyche to ‘a modern State in which a mob, eager for enjoyment and destruction, has to be held down forcibly by a prudent superior class’ (Elliott 1999, 38). Our irrational, instinctual desires that tend towards violence, according to this view, need to be kept in check by society’s contract of mutual security; violence is then equivalent to nature, desire, and civil society to culture, rationality (Carroll 2007, 4).

friends in words, at the conclusion of the evening. In more popular forms of music, such as rock, people may be moved to dance, laugh, applaud or heckle during the performance, but only in response, reactively, to the work presented to them. Seldom is the audience encouraged to take a radically active, creative part in the work itself, to steer the course of the performance towards a more socially transformational experience.<sup>4</sup>

The ritual of the standard form thus presents a lot more than a piece of music; it *represents* a whole set of social structures and relations that are relived outside the performance situation. Hence, the performance becomes a kind of religious experience, in the sense of re-linking, re-binding: It connects the audience to the accepted social norms of behaviour and thus promotes a certain worldview, of what is a proper way to be in the world.<sup>5</sup> As such, it is bound to mythology, to the underlying dominant beliefs of this community, and to a sense of the sacred, the bond between human and the rest of the world, concepts which are of central importance to this research.

In proposing an alternative to this standard form, I am also implicitly critiquing these everyday norms of behaviour, the social structures and relations founded on a dichotomy. I am attempting to disrupt (displace and rupture) this dualist thinking, to reframe the self and community as being contingent potentials of human experience, forever in flux, zigzagging between the imaginary polarities with which we conceptualize our social being. I am attempting to generate a spontaneous, heterogeneous community through a *ritual without ritual roles*, where the creation of the work is dispersed amongst those taking part, and where the experience aims to be visceral and immanent rather than rational and transcendent. In transforming the form of performance, I am therefore attempting to transform the everyday social structures and relations it sponsors, to offer an alternative perspective on the self and the world in a playful weaving of reality and illusion.

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<sup>4</sup> The idea that this kind of socially transformational experience should be one of the tasks of performance is raised by Schechner (1988, 191).

<sup>5</sup> Incidentally, Tim Blanning sees the rise of this religious nature of concert music to coincide with the secularization of society during the Age of Enlightenment. This trend was embodied in the newly built 'temples for music', the concert halls that 'gave architectural expression to the growing and powerful sacralisation of music' (Blanning 2009, 135).

The chief interlocutors of this research are the French novelist and philosopher Georges Bataille (1897–1962) and the German artist and social activist Joseph Beuys (1921–1986). Both Bataille and Beuys attempted to find ways to overcome the rationalist worldview inherited from the Enlightenment, the split at the heart of modern Western society. Bataille's writings and Beuys' art thus become a suitable position from where to further the idea of a community that has the potential to overcome this split through the transformation of its social structures and relations, however fleeting, however fragile.

## 2 Contextualisation in the social sciences

### 2.1 Myth

*My answer to anyone is first of all a question. I hope to ask, from one man to another, whether he has ever suspected some hoax. On the surface, everything is in order, foreseen and defined, but none of this is certain.*

—Bataille, cited in Nikolopoulou 2009, 99

Myths have traditionally been seen as stories about superhuman beings or acts. They have been variously described as primitive (but false) explanations of the world (a kind of proto-science), symbolic representations of abstract concepts or as cognitive models of thought (Segal 2004). In contemporary usage the word myth has also taken on the meaning of falsehood, both in everyday language as well as academia. Roland Barthes (1972 [1957]) for example, sees the contemporary world as full of myths, their falsity being hidden by virtue of their semiotic construction.

Malinowski (2008 [1926]) sees myth not as a piece of fiction, but a living reality, a reality lived. For him, myths are an expression of the governing principles of a community, a tool for social organization. They are, at their very root, expressions of collective being. For Bordieu, myth is not a finished object, but the *act* of myth-making (Bell 1992, 80). Neither is it a fixed genre, but, in the words of Boas, a ‘shifting mosaic of fragments subject to social pressures’ (Von Hendy 2002, 218), always in flux and prone to borrowings and appropriations in a syncretic puzzle.

Moreover, a myth is never a story in isolation; it is supported on all sides by a mythical framework, what Clifford Geertz calls a *worldview*; a community’s set of unquestioned beliefs about how the world works, the sense of the ‘really real’ (Bell 1992, 26). This worldview guides peoples’ daily lives and situates their role in a greater cosmological scheme. Accordingly, myth is, above all, constitutive and efficacious; it is behind (or

underneath) our understanding of knowledge and truth, what we view as relevant and meaningful information about the world.

Nietzsche draws a circular relation between myth and truth, both being socially constructed. According to him, 'it is we alone who have devised cause, sequence, reciprocity, relativity ... motive and purpose; and when we interpret and intermix this symbol-world ... with things, we act once more as we have always acted—*mythologically*' (Nietzsche, cited in von Hendy 2002, 75). All knowledge is perspectival, and subject to interpretation. Taussig concurs with this constitutive view of myth, claiming that 'all societies live by fictions taken as real' (Taussig 1987, 121).

### *2.1.1 Bataille and the absence of myth*

Georges Bataille (2006 [1946–51], 48) claims that the basic myth of contemporary Western society is the *absence* of myth. The Enlightenment ideals of objectivity, rationality and secularity have replaced the cosmogenic myths of the past with their own myth, what he calls the only 'true' myth. Here Bataille is playing with the shifting meaning of the word myth; now true, now false, now functional, now fictional. The universe without myth is the *ruin* of the universe; it is reduced to the rubble of mere *things*, objects for scientific contemplation.

As a corollary of the absence of myth, Bataille (2006 [1946–51], 81) saw the absence of community. Myth being the shared worldview of a community, an expression of social solidarity, its purported absence atomizes society into its individual members, neatly summarized in Margaret Thatcher's maxim 'there is no such thing as a society' (Elliott 1999, xi). The individual, then, becomes the most important social unit, no longer as a functioning part of a greater whole but a separate entity in opposition to the other. The myth of the self-constituted individual (the Cartesian *cogito* that is beyond doubt) has thus become the social face of this absence of myth.

According to Adorno, this non-community of individuals is, however, founded on a debased kind of self, the 'subjectless subject' (Elliott 1999, 214), created by late capitalist society's commodification of identity. Marcuse shares this pessimism, arguing that 'in a rationalized world of commodified culture and depersonalized social relations,

subjects can no longer express a measure of autonomy and spontaneity' (Elliott 1999, 214). This leads to pathological narcissism, the bridging of the subject/object divide by the subject's self-identification with objects; the feeling that *this* pair of shoes or *this* car expresses my identity, is part of me, my being. As a result, no authentic self-awareness can arise, and subsequently no genuine emotional connection to the other can be formed. Thus this societyless conglomeration of individuals is based on a misrecognition of the subject *and* the object, with no prospect of reconciliation. This narcissism is seen as a particular characteristic of the postmodern worldview, identified by Jeffrey Satinover to be intimately connected to the loss of a 'religious' worldview; the communal mythological framework that *binds* society together (Satinover 1987, 85).

### 2.1.2 *The myth of the self*

The idea of the self, the self-constituted ego, has itself been viewed as yet another myth. Nietzsche brought out the tension in the Cartesian consciousness via an appropriation of Schopenhauer:

We might apply to Apollo the words of Schopenhauer when he speaks of the man wrapped in the veil of *maya* ... "Just as in a stormy sea ... a sailor sits in a boat and trusts in his frail bark: so in the midst of a world of torments the individual human being sits quietly, supported by and trusting in the *principium individuationis*." In fact we might say of Apollo that in him the unshaken faith in this *principium* and the calm repose of the man wrapped up in it receive their most sublime expression.

In this same work Schopenhauer has depicted for us the tremendous *terror* which seizes a man when he is suddenly dumbfounded by the cognitive form of phenomena ... If we add to this terror the blissful ecstasy that wells from the innermost depths ... at this collapse of the *principium individuationis*, we steal a glimpse into the nature of the *Dionysian* (Nietzsche, cited in von Hendy 2002, 72).

In Nietzsche's reading, the myth of the transcendent individual is thus laid bare in the ontological dread that confronts the self when it is shown to be but a fabulation, a fragile veneer beyond which the Dionysian nature lurks.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For Nietzsche, the Apollonian signified rationality, order, logic and individualism and the Dionysian signified irrationality, chaos, instinct, wholeness; the two facets of being human (Hough 1997, xvii–xix).



For Lacan, the self is a misrecognized object of the Imaginary, yet another piece of fiction (Elliott 1999, 110). Lacan's psyche is structured by three orders: The Real, the Imaginary and the Symbolic. The Real is a condition of complete lucidity with the world, where there is no concept of the self or the other, a condition of animality that the human being can only experience in very early infancy, when its being is scattered in a confusion of bodily sensations and desires. Between the age of 6 and 12 months, the infant goes through a 'mirror stage', entering the Imaginary Order, which marks the first appearance of the mirage of the self. The infant recognizes itself in the mirror, and from this recognition leaps to a misrecognition of itself as a substantial unity, as an ego, a self. The fragmented subject of the Real Order thus becomes alienated from itself, defined by an otherness ('*there* I am, in the mirror'), and the attempt at a narcissistic reconciliation through an unending search for one's own image in the newly discovered objects of the world, like Adorno and Marcuse's debased subject. Further alienation ensues in the next stage of development, the Symbolic Order, which introduces *language* as a substitute for an ontological lack situated in the self; the empty, missing signifier that the linguistic formulations cannot fill, instead setting off a chain of differentiations and individuations. The 'other', the narcissistic Imaginary object of desire, is transposed to the linguistic Other; a radical, repressive difference to the subject that forever bars the entrance back to the immanence of the Real (Elliott 1999, 115). The misrecognized self thus becomes another one of Nietzsche's 'vital lies', constitutive to our subsequent ability to conceptualize reality (Von Hendy 2002, 74).

#### *2.1.2.1 Bataille and the sacrifice of the self*

Bataille also attacked the substantiality of the self-constituted ego. For him, the self 'is not the subject isolating itself from the world, but a place of communication, of fusion of the subject and the object' (Mitchell & Winfree 2009, 10). The fusion that Bataille is proposing is not the narcissistic self-identification with the mirror-objects of the world, but a result of the openness of what he called 'sovereign' being, an ideal state in which the subject is outside the domain of necessity, of utility, of the everyday social structures and relations (Lamarche 2007, p 66). Though such a nirvana is unattainable, this ontological state can be glimpsed in acts of self-sacrifice that result in a 'lucidity of consciousness [that] re-establishes the impossibility of a limit between humanity itself and the rest of the world' (Bataille 2006 [1946–51], 82). This sacrifice of the self, a

glimpse of the death of the subject, is a leap into collective being, into the *immanence* of being that is obscured by the mask of the individual self.<sup>7</sup>

The openness of the individual to the world, to other humans and the environment, creates a potential for *communication*, a kind of mutual permeability of the self and the other. 'Communication with things is not wresting of information out of them, but finding oneself invaded and ravaged by them' (Lingis 2009, 127). The self becomes thrown outside of itself in this ecstatic moment of communication and 'ruins itself in an undefined throng of possible existences' (Gemerchak 2009, 68); it becomes part of a community. The self is problematised not in terms of what is essential to it, but by an exchange, a flow; it becomes a locus of communication, leaking like a wound to the outside world (Mitchell & Winfree 2009, 5). Community as a terrain of communication is then equally not defined by totalising, homogenous boundaries, such as nationality or religion, but is to be viewed as that *absence* of community that Bataille (2006 [1946–51], 81) saw to be the foundation for any future community; a heterogenous constellation forever in flux. This community of communication, then, is *anarchic* rather than *utopian* (Mitchell & Winfree 2009, 4).

A sacrifice makes something sacred, or reveals it, and for Bataille (2006 [1946–51], 114) this sacred is precisely this kind of communication or contagion, an interpenetration of the subject and the object that constitutes the bond of everything in society and, following Emile Durkheim, makes it more than the sum of its parts (Bataille 2006 [1946–51], 110–111).

## 2.2 *The sacred*

The sacred, as defined by Durkheim (Colpe 1987, 518–519), is marked by its difference from the profane, and vice versa. The sacred is somehow special, not mundane, not ordinary; it has religious connotations, it reaches deep into the mythical framework of society. Mauss (2001 [1902/1950], 145–146) sees a correlation between the magical force, *mana*, and the sacred; it is like a force or a power, heterogeneous and immanent,

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<sup>7</sup> Bataille saw this self-sacrifice to be demonstrated, for instance, in the erotic experience, where the 'being calls its own existence into question by losing itself in the very experience' (Direk 2007, 96).

that is superimposed onto the natural world and is revealed (or released) in certain extraordinary actions. This is not far removed from Bataille's concept of the sacred; as communication or contagion, the sacred unifies the world and reveals it to be whole. For Bataille (2006 [1946–51], 114), the profane object is not necessarily different from the sacred object; it is a matter of perspective, a way of seeing. The sacred perspective consumes and destroys *things*, the profane objects, and in the process reveals the world as a whole, as the universe, as a world of communication. In this way the sacred act, in all of its violence and destruction, reveals and releases the immanence of collective being that is all at once everywhere, yet hidden by our viewing the world as one of profane objects; of use, of rational contemplation, of scientific study.

Bataille traces the concepts of the sacred and the profane to humanity's break from animality. For him, the animal world is one of immediacy, immanence and intimacy, much like the Lacanian Real. Animals are like 'water in water' (Bataille 1989 [1973], 18). There is no conscious separation between animals and the world, a state of affairs that is broken once a being learns to use tools, 'a nascent form of the non-I' (Bataille 1989 [1973], 27). The tool transforms the world into objects, of use and mediacy, and this eventually leads to seeing ourselves on that same plane, on the plane of the tool-object. As a result, other people also become tools, means to an end, in a subject/object confusion (Bataille 1989 [1973], 32). We are no longer like water in water, but now sail as Nietzsche-Schopenhauer's Apollo-ego on the stormy seas (see section 2.1.2, above). In Buber's terms, this is equivalent to the loss of an 'I-Thou' relationship with nature, marking a mutual, holistic existence, replaced by 'I-It' relationship, marked by the lack of a meaningful encounter between the self and the world (Von Hendy 2002, 21).

