The embodied space: designing a blest moment

Songs Of Ourselves – A Meditation on Reconciliation

'When all seems strange and yet familiar, when I am possessed by the wonder of living, this is a feeling that can come to any man at any time… At this timeless moment in time philosopher and shoemaker, 'master' and 'slave', priest and layman are reconciled and indistinguishable.'

Eugene Ionesco (1964) *Notes and Counternotes* John Calder, London p.29

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Submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Theatre Design
December 2007

Printed on archival paper

Statement of Originality

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

Signature of Candidate:

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Acknowledgements

As with all projects of this nature there are many people who have given of support, expertise, skills and time to make *Song of Ourselves* and this dissertation come into being.

First of all, I would like to acknowledge the assistance, guidance and generosity of Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy and Thanakoupie and all of the Indigenous performers and artists who gave so whole-heartedly of their talents, trust and cultural knowledge.

Secondly, I would like to heartily thank my supervisors, Associate Professor Richard Roberts and Michelle Evans, Head of the Wilin Centre for Indigenous Arts and Cultural Development. I am grateful for their insight, support and intelligent critique and conversation, which has assisted enormously in the creation of this work. I would also like to mention the significant contribution of my former supervisor Trina Parker, who encouraged and provoked in equal measure with great care, humour and enthusiasm.

Thirdly, I would like to acknowledge the patience, faith and welding skills of my work colleague and partner Bernard Nagle for his enduring support and contribution.

My gratitude also goes to Cynthia Troup and Aven Hodgess who have motivated, edited and inspired. Here I would also like to acknowledge the work and continuing inspiration of my former mentor and friend Neil Cameron and his partner Faridah, with whom I have been through many of art's — and life's — rituals.

Last, but not at all least, I would like to acknowledge and give my thanks to the inspiring, talented and enduringly generous cast and crew of *Song of Ourselves*, without whom this event would not have been possible.

Margie Mackay
December 2007

1.0 Introduction

'Read myths in the present tense: Eternity is now.' Joseph Campbell

Figure 1. The Bowl Holders: Song Of Ourselves

Contemporary dramatic arts practises in most cultures around the globe have arguably derived from the ancient rituals and rites of past millennia. Performed in public gatherings to acknowledge the profound powers of the cosmos, these archaic rites celebrated and acknowledged the mysteries of life, death and creation. Today, in an increasingly secular Australian society, we have fewer and fewer of these grand rituals based on spiritual themes with which our lives are measured and enriched, and yet the opportunity exists for modern cultural practitioners to harness the potency of such inherently performative modes.

Undeniably, ritual and ritualised forms are ubiquitous. We compulsively ritualise. Every culture throughout the ages and across the breadth of the globe has developed its own rituals and ceremonies. It is a mode that we also observe occurring outside of our human selves, uniting us with the animal kingdom, as we use it to describe particular animal behaviours. We recognise ritual behaviours in other cultures and even other species even when we do not have a full grasp of language and meaning. Thus it appears to be a mode we instinctively seem to 'know'.

According to performance theorist Richard Schechner, ritual acts on us to:

> '…short circuit thinking, providing ready-made answers to deal with crisis. Individual and collective anxieties are relieved by rituals whose qualities of repetition, rhythmicity,

> exaggeration, condensation and simplification stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins into the bloodstream… yielding a relief from pain, a surfeit of pleasure.'[1]

Ritual is a mode of behaviour that each of us has affected and can fall into at times completely unawares. Perhaps in order to keep us healthy and functional, ritual is a necessity. Ritual is inherently performative and in order for it to work we need to engage with it bodily, emotionally and spiritually. It could be that this familiarity (if not necessity) is what makes ritual such a rich dramatic agent and which, when married with issues of import to us personally and as a society, has deeply transformative possibilities.

Ritual has a powerful role as both a prosaic and a poetic communication device, from the cleansing morning shower to the binding exchange of vows. We make reference to the vital awakening morning coffee ritual and yet use the same genre to describe the solemnity of a funeral. Given that this classification can describe such seemingly polar functions and behaviours, one could conclude that ritual connotes a range of activities that we mark as important if not essential to the structure of our lives. In a grand over view of ritual, Mircea Eliade suggests that in ritualising our own lives we mythologise them and colour them in allusion to the epic experience.[2] We extend our imagination beyond our individual lives to embrace the continuum of archetypal expressions of life. Ritual gives us context, continuity and connection.

With an awareness of the rich potential that ritual form offers the designer, *Song of Ourselves* was the culmination of my research into an exploration of the role and relationship of audience and space in the design of a new ritual.

Figure 2. The 7 Pillars - Woodford Closing Ceremony 2001/02
Neil Cameron Productions

[1] Schechner, R. (1995). The Future of Ritual : Writings on Culture and Performance. London ; New York, Routledge. p. 233.

[2] Eliade, M. (1974). The Myth of the Eternal Return, or Cosmos and History. New York, Princeton University Press. pp. 17 – 21.

1.1 Ritual design and reflexive experience

I celebrate myself, and sing myself,
And what I assume you shall assume
For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you.

Walt Whitman *Song of Myself*[3]

Figure 3. Skeleton Woman: The Wheel of Life, Maleny Folk Festival Closing Ceremony 1996
Neil Cameron Productions

My research and this commentary upon it examine the elements in the design of a piece of ritual performance and the integration of the audience, embedded as a part of that design. In creating a ritual that was a meditation on reconciliation, my aim was to trigger in both audience and participant the deep need, I feel that we each harbour for balance and bringing into harmony in our lives.

It is my intention in this paper to examine how elements of the design impacted on the reflexive experience of the audience and how a subtle transformation might have occurred to create a shift within the locus of the self, as the audience, at times perhaps unwittingly, entered into the process of becoming participants in the ritual and were embedded into its design. [4] As the audience shifted into deeper levels of participation, their emotional, sensory, psychological as well as intellectual

[3] Whitman, W. (2001). *Song of Myself*. Mineola, New York: Dover Publications Inc. p. 1.