The concept of the sacred, for Bataille, is born of a nostalgia for this lost immanence:

The real world remains as a residuum of the birth of the divine world: real animals and plants separated from their spiritual truth slowly rejoin the empty objectivity of tools; the mortal body is gradually assimilated to the mass of things. Insofar as it is spirit, the human reality is holy, but it is profane insofar as it is real (Bataille 1989 [1973], 38).

Bataille sees the rationalist modern society to have abandoned this search for intimacy, the religious (in the sense of re-linking) quest for our origins and connection to the sacred world of immanence. According to him, we have flattened the world to the order

of the real, using the logic of the world of things to discuss the world of intimacy (Bataille 1989 [1973], 96). The transcendental religions negotiate this dualism via a complete separation of the sacred and the profane, the chasm between heaven and earth being only bridged by the flight of the soul from the body, the debased abject vessel that it is forced to suffer for its mundane lifetime. No prospect is given of transcending the real world into the immanent world of communication; this being exactly the same material world, but seen through the sacred perspective of intimacy (Bataille 1989 [1973], 73).

For Bataille, a lasting return to this sacred intimacy is impossible. However, he considers ‘the festival’ as an act of reconciliation between the incompatible necessities of human life; the instrumental view of the world of things, of objects, and the sacred, communicative view of the world of intimacy, of immanence (Bataille 1989 [1973], 55); the rational Apollo and the irrational Dionysus dancing arm in arm. In the festival, the subject/object division collapses in a community of ‘spirit’, as a ‘subject-object’, and individuals melt into a ‘fusion of human life’ (Bataille 1989 [1973], 54).

Though the definitions of festival and ritual hardly collapse into one another, they both have the potential to propose alternatives to the everyday social structures and relations. Ritual, like Bataille’s festival, presents a performance of transgression, the breaking of taboos through excessive, non-utilitarian consumption and destruction exemplified in sacrifice. As such, both ritual and festival remove themselves from the world of profane things, of utility and servility, and prise open the floodgates of the sacred into which these transgressions and sacrifices flow, allowing the participants a momentary experience of intimacy before they return to their tools.

### *2.3 Ritual*

Ritual has been viewed as a privileged domain of the sacred. Ritual adds *mana* (the sacred force) to things, and is of the same substance (Mauss 2001 [1902/1950], 137). A ritual *sacralizes* things; it transforms the profane into the sacred (Bell 1992, 91). For Durkheim (Zuesse 1987, 414), sacrificial rituals and rituals of transformation bring the worlds of the sacred and the profane in touch with each other. This link between ritual and the sacred is demonstrated in the way ritual activity is marked by its difference from

ordinary, mundane activity: The sacred being marked by its *difference* from the profane, access to it must be marked by actions that are *different* from the ordinary.

Others have seen ritual as a privileged fusion of thought and action. For Geertz (2008 [1966]), in rituals the world as lived and the world as imagined are fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms; the two turn out to be the same world, integrated in this act. Rituals are thus models *of* and *for* belief; they both reflect and reinforce the worldview of their participants. Still others have interpreted ritual as *performance*, as a dialectic between the individual and the community. Victor Turner (1977 [1969]) saw ritual as a kind of social drama that resolves crises and tensions in a community and emphasizes social cohesion. As social drama, a ritual demands *participation*, rather than spectatorship (Schechner 1988, 130), its efficacy being predicated on an active community of participants. As such, a ritual's true meaning, its real effect, is not in what it *claims* to be doing (through its magic spells and gestures), but in how it *shapes society*, in what kind of social structures and relations it sculpts from the worldview of the participants through this social drama (Bell 1992, 87); it is therefore founded on a constitutive misrecognition of its aims. This misrecognition creates a kind of displacement and distance between what the ritual says and what it does, allowing the participants to engage with its superficial content as a point of departure for the performance of the underlying context; the reshaping of society itself.

Turner (1977 [1969]) used the terms liminality and *communitas* to demonstrate the transformation effected by ritual on its participants. He adopted the term liminality from Van Gennep, who divided rites of initiation into three distinct stages: the preliminal rites, being the rites of separation from the initiate's previous world and role; the liminal rites which were the rites of transition; and postliminal rites, which heralded the incorporation of the initiate into their new social roles, their new world (Siikala 1978, 67). For Turner, liminality is characterized by an ambiguity of being, a state between or beyond well-defined categories of social order. It is a transcendence of one's ordinary role in society, a condition in which one's identity is stretched to its limit and finally suspended. *Communitas* is the sense of community produced by liminality, an undifferentiated form of collective being that challenges the hierarchical nature of society; an anti-structure to the structure of organized society. The purpose of ritual, for Turner, is to create a dialectic between structure and anti-structure, hierarchy and

*communitas*, acting as a kind of purification of social pressures. As a result, rituals create (and recreate) society itself, like the phoenix bird ever rising back into a structured form from its ashes.

Michael Taussig developed a less reductionist view of the concepts of liminality and *communitas* in his study of the *yagé* nights of Putamayo Indians, a festive communal ritual involving the drinking of a hallucinogenic drink to cure ills and access other realities (Taussig 1987, 441–442). Intrinsic to the *communitas* resulting was its transgressive, fragmented, heterogenous character, rather than Turner's homogenous human putty out of which a new form could be shaped by the machinations of the ritual. For Taussig, the *yagé* nights make mockery of such structuralist ideas, as they are characterised by a kind of montage; 'cracks, displacements, flashing back and forth between the self and the group', engaging in chaotic and humorous allegory rather than sombre symbolic structuring (Taussig 1987, 442). For Taussig, then, rituals can adopt liminal transgression itself as a way to enhance a feeling of community, a community that is not a formless mass waiting to be restructured, but a patchwork of overlapping roles forever in flux.

A ritual, like myth, implies a tradition, a convention, bound to specific gestures and words known to produce the desired effect in the world (Parkin 1992, 17). However, ritual tradition can change if a critical mass of participants undertakes to alter the course of the proceedings. This malleability shows, as F.G. Bailey has noted, the 'paradox of cultural performance: it is real in its effects but, because imagined, gives its creators and their audience a freedom of invention and interpretation that does not exist with regard to structured or positive reality' (Parkin 1996, xxi). As a performance, a social drama, ritual is never fully articulated, but is always indeterminate and ever-changing, with a dynamic tension between the encoded text and the performance situation; structure and improvisation (Bell 1997, 73; Harding 2000, 205). Neither is it just an abstract expression of collective values and beliefs but an actual vehicle for effecting a change in people's perceptions and interpretations of their place in society and the world (Bell 1992, 209; Bell 1997, 73).

The play between different realities is evident in many rituals. Schechner talks about the Indian concept of *maya-lila*, 'illusion-play', in the Hindu ritual of Ramlila; the weaving

of ‘interpenetrating, transformable, nonexclusive, porous realities’ (Schechner 1993, 34) with their shocking possibility of other worlds, filled with daemons and gods. Ritual thus becomes the nexus of alternative ways of seeing the world, never cancelling each other out, but always shifting, flickering between different possibilities, the Geertzian ‘really real’ being yet another playful illusion, another misrecognition.

Rituals are also instances of transgression and transvaluation of everyday norms of behaviour, as demonstrated by ritual sacrifice. The sacrifice marks a moment of transgression, the breaking and consequent invoking of a taboo (Allison 2009, 96). The taboo becomes an object of libidinal cathexis, intensified by fear, and so the ritual breaking of the taboo, the sacrifice, is a moment of release, of an ecstatic intimacy and immediacy with the sacrificed object. ‘Taboos are the irrational elements that permit the edifice of rational society’ (Allison 2009, 88). Rituals codify and control these instances of violent transgression, allowing a momentary union with the sacred in order to provide instances of cathartic release of the Dionysian irrational before the community returns to the normative and proscriptive function of the taboo as limiting behaviour. The breaking of taboos in violent ritual sacrifice can thus be seen as a way to disrupt the everyday view of the world and the concomitant social structures and relations, if only momentarily.

#### *2.4 Shamanism*

The central tenet of shamanism, according to Å Hultkrantz (1996 [1978]), is an idea of contact between the normal and the supranormal worlds through the intermediary of the ecstatic experience of the shaman. Shamans are mediators of these two worlds; healers and crisis-solvers (Siikala 1978, 319). An illness or a crisis is seen to signify a rift, a lack of harmonious balance, between the two worlds, and it is the task of the shaman during a ritual to traverse the two realms and adjudge the proper remedy to overcome this rift in the fabric of the universe.

The shamanic ritual, as suggested by Anna-Leena Siikala, is primarily conducted through the techniques of role-taking and ecstasy, or trance (Siikala 1978, 28). This role-taking serves to displace the shaman’s own subjectivity and replace it with an imagined other, most commonly an animal spirit. As a result, the shaman’s

consciousness ‘changes as reality takes shape according to the new role’ (Siikala 1978, 64). During the ecstatic experience, the shaman is thought to be able to free his/her soul from the material world and to henceforth travel through the spirit world, allowing the various tutelary spirits to communicate through his/her own body. Different tricks, or techniques, such as ventriloquism, sleights of hand, and simulated self-wounding, are used to convey the impression of otherworldly communication to the audience.

For Taussig, this shamanic trickery is defined by what he calls *contrived misperception*; a ‘skilful revelation of a skilful concealment’ (Taussig 2006, 123). The participants understand the mechanics of the trick but choose to view it through an alternative perspective, as if it were an act of supernatural magic. This becomes like an acknowledgement of the contingency at the base of all our knowledge and subjectivity; the Nietzschean lying truth and the Lacanian misrecognized self, the necessary fictions that condition our social life. Taussig refuses the view of the Shaman as an essentialist figure and rather proposes contingency and ambiguity to be at the heart of this role-playing trickster. He sees the ‘decentered character of the shaman as a strategic zone of vacuity, a palette of imageric possibility’ (Taussig 1987, 444), oscillating and mediating between laughter and death; showing now this, now that, possible truth.

## *2.5 Application of myth, sacred, ritual and shamanism*

I am using the concepts myth, sacred and ritual both as tools of critique of the standard form of performance and its concomitant social structures and relations, as well as dynamic catalyzers of their transformation. Hence, in my research I am defining myth to be both constitutive to our everyday worldview, as well as a malleable fiction with which to create other worlds. The definition of the sacred is, for my purposes, strictly Batailleian; a perspective of the world that privileges communication, intimacy and immanence, the *connections* between the self, others and the world. Ritual is then a locus of this sacred dialogue between the human and the world; a playground for the participants’ active myth-making and experimentation with possible social structures and relations, founded on a misrecognition between its stated, magical, aims and its real, social effects. My appropriation of shamanism is predicated on its technique of mediation between two worlds as a way to overcome a perceived rift. As my research is based on a critique of the standard form of performance and the dualism it sponsors, I



am appropriating shamanism as one way to communicate across this divide, to bridge its seemingly incompatible terms. Shamanism, in Taussig's reading, is also useful for its trickster character; the hoaxer of misperception conjuring up alternative worldviews, alternating perspectives.

### **3 Contextualization in the arts**

#### *3.1 Art and ritual*

Many artists have developed bodies of work that address the idea of performance as a ritual (and ritual as performance) and challenge the logic of bivalence and the dichotomies of subject/object, mind/matter and performer/audience. Rituals are seen to sponsor a non-dualist view of a ‘person as inseparably both mind and body’ (Parkin 1992, 23), and are thus useful vehicles for the critique of rationalism and everyday social structures and relations. In the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, art movements such as Dadaism, Futurism and Surrealism developed performance strategies that liquidated the boundaries between established artforms and created chaotic ritualistic events that were designed to shock the audience from their comfort zone, transgressing their everyday moral and aesthetic norms and rupturing the rationality of their worldview (Groys 2009, 24–26). Bataille saw the Surrealists’ aim to be the reinvigoration of myth in contemporary society and the challenge of the everyday notion of the self and society (Richardson 2006 [1994], 11–15). André Breton’s ‘simplest surrealist act’ (go into a crowd of people and shoot randomly until the crowd kills you) is not, for Bataille (2006 [1946–51], 167–169), merely a senseless act of madness, but a shocking way to reveal the collective, a dissolution of the individual in the whole. It is a ritual sacrifice of the self (and the other) in the immanence of death (the limit point of individual being), and as a sacrifice it generates the sacred viewpoint, makes it visible to the ‘participants’ in its violent destruction of the subject/object dichotomy (Bataille 2006 [1946–51], 150). It shows life to be sacred in its communicative, contagious nature, as a form of collective being.

The surrealist Antonin Artaud’s writings on the theatre as a transgressive force were an influence on later artists such as the American Allan Kaprow and his Happening and fluxus colleagues (Kirby 1995 [1965], 22). Artaud called for a ‘theatre of cruelty’ that steered away from intellectualist notions of art as representation and instead placed the audience at the centre of the spectacle, terrorizing them out of their everyday

complacency by means of a shocking, visceral drama; sacrilege (rather than sacrifice) as a herald of the sacred (Graver 2000, 49). His influence in theatre is still continuing, for instance in the work of Romeo Castellucci, who aims for a 'transgressive/transformational theatre', where 'form becomes spirit' (Marshall 2002, 7).

The Vienna Actionists, active in the 1960s, also utilised violent transgression in their work through shocking images of death, most iconically demonstrated by Hermann Nitsch's sacrificial blood-rituals (Parcerisas 2008, 16). Nitsch, informed by his study of cults and rituals, aimed for a rupture in the membrane separating the super-ego and the id, culture and libido, through Dionysiac rites accompanied by loud music (Berghaus 1995, 363–367). This was a view of art appropriating ritual elements as tools of perpetual liminal transgression, completely unincorporable to the everyday social structures.

There are some recent examples of research into the way music acts as a ritual. Turner's concepts of liminality and *communitas* and Bataille's ideas about the search for the sacred through the transcendence of the self and the subject/object dichotomy have been used extensively to describe the transformational, ritual-like qualities of techno/rave music (St John 2004). Small (1998) suggests all music should be primarily seen as a ritual *activity*, a process that structures the world and our perspective of it. Jacques Attali (1992 [1977]) sees music in a similarly socially effective and productive way; for him, music is a simulacrum of ritual sacrifice and a means of creating a community, transforming the everyday and changing the world's reality. He sees a clear connection between myth, magic, music, sacrifice and ritual (Attali 1992 [1977], 11–12), something echoed by studies in religious and ritual musics of the world, which often cite music as a privileged medium of communication with supernatural powers (Sullivan 1997). Furthermore, Attali sees in 'noise' a kind of subversive potential, a transgressive act against the normative structure of 'music'. His thesis has been extended by Hegarty (2007), who views noise as a non-rational form of the sacred, something beyond the individual, and draws heavily on Bataille in his account of the ontological and social implications of different forms of experimental and noise music. This transgressive concept of noise has been explored by artists such as Merzbow (Hegarty 2007, 153–166) and Diamanda Galás (Sydney Morning Herald 2008), both attempting to access a non-everyday, non-rational plane of experience through

extremely loud volume and unconventional means of sound production. In Melbourne's performing arts community, *Hi-God People* use absurdist theatrical and ritualistic elements, mixed in with humour, in their musical performances (Baker Fish 2008). However, the ritualisms of music are rarely extended to include the audience as anything other than spectators; the standard form of performance still holds and creates an invisible wall between the performer and the audience, rather than assigning an active creative role for all its ritual participants.

### 3.2 *Art and Participation*

One of contemporary art's chief trends has been a turn towards socially involved, participatory art (Groys 2009, 19). The roots of this can be seen in Wagner's concept of a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, the 'total work of art', which he saw as a tool for the 'passing over of Egoism into Communism' (Groys 2009, 21). In the future, the task of the artist was to sacrifice his/her individuality in order to advance a truly participatory, egalitarian society. Whilst the artistic revolutionaries of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century (the Dadaists, the Futurists and the Surrealists) developed this idea of art as a tool of anti-individualist social action, they did not generally engage their audiences as active participants in the creation of the work, instead using the strategy of provocation to shake spectators out of their passive complacency (Groys 2009, 24). To me, such exclusivity of the revolutionary cadres dictating the shape of things to come from the stage speaks of an attitude of univocality, the artist lecturing the masses. For a more far-reaching interrogation of the limits of social structures and relations, of an open forum of multivocality, we must allow the audience to become true participants, co-creators of the social work of art. Such democratic openness was the hallmark of Allan Kaprow's Happenings.

#### 3.2.1 *Kaprow and Happenings*

Kaprow's first Happening, *Eighteen Happenings in Six Parts* (1959), utilized various sonic, dramatic, choreographic and architectural elements, 'blurring the edges between composer, performers, and audience, with the ultimate aim of eliminating the audience altogether by offering its members the opportunity to participate in the work's unfolding' (Kelley 2004, 41). In this work, however, there was not yet an *active* part for

the audience. Rather, they were merely being moved from one room to another, offering various perspectives on the performance, framing and reframing awareness in so many ways.

Another, more ritualistic Happening was *Chicken* (1962):

The theatrics of *Chicken* turned the myths of sacrifice, regeneration, and so on into carnival gags, albeit with a gallows humor and a horrific edge. Kaprow regarded these myths as cultural debris—the refuse of belief systems—and he used them, like he used any other garbage, generously and as a parody of the mythic weight of art: in this case, of theater (Kelley 2004, 74).

Again, the participation of the audience was more peripheral than central to this work, consisting of walking around the open space of the performance, the standard division of stage and audience having been discarded, and ducking from the path of the occasional flying debris. The festive quality of this Happening was intended to convert the mythic energy of the symbolic allusions into physical energy: ‘Kaprow wanted to so vivify myths as physical activity that reflection upon their narrative or moral meaning would fade by comparison’ (Kelley 2004, 67).

Happenings that demanded more active participation soon followed. In *Push and Pull* (1963), the audience were invited to reassemble the furniture in a neatly decorated room, often with chaotic results (Kelley 2004, 80). *Fluids* (1967) involved building enclosures out of ice bricks on a hot Autumn day, a losing battle between the supposedly square structure and the formless melting ice that incorporated the notion of failure in its foundations (Kelley 2004, 120). *Calling* (1965), for performers only, involved the participants being given roles to play, as abductors and abducted in public places, bringing in the unwitting complicity of bystanders to this kidnapping drama. The abducted were wrapped up and taken to the woods where they were to call out each other’s names, these city folk metamorphosing from their cocoons into children of nature. The rich metaphors underpinning these Happenings utilized a kind of misrecognition; the meaning of the work did not lie in their semantic significance, but in their ability to ‘transform mythic scenarios into physical experiences’ (Kelley 2004, 68), to engage people in a social drama. Kaprow aimed at a kind of ritual theatre unburdened by the weight of myth, relying on the participants’ enthusiasm to playfully question the demarcation between art and life. (Schechner 1995 [1965], 222; Kaprow 1995 [1965],

235). The resulting performances were both parody and celebration, serious and flippant, again confusing the bivalency of the either/or of traditional logic (Schechner 1995 [1965], 224).

Across the Atlantic, the German Joseph Beuys was engaged in his own, more private rituals, highlighting, rather than discarding, the role of myth as a foundation upon which to build his artistic edifice.

### 3.3 *Joseph Beuys*

*Man must once more be in contact with those below, animals,  
plants and nature, and with those above, angels and spirits.*

—Beuys, cited in Stachelhaus 1991, 68

#### 3.3.1 *Beuys and Myth*

Beuys is one of the most influential post-WWII artists, mostly known for his large sculptural installations and his *Aktionen*, or Actions, which comprised ‘lectures and demonstrations, speeches, activities of the political party and discussions or ritualised installation of art’ (Lange 2007 [1995], 186). Beuys premised his work largely on a personal account of his plane crash in the Crimea in 1941, when he served in the German air force. According to this account, he was found buried in the snow by a tribe of Tartars, these shamanic nomads nursing him back from the brink of death by keeping him warm in layers of fat and felt (Moffitt, 130). This story of survival was famously debunked as a piece of fiction by Benjamin Buchloh (2007 [1980]), who viewed Beuys’s personal mythologizing to be predicated on a kind of escapist ahistoricity, the ignoring of the real political and social circumstances that Beuys’s actions were involved in (Buchloh 2007 [1980], 110). Through such displacement of the historical situation, Beuys transposed the history of WWII to a personal story of redemption, facts into fiction.

Beuys's broken face, staring at us from so many documents of his work,<sup>8</sup> is a constant reminder of his injuries sustained in the accident, his very own initiatory rite into shamanhood. In shamanic cultures, such initiatory rites involve the feeling of being dismembered and put back together by spirit smiths, a rebirth that breaks the initiate's bonds to common mortality and connects him/her to the supranormal realm (Eliade 1989 [1964], 34). Beuys's lifelong obsessions with fat, felt and heat (Stachelhaus 1991 (1987), 71) are acknowledged in this story of initiation, and his personal mythology thus becomes the very material of his creative output (Spector 2006, 22).

Beuys's personal myth is, as Vera Frenkel puts it, a 'lesson in myth-making' (Frenkel 2007 [1981], 128). Beuys could not have imagined that his hoax, his personal myth of shamanic initiation, would be left uncovered. Therefore, his insistence on this story is not indicative of his trying to mislead anyone, but rather an exposition of how mythical stories of origins *can* come about, and how they already exist in the fabric of our entire worldview. This insistence on such a constitutive hoax, or contrived misrecognition, as the base of his art, seems like a comment on the fluidity of fact and fiction, reality and illusion; a way to engage his viewer in a mutual weaving of these fluctuating perspectives, like Schechner's rituals of *maya-lila* (see section 2.3, above).

Beuys's standing outside (his 'ekstasis') the historical situation could also be interpreted as a kind of transvaluation of the war experience. We know the statistics, the techniques of torture, but in a kind of rational way; as so many facts, so many things. Beuys's very personal story of the Second World War becomes a more intimate way to gain an insight into the way war transforms people and their relations to the world. Similarly, his comment that the Berlin Wall should be raised by five centimetres, and his insistence on the aesthetic improvement this would result in (Rosenthal 2004, 33), seems at face value to be insensitive humour parodying the plight of a people divided. However, this transvaluation again shakes the audience members from their standard approach to the subject, placing Beuys in Taussig's shamanic zone of vacuity, now presenting laughter, now death (see section 2.4, above). It creates a kind of liminal ambiguity about what the terms of the argument should be, or *could* be, reinventing and displacing the everyday dialogue. On the one hand, the Berlin wall is laughable. On the

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<sup>8</sup> For instance, documentation photos of the Action *Titus / Iphigenie* (1969) (Rosenthal 2004, 32).

other, it is (or was) a fact of life, and as a physical structure has an aesthetic dimension. Beuys was particularly interested in such dividing and splitting structures, in the 'wounds' of society;<sup>9</sup> chasms which he sought to bridge with his shamanic role-playing (Moffitt 109) and his trickster transgressions (Rosenthal 2004, 24).

### 3.3.2 Beuys the trickster-shaman

Beuys's work was characterized by 'myth, magic, ritual and shamanic spells' (Stachelhaus 1991, 73). He used animals, both alive and dead, in many of these rituals, demonstrating his stated desire to open a conduit of contact between the human and the animal world.<sup>10</sup> This recalls the shaman's communication with his/her animal tutelary spirits, guiding him/her to the appropriate remedies for overcoming the rift between the different worlds that is the cause of illness (see section 2.4, above). These actions, placed in the context of post-WWII Europe, necessarily raise the question of the level of contrived misperception/misrecognition that Beuys is utilising; whether he is attempting to generate genuine belief in the efficacy of such inter-species communication, or whether he is using shamanism as a trope for the demonstration of alienation between human and nature, between the rational and the visceral, in contemporary society. This latter view, where his shamanistic role-playing functions as a critical technique, is adopted by Rosenthal as evidence of Beuys's embracing of the trickster figure; 'an inherently amoral transgressor, impersonating people or animals while toying with the audience' (Rosenthal 2004, 24).

Beuys the trickster-shaman, the transgressor and transvaluer, wanted to heal the wound in modern society, the rift in the Western man. For him, this rift was caused by the everyday worldview of our age, exemplified in the rationalist view of matter as a dead, ossified thing of scientific enquiry, devoid of spirit, of soul (Vischer 2007 [1986], 158). Beuys wanted to mediate between matter and spirit, body and mind, through a kind of hermetic *coniunctio oppositorum*; the alchemical striving for the union of these opposite realms (Von Graevenitz 2007 [1995], 39), again evoking the shamanic reharmonizing of the normal and the supranormal worlds (see section 2.4, above). He was committed to

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<sup>9</sup> Exemplified in his work *Show us your wound* (1974/74) (Rosenthal 2004, 68).

<sup>10</sup> For instance in *How to explain Pictures to a Dead Hare* (1965), which involved Beuys, covered in honey and gold leaf, walking around an exhibition space and mumbling incoherently to a dead hare cradled in his arms (Rosenthal 2004, 28).



‘the revolutionizing of the historic bourgeois concept of knowledge ... but also of religious activity’ (Buchloh 2007 [1980], 119) and took the position of Romanticism to counter the rationalist Enlightenment values, much as the Surrealists had done earlier in the century (Mesch & Michely 2007, 24). This turn towards Romanticism is identified by Cornelia Klinger to entail a turn towards community, nature and mythology (Zwirner 2007, 82), all being central concerns of Beuys’s work.

However, instead of embracing contemplative 19th Century Romanticism with its transcendental division of spirit and matter, Beuys wanted to engage with matter itself, to discover the spirit immanent *in* matter through its transformational potential (Vischer 2007 [1986], 165). This led to open, contingent works that explored complementary pairs of energy/form, chaos/order, warm/cold, expansion/contraction, opposite realms that could be brought into balance through dynamic processes employing heat, energy, movement and action (Rosenthal 2004, 26). By exploring the transformational potential in all substance, Beuys could thus break down the everyday hierarchical divisions by engaging them in this kind of thermodynamic exchange. And if he could resolve the tension between these seemingly opposite concepts in his work, maybe this would metonymically flow into the outside world; the medicine-man Beuys healing the wound in society with his homeopathic art (Moffitt 1988, 80, 149).

Beuys tried to push art into an anthropological sphere (Von Graevenitz 2007 [1995], 31). He wanted to see art as a transformational, politically productive force capable of releasing hidden creative potential in our lives; a tool of social evolution (Moffitt 1988, 173). His solution was to develop types of work that eroded the boundaries between artforms and resulted in a kind of Wagnerian *Gesamtkunstwerk* (Moffitt, 1988, 32). The limit ideal of this was to claim that everyone is an artist, and that society is itself a work of art or ‘social sculpture’ (Moffitt 1988, 169). Insisting that humanity is intrinsically creative, and that harnessing this creativity is the critical task of art, undercut the bourgeoisie concept of the art world as comprising its own micro-society of talented individuals providing aesthetic pleasure for the educated few. Beuys the revolutionary rallied for the end of the creative alienation this division of labour produces, imagining a future world of direct, uncommodified creativity (De Duve 2007 [1988], 142).

Beuys contributed to the German fluxus movement in the 1950s, and would have related to George Maciunas' ideas about the social goals of art (Moffitt 1988, 16). However, he became increasingly critical of the fluxus project of playful neo-dada agitation, complaining that it 'held a mirror up to the people without any effect and without any improvement of the situation' (Germer 2007 [1988], 57). Presumably, he would have had similar misgivings about Kaprow's Happenings, drained of myths, their absence being filled by 'meaningless' physical action (see section 3.2.1, above). Kaprow himself didn't see his art as political, or a tool of social change (Kelley 2004, 155). His rituals were, in a sense, purely empirical. Beuys had far clearer idea of what the artistic utopia would look like, and for inspiration, he turned to Rudolf Steiner's anthroposophy.

### 3.3.3 Beuys and ekphrasis

John F. Moffitt argues that Beuys's art can be seen as a form of ekphrasis<sup>11</sup> of the writings of Rudolf Steiner (1861-1925). Steiner's esoteric philosophy attempts to forge a union between science and mysticism, between the material and the spiritual, and his many idealisations and mental pictures became the raw material for much of Beuys's output, especially his Actions (Moffitt 1988, 140). Through these Actions, the concept of art becomes extended into the social, educational and political arena. Beuys often presented talks and scribbled convoluted notes on blackboards as further explanation of his less verbal acts (Lange 2007 [1995], 177). There was thus an iterative cycle between Steiner's writings, Beuys's theatrical enactments, and the scribbles on chalkboards, a cycle he no doubt wished to be repeated outside the exhibition space by the audience as a centrifugal force dragging in fragments of the rest of society.