[4] Reflexive: implying that the action is reflected upon the doer (Oxford Writers Dictionary – OUP 1990)

Reflexive: 1.Capable of bending or turning back 2. Of mental operations: turned or directed back upon the mind itself. (The Shorter Oxford Dictionary 3rd edition Guild Publishing London 1986)

Reflexive: 'arousing consciousness of ourselves as we see ourselves' (Turner 1982 :75)

worlds were increasingly engaged. It was my hope to eventually instil a collective spiritual hope or yearning in the audience, in this instance a desire for reconciliation between white and black Australia. This commentary attempts to plot and map the design process and choices made to this end.

Song of Ourselves was a consciously referential title for this event. The name was chosen partly as homage to Walt Whitman's *Song of Myself* (an elegant and emotional celebration of self and nature and a meditative questioning of one's place in eternity) and partly because of the need I feel we have to 'sing up' new and shared ways of being in this country. [5] If we are to go forward together new songs are needed expressing a firm and honest appraisal of ourselves, where we are now, and with aspirations of how we would like things to be. This notion of 'singing up business' is arguably the bedrock of Aboriginal ontology and will be more deeply discussed later in this discussion.

When creating a ceremony or ritual, particularly in which one professes to integrate the audience at such a level and to move them physically, emotionally and spiritually, it is vital for the designer to have a deep comprehension and personal commitment towards the focus of the event. A felt and committed genesis when creating such an exaggerated and patterned performance mode as ritual will dispel the very real risk of creating a tokenistic result. Keeping firm to the one central idea – the heart of the matter- assists the designer in avoiding superfluous, extraneous (and thus confusing) symbolic images and gestures.

I chose the theme of reconciliation for many reasons. Firstly, creating a ritual or ceremony without a focus or objective in mind is (to my mind) a pointless endeavour and certainly one, which by virtue of its lack of focus, would struggle to engage the audiences' emotions. I needed to have an authentic 'why' as the basis of the event and one that I could wholeheartedly and sincerely delve into. This was a notion that I was to interrogate more fully as part of my praxis. Secondly, and equally importantly, reconciliation is an issue in common public debate which I believe to be of import to the spiritual, symbolic and practical future of this Country.[6] The disparity and dislocation between White Australia and Black is an enduring source of shame and sadness to me. Statistics of poor Indigenous health, infant morbidity, poverty and illiteracy are a national disgrace.

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[5] This term, to 'sing up' something, is often used by Aboriginal people perhaps in an attempt to express in English language the generative forces at work in the world in. It also has resonance in the 'songlines' in Indigenous culture which are arguably sung to bring forth generative equilibrium and to concurrently describe or 'sing into being' routes of travel, replete with information necessary to navigate that landscape. Songlines could thus be described as vocal/ aural ontological mappings of landscape, flora and fauna. I find it useful to describe generative forces in *Song of Ourselves* as being 'sung up' as this holistic attention or gaze I saw as vital to the piece's success and also mirrors the sense of attendance necessary when creating work of depth.

[6] These terms are consciously used in reference to Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard's coinage of the term 'Practical Reconciliation'. This term was used to describe his government's approach to Indigenous welfare and served to stress an unflinchingly dismissive attitude towards the need for symbolic or spiritual healing as well.

The event I finally created, I would describe as a modern secular ceremony or 'new ritual' drawing upon a wide mode of performance making which when conceived in this mode is often categorised as ritual theatre.[7] For my purposes I find these terms inter-changeable. Rituals are frequently theatrical in execution as they are convened in an active mode which necessitates performance. Theatre can be seen as inherently ritualistic as there are forms and conventions which are repeated and seen as vitally important to its existence and enactment. Arguably, and certainly contestably, Western theatre is said to owe its very existence to Ancient Dionysian rites.[8]

[7] Appendix One: event summary

[8] Grimes, R. L. (2006). Rite Out of Place : Ritual, Media, and the Arts. Oxford ; New York, Oxford University Press. p. 11.

1.2 Indoors and intimacy

'…every idiom wears out in the end; a lively tradition hardens into traditionalism, it becomes set in its form and is 'imitated'; in its turn it too must be rediscovered…An extension of the frontiers of known reality depends upon a rediscovery of method and a rejuvenation of idiom.' E. Ionesco *Notes and Counter-notes*

Figure 4. Audience and the Lantern Procession
Neil Cameron Productions

My work over the past sixteen years has centred around large scale, outdoor, ritual theatre events based on mythologically inspired themes of transformation, transcendence, and the celebration of life. Because of their universality, these themes when applied to artistic works, contributed to a sense of communion with those who witnessed the event and those who 'performed' in it.

This work was created by our company *Neil Cameron Productions* (NCP) at Festivals and in communities throughout Australia. I was assistant director of the company and co-artistic director during the last years of the company's history. During my thirteen years with NCP I trained in every aspect of outdoor ritual with this company, from lantern making to production management, large-scale imagery and pyrotechnic design to choreography and rigging**.** We worked on an epic scale creating work designed to unify communities (if only for one beauteous moment), and we consulted with and created that work with the permission of indigenous elders of those specific countries. These ritual events often involved hundreds of performers and audiences of many thousands, and always culminated in the burning of a very large bonfire. The fire warmed the faces of the audience and this was always the liminal highlight – the moment of letting go of the old business, often literally of the old year – and of embracing the future and dancing in celebration and communion.

On commencing my studies, I found that I wanted to create something more refined and delicate than possible in the epic scale. Instead of leading a group of performers through a cathartic 'fire event', I wanted to lead the audience, as participant, through an experience of depth and meaning for them. I also felt compelled to examine the possibility of keeping the 'ritual energy' sustained, working within the confines of most theatre making, by making the work spread over a season of several performances rather than being bottled up for one climactic event.