Beuys's preoccupation with bees and honey<sup>12</sup> is one of the more striking example of this ekphrasis of Steiner's philosophy. The apiary, for Steiner, is a perfect socialist organism, where all parts function together as a balanced, harmonised living body (Moffitt 1988, 139); it a microscopic model of his symbiotic utopia. Beeswax and honey

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<sup>11</sup> Ekphrasis is a method of translating one medium of art to another (Moffitt 1988, 139).

Though originally a device for attempting to capture the essence of a painting through writing, it can also be conversely used to describe visual art interpreting the essence of a text.

<sup>12</sup> Demonstrated in works such as *Queen Bee III* (1952) and *The Physiology of Bees* (1953) (Moffitt 1988, 136).

also become the perfect analogy for the evolutionary, transformational process of the cosmos, which, according to Steiner, originated from a completely fluid state, its subsequent evolution being one of solidification of matter into its current form (Moffitt 1998, 123). This cosmogenetic principle is demonstrated by the transformational properties of beeswax and honey; fluid when heated and solid when cooled down, the history of the universe being re-enacted before one's eyes. Beuys's adoption of bees and their byproducts actualizes Steiner's metaphors and translates his ideas from the written page to the sculptural and the performative domains, extending their field of perception to the tangible and the visceral; one step closer, perhaps, to a lived reality, to Malinowski's functional mythology (see section 2.1, above).

The Steinerian critique of modern materialism's insistence on scientific positivism and its subsequent loss of spiritual mass became a perfect conduit for Beuys's desire to resynthesise the mind and the body, spirit and matter, from the fragments left behind by the Enlightenment (Moffitt 1988, 108). One wonders whether Beuys took Steiner's esoteric ideas about the nature of the world as 'true' representations of reality, or whether he saw in these mental pictures convenient metaphors for the advancement of his own agenda. Was his adoption of Steiner, then, another case of contrived misperception and misrecognition, a toolbox of tricks that demonstrate not belief in their veracity but in their efficacy as social forces? After all, if one wants to criticize rationalism, it would make sense that one needs an irrational platform, not logical arguments, to undermine its claim to the univocality of truth.

Beuys didn't want his works to be read semiotically, to be rationalised: 'I do not work with symbols, but with materials' (Beuys, cited in Stachelhaus 1991, 136). He wanted to inspire energy impulses, 'counterimages' (to Steiner's mental pictures?), in the viewer, rather than intellectual processes. His preoccupation with the transformational potential of matter should then be intuited directly through the material itself, and lived through a personal transformation in the viewer, through the actualisation of his/her own creative potential. By such contiguity, Beuys could bring spiritual warmth to the cold, icy landscape of the rational modern world, to reach an equilibrium between the material and the spiritual, the scientific and the mystic.

### 3.3.4 Critique of Beuys

Beuys is useful to this research for his instructive use of myth-making as constitutive of a creative practice, his views on art as a form of social sculpture, his demonstration of processes of transformation in his works, and his attempted shamanic healing of a perceived rift in society, all being central concerns of my research. His shamanic communication with animals, his trickster role-playing, his ekphrasis of Steiner, and his self-mythologizing all seem to me to be concerned with ritual techniques of contrived misperception and misrecognition, of displacement and distancing, of liminality, transgression and transvaluation. These all draw attention to the *context* of the work, its social meaning, and thus become critical techniques in my research.

However, though Beuys utilised the shaman and the ritual tropes, he didn't often engage the audience in an active participatory role.<sup>13</sup> His mythology was exclusively personal, as were his mystic, shamanic rites. He was on *display*, as a lost artefact, as a myth himself. Beuys thus ignored a fundamental feature of shamanic and ritual activity; the active involvement of the community of participants in the ritual (Horwitz 1995, 240). There was no *exchange* of energy between himself and the viewer; the energy only flowed out of him, in an unbalanced thermodynamic system. In Bataille's terminology, there was a lack of genuine *communication*; the sacred social force of intimacy was denied its character of mutual interpenetration (see section 2.1.2.1, above). Whilst I am indebted to many of the elements of Beuys's work, I believe his work suffers from a contradiction between its stated aims and its form of exposition. In order to further art as a social force, and for works to be experienced somatically rather than semiotically, I believe active participation is required. It is only through such direct experience that the transformation embedded in the objects of the performance can be viscerally understood by the viewer, in the interactive rehearsal of alternative ways of social being.

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<sup>13</sup> One exception is *7000 Oaks* (1982), which involved people around the world planting oak trees; a tribute to Beuys's environmental activism (Stachelhaus 1991, 148).

## **4 Methodology**

### *4.1 Ritual and participation*

My methodology is predicated on the idea of ritual as an active locus of the weaving of myth and access to the sacred, and a practical forum for the experimentation with social structures and relations (see section 2.4, above). I am using ritual both as the agency of critique of the everyday worldview and its concomitant social structures and relations, as well as a vehicle for their transformation. This is effected in the performance through the demonstration of the standard form of performance with an active performer and passive audience, followed by a presentation of an alternative to this, where the audience is engaged as an active body of participants in the creation of the resulting work. Participation is thus seen as a vital technique in the transformation of the standard form of performance into one that sponsors something akin to a Bataillean community of sacred communication (see section 2.1.2.1, above).

### *4.2 Contrived misperception/misrecognition*

The thread of contrived misperception and misrecognition begins with the idea that the meaning of a ritual is not given in what it claims to be doing, but in the underlying social structures and relations it mirrors and recreates (see section 2.3, above). This constitutive misrecognition becomes a major theme in my performance, where nothing is quite what it seems, where meaning slips away from the sign in order to unveil the potential for social action hiding behind it. Deliberately emphasizing the function of misperception and misrecognition through ambiguity and ambivalence becomes a way to encourage the audience to accept a lack of fixed meaning, to engage them in active participation rather than a semiotic reading of the work. This technique, reminiscent of Beuys (see section 3.3.1, above), is already employed in the invitation to prospective audience-participants, in the ambiguous hoax that it sets up; presenting the performance as a lecture followed by a shamanic music ritual, without acknowledging its fictional facade or its underlying, social aims.

#### 4.3 *Liminality*

Liminality is a ritual stage that serves to destabilise, to confuse, to put in motion, the hierarchical structures of everyday social relations, creating a zone of uncertain potential, of ambiguous identity (see section 2.3, above). It is thus an ideal concept to develop in the attempt to critique a form of performance that sponsors a rationalist, fixed worldview. I am effecting a state of liminality in my performance by dismantling the normative ritual roles of the standard form of performance and putting these roles in a state of flux by not proposing alternative, fixed roles in their place. Liminality also points to transgression and transvaluation; it creates a social position outside everyday norms of morality and truth, and thus undermines these by displacing and distancing the resulting perspective on self and the world away from accepted points of view. This is explored in my performance, following Kaprow (see section 3.2.1, above), by the transgression of the ritual roles sponsored by the standard form of performance through the activation of the audience as participants, and the transvaluation of the artistic experience from an aesthetic one to a social one.

#### 4.4 *Displacing and Distancing*

Displacing and distancing of the subject matter of a work can be used as a technique to draw out the formal structures at play in society, to highlight the contextual elements of a work of art. Adorno and Horkheimer (Von Hendy 2002, 295–296) see Homer using this kind of effect in *Odysseus*, setting the action in a bygone age whilst in fact describing the present-day society, providing a mythical justification for the social structures of Homer's own time. The episode with the sirens, for instance, becomes an allegory for the natural order of the master and the slave and the triumph of reason over bodily desire. The sirens, the reified angels of desire, are beaten by Odysseus' control of his body, sublimating his desire to the aesthetic pleasure only. Meanwhile, his crew, deaf to the higher pleasures of the mind, labour away at the oars, much too connected to the brute nature of manual productivity to appreciate the Arts. The rational master at once controlling his own body as well as the body of the slaves thus prevents his

microsociety from suffering the fate of his predecessors, shipwrecked on the rocks of bodily desire.<sup>14</sup>

I am utilizing a similar technique of allegorical displacing and distancing in my performance, creating a deliberate misrecognition of the subject matter at hand in an attempt to draw attention to the *form* of the performance, to its concern with social structures and relations. This technique is evident in the invention of a ritual that is geographically and mythologically displaced and distanced; the setting and supposed effect of this ritual are in arctic Lappland, far away from the daily concerns of the Melbourne audience.

#### *4.5 Ekphrasis*

I am using ekphrasis as a technique to demonstrate Bataille's ideas about the self and community, the sacred, and communication. As with Beuys's ekphrasis of Steiner's philosophy (see section 3.3.3, above), I am transposing some of Bataille's metaphors to the tangible domain, to material, sculptural representations of these concepts. The transformations in these materials become a mirror of the transformations Bataille suggested to be at the heart of the sacred community of communication; the animal intimacy of being 'like water in water' and the destruction of the objects of the world as a herald of this sacred perspective of intimacy (see section 2.2, above). Ekphrasis is closely related to appropriation, another central technique in this research, both being examples of the recontextualization of given material.

#### *4.6 Appropriation*

The postmodern fascination with appropriation has been traced to Walter Benjamin's philosophy of montage (Evans 2009, 13). Montage presents an 'image of truth as experiment, laden with articularity, now in this guise, now in that one, stalking the stage whose shadowy light conjures only to deconjure' (Taussig 1987, 445). This technique

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<sup>14</sup> Incidentally, this concept of rational aesthetic pleasure and the social structures and relations it implies are very close to those sponsored by the standard form of Western music performance (see section 1, above).

of montage, the representation of *now this perspective and now that*, together with bricolage (the use of material such as found objects and quotations), allegory and parody, become the tools of appropriation (Evans 2009, 14).

The adoption of historical figures to act as the assumed spokesperson for one's own ideas is one mode of this artistic appropriation; a way to say something through the very form of representation itself by siding with, or parodying, the known views of a past protagonist in the story of art. This identity-theft becomes a trope, a perspective from which to launch an argument. Two examples of this are Guy Debord and Gil J. Wolman's crediting of their article *Directions for the Use of Détournement* (1956) to the surrealists Louis Aragon and André Breton (Debord and Wolman 2009 [1956], 39), and the adoption of the very name Walter Benjamin by an incognito Slovenian artist/group in an interview (Zerovc 2009, 226).

Appropriation typically attempts to recombine cultural signs in order to critique and to propose alternative fictions. Hence, the appropriator is often drawn to imagery of cultures other than his own, to create this distance that draws out the representational function. It is thus associated with colonialism, and at times a 're-colonialism', the Western artist plundering the chest of native myths and symbols either to indulge in the exoticism, the otherness, or to self-reflexively re-articulate their own cultural tropes (Welchman 2009, 194). This one-way exchange may be the product of 'an authentic desire to question the historical validity of a local, contemporary code by linking it to a different set of codes, such as previous styles, heterogenous iconic sources, or to different modes of production and reception' (Buchloh 2009 [1982], 178). The exotic other is appropriated for its 'authenticity', its resistance to Western cultural norms, as a tonic for the imaginary lack in our own culture. 'Projecting certain qualities onto other societies permits people to talk about what cannot otherwise be talked about' (Root 1996, 41). Appropriation of the exotic is thus seen as an escape from the bureaucratic urban culture in the form of the reconnection to the land, and the sacred; a self-referential search for the lost qualities of modern life.

However, due to the machinations of the culture industry, such appropriation may result in outsider, marginalized voices being silenced by their incorporation into existing structures of power (Buchloh 2009 [1982], 179). Art drawing on different cultures for



the purposes of social therapy and critique may become counterproductive, as this otherness is swallowed up and recontextualised (or decontextualised) and finally neutralised, becoming an aesthetized commodity in the culture market. The exotic other is finally reduced to a reified product of romanticized cultural primitivism (Wallis 2003, 49). This trend is not confined to the plundering of other cultures; mainstream fashion does this with underground movements emerging from its own social context, such as punk, neutralizing a threat to the status quo by absorption.

Though cultural appropriation is a difficult terrain to traverse without committing such neo-colonialist pillage, it is still, I believe, a technique that can be utilised effectively as a mode of social critique. The play on difference can be ‘artificially exaggerated to provoke and prolong a sensation of unease and ambivalence’ (Root 1996, 50). This exaggeration then radicalises the other and bounces back on us as a forced examination of our own cultural norms. ‘Rather than objectifying difference and turning it into something to entertain, we can see difference as a mirror that allows us to recognize the extent to which the society we live in has come to feed off violence and alienation from the land’ (Root 1996, 204). In other words, if cultural appropriation can utilise the other as a flashlight of self-reflection, rather than exhibiting this otherness in a safely framed manner, it can become a powerful tool of critique of the practices of the appropriating culture. This is the sense in which I am adopting appropriation as a critical technique in my research.

Apart from the ekphrastic appropriation of Bataille’s ideas, I am also appropriating elements of Beuys’s works, for instance his signature use of felt, and his preoccupation with the transformational potential in matter and society (see section 3.3.2, above). These are incorporated into my performance both as elements of a private mythology, as well as materials and dynamic processes suggestive of such transformation; for instance, heat melting the frozen, fixed everyday social structures and relations. Like Beuys (see section 3.3.2, above), I am appropriating shamanism as a trope for its analysis of social ills as a rift in the balance of the world, for me demonstrated by the separation of mind and matter, self and other, in the everyday social structures and relations. Shamanic healing is metaphorically rich in its mediation of such a rift through ecstatic (‘standing outside oneself’) travel, suggesting that one solution to this irreducible dualism is a displacement of the rationalist, essentialist notion of the self-

constituted ego via a reconfiguration of the self as a fluid locus of communication, like Bataille's sovereign being (see section 2.1.2.1, above).

Appropriation and ekphrasis both locate the meaning of a work in a context that reaches outside it, in the way it reinterprets the original, rather than purely in its aesthetic effect or internal logic. Both these techniques create a kind of distance between the original and the new, a relation that sets in motion a dialogue about the social meaning of the work. In my performance, displacing, distancing, appropriation and ekphrasis are all used with this intention of creating a sense of an exaggerated otherness that highlights the context of this ritual; how it transforms the standard form of performance and consequently points a way towards a liminal play of other possible social structures and relations, of alternative worldviews.

#### *4. 7 Private mythology*

Like Beuys (see section 3.3.1, above), I am saturating my performance with what could be called a private mythology; concepts and symbols that are not communicated to the audience in a semiotically transparent or coherent manner. The appropriated elements are stitched together in a loose patchwork, with no attempt to create a meaningful thread through it. I am adopting a Beuysian strategy of eclipsing any attempts at a semiotic reading of this work (see section 3.3.3, above), using a deliberately obscure and ambiguous combination of fact and fiction to animate social forces rather than private thoughts. Thus, the extremely arcane content of the performance is itself a technique of contrived misperception and misrecognition, serving only the purpose of providing a point of departure from which to begin the exploration of various contingent perspectives on self and the world.

#### 4.8 Writing

The written components of my research are conceived as ‘performance writing’:

Performance Writing explores relationships between textual and text-based work when developed in conjunction with other media and discourses. Performance Writing opens the investigation of formal and ideological strategies which writers and artists develop textually in response or in reaction to their own time and their own fields (Bergvall, cited in Allsopp 1999).

My written work is a reflection of the play between reality and illusion, between different realities, different illusions, evident in my performance; a ‘performance-in-writing’ that traces the ritual form’s shifting perspective and provides it with both a mythical and a hermeneutic context.

The two exegeses of my performance interrogate my aims from contrasting perspectives. The first is an ‘imaginary’ exegesis that treats the performance as if belonging to an established ritual tradition; a fictional account of its history, mythology, symbology, structure, techniques and intended effects. Its style of writing is influenced by anthropological manuscripts from the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century, as a technique of distancing and displacing. This imaginary exegesis is in two parts; an invitation mailed to prospective audience members, which begins the weaving of reality and illusion, and a fictional anthropological article distributed to the audience at the commencement of the performance as a kind of program note. This article also becomes a ‘script’ for the first half of the performance, the ‘lecture ritual’, and is intended to prepare the audience, through its fictional account of an invented shamanic ritual, for the second half, the ‘music ritual’.

The present document forms the second, ‘hermeneutic’ exegesis, providing a context of interpretation for the performance, acknowledging it as an invented ritual belonging to the tradition of Western performance art. This exegesis is concerned with the performance’s central philosophical, social and aesthetic themes and how these are reflected in its structure and techniques. It also includes a physical description of what actually happened in the performance and an evaluation of how I perceive my aims to have been realised. Its style of writing is influenced by scholarly commentary on music, art and performance.

The overriding aim of both the performance and the written work is to engender a shifting of perspective in the audience-participants, whether it be momentary or lasting, playful or earnest; the potential to see the world and one's role in it in a way not often encountered in everyday life. The two exegeses reflect this shifting perspective; when presented together, they provide two contrasting but complementary accounts of the performance, flickering between the 'fictional' and the 'factual', 'illusion' and 'reality'.

#### 4.9 Failure

The acknowledgement of failure in an attempt to transform the everyday social structures and relations becomes an integral part of this project. I do not have grand illusions of a *permanent* transformation in the participants' consciousness through what is essentially a 'baseless', invented, ritual, but rather premise this research on a desire to suggest an alternative perspective to the everyday one, a playful journey across other possible social landscapes.<sup>15</sup> The constitutive nature of failure in any attempt at transgressing the everyday norms is brought out in Hegarty's reading of Bataille:

So successful transgression can only ever aspire to be "successful"—it is caught in a loop of alternating failures—in its mundane failure in not disposing of the taboo, its alternative failure in getting rid of it and thereby becoming the norm, and above (beneath) all, its failure to even fail properly, as it negotiates between various ways it does not come to be. Transgression is always potential, or always already lost, but this does not stop Bataille ... acting as if it were possible ... (Hegarty 2007, 111).

The very *attempt* at transforming, at transgressing, the standard form of performance and the concomitant social structures and relations becomes more important than its perceived success or failure. Hence, while this attempt cannot hope to effect a genuine, lasting, shift in these structures, it demonstrates the *potential* for such socially transformative action, generating enough energy to, in Beckett's words, 'try again. Fail again. Fail better' (Beckett 1983, 7).

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<sup>15</sup> Schechner views bona fide rituals as effecting permanent transformations in society, and performance, such as theatre, effecting a momentary transformation (Schechner 1988, 191).

## 5 The performance

### 5.1 Description

#### 5.1.1 Invitation

Prospective audience members receive an invitation by mail to attend a talk by Lord Auch, entitled *Shifting Sounds: Music as A Ritual of Transformation*, followed by a ‘performance of his arrangements for string quartet of Finnish Shamanic Music’ and ‘An Authentic Finnish Shamanic Music Ritual by renowned Master Shaman Shamaani Kuuluu’ (Appendix 1).

Lord Auch is the *nom de plume* of Georges Bataille in his novel *Story of the Eye* (Bataille 2001 [1928]), and the photo in the invitation is indeed that of Bataille in his old age. Bataille formulated this pseudonym as a neat compaction of his philosophy of ‘base materialism’, being a combination of Lord (and he used the English word), referring to God but also to the aristocracy, and an acronym from *au chiotte*, French for ‘to the shithouse’. ‘Lord to the shithouse’ combines the high and the low in the one title, creating a transgressive oscillation between the conventional notions of the sacred and the profane. Bataille tried to develop a conceptual way to sidestep such conventional dialectical oppositions of high and low, of spirit and matter, to destabilise the hierarchical way of thinking in this split (Lamarche 2007, 56). The marrying of the concepts of high and low, of God and Shit, under the one rubric confuses the idea of such a hierarchical division. It puts into flux the concepts of the sacred and the profane, and replaces this duality with a base materiality that revels in the resulting aporia.

The photo of Shamaani Kuuluu is in fact that of Joseph Beuys performing *I like America and America likes me* (1974), an Action that involved spending three days in a New York exhibition space with a coyote whilst performing repetitive, ritualistic actions (Tisdall 1979, 228–235). The coyote urinated and defecated on copies of the provided Wall Street Journals, which could be seen as a reaction of nature against

culture, a native god's judgement on the cultural norms of the invader. Beuys the trickster-shaman travelled to New York and only made contact with the trickster-god of the American Indian, aiming to communicate with the marginalised, unheard voice of America, to heal the rift between the Old and the New World.<sup>16</sup> Still, to me this seems like a forced conciliation, insofar as the European still colonised the native's, the animal's, freedom and being, set it up for exhibition for the purposes of his own ends, and packed up and left once his point was made. Was Beuys parodying himself even as he was criticizing the unresolved issue of the relationship between the colonialists and the indigenous peoples of America? Was his 'participant observation' of the ways of the Native American god/animal of the same order as that of Malinowski, who Taussig sees as a performer and trickster, full of irony and sarcasm when he acts out and parodies his own role as a member of the colonial overlords extracting local knowledge from the natives (Taussig 2009, 127–128)?

The layout and some of the written content of the invitation is appropriated from a poster of Grey Owl's talk *Back to my beaver people* from March 26, 1938 (McMaster University 2010). Grey Owl (1888–1938) was in fact an Englishman, Archibald Belaney, who moved to Canada and recast himself as a Native American, writing best-selling novels and touring around the world as an expert on First Nations cultural knowledge. Popular during his lifetime, he suffered a posthumous fall from grace when his fraudulent claim to indigenous authenticity was uncovered (Root 1996, 103).

### 5.1.2 Lecture ritual

The performance begins with the audience walking into a gallery space to the sounds of a live string quartet playing Mozart and a host (the artist), dressed in white tie, welcoming them at the door. The bar is open, and the audience is encouraged to purchase a drink and mingle. In the exhibition space, 36 chairs have been laid out in a square, 6x6. A chalkboard with a few scribbles, which some may recognize as a rough copy of an unfinished Joseph Beuys work, stands in front of the audience, next to a music stand. As the audience take their seats, they find a photocopied article, *An*

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<sup>16</sup> He went so far as to be carried on a stretcher in the back of an ambulance between the airport and the exhibition space in order not to have contact with anyone in New York but the coyote (Stachelhaus 1991, 174).

*account of a Finno-Ugric music ritual by Lord Auch*, on their chairs (Appendix 2). This article is produced in such a way that it appears to have been extracted from a book, starting on page 36.

The host looks nervous as he asks for the string quartet to finish on a cadence, and explains to the audience that Lord Auch will in fact not be able to come and deliver his talk. The performance thus begins with a failure, a reinforcement of the notion that nothing is quite as it is advertised, that the substance of this evening is not in the supposed explication of an exotic culture, but in some kind of laying bare, a deconstruction, of the mechanisms of such an event. In fact, the crumbling of the supposed order begins even before the host's preamble, as the audience numbers more than 36 and extra chairs are hastily added to the neat square in the middle of the room, bleeding into the surrounding space.

The host begins to read Lord Auch's article in a slightly struggling monotone, the audience members reading their own copies simultaneously. Many in the audience, their heads bent down towards the written page, do not even make visual contact with the host, their only interaction with him being the communal turning of the pages and the odd outburst of laughter in response to his deadpan humour. The ritual this article explicates is an invented one; the yearly welcoming of the sun for its first appearance above the horizon of the year. It is one that *could* be a plausible calendrical rite, marking a very significant moment in the yearly cycle of life of the arctic. The host makes a reference to the important timing of this performance, the sunset in Melbourne on this day coinciding with the first sunrise of the year in the Arctic Lappland, emphasizing the occultist flavour of the night.

At the close of the lecture, the host explains that after an interval, during which the audience is encouraged to consume more intoxicating substances,<sup>17</sup> the audience will have an opportunity to participate in the shamanic music ritual described in Lord Auch's article, conducted by Shamaani Kuuluu himself. It is impressed upon them that their contribution to the sonic energy in the room is a vital ingredient in the success of

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<sup>17</sup> The consumption of intoxicating substances is a feature of many shamanic rituals as an aid to achieving ecstasy (Eliade 1989 [1964], 401).

the ritual and that they are free to use any of the instruments displayed in the space in order to generate this energy.

Before the interval, a second performance from the string quartet is heard, conducted by the host. This music is announced as Lord Auch's string quartet arrangements of traditional Finno-Ugric shamanic songs, and the players are given parts they have not seen before, made of graphic lines across manuscript paper. The host conducts emotively, inspiring various scratches, scrapes and squeaks from the string quartet. Pages are turned at different times, and the semblance of coordination between the players and the conductor unravels almost as soon as the first note is played; another performance of failure. This concert then turns into a complete antithesis of the opening Mozart in an uncivilised, animalistic orgy of noise.

### 5.1.3. *Music ritual*

After the interval, the audience descends from the upstairs gallery to the downstairs theatre. Masks are given to these initiates, and many choose to wear them at the beginning of this music ritual. The theatre, with its installation, presents a distorted mirror image, or an inversion, of the upstairs exhibition space. Where upstairs, there was a neat ordering of chairs in the middle of the room, the host-performer having his back against the wall, here there is a collection of large sculptural objects scattered in the middle of the room, with an asymmetrical collection of chairs scattered on the periphery. Where upstairs there was an elegant account of Mozart's *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*, here a soundtrack of four violins scratching and wheezing is heard from speakers in the four corners of the room, already hinted at by the closing performance of the first half. Where upstairs, the performer was standing up, looking down at the seated audience, here the host, now acting out the role of the shaman's assistant, is barely seen, sitting on the ground, whilst the audience is mainly standing and walking around. Where the upstairs space was well lit with fluorescent light, here the only light comes from low-watt bulbs hanging above each sculpture. Where upstairs the host waited for the audience to be seated before beginning, here the audience flows in through the entrance to the sound of his steady drumbeat. An older man with grey hair, whom many recognize as John Rodgers, a violinist, seen earlier mingling with the crowd upstairs,



sits on the ground next to the host, taking occasional sips of vodka and at times holding a violin in his hand.

The sculptural installation can be recognized to be analogous to the description of the shaman's tent in the text by Lord Auch, but, again, via a distorted, or displaced, transformation. Seven sculptures are arranged around the room in a roughly symmetrical manner, somewhat resembling the cardinal points of an anthropomorphic figure. In the centre stands a ladder, representing the world pillar, the world tree-phallus. Above the ladder hangs a large bronze cymbal; the sun ring. On the south side of this ladder, along a central axis, rests a 44-gallon drum filled with ice; the frozen heart of the earth. On the north side of the ladder, a child's bath rests on a metal frame, with a plumbing tube leading from its sinkhole to a metal bucket below.<sup>18</sup> Inside the bath, a rusty old iron throwing-ball rests in a pool of red water; the womb with its astral foetus, waiting for delivery. The polarity of this arrangement is reversed in comparison to the text, to take into account the antipodean geography; the ice points to the Antarctic, the hot uterine blood to the equator. At the southernmost point from this central spine, the silent violinist-shaman and his assistant sit on the ground. At the northernmost point, a table is laden various musical instruments (violin, ukulele, sticks, recorders, stones); the silent souls of the dead waiting for a sonic rebirth. To the southeast, a pile of sticks is arranged, like a beaver's lodge, and to the southwest, a funeral pile of rocks. To the northeast, a bar heater radiating light and warmth, the promise of the rising sun, slowly melts the ice and ferments the germinating foetus in the bath. To the northwest, a roughly made sled carries a load of 36 felt squares; the reindeer-sacrifice to the earth.

Upon entering, the audience gravitates towards the table laden with the miscellaneous instruments and stones. Immediately, an ad hoc orchestra is assembled from these remnants, and many begin to experiment with the sonic potential of the sculptures themselves; the audience transforms into a community of participants. Soon a cacophony of sound overtakes the space, and the pre-recorded violin soundtrack is thrown into the aural periphery, completely overpowered by the spontaneous violence

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<sup>18</sup> This recalls Beuys's *Bathtub* (1960), which refers to 'the wound or trauma experienced by every person as they come into contact with the hard material conditions of the world through birth' (Tisdall 1979, 10).

being directed at the matter in the room. The bath, the cymbal and the 44-gallon drum become the favourite targets of this mayhem, and at some point the throwing ball is extracted from the bath and becomes transformed into a wrecking ball, worked on the quarry of the funeral rocks. Some participants choose to play in synchronicity with the shaman-assistant's drumbeat, whilst others play completely independently of this.

The sled is unloaded of its surrogate animal skin and spun around the room. Some use the bucket to transport the warm red water into the 44-gallon drum filled with cold ice. This drum finally succumbs to a mighty heave and falls over, spilling its cargo of fast-melting ice and splatters of newly transfused blood onto the floor. A light bulb becomes the victim of a reinvented game of totem tennis, smashing into pieces upon the bath. After 33 minutes, spotlights fade in on the sun-cymbal, and the shaman's assistant climbs the ladder and hits it with a stick 36 times. After this, he walks out of the theatre, followed by the silent shaman-violinist. A loud sine-tone polyphony fills the space, rising above the continuous noise of the participants, and finally ends, at 36 minutes. Houselights fade in, and the participants quickly stop their actions, applauding and slowly climbing up to street level.