An important aspect of contemporary relevance of this work lies in my belief that human beings yearn for expressions and experiences of the transcendent. It is why Australians congregate for the celebration of sporting festivals - with all their ingrained rituals of dress codes and etiquette and fleeting moments of tribal *communitas*. We quietly crave to be reminded and included in the cyclical patterns of life, the profundity of existence and the infinite possibilities of our universe. One could see the cyclical battle of the winter gods of footy or the summer deities of cricket playing out their ritualised performances on the hallowed ground of the Melbourne Cricket Ground as the closest thing that our contemporary culture manages in approximating a communal recognition of seasonal rhythms.

Australian culture is in need of works of art that are capable of elevating the audience from passive viewer to participant and witness by engaging them in an experience that enlivens a sense of awe in their own being, each other and habitat. We have need of this mode of attendance and engagement for what it allows our psyches, and for how it feeds our spirits. I will unashamedly reference 'spirit' and 'sacred' throughout this text, defining it simply with Ronald Grimes' words: 'sacred is the name we give to the deepest forms of receptivity in our experience.'[9]

In Australia our connection to place and land is coloured by generations of colonial and environmental degradation and tempered by a fear of the unknown. Yet to thrive and survive a shift in awareness and understanding is vital, not just for ourselves but also for the land. Indigenous knowledge of and relationship with land and place has much to teach whitefellas about how to be here in this country. [10] For their survival, it is clear that the Indigenous community is in desperate need of a radical shift in mainstream values. Simply put, I believe both communities need a deeper connection and understanding of each other; a recognition of the past and a vision of possible futures which will enable us to know and feel that we are united in multiple expressions and experiences of our Australian identities.

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[9] Grimes, R. L. (1982). Beginnings in Ritual Studies. Washington, D.C., University Press of America. P. 63.

[10] The terms whitefella and blackfella are widely used throughout Australia by both Indigenous and non Indigenous people alike. The gentle poetic lilt of tumbling syllables in egalitarian tones tacitly expresses things as they are - in black and white.

Whilst 'ritual objects' have been extensively researched in the realms of anthropology, archaeology and theology, I perceive a gap in research regarding the role of design both visually and dramatically in ritual theatre. By connecting with the appropriate cultural signifiers and semiotics and by refining my inquiry into ritual theatre forms and contemporary practice, I hoped to create work that is capable of such qualities and could be a significant contribution to ritual theatre design in Australia.

1.3 The Thieving Gypsy – a methodology

'Nomads never say Goodbye' Anonymous.

1.3.1 Nomads and Bricoleurs

In creating *Song of Ourselves*, I consciously kept what could be described as an open and 'nomadic' approach whilst mapping my way towards the completion of my advanced level research project.[11] For an artist, the intuitive creative act and forces of attraction and obsession cannot be under rated. Being open and receptive is an important aspect of the generative mode as well as good practise in academic enquiry and as such formed the fundamental methodology of my praxis.

Of importance is the notion of contemplation or attendance. As with any work of art ritual cannot be hurried in the designing or divining.[12] Ritual emerges in its own time to the diviner and it is necessary to wait in attendance for that imaging and imagining which further prevents tokenism.

> 'Circumspection and allusion are of the essence to this model. Yes you want results, but you know that too conscious a fixation on them will get you the opposite – some contrived, self-conscious piece of bad poetry. So you wait, attend, contemplate, watch, and see what emerges.' [13]

Levi Strauss suggests that cultural artefacts such as myths and stories could be seen to be created via a process he terms 'bricolage'. 'Bricolage' is a process of gathering what is at hand – both things and ideas – in order to knit them together into a new assemblage. The bricoleur is thus the jack-of-all-trades, the handyman whose distinction is that he builds things out of the remains of other things, constructs new works out of the fragments of older works.[14] I would describe my process as a designer of ritual to be one of informed bricolage. With all their former meaningful resonances, and the additive creation of new ones, I sought to assemble or 'cut and paste' new artefacts from extant physical and intellectual cultural materials. [15]

As part of my research praxis, and very much in the nomadic tradition, I attended several postgraduate classes outside of my specific discipline of 'Theatre Design'. These included puppetry, dance improvisation, and kinaesthetic movement classes. Attending workshops grounded me and

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[11] " This includes extensive rhizomatic alliances; a concrete practice of cross-disciplinary discussions needs to be adopted, with transposable notions moving about…. a nomadic style of thinking which is open to encounters with others".

Braidotti, R. (1994). Nomadic subjects: embodiment and sexual difference in contemporary feminist theory. New York, Columbia University Press. pp. 138 -139.

[12] Grimes, R. L. (2000). Deeply Into the Bone, Reinventing Rites of Passage. Berkeley, University of California Press. p. 13.

[13] Ibid p. 12.

[14] Levi-Strauss, C. (1966). The Savage Mind. Chicago, University of Chicago Press pp. 16 – 17.

[15] Grimes: Deeply Into the Bone p. 84.

kept me actively and physically engaged providing a necessary counterpoint to theoretical enquiry. I saw a sensory enquiry to be of paramount importance, and this awareness of embodiment led me to conduct a series of research laboratories with groups of performers in ritual and object — which are outlined below.

When it came time to put this research into effect with my final performance event, it was clear that the process had to be commensurate with the production. To create a work that was a meditation on reconciliation I needed to form an ensemble made up of indigenous and non-indigenous individuals. Of vital importance was the input, collective ownership of the piece, and a high degree of commitment on the part of the participants. The process of making the work being one of harbouring reconciliation as much as was the final event itself.

1.3.2 Protocol

Creating work whose central tenet is to endow indigenous protocols with respect and broaden awareness of their existence was of vital importance to me. Recent experiences had taught me how very fragile these protocols are and how widely abused and misunderstood they are by much of non-indigenous Australia. Here I would hasten to stress that I myself cannot in anyway presume to have knowledge of the 500 language groups of this country nor their specific etiquettes, let alone have a deep understanding of the intricacies of their cultures.

The ability to listen to what is said — with more than words — as well as a commitment to seek advice and approval along the way is vital in cross cultural work. Further, it is undeniable that there are some central tenets and behaviours that apply to almost every culture on Earth. Respect is paramount in these values.

1.3.3 Permission

Whenever any cultural property — be it intellectual, spiritual or artistic — is to be referenced or utilised outside of its usual context, permission to do so must be sought. This is very important for many reasons and will be further demonstrated in this thesis. Often there are layers of understanding and significance that remain occluded to the outsider making usage impossible and inappropriate. Permission is a cultural currency that is very much alive and prevalent in Indigenous cultures and as such must be respected. With this nomadic approach to my research praxis, moving between disciplines and cultures, academic texts and the works of art that caught my bricoleur's magpie eye, I have constructed this commentary on the design of *Songs of Ourselves*.

Date	Activity	Significant events or realisations	See Page
Feb. 2004	Commenced study – attended Adelaide Festival Series of 7 Performance based Ritual Theatre Laboratories	The Ernabella Choir Relationship of object and meaning - form and content	41 37 - 40
June '04	Showing of work thus far: "The Labyrinthine Walk"	Labyrinth in fire a powerful tool – even in the simplified version.	40
July '04 - June '06	Researching literature (ongoing) / post graduate workshops Queens Baton Relay Event – Indigenous community event in Healesville Victoria Dreaming Festival of International Indigenous Arts – stage managing Opening and Closing ceremonies	Ron Grimes, Richard Schechner, Victor Turner, Mircea Eliade Facilitator of Private Indigenous Welcome ceremony to Ngai Tahu People of New Zealand. Director of event: during which a significant elder passed away. Indigenous Death protocols Notion of the role of 'ritual stage manager' emerges. Ritual sensibility blended with stage management skills	17 - 29
July '06 - Oct '06	Navigators Project Journey to Northern Cape York with DAS ARTS and VCA students. Staying on country with Aunty Thankoupie. Visiting communities at Arakun, Mapoon, Napranum and Bouchat	Frustration with lack of awareness of European cohort Aunty Than's flag – catalyst for theme of reconciliation. Stories of Mapoon burning from Aunty Grace and experience of meeting and being with Indigenous people, sharing food, hearing stories, being on country	32
Jan '07 – July 2007	Designing Space and content commenced Significant meeting with Aunty Than and final redesign of ritual	Design one based on Aunty Than's Flag Design two emerges and performers cast and crew gathered – in all over 45 individuals involved in the production.	33 - 41 42 - 66

Figure 5. Timeline of significant events in Research

1.4 Working Definitions

'Re-sacralize the secular: even a dollar bill reveals the imprint of Eternity.' Joseph Campbell

Figure 6. Fire Rituals: mundane and sacred

1.4.1 Ritual

As this discussion is concerned with both ritual and design I feel it important to define the boundaries of these terms from the outset.

Ritual as both a noun and an adjective can describe a broad spectrum of events and mode of behaviours. Initially the term 'ritual' was reserved for the religious and sacred realms in human experience, but more recent definitions have included secular and civic ceremonies 'and even various forms of repetitive and compulsive human behaviour'.[16] Thus the term, as it is used contemporarily, is hard to define within firm boundaries, as it is capable of describing both the sacred and the secular. Ritual in the broadest sense could be seen as a 'mode of action'.[17] However, running is also a mode of action, but not necessarily a ritual so we must enquire what differentiates it from other modes.

Ron Grimes definition of ritual and the sacred although simple is clarifying and provides an excellent starting point to elaborate upon further:

[16] Rozik, E. (2002). The Roots of Theatre: Rethinking Ritual and Other Theories of Origin. Iowa City, University of Iowa Press. p. 3.

[17] Ibid p. 4.

> 'By ritual I mean sequences of ordinary actions rendered special by virtue of their condensation, elevation or stylisation. By spirituality, I intend practiced attentiveness aimed at nurturing a sense of the interdependence of all beings and all things ordinary.'[18]

This further description delves more deeply into substance declaring that:

> 'Ritual is a sensuous activity. It is not merely a decoration, a kind of illustration of what we know by other means. Rather, ritual is a means of knowing, a way of learning, remembering and imagining. What one constructs with it is a world - felt, sensed, thought.'[19]

Anthropologist and mythologist Joseph Campbell describes the function of ritual being to 'give form to human life, not in the way of a mere surface arrangement, but in depth'.[20] In essence, Campbell sees rituals to be coded behaviours that help guide one's passage and experience as a human being through life and remind one to be take cognisance of certain important occurrences and activities.

Implicit in these two latter definitions is the notion that ritual is capable of giving our lives both form and meaning concurrently. I have divided rituals into the two most common categories according to their gaze or function and their relationship to the differing experiences of the passage of time. However, I would note here that these classifications are simplistic and rudimentary. Within both of these categories there is a wealth of different kinds of ritual. Taxonomies of ritual will be discussed later in more detail in this paper.

Mundane Rituals

Mundane rituals are those rituals that defer to nothing beyond themselves - there is no greater context, symbolism or spiritual alignment intended within them. Many appear to be merely habitual compulsions. These are rituals that occur within the constraints of the social linear arrangement of time, according to the clock or in the performance of one's daily duties. Their purpose is to uphold the status quo or to re confirm its alignment, and not to throw existential or spiritual dilemmas into the fray. Neil Cameron describes these rituals as 'reinforcement' rituals.[21] Examples of these could be the 'daily cuppa' and the shower, civic celebrations such as a coronation, medal awards, speech nights, sports events, theatre going, among countless others. Although some individuals may experience school speech nights or award ceremonies to be highly moving events, the ritual is not primarily designed to emphasise the individual and their personal response but rather are used to signal the individuals place within a society or group. These rituals are not the stuff of my inquiry.