## *5.2 Artist intentions*

### *5.2.1 Invitation*

The invitation sets up Bataille and Beuys, the Shit-Lord and the Sham-Shaman, and the hoaxes and metaphors each perpetuated in order to communicate their philosophy, as the two supporting pillars for this performance. Both are already corruptions of the ideals they represent; the absoluteness of God and the imaginary other of the sorcerer (Taussig 1987, 465), and thus become fertile material for the play of liminal ambiguity. Nothing is quite what it seems, and the ruptures become more important than the surface.

With this invitation I am setting up a more or less obvious hoax through the employment of old-fashioned hyperbolic promotional language and framing of the exotic, and the appropriation of the layout of the Grey Owl poster; the technique of contrived misrecognition is already in full flight. I have purposefully created or

appropriated a complementary pair of exaggeratedly exotic characters, the Western nobleman and the ‘ethnic’ shaman, aiming to create enough distance between the audience and the supposed exhibit so that the real subject, the mechanisms of the performance event, can be observed, like in Adorno and Horkheimer’s reading of *Odysseus* (see section 4.4, above). In my allegory, Lord Auch is conceived as the purveyor of the standard form of Western performance, with its concomitant perspective of the world, and Shamaani Kuuluu becomes the alternative, the ‘other’ perspective, a challenge to the everyday worldview, the everyday social structures and relations.

Several different modes of appropriation are explored in this invitation: Bataille’s deferral of responsibility for his work to an invented author, Beuys’s shamanic role-playing and borrowing from American Indian mythology, Archibald Belaney’s fraudulent native identity, and my own montage of all these elements. The appropriation of these identities will not automatically transmit to the audience the same semantic charge as it does for the artist. This raises an important question about the effectiveness of such a technique, the relationship between the artist’s intentions in such montage and its actual effect on the audience.

Though the invited audience members may not, and are not expected to, recognize these figures or indeed have prior knowledge of their work, they act as foundations of my private mythology in this performance. It is impossible for the artist to predict the extent to which audience members will read the work semiotically, and whether their interpretations converge with the artist’s aims. However, in this particular performance this concern for a correct semantic reading is secondary. The appropriated elements, which also include such occult figures as magic squares and other numerological obsessions, are not intended to be read by the audience as signs pointing to well-defined meaning. Rather, these elements act as catalysers of the artist’s creative process, as points of departure for the finished work. And this finished work is, ultimately, not a semiotic one, but a social one. Hence, the intended effect is not dependant on the audience’s ability to navigate the symbolic maze I have provided, but in the call to action that the materials and the form of the performance suggest, like Kaprow’s misrecognized metaphors (see section 3.2.1, above). The chief aim of this performance is, after all, to conceptualise music as a social force; to demonstrate in a visceral way

the standard form of performance and one alternative to it, and to effect a transformation in the social relations and structures of the audience, the participant community.

### *5.2.2 Lecture ritual*

The first half of the performance attempts to create an atmosphere alluding, however (deliberately) unsuccessfully, to a kind of aristocratic gathering of like-minded individuals, fascinated by the prospect of attending an exposition of the exotic; a kind of outdated high society chamber lecture. This atmosphere is already activated by the invitation, and is perpetuated by the elegant string quartet music, and the white tie costume and staid mannerisms of the host. Were this done in good faith, the effect would be one of framing the strange, exotic other in a non-threatening way, complete with the comforting classical music that speaks of civilized society; the standard form of performance being a safe vessel for the foreign cargo. And indeed, this lecture-ritual is intended initially to be a representation of this standard form. However, a kind of Taussigian contrived misperception, the ‘skilful revelation of a skilful concealment’ (see section 2.4, above), starts to creep into the course of events through the agency of deadpan humour, and the framing becomes displaced. The laughter begins to shift the standard form, undermining the passive ritual role this form assigns to the audience and presaging the more active role the audience is expected to adopt in the second half, the music ritual. The audience is presented with familiar elements (the string quartet, the white tie costume of the host) but in an increasingly strange form, this displacement and distancing intended to become more and more obvious as the evening progresses.

The article that the audience members find on their chairs is written in an outdated style, borrowing some of its authoritative and somewhat patronising tone from the French sociologist Marcel Mauss (1872-1950) and the Finnish ethnographer Rafael Karsten (1879-1956). Hence, this paper itself becomes a study in the floating signifiers of otherness; both Century-old Western academic writing, as well as the partly factual, partly fictional shamanic setting it creates. The aim is to effect the kind of exaggerated distancing where the appropriation of other cultures becomes an attempt to critique one’s own culture, a flashlight of self-reflection (see section 4.6, above). The article itself is not intended to be a satisfying piece of fiction, or a particularly informative

article of fact. It plods along, combining appropriated elements from shamanic field studies with adaptations of Bataillean philosophy and Beuysian symbology. Again, it demonstrates some of my private creative obsessions, but also emphasises the participatory aspect of a ritual, hinting at the things to come.

The subject of this article, the supposed ritual of the yearly sun-birthing, is connected to the symbolic function of the sun as the locus of enlightenment, of truth, via an ekphrasis of Bataille.

Bataille argues that the mythical conception of the sun as symbolizing illumination, edification, the *pinnacle* of truth, is only half the story of the symbolic function of that concept. A more complete ethnographic record shows us that the sun also represents ritualistic slaughter and ex-sanguination ... that is to say, in general, both the ascent to Icarian heights, and the illusion of Icarian elevation that is confirmed by the inevitable catastrophic fall back to earth (Lamarche 2007, 55).

The choice of the ritual in this article is thus less connected to its factual plausibility, and more to its usefulness for such an ekphrasis. Bataille's use of the sun-symbol becomes a critique of the absoluteness of truth, a univocality he proposes to undercut through another example of his base materialism, the mutual interpenetration of the high and the low represented by Icarus's fall that is already constitutive of his ascent. The invention in my text of the earth as the child of the sun and the moon, and each yearly sun as the child of the earth, sums up this idea of the communication between heaven and earth, the sacred and the profane, truth and fiction, bound together in an eternal play of ambivalence.

Another key metaphor in the article is the silence of Shamaani Kuuluu. His is a form of nonlinguistic communication, an imitation of the sounds of animals and elements; the voices of Bataille's intimate, immanent world (see section 2.2, above). He is intended to stand in stark contrast, then, to Lord Auch, the wordsmith, but not without complications, not in pure opposition of authentic/inauthentic, sacred/profane. He is, after all, using a violin, a gift from the missionary colonialist, as his tool, an appropriation that has cost him his native tongue; the cultural invasion displacing his own language, his own voice. This invention is also a ruse to allow me to use my instrument, and my own relationship with it, as the thread woven through the performance. I am attempting, on the one level, to find a new approach to using

instrumental music to advance a type of concert that breaks from the standard form of performance, and the shamanic violinist becomes an allegorical healer of this instrument, allowing it to access the sacred world of intimacy rather than being a servile tool of rationalist Enlightenment aesthetics.

The failure that is constitutive of the drama of this performance becomes a theme early on; in the failure of the chair-structure to accommodate all of the guests, in the failure of Lord Auch to materialise, in the failure of the string quartet to be able to read their music in a synchronised manner. This failure hints at Bataille's insistence on the importance of attempting transgression, exposing the wound in society, even if this project is bound to fail (see section 4.9, above). The obsessive failing could also be seen as a pessimistic trait in that it hints that there can be no satisfaction at the end of the performance, no consumption of an aesthetic product that will linger in the mind afterwards. The signified is deferred each time, creating an ambiguity about the true object of the performance. This confusion is meant to elicit a more visceral response from the audience, as the rational logic of the standard form of performance breaks down and leaves behind a semantic gap.

The second performance by the string quartet, of the supposed transcriptions of shamanic music, is intended to provide a liminal coda to this lecture. This moment of transformation becomes like Attali's simulacrum of sacrifice (see section 3.1, above), the reindeer-Mozart of the opening skewered and burnt until all that is left are fragments of violently butchered musical gestures. It is the first sacrifice of the ritual, and the final act of the preparation of the audience for the ritual proper.

### 5.2.3 *Music ritual*

The two levels of the performance space become a tool for the demarcation of the contrasting forms of performance utilized in the first half, the lecture ritual, and the second half, the music ritual. The lecture ritual utilises the standard form of performance, with an active performer and a passive audience, the music ritual an alternative form, one of active participation.

The descent from upstairs to downstairs becomes like some Lacanian procession of regression from the linguistic Symbolic to the ‘frozen world’ of the specular Imaginary (Elliott 1999, 127). The masked participants become mirror images of each other, empty signifiers orbiting around the space like some nameless moons. These masks homogenize and de-individualize the participants, an artificial staging of Turner’s *communitas*, but also effect a visual transformation that alludes to the socially transformative nature of this part of the performance. They signify liminal social roles, open to potential and possibility, the ‘dismantling all fixed notions of identity’ (Wallis 2003, 234) that Taussig sees as a defining character of shamanism.

The role of the host-performer transforms to that of the shaman’s assistant, being reduced to the keeping of a steady beat, a metronome that is drowned out as soon as the participants become active in their noise-making. The role of the older man sitting on the ground beside him, sipping vodka and holding a violin is deliberately unclear. Again, the ambiguity of the situation is intended to create confusion, to frustrate the chain of signification: Is this man meant to be the shaman? He is dressed in a dinner suit, and doesn’t even attempt to play the violin. Is he a stand-in? A representation? The Western musician-as-a-shaman, the traverser of the musical spirit world? In any case, this duo hiding in the dark is for the most part ignored, as intended, and so this detritus of the standard form of performance, the forgotten performer, becomes submerged in the physical and sonic action flooding the space.

The installation of sculptural objects in the room is an attempt to set up vectors of potential; of play between inert and volatile, cold and warm, materials; of exchange between solid and liquid states; of movement between vertical, horizontal and diagonal planes. The chief concern in this arrangement is its capacity for transformation, suggested by the natural processes already in action. The use of felt and the emphasis on thermodynamic processes are strongly influenced by Beuys (see sections 3.3.1 and 3.3.2, above), as is the idea of the equivalence between sculpture and sound (Stachelhaus 1991, 138). This idea was clearly investigated in the most obvious transformation that took place during this music ritual; the metamorphosis of the objects in the room into sonic matter.

The use of melting ice was intended as a kind of summoning of Bataille's sense of sacred intimacy, exemplified in his concept of being 'like water in water' (see section 2.2, above). In my ekphrasis, the loss of this immanent intimacy is demonstrated in the solidifying of the water into ice, into separate objects no longer engaged in sacred communication through interpenetration. The melting of the ice thus becomes a homeopathic cure for the frozen social landscape, an attempt at reaching a liquid state in its social structures and relations; a community of communication (see section 2.1.2.1, above). The choice of the arctic Lappland as the supposed location of this invented ritual originates partly from my Finnish origins, providing a ground for the subsequent mythologizing, but mostly from its suitability for such a demonstration of Bataille's ideas. It becomes akin to Beuys's ekphrasis of Steiner through the agency of bees and honey (see section 3.3.3, above); a physical demonstration of the philosophical principles of the author and an attempt at a contagious healing, via metaphoric suggestiveness and metonymic contiguity, of the perceived rift in society.

The lighting and the sculptural installation in the space were intended to evoke a sense of liminality, of charged potential for transformation. Turner considered liminality to be linked to 'death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun and the moon' (Siikala 1978, 67). These in-between states are metaphorically rich in their ability to effect a change in one's consciousness or a rupture in the everyday order of the world. The constant pulse played by the host-assistant on the drum alludes to the heartbeat of the foetal sun; such repetitive rhythms being known to generate altered states of consciousness, changing the electrical activity of the brain and inducing liminal states of trance or ecstasy (Siikala 1978, 42, 333).

This music ritual was an attempt to radically transform the standard form of performance into a participatory event. The emphasis on liminality and viscosity was intended to displace the fixed social structures and relations of the standard form, embodied by the lecture ritual, and to propose an open forum for the experimentation with alternatives through the agency of a community of active co-creators. The loose mythological framework embodied in the sculptural installation was never meant to get in the way of direct communication with matter through sound-making, the attempt at forging a Bataillean sacred perspective that would momentarily destroy the everyday



one. Rather, this playful myth-making was intended to be an accessory for this communication, for this social transformation, as a means of engaging the participants and encouraging them to forge new worlds out of this given, invented one.

## 6 Conclusions

### *6.1 Evaluation of the aims and results*

The aim of this research was to explore music as a social force; nonlinguistic, visceral, embodied communication capable of engaging in a critique and transformation of the standard form of Western performance and its concomitant everyday social structures and relations. This was to be achieved through the conceptualization of music as a form of ritual practice, and the techniques of contrived misperception and misrecognition, liminality, ekphrasis, appropriation, displacing and distancing.

This evaluation is based on observations of the empirical aspects of the resulting performance, rather than an analysis of individual audience responses. I did not gather data from the participating audience, and neither did I explain to them the aims of the research. I was interested in the way the form of the performance would impact on the observable social situation, on the way the audience/participants reacted physically to the situation. The meaning of the performance was not to be found in the way the audience interpreted it semiotically, but in what kind of community it sponsored.

The technique of contrived misperception/misrecognition created a playful atmosphere from the beginning. The audience responded with laughter to elements of the lecture, communicating an understanding that the substance of this performance was not in a correct semantic reading of the material presented, but in something more social. Throughout this lecture, they fulfilled their expected ritual role assigned by the standard form of performance, sitting quietly, save for this laughter, in their seats. At the conclusion of the lecture, the audience applauded, again, as dictated by this standard form. During the second, butchered, performance by the string quartet, many in the audience continued their laughter, an unthinkable response had this been a 'serious' performance of contemporary music. Thus, this became a liminal moment where the structures of the standard form began to rupture, to break down. The audience were no

longer bound by the role of being silent, passive, docile, instead becoming co-creators of the sonic work.

In the second half, the music ritual, most audience members embraced their new role as participants. It must be stressed that most invited guests had a personal connection to me, the artist, and were thus familiar with some of my preoccupations and certainly were open to my suggestions about contributing to the resulting performance. Thus, the results of this performance were the product of a very biased test group.