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[18] Grimes: Deeply Into the Bone pp. 70 – 71.

[19] Grimes, R. L. (2000). *Notes for Rites of Passage Workshop with Welfare State International*. p. 4.

[20] Campbell, J. (1995). Myths to Live By. London, Souvenir Press. p. 44.

[21] Cameron, R. N. (2004). New Alignments in Ritual, Ceremony and Celebration. School of Arts, Faculty of Arts, Griffith University, Griffith University. Master of Philosophy. p. 54.

Sacred Rituals

My inquiry lies within rituals that reflect the sacred realms of human experience. These Rituals are experiences that, although often expressed with differing symbols, are often cross culturally celebrated or enacted. A burial, a marriage or a celebration of the passing of the seasons is immediately understandable content in most cultures even if the language is foreign to our own. Transformation, transcendence and catharsis are often at the heart of these rituals, and although sometimes occurring simultaneously in the design of a ritual, they can also occur in isolation as the primary agent of change. As one's world alters and changes, or one's self alters and changes, rituals can help make sense of or mark as significant such journeys in being.

Seasonal ceremonies, many rites of passage, shamanic practices and religious rites often exist in relationship with cyclical time (seasonal celebrations) and celebrate the numinous and eternal (death, birth, and the divine).

Colin Counsell in *Signs of Performance* goes further to describe ritual for its visceral impact:

> '…the purpose of these activities is not functional but symbolic, for the primary goal of religious celebrations, shamanistic ceremonies, totemic and initiation rites and so on is to image the divine, to create in the profane world a moment in space/ time that is sacred.'[22]

'Imaging of the divine' and the creation of a moment in time and space that is 'sacred' lie at the heart of my inquiry. It is also a territory that is often viewed as taboo at best, and at worst risks being found comparable to the desperate supermarket style religiosity of many New Age philosophies. By 'sacred' I simply mean that I want to access and celebrate a moment of deepest humanity: to touch the soul and the heart of the audience and of the cast. To give time and space for the inviolable, private and sacred space held within us all in a shared moment of communion.

I am keen to avoid tokenism and sentimentality by exploring what it is that creates a sense of authenticity — or to use an Indigenous idiom 'real business' — in a moment of ritual. I feel that there can only be preventatives for tokenism for, as with any artistic endeavour, each participant or viewer will be the ultimate judge. Such preventative actions would ideally include the alignment of motivation of all concerned in the ritual's creation, a thoroughness of research into the subject of the ritual, selection of appropriate visual and symbolic language, adherence to cultural protocols and permissions, and a process of integrity, accountability, transparency, flexibility and sincerity.

[22] Counsell, C. (1996). Signs of Performance: An Introduction to Twentieth Century Theatre. New York: Routledge. p. 114.

1.4.2 Design

The territory of design that this discussion is to embrace requires explanation and definition. If one is to design a ritual the complete form needs to be designed, from the working process and methodology of performance creation, through to the final visual style and the enactment itself. The vital final ingredient is that whoever is taking part is invited, through the efficacy and accuracy of this process of decision making, to become involved to such an extent that everyday concerns disappear and that some sense of an enacted response to the ritual is as apparent to them as it is to the cast. If one takes the idea that design suggests the look and functioning of an object or event then when designing a piece of ritual theatre the look and function must needs be intertwined.

There are many considerations to be aware of when attempting to design a ritual, and in order to do so it is incumbent upon the designer to research in depth. As part of this research one of the most important considerations is to recognise the very real psychological effects that such enacted and embodied events like rituals can create in both participants and viewers. When designing and thus generating such powerful and potentially transformative states, a responsibility or duty of care exists in order to transport participants safely into and out of this ritual state. A thorough understanding of the topic is thus equally as important as an in depth understanding of the phenomenological and psychological impact of ritual and its design, in order not to abuse either the form or, more importantly, the participants. Ritual modes, particularly ones that appeal to a transcendent sensibility, can be easily abused and participants manipulated in the fervour of the moment.

An extreme example of this abuse can be observed documented in the propaganda films of Leni Riefenstahl during the Second World War. '*Triumph of the Will'* captures a category of ritual which, although finally cinematic, portrays a nation whipped into frenzied Hitler 'worship' in heavily ritualised and symbol-laden processions and gatherings. [23] Only with hindsight can the civilian population come to realise the horror of the regime they once adored. And yet, powerful ritualistic devices were designed and intentionally abused by the Nazis with a clear and focused intent to manipulate the hearts of German people.

[23] *Triumph of the Will (ToW)* is a 1934 propaganda film by the German filmmaker Leni Riefenstahl chronicling the Nazi Party Congress in Nuremberg. The film contains excerpts from speeches by several leading Nazi figures including powerful excerpts of Adolf Hitler's orations. The document is interspersed with footage of party members marching in vast, massed numbers carrying ceremonial flags and symbols of Aryan supremacy in fire-lit parades. Hitler is very much presented as the heroic German Leader who will bring glory to the nation. The record of the Nuremburg rallies as created in *ToW* suggests a gathering that was meticulously orchestrated and ritualised in order to create a cathartic if not transcendent experience.

Clearly, this example is extreme, but it does serve to warn and highlight the very real power that such designed events can procure within active and receptive participants. In creating *Song of Ourselves* I was consciously wishing to implicate the audience into the structure of the design utilising a transcendent framework I was doubly aware of the need to create that work in an open and transparent manner which did not manipulate but gave space for deep engagement in the ritual subject matter.

In such endeavours it is also incumbent upon the designer to be informed and aware of contemporary discussions and issues impacting on design choices and then to posit one's self in the continuum. A brief overview of the theories of a few of the most influential scholars and practitioners in ritual and its design is an important part of this commentary on *Song of Ourselves,* as their analysis and perceptions have helped guide and form my work.

2.0 Ritual Theory

'It is in the nature of profound things to clash and combine, to evolve from one another.'
Antoin Artaud *The Theatre and its Double*

Figure 7. Central Chamber, *Song of Ourselves*

2.0.1 Contemporary Ritual Theory

Ritual Theatre Design or 'new ritual' design, as a contemporary vein in performance making remains a field in which there has been scant academic study. There is a weighty analysis of ritual within the fields of performance theory, religious studies, philosophy of history, philosophy of art, anthropology and ethnographic studies, however few scholars have chosen to study the design choices, processes involved in design and the inner workings of the creation of contemporary secular rituals. In this commentary on 'Songs of Ourselves' I will endeavour to elucidate these choices and processes, both in theory and in practice, focussing on how they affect the integration of the audience.

In fashioning a deeper understanding of the function and *modus operandi* of designing ritual, I have chosen to focus on some of the leading exponents in these above-mentioned fields in order to gain insight into what is the compelling human compunction to ritualise. Of specific interest to me as a designer of ritual performance is how and what form the manifestation of that compunction takes place in object, gesture, ephemera and place.

Importantly, because of its very nature, ritual is not something that one can merely observe to understand. A phenomenological experience and hence a bodily participation is necessary in order to enter into discussion of the role and methodologies of ritual sensibility. This cannot be forgotten in the analysis and shall be discussed later.

From the vast field of research, I have chosen to make reference to the works of five prominent scholars in the following fields of study: history of religion, religion and cultural theory, anthropology, performance theory, and new ritual design theory throughout the body of this thesis. I will give a brief analysis of their perspectives and what I have discovered as part of this research to be the building blocks of designing ritual performance.

Mircea Eliade was a Romanian anthropologist whose specific field was the history of religion. His insights into the nature of the sacred and the profane in the history of civilization, whilst now several decades old, have lent much scholarship to the field of ritual studies as well as an appreciation of the poetic resonances in ritualising that many cultures share.

Performance theorist Richard Schechner is Professor of Performance Studies at the Tisch School of the Arts, New York University, the editor of TDR: The Drama Review, and as part of a life long enquiry, has written several books on the subject of ritual performance.

Any study of ritual would be incomplete without an awareness of the vast contribution to the field by prominent anthropologist, and former professor at the University of Chicago, Victor Turner. Turner spent his life researching rituals around the globe and applied his theories on rituals and rites of passage to world mythologies and religions, and his scholarship has been highly influential on the field.

Ronald Grimes is Professor of Religion and Cultural studies at Wilfred Laurier University in Canada. Grimes examines ritual from both a theoretical and a phenomenological stance making his work particularly vibrant and useful to the designer. He has worked across the globe observing the rituals and rites of passage of innumerable cultures. Notably, he has also delved into the arena of ritual theatre having observed and worked with the like of the Actors Lab, Grotowski and Welfare State International.[24] Grimes is committed to the notion of re-inventing our contemporary cultural rituals to endow a sense of 'meaning' that is coherent within the shapes of our post-modern experience. Hence anything from divorce rituals to naming day rituals he sees as open for interpretation. This makes Grimes one of the rare contemporary scholars analysing secular ritual making, or 'new ritual' and thus I see his work as central to my study.

Of pivotal importance is the work of my former mentor and collaborator Neil Cameron. It has been my great fortune to have been apprenticed to Neil who is one of the leading proponents of 'new ritual' in this country. We worked closely, for over thirteen years, on a large number of community rituals and celebrations across Australia. Our collaboration grew to the point where I became co-

[24] These three theatre makers consider ritual to be foundational to their practice.

artistic director in the last few years of the company's life. An ongoing and lively discussion surrounding methodology, process, myth, archetype and ritual design was one of the most rewarding aspects of this work for me. It is his analysis of our working methodology and process and the definitions and terminologies he has created around that work which continue to have relevance and resonance in my own work.

Neil Cameron completed his Masters degree in Philosophy in 2004, producing the thesis *New Alignments in Ritual, Ceremony and Celebration*.[25] This is an immensely valuable contribution to study in this field. Cameron's thesis focuses mainly on the type of events we created; being large community based celebrations, arts festivals and works commissioned by specific communities. The commonality between them was the desire to create events that would be meaningful to the community in attendance, and thus the design process was necessarily a highly consultative one. It was also a process which borrowed much from the legacy of Welfare State International, and the work of John Fox and Sue Gill, who are the progenitors of much community based theatre practiced in the UK and Australia. [26] With an emphasis on engaging the community physically and imaginatively in process, as much as in consultation, by having children decorate lanterns, cast members create images of personal contemplation or the formation of choirs, this work aimed at creating 'a new way forward to convene reflexive experiences'.[27]

My stance

Cameron and Grimes' writings and teachings I have found to be the most beneficial to my own enquiry as they both concern themselves with the phenomenology of ritual — its enactment and experience — which is an invaluable and indispensable element to comprehend when designing. It has also been my considerable fortune to have studied ritual with both of them, both theoretically and in the making and enacting of it.

However, in attempting to posit myself within the stream of current contemporary theatre and ritual making I find Richard Schechner's notions on the 'avant-garde' to be insightful. Schechner, whilst aware of it being a potentially outdated terminology, redefines 'avant-garde' into five overlapping categories: 'the historical; the current (always changing); the forward looking; the tradition seeking and the intercultural avant-garde.'[28]

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[25] Cameron, R. N. (2004). New Alignments in Ritual, Ceremony and Celebration. School of Arts, Faculty of Arts, Griffith University, Griffith University. Master of Philosophy.

[26] Welfare State International was founded in 1968 by John Fox and Sue Gill, Roger Coleman and others, Welfare State International was an association of freelance artists bought together by shared values and philosophy of creating public festivals, processions and celebrations (www.welfare-state.org).

[27] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 16.

[28] Schechner, R.(1995). *The Future of Ritual* Routledge Press, London p. 5.