This participatory ritual wrought a transformation of the tactile matter, of the spatial architecture, and the sonic atmosphere largely through the agency of destructive violence towards the objects in the space; the sacrifice of *things* for *sound*. The loudness of most sounds produced by the participants was certainly violent, as was the destruction of many of the sculptures. It is tempting to see a connection here with Bataille's notion of the destruction of the objects of the world heralding the emergence of the sacred perspective (see section 2.2, above). He notes that 'the (dualist) good is an exclusion of violence and there can be no breaking of the order of separate things, no intimacy, without violence' (Bataille 1989 (1973), 80). The intimacy created was one of an immanence of sound; whilst the participants refrained from any form of direct physical violence towards one another, the agency of noise was certainly at times painful, and could potentially have caused lasting physical damage. This also recalls Hegarty's view of noise as an non-rational form of the sacred, and Attali's view of noise as a transgression against the hegemony of *music* (see section 3.1, above); rational, docile, well-ordered music being sacrificed through irrational, violent, chaotic noise for this glimpse of the immanence of the world as sound.

But why the turn to violence? The potential for using the room as a giant instrument was naturally encouraged from the outset, but not necessarily in such a destructive manner. The tendency of participants to engage in violence when given freedom to act has been shown before by Marina Abramovic in *Rhythm O* (1974), in which audience members were allowed to manipulate the artist's body with various objects laid out before her, roughly divided between those one would imagine to generate pleasure and those that would cause pain. The performance came to an end after many violent actions

threatened to transform the artist into a real sacrifice, some participants finally holding back others intent on possibly fatal acts (Frieling 2009, 39).

As noted above (section 2.3, above), rituals are often seen as instances of codified, controlled violence, a kind of purification of the violent tendencies inherent in society. In my performance, the violence was certainly not codified (except by the choice of tools at hand) and barely controlled, though had the issue of interpersonal violence risen, the performance would have no doubt come to a premature end, like Abramovic's simulated self-sacrifice. This freedom, then, inspired a plethora of visceral, tactile experimentation with material; playful destruction that transgressed against the order in the room, against the stifling 'formality' of the lecture, against the expectations of being a member of an audience in a concert. The participants found their own roles, their own strategies, at times in synchronicity, at times completely independently.

The intention was to create a state of transgressive liminality, of creative potential, without suggesting correct responses; a ritual without ritual roles. The subject positions were always open to reinterpretation here; contingent rather pre-assigned. By providing a semblance of a worldview without explicating a well-formed myth or specified ritual actions, this ritual remained deliberately ambiguous in order to maintain a degree of openness in the reactions of the participants. The participants were thus, in a sense, 'inventing' a tradition, a set of appropriate responses to the given material.

A ritual could be seen to derive its effectiveness from a bona fide traditionalism, from the repetition of normative social structures, from the codification of behaviour (see section 2.3, above). However, in our current society, such totalising rituals tend to be equated with fascism (Taussig 1987, 443), and it certainly wasn't my intention to create an audience-identification with a heroic leader of a cult, the shaman as a charismatic master of ceremonies. Rather, the constant deferral of the 'expected' figures of the authoritative Lord Auch and the mysterious Shamaani Kuuluu, being replaced by a bumbling host and a silent bum-violinist, left a distinct emptiness at the end of that chain of signifiers, with no figurehead to lead the audience through the performance.

The 'shaman' and his 'assistant' were thus mostly ignored, and the *communitas* in the room was dispersed in Taussig's heterogenous version rather than concentrated in

Turner's homogenous one (see section 2.3, above). In fact, the homogenizing masks were quickly taken off as soon as the participants began engaging with the material, unnecessary hindrances in this Taussigian 'flashing back and forth from self to group' (see section 2.3, above). The participants began to form their own strategies, at times assembling spontaneous groups, at times going their own way. It was with this heterogeneity, this anarchy, that this performance seemed to counter the tyranny of the standard form of performance and its concomitant social structures and relations, immersing the participants in the immanent effluence of each other's noise-action, in the transformation of substance into sound.

Thus, the action became an experiment in Bataille's idea that the absence of community must be the foundation of any future community (see section 2.1.1, above). The community here was not bound together by a common set of responses to the ritual symbolism, which, after all, was quite empty of meaning, suggestive and open rather than fixed and closed. It was created under pretense, through the playful technique of contrived misrecognition; the absence of myth as the basis for any future myth. The attempt was not to inspire belief in a particular myth, or worldview, but to use an alternative to our everyday perspective as a distorting mirror that creates displacement and distance and thus enables one to see potential for other possibilities of being, of social roles, not encouraged by this everyday perspective.

This performance then functioned like Anthony Elliott's ideal social movements (Elliott 1999, 220); presenting an alternative to the everyday social structures and relations, fracturing them and providing alternative imaginary forms as a method of transformative social therapy. Elliott sees the Lacanian Imaginary as constitutive and creative to this organization of the 'economy of the self' (Elliott 1999, 243), the relationship between the individual and the community. It is here that some of the homogenizing everyday social structures can be broken down, reorganized and reincorporated into a new model, one that privileges neither the narcissistic individual nor the de-individuated, bureaucratic 'public', but instead creates new pathways of mediation between the two flickering, illusory poles; the self and the other. And for Nietzsche, it is music that is specifically privileged in this task, for its 'ability to flow between Dionysiac transport from selfhood and Apollonian will-to-representation, excluding any moment of transcendental not-willing' (Von Hendy 2002, 73).

The ambiguity, heterogeneity, ambivalence and anti-individualism evident in the intended goals of this performance are all hallmarks of a postmodern sensibility (Elliott 1999, xviii). This performance was conceived on the one hand as a negative critique of the standard form of Western performance that privileges Cartesian dualism and its corollaries, and on the other, as a positive attempt at mediating the aporia between the self and the other in the postmodern narcissistic worldview (see section 2.1.1, above). The active form of performance embodied in this performance, which demands participation and physical engagement, together with the Bataillean thesis of the social self, which is premised on the individual as an open being, serve as one possible model of transformation of these social structures and relations, of the materials of human existence. And there certainly was an observable transformation in the social structures and relations between the lecture ritual and the music ritual, between the forms of active performer-passive audience of the former and the heterogenous active community of participants of the latter. This speaks of the potential of the very form of the performance to sponsor different kinds of community, different kinds of social structures, as well as the willingness of the participants to experiment with this potential.

The applause at the end of the music ritual was perhaps indicative of the participants still operating to some extent within the ritual roles dictated by the standard form of performance. After all, a truly participatory ritual has no target towards which such applause could be directed; no performer, other than the entire participating community, to congratulate. In a way, the applause became a post-liminal moment; a reincorporation of the participants' social roles to the everyday structures. And as stated previously (see section 4.9, above), I did not imagine that any transformation that took place could have a lasting effect; I was fully conscious of the limits of an attempt at challenging the everyday perspective. And perhaps this unwanted applause was a fitting end, a punctuation mark that clearly marked the end of the experiment; the safe return of the normative everyday dualism after a brief sojourn through other possible social landscapes.

The ideas explored in this research, though not original in themselves, crystallise a concern I have for the arts, that of being a conduit for social critique and experimentation. Performance is privileged in presenting a practical testing ground for

such ideas, how they translate from the word to the act. The argument is waged in real-time, in the viscosity and physicality of the participants' social interaction, rather than in the archaeological sifting of ossified words in ancient tomes. As Jeff Kelley comments on the work of Allan Kaprow:

The price of giving experience back to art was that art became a gerund—it could be experienced only fleetingly, as a form of doing. Once the doing stopped, it became an artifact of memory, history, theory, and gossip. It threw itself away. Throwaway actions, throwaway myths, throwaway conventions, throwaway professions, throwaway identities, throwaway art—all beg the question of what remains for keeping (Kelley 2004,224).

My answer to this is that what remains for keeping is a demand for more action, more gerunds transforming the inert mass of the audience into the ecstatic liquid of the participant. It is in the ruptures of this shift that music can appear as a *ritual of transformation*, as an alternative perspective, as an ongoing questioning of the everyday social structures and relations.

## 6.2 *Suggestions for further research*

Further research would be useful in extending the domain of the participants beyond my friends and colleagues, to explore whether these ideas have a wider currency; whether these social transformations can be effected beyond this narrow circle of willing and sympathetic associates. Without this willingness, there could be no transformation, no experimentation of the social structures and relations, unless one believed that the form of performance is imbued with a magic substance that by itself could effect such a transformation. It would also be informative to engage the same group of participants in a series of performances rather than one isolated event, to see how this participant community develops through time.

Another interesting extension of this project would be to explore a more nuanced spectrum of performance forms, rather than the exaggerated opposition between my standard form and the participatory alternative.<sup>19</sup> This would enable a more attenuated evaluation of the potential of different forms of performance to sponsor different kinds

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<sup>19</sup> For instance, including a number of 'planted' performers amongst the audience-participants, creating a combination of preconceived and spontaneous action, or involving the participants in the planning of the performance itself.

of community, and would do away with the dualism that is still implicit in my supposedly antithetical forms. Although I have emphasized the flux between these forms in my performance, and, following Bataille (see section 2.1.2.1, above), the flux in the resulting social structures of self and community, I feel there is still something caricatural in this formulation, as there is in the private mythology I have created. Though the friction caused by such amplification of the supposed characteristics of these performance forms generates a kind of creative energy suitable for the vivification of a work of performance art, being fertile ground for metaphors of movement and mediation, these caricatures may in the final analysis be less productive for the germination of instances of genuine social transformation, of a lasting questioning of the everyday worldview.

This research has also proposed the question of whether the concept of ritual, and ritual form, is the most useful one in the advancement of music performance as a vehicle for a Bataillean sacred community of communication. Bataille himself suggests the *festival* as a gateway to this community (see section 2.2, above). The festival speaks of a less structured event than ritual, and the festive community is perhaps a truer representation of his ideal anarchic, heterogenous social structures than the ritual community; this latter being, after all, primarily one of confirmation of status and hierarchy, these social structures being solidified once more after the liminal stage of ambiguity is resolved. Though this research was concerned with the demonstration of the standard form of performance as well as an alternative to it, it may be useful to investigate forms of performance outside such ritual considerations that may offer more consistent critiques of, and alternatives to, the everyday social structures. The view of music as a ritual has been useful as a way to displace the argument from content to context, but it may be that an alternative view of music performance as a *festival of sound* will ultimately be a more successful perspective in the conjuring of new social worlds, of new communities of communication. This formulation would then shift the concepts from music to sound, from ritual to festival, from the hierarchical and normative to the anarchical and transgressive. This could become another strategy for transvaluing the dualism that is still evident in my research, for stepping beyond the very conceptualization of the opposites that are at its base. The festival of sound could be regarded as a truly open, contingent form that allows for a community in real flux, without binding the participants to a prescribed time and place, to a form of performance that dictates their



possible responses. As a limit state, this concept could then be viewed as a sonic correlate of Beuys's 'society as sculpture' and a recalling of his idea of the equivalence of sculpture and sound (see section 5.2.3, above). The acknowledgement of the creative potential in all human sound-making would then characterize society as precisely this festival of sound; a state of immanence that would constantly remind its members of the sacred perspective, of the fluid intimacy of sonic communication resulting in a Bataillean 'fusion of human life' (see section 2.2, above).

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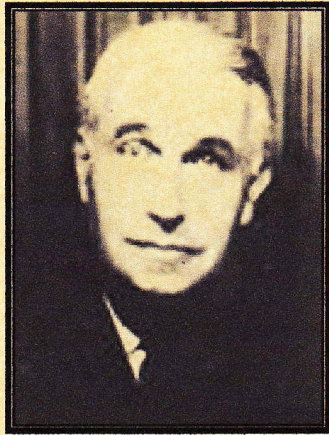
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## **Appendix 1**

Invitation to *Shifting sounds: music as a ritual of transformation*





**WITH US FOR THE FIRST TIME IN AUSTRALIA!**

After a brilliant and overwhelmingly successful tour

of

The British Isles and Continental Europe

**LORD AUCH**

WILL GIVE HIS TALK

**“SHIFTING SOUNDS: MUSIC AS A RITUAL OF TRANSFORMATION”**

FOLLOWED BY A PERFORMANCE OF HIS ARRANGEMENTS FOR STRING QUARTET OF

FINNISH SHAMANIC MUSIC

AND

**“AN AUTHENTIC FINNISH SHAMANIC MUSIC RITUAL”**

BY RENOWNED MASTER SHAMAN

**SHAMAANI KUULUU**



— AT —

**45 DOWNSTAIRS**

45 Flinders Lane, Melbourne, Australia

**FRIDAY JANUARY 15th 2010**

Commencing 7.30 p.m. sharp. Doors open 7.00.

**FREE ENTRY!**

Refreshments will be available throughout the evening.

PRESENTED BY  
MR. ERKKI VELTHEIM  
Candidate for Master of Arts  
Victoria University



## **Appendix 2**

*An account of a Finno-Ugric music ritual by Lord Auch*

material and spiritual economy of the region. In summer, plagues of mosquitoes that breed in the many swamps molest both the reindeer and its human guardian, and in winter, a thick blanket of snow and ice covers every visible surface to the horizon, with the temperature falling as low as -50°C. For some seven weeks of the year the sun does not rise above the horizon, and a stupor of darkness takes over one's soul. Hallucinations and other nervous conditions become common amongst the population, resulting in what is commonly known as *talavhulluus*, 'winter madness', by the locals. The only relief in this gloom comes from a faint twilight during the middle hours of the day and the spectacular *aurora borealis* on particularly cold nights. Most birds have fled the bitter cold to the south, bears and reptiles have retired into hibernation, and the only evidence of life continuing is the infrequent drumming of the woodpecker, or the lonely, raspy call of the crow. Imagine, then, the elated hysteria that greets the very first sunrise of the year, a most vital event that is the setting for the yearly ritual of *Auringonsynti*, 'the Sun's birth'. It is this significant calendrical rite that I will explicate through this article, and hope that it will inspire an appreciation and respect in the reader of the complex and nuanced manner in which ritual, and specifically *music ritual*, acts as a sacred bond between the inhabitants of this cruel, god-forsaken landscape.