Any work of art may contain qualities of more than one of these categories. Of particular interest to me is the final category, the 'tradition seeking avant-garde' which Schechner describes as:

> 'present in Grotowski…as well as in 'roots' movements and 'shamanic' performances'.[29]

He further describes it as an approach which:

> 'rejects fancy technology and cybernetics, preferring the 'wisdom of the ages' most often found in Non-Western Cultures.'[30]

Nonetheless, when studying other cultures, it must be remembered that it is foolhardy to attempt to restage traditional rites which are not from one's own tradition. This activity is fraught with danger as the risk of making not only inappropriate choices but also disrespectful ones is paramount. Careful selection and understanding of the functional elements operating within these rites can be observed and utilised if not their actual symbology and mythology.

Mark Franko in *Ritual and Event* raises the suggestion that rituals are by necessity 'mutating into 'post-rituals".[31] He perceives difficulties in this post 9/11 age (an intensely ritualised event and date) of finding or creating rituals that are 'adequate to the event'. I feel that this is an ill-considered stance. Monumentally devastating events rarely feel normalised by ritual – nor is that ritual's function. Whilst Franko concurs that ritual is cultural performance (or in his terms a 'corporeal performance' or 'embodied agency') reliant on event - that is its enactment - I cannot see any innovation in the mode or form of ritual that he presents to suggest a need for this taxonomy. In spite of his references to 'Derridian notions such as spacing and trace', Franko makes little headway in suggesting that post-rituals 'introduce avenues to explore contingency, loss and discontinuity imposed by the event.'[32] I would suggest that many rituals have been ever so.

Spacing and trace are certainly two crucial building blocks of ritual. Space is the crucible in which the rite takes place and attendance to its design or an awareness of placement in space will deeply effect the functioning of the ritual. Traces of past rituals, a sense of being in place where repeated almost identical events have taken place over time, adds a numinous profundity to ritual. It is why we return to certain places that have been special for us in our lives and why for religious people the temple, church or synagogue contains a special power, not simply because of spatial design and assignation to a certain faith, but because of traces of past rituals enacted under the covenant

[29] Ibid p. 11.

[30] Ibid p. 17

[31] Franko, M. (Ed.) (2007). Ritual and Event: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. London, New York: Routledge. p. 1.

[32] Ibid p. 3.

of that particular faith. An awareness of space and trace is also perhaps why I chose to use Studio 45 for *Songs of Ourselves*, which I shall elaborate upon later in this commentary.

2.0.2 Meta-structures of Ritual

Rituals introduce and exaggerate boundaries. Any exploration in depth of funerals or initiation rites, for example, will provide variations of all of these above states acting on both the primary subject of the ritual and on all in attendance - and thus also structurally as the very form of the ritual itself. The function of ritual has always been a means of tracing a way through one's existence both in space, place and time, of marking boundaries and assigning significance. This is the very essence and power of ritual.

It is important to remember that similarly to theatre, ritual is enacted in the subjunctive mode. Whilst this may be an imagined space it is also paradoxically concurrently very much a real space as well. There is an inherent questioning of being within ritual and a committed positing of what might be. It is a mode in which we can image, imagine and enact hopes for he future. With no collective spiritual gaze or a seasonal celebration to ritualise, reconciliation was, for me, the ideal choice for creating a contemporary Australian ritual. The very fact that its subject matter was respected by cast and crew, and arguably could be safely assumed to be held by the invited theatre going audience, suggested that there was potentially a shared system of values or belief. From this beginning a collectively imagined world could grow:

> 'Ritual is the predication of identities and differences (metaphors) so profoundly enacted that they suffuse the bone and blood, thereby generating a cosmos (an oriented habitat). In rites we enact a momentary cosmos of metaphor.'[33]

> 'the deep world because it is an imagined, performed cosmos, is momentary and occasional, but it is also metaphorically and utterly real, as real as anybody's smokestack or weedwacker.'[34]

Inherently reflexive experiences (the extent of which being dependant on the role one plays in a ritual and its focus), some rituals engender a plurality in the reflexive gaze wherein one's community's actions, choices and health and not just one's own organism come under scrutiny. With its focus on reconciliation, a plural reflexivity was an important awareness to develop and seek to attain in Songs of Ourselves. This plural reflexivity is necessary if we are to face the challenge of reconciliation within the self, and also more widely between each other, between races, nations, and (in this era of global climate change) reconciliation with the Earth.

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[33] Grimes: Rite out of Place p. 156.

[34] Ibid p. 153.

In *Rite out of Place*, Ron Grimes charts the evolution of ritual studies. In the Nineteenth Century he suggests that ritual was seen as a primal urge. [35] In the early Twentieth Century he claims Durkheim and Freud classified rituals for what they appear to 'do' from functioning as social glue to being a means of providing consolation. By the mid to late Twentieth Century he purports that, with the aid of Victor Turner's weighty scholarship, ritual was seen as acting on participants psychologically - either towards a sense of *communitas* or possibly subversion. In the Twenty-first Century Grimes finds that rituals have become identified with 'boundary issues' — they are seen to be acts of 'marking off'.[36] Whatever the current trend of theoretical classification, always incumbent on the philosophies and psychologies of the times, ritual as a mode of human expression remains ubiquitous and identifiable. I suggest that each of these definitions fit into my view of ritual, and an awareness of these functions was vital to the design of my final performance event, particularly in hoping to incorporate the audience more than simply physically. I was conscious of the need for social glue in engendering a sense of *communitas*, and without consideration of boundary issues and the psychology of ritual, both throughout the process and the enactment of *Songs of Ourselves*, it would have been difficult to achieve this end.