Shamaani Kuuluu, the grand old spiritual master of this place, is a repository of traditional knowledge passed down from his father's father, as well as from various tutelary spirits during his initiation and séances. He is also the principal vehicle of communication between his community and the spirit world, and as such has the task of ensuring that life is organized in accordance with the laws of the surrounding nature. His name, *Kuuluu*, has various translations, one of them being the modal verb 'should', a reference to behaviour that is deemed correct or appropriate to the circumstances. Another translation is a present passive tense of the verb 'to hear'. However, perhaps the most

## An Account of a Finno-Ugric Music Ritual

By Lord Auch

I had the good fortune of making an extensive study of the Finno-Ugric peoples of Lapland, Karelia and the Komi Peninsula between the years of 1976 and 1989. During this time I formed a close bond with a small community that inhabits the area around the borders of Norway, Russia (then Soviet Union) and Finland. Access to this area was especially difficult during the Cold War years, but I managed frequent visits thanks to the co-operation of anthropologists from each of these countries, united in their wish to preserve for posterity the unique shamanic practices of the inhabitants of this area. After the fall of Soviet Union, I ceased my visits due in part to personal reasons, in part to the political instability of, especially, the new Russia, which made it difficult to access this sensitive area, being a combined land border between a NATO, a Warsaw Pact, and a politically neutral country. I resumed my visits in 1999, hearing that my friend, fellow spirit-medium and key cultural informant Shamaani Kuuluu, the chief shaman of this community, was gravely ill. Upon my return to his village, Shamaani Kuuluu performed many séances and rites to bring himself back to good health, and I have visited his tribe at least once a year since this welcome reunion.

The climate and environment of this part of the world is especially harsh, being some 360km north of the Arctic Circle. The vegetation consists mainly of trees, such as spruce and pine, and moss, the staple diet of the reindeer, the cornerstone of the



obvious and symbolically significant translation of *Kuuluu* is 'Moon Bone', an acknowledgement of my friend's affinity with our satellite, and a reference to an old cosmogenic legend that posits the Earth as the child of the Sun and the Moon. In this fable, the masculine Sun united with the feminine Moon during an eclipse and produced a giant egg out of which the Earth was born. Alas, the Moon's tryst with the fiery Sun burned off her skin and flesh, and she remains a pale skeletal figure in the sky. Though reduced to mere bone, the Moon is both dead and alive, reincarnating each month through the lunar cycle and occasionally bursting into a vivid red 'blood moon'. The Sun is considered the omniscient eye in the sky and, conversely, the Moon is thought of as the all-hearing ear, the sense faculty that becomes the primary one in the long night of the northern winter. Hence, Shamaani Kuuluu's name refers both to the feminine, regenerative alive-dead Moon, as well as to the Moon's attribute of hearing, and it is indeed sound that is regarded by the shaman as the main conduit between the material and the spirit worlds. Though physically a man, Shamaani Kuuluu's nominal association with the female Moon pronounces him spiritually hermaphroditic, implying an ability to assume roles beyond his physical limitations and hence fulfil tasks a mere man could not undertake.

Kuuluu's tribe considers the Universe to be made of three worlds, interrelated by structural parallelisms. Each of these worlds has 'embodied' inhabitants, as well as 'spirit' inhabitants. Though this division between matter and spirit is clearly made, there is no implication of a hierarchy of existence: Matter is not a baser form transcended by the spirit, as in some other metaphysics. Rather, their relationship is more akin to that of a fundamental tone to its upper partials, mutually embedded in the immanence of the harmony of the spheres. The Upper World, Sky, or Heaven, is inhabited by the gods, being the Sun, the Moon and the five planets visible to the naked eye: Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. The rest of the stars are thought of as the

ethereal spirit-bodies of the sky. The Middle World is inhabited by humans, animals, plants and minerals, all of who possess spirit counterparts, normally invisible to all but the shaman during states of trance or ecstasy. This worldview is universally animistic: Humans are seen as no different to other things in their capacity for spiritual life. The Lower World is the world of the dead, both their material remains as well as their disembodied spirits.

Each world has a river flowing through it: The Upper World has the Milky Way, thought to be composed of the sperm of the Sun. The Earth has its Great River, originating from the Spring of Rebirth in the south, and flowing downstream to the frozen Sea of the Dead, the Northern Sea. North is called *Pohjola*, the Netherworld, and the resemblance to Dante's frozen bottom of Hell is striking in this image. The Great River is a metaphor for time and the course of life, the span of life being measured by the flow of the river from its origin to its fateful mouth. In the Lower World, we find the subterranean River of Blood, flowing in the opposite direction to the Middle World's Great River, from north to south. This river, with its reference to menstrual blood and allusion to the 'blood moon', is thought to carry the to-be-reincarnated souls of the dead back to the Spring of Rebirth, where they will yet again begin the journey downstream. Death begets life and vice versa in this homeostatic cycle of the earth's circulatory system.

The three worlds of the cosmos are joined by a World Pillar, or the World Tree, a giant pine whose roots spread through the underworld and whose branches caress the heavens. This tree grows at the junction of the Spring of Rebirth and the mouths of the subterranean River of Blood and the Milky Way. It is both the Earth's umbilical cord and its phallus, as well as a ladder for the shaman to traverse the different worlds. The Earth is thus hermaphroditic, combining within itself both the feminine and masculine reproductive functions and, as a biological system, autogamous, self-reproducing itself being by being, part by part.



This cosmological scheme gives the impression of being anthropomorphic, a mythology being born out of an observation of the human life cycle, which is then extrapolated to the surrounding environment. However, Shamaani Kuuluu's people would beg to disagree with such an interpretation, and could not conceive of a 'human' as an abstract form in contradistinction to the 'world'. Any such claim of an outward-directed ontology would simply be incomprehensible to these people, who see themselves as a dynamic part of a larger organic system of Being, whose selfsame forms are repeated at the micro- and macrocosmic levels. Similarly, they would not distinguish between a 'natural' and a 'supernatural' world; all Being, to them, is perfectly natural, spirits being just as real as the flesh of their own bodies.

The calendrical rite discussed here is known as *Auringonsynti*, 'the Sun's birth', coinciding with the first sunrise of the year after 48 days of darkness. Each year towards the end of winter, the Sun first appears on the south-eastern horizon, the direction of the Spring of Rebirth, and gradually grows stronger through spring and summer until it stays above the horizon continuously for 48 days. In autumn, it begins to wither away until once again disappearing completely beyond the horizon. It is thought that the Sun dies and is reborn each year, and that it is in the womb of the Earth that it gestates through the middle of winter. Whilst the Earth is the child of the Sun and the Moon, it is thus also the regenerative parent of the yearly reincarnations of the Sun. This birthing ritual is intended to ensure the safe passage of the newborn Sun from the Earth's birth canal into the sky, so that it can in turn rejuvenate its parent-child with light and warmth and begin yet another round in this play of eternal return.

For the ritual, Shamaani Kuuluu's people travel to the site of a crater left by a meteorite in a bygone age. According to legend, the meteorite's fall coincided with the ultimate sunset of the year, and it was thought that this round rock, roughly the size of an infant's head, was indeed the actual corpse of the Sun, falling

from the heavens into its child's embrace. The rock itself has passed through the generations from one shaman to the next, and it is seen as the responsibility of this community to return each year to this site and cradle the Sun back to life.

The ritual takes place in the shaman's tent, which is configured as a diagrammatic representation of the tripartite universe. In the middle of the tent stands a vessel containing the blood of a sacrificed female reindeer, representing the subterranean River of Blood. Submerged is the meteorite rock, representing the foetal Sun in the womb of the Earth. In another container is heaped ice and snow, representing the frozen Sea of the Dead. A wooden central pillar, smeared with the sacrificed reindeer's blood, stands for the World Tree. At the top of this pillar hangs a 'sun ring', made of brass, which is used to catch the Sun's rays. To one side is placed a sled loaded with the sacrificed reindeer's skin, a gift to the Earth for bearing a new Sun for its inhabitants. A burial mound of rocks for the reindeer's bones is placed near the entrance. In one corner of the tent, a fire burns, slowly melting the ice and snow. All these elements add up to the sympathetic magic effect of the ritual, metaphorically and metonymically designed to bring out the desired effect in the greater cosmos.

The shaman's role in this ritual is to consult his tutelary spirits and travel down the world pillar to the conjunction of the River of Blood and the Great River of Life and ensure that nothing prevents the sun's safe journey up to the sky. Shamaani Kuuluu's tutelary spirits include the reindeer, the black woodpecker and the beaver. He wears the sacrificed female reindeer's antlers as a headpiece, which could be considered a form of cross-dressing, further emphasizing his hermaphroditic role-playing. Whilst male reindeer have antlers in summer, females grow them in winter, and this is seen to reflect the roles of the male Sun and the female Moon as guardians of the respective seasons. The reindeer is the sacred animal of all nomadic herding Finno-Ugric tribes, being



their most important source of food and clothing. Furthermore, the inability of humans to fully domesticate this animal and their consequent dependence on its annual migratory habits is seen as proof of its connection to the world of spirits. In fact, it is only a shaman that can tame the reindeer's spirit, and henceforth use this spirit-body as a vehicle for travel across the different worlds.

The black woodpecker, one of the few birds that does not escape the northern winter to warmer lands, is thought to be able to communicate with the spirits of both the Upper and the Lower Worlds by drumming on the trunks of trees. It is often observed pecking, then listening intently, then pecking again, as if conversing over a telegraph line. All birds are also thought to be able to travel to the Upper World through flight, and in the language of this region the Milky Way is in fact known as *Linnunrata*, 'Bird's Way'. The woodpecker is also thought to be significant for its complete reliance on the tree, the World Pillar, for its survival, from carving out its nest into the trunk to feeding on the insects inhabiting it. The beaver is similarly reliant on wood, feeding on it and building its lodges from it, as well as engineering wooden dams to control water level around its homestead. This ability to raise and lower water levels combined with its nocturnal habits demonstrate the beaver's kinship with the moon. Being expert divers, beavers are also thought to be able to traverse the subterranean blood river and so access the Lower World, the land of the dead.

These animals, the reindeer, the woodpecker and the beaver, and their spirit doubles thus provide the shaman the means of communication and travel to the different worlds and their spirits. Shamaani Kuuluu would consider himself to be transformed to each of these spirit-bodies for different tasks; the reindeer for operations where strength is required, the woodpecker for gathering information from the spirits and travel to the Upper World, and the beaver for travel to the Lower World. Major rituals such as the Sun's birth require the use of all three animal spirits

and their combined skills, as they involve many repeated journeys to the different levels of the Universe and extensive negotiating and at times battling with various benevolent and malicious spirits.

The role of music in this ritual is paramount. It is through sound itself that the shaman and other participants access the channel of communication with the spirit world and reach a state of ecstasy. Ecstasy, from the Greek *ekstasis*, 'standing outside oneself', is a defining characteristic of all shamanic rituals, being a state of consciousness during which the spirit of the shaman is thought to leave his body to travel through the different worlds with the help of his tutelary spirits. Ecstasy is aided with the use of continuous drumming and the consumption of poisonous fly agaric mushrooms, alcohol, and the bark of alder. All participants in the ritual play percussion instruments such as drums, stones and clapsticks, and sometimes primitive flutes and stringed instruments, and intermittently emit various vocal sounds, either involuntarily or in encouragement to the shaman. Shamaani Kuuluu is himself mute and, unusually for a Finno-Ugric shaman, uses a violin rather than singing to communicate with the spirit world. This violin was given to his grandfather's grandfather as a gift by missionaries, who, alas, failed to convert these unrepentant pagans. According to the old women in his tribe, Kuuluu was talkative as a child, but lost his power of speech after his grandfather presented the violin to him during his shamanic initiatory rites. As a result, he soon developed an astonishing ability for ventriloquism and imitation of animal sounds on this instrument, but has otherwise spent the rest of his life in complete silence.

Music in this culture is seen not as an aesthetic product, but as an effective way to access a pre-linguistic, undifferentiated means of communication between all the beings of the Universe. Hence, music is not regarded as the opposite of noise. Rather, all sounds, audible to human ears and otherwise, contribute to this harmonic

immanence, including the movement of the heavenly bodies, the radiance of light, and the vibration of water. Even inert objects such as stones are thought to have a frequency that is audible in ecstatic states. It is music, then, that acts as a ritual tool to allow the participants to partake in this universe of sound and transport the shaman over to the spirit world.

At the beginning of the ritual, Shamaani Kuuluu, sitting on the ground at one end of the tent, takes several sips of vodka and begins to yawn repeatedly, 'drinking in' the spirit. His assistant provides a steady beat on a one-sided handheld drum, and soon the shaman is in a trance and able to communicate with the spirits. He begins to imitate the sounds of his animal tutelary spirits on his violin, and gradually becomes assimilated with these animals. Henceforth, it is considered that the animal-spirit is communicating directly through the shaman, and any subsequent actions and sounds he emits are not the product of his own volition. The reindeer, the woodpecker and the beaver each give repeated accounts of the shaman's progress in his task, interspersed with the sounds of the various elements he must travel through on his journeys between the Lower and the Upper Worlds.

All participants become visibly excited during the ritual. Often the intensity of the experience is so strong that the participants also reach a state of ecstasy and literally 'forget' themselves, imitating the actions and sounds of animals and the elements, like members of some Dionysian Greek chorus. This 'becoming' an animal demonstrates an awareness of the intrinsic link between humans and other beings, of the impossibility of a limit between the human and the world. There is an intimate understanding of the exchange between humans and animals, and the fundamental unity of all of nature. The shaman is a mediator of this exchange economy, but the responsibility for its maintenance lies with the entire population. The success of this ritual is seen as a communal duty, rather than an opportunity for the shaman to demonstrate his

personal prowess. Therefore, it is instrumental in generating the feeling of a sacred bond, of an indivisible cohesion, between all members of the community and their surrounding environment. The bestial role-playing also emphasises the transformational character of the ritual, the sacrifice of the individual ego being a prerequisite for the collective effort to effect a real change in the Universe.

The ritual has a well-defined end in the first rays of the Sun appearing above the horizon, proof of a successful delivery by the shaman and the entire tribe. At this point, Shamaani Kuuluu's assistant gets up and climbs the tent's central pillar to repeatedly strike the sun ring hanging from the ceiling, welcoming the return of light to their land. The exhausted participants celebrate by feasting on the sacrificed reindeer's meat and drinking vodka. There are yet more rites to be enacted and sacrifices to be made before the Sun reaches its full strength at the summer solstice, but for now, this community has fulfilled its midwiferial obligations and ensured that the yearly cycle of life continues, both above and below.