Both Grimes and Cameron have created taxonomies for rituals which are invaluable to consider. Grimes, finding the terms mundane and secular insufficient to distinguish the many modes of ritual behaviour, suggests six modes of 'ritual sensibility'.[37]

The first mode of 'ritualisation' he suggests to be a classification of our compulsive, repetitious animal functions such as eating, drinking, mating and reproducing. The second mode, 'decorum', he describes as those expected rituals with which society regulates itself. He sees these as being of an intimate scale, such as the gestures of manners and etiquette we adopt, including handshaking, introductions, opening doors for others etc. 'Ceremony' is the third category which according to Grimes are inherently political interactions as they enforce an symbolise respect for the offices and power bases of society. Coronations, award presentations and obituaries are all ceremonial practices.

'Liturgy' is the fourth mode which Grimes sees as operating in an 'ultimate frame of reference and the doing of which is felt to be of cosmic necessity'.[38] He further describes it as a symbolic action, hinging on 'deep receptivity' in which contemplation and meditation are cultivated. The fifth category is 'magic'. He views rituals of magic as utilising transcendent frameworks in order to

[35] Ibid p. 12.

[36] Ibid p. 12.

[37] Grimes: Beginnings in Ritual Studies p. 36.

[38] Ibid p. 43.

create change in 'the ordinary reality of social interaction'. In desiring change, magic rituals, like hexes and curses, declare and seek to invoke supernatural powers to control and affect consequences.

The sixth and final category Grimes describes is that of celebration. Grimes points to the ludic and spontaneous roots of celebration as ritualised expressive play. Importantly, it is a mode in which there is 'no difference in value between what is utterly serious and what is playful'.[39] Hence for many of us celebration holds huge appeal.

Of course, Grimes points out that these six categories can co-exist and should not be regarded as exclusive or independent of each other.

Whilst I concur with Grimes assessment that rituals should be viewed in more detail than simply as mundane or spiritual I find his categorisations limited. Grimes categories belie his phenomenological pedagogic practice and serve to emphasise only the societal functioning of rituals. I suggest that there is further benefit in considering implications of ritual on the individual. With an awareness of how ritual sensibilities act upon the self, or any individual, it is possible to extrapolate and with more assurance design an event which will avoid tokenism and prove to be deeply affecting.

In contrast to Grimes, Cameron describes his categorisations as 'alignment processes'. Similarly to Grimes he claims that elements of these different processes can coexist and occur simultaneously. In naming them alignment processes Cameron references Arthur Koestler's 'matrices of thought' – often fixed codes of behaviour and perception — which when fundamentally challenged or dislocated can be realigned into new configurations.[40] Clearly this ability found within many ritual structures, to literally transform and transcend one's habitual matrices of thought, is vital information to the designer of new ritual and will effect all design choices made.

Cameron's first category of ritual process is 'transformation'. These are rituals which are designed to create radical and permanent change within the participant. Cameron argues that these rituals act on the psyche to create a permanent realignment of identity and of structures of ontology. 'Reinforcement' is the second category which he sees bringing into alignment certain beliefs or feelings in a prescribed format in order to reinforce them. Cameron sees these rituals as acting temporarily. However, at this point I would question this proposal as he suggests an ensuing enrichment as a result of the rite. Although this may not be a dramatic transformation, it could be seen as a cumulative augmentation and thus even if small is permanent.

[39] Ibid p. 49.

[40] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 24.

Thirdly Cameron suggests 'transcendence' as a state of being which in certain rituals is temporarily engendered in order to rise above the mundane. Cameron sees this as a formless structure in which the ego is supplanted by the experience of profound feelings of group identity and belonging. It is simultaneously a highly reflexive state. Importantly, Cameron points out that of all his categorisations a transcendent alignment ritual is the variety which is most open to abuse. Of importance in the designer's methodology, therefore, is a transparent and reflexive process with an awareness of the potential for misuse.

The fourth and final category is 'catharsis'. This realignment is also seen as permanent as the experience of these rituals is most often linked to participants who have experienced crisis or trauma and in ritual enactment have achieved some breakthrough or relief from their distress. Catharsis rituals are not exclusive to these extremes but they are intended to comfort and enrich the participants and to address whatever is preventing their well-being. Whilst the ritual designer is not responsible for an individual's personal experience of catharsis, nor their inward state of receptivity, the ritual designed acts as crucible for this cathartic state.

In concert with Grimes' categories I find Cameron's definitions of varieties of alignment to be extremely beneficial. A conjoined taxonomy enables the designer to further define the boundaries between self and wider culture as well as of the mind and to refine design criteria. In defining *Songs of Ourselves* within these categorisations I aimed to create a transcendent, liturgical (albeit secular) celebrational ceremony.

In gazing more deeply into the structural functioning of ritual it is helpful to consider both Turner and Grimes assessments of Van Gennep's structural analysis of rites of passage.[41] Grimes summarises Van Gennep's division of rites of passage as: separation (*preliminaire*), transition (*liminaire*) and incorporation (*postliminaire*). He goes on to stress that although Van Gennep suggested that every rite would pass through each of theses stages he also purported that different rites would emphasise different moments (for example: funerals emphasise separation whilst an initiation emphasise transition).[42]

[41] In 1909 Van Gennep published Les rites de passage (The Rites of Passage) which includes his vision of rites of passage rituals as being divided into three phases.

[42] Grimes: Deeply Into the Bone p. 104.

Grimes goes on to compare Eliade and Joseph Campbell's similar triumvirates with Van Gennep's and is of the opinion that in each case these categorisations of the phases of rites are more imposed than discovered. I find this an interesting conundrum to consider.

Ritual Structure in Song of Ourselves

Whilst rites do not need to stick resolutely to the above tri-fold models of ritual making, there is much to be improvised upon within this basic structure, although not necessarily in the prescribed order. When designing *Songs of Ourselves* I found myself (and perhaps this was actually perforce of years of practise) instinctively considering, very carefully, states which the audience would need to pass through during the event, physically and psychologically, in order to reach the final goal of integration, participation and *communitas*. It was essential to consider at each stage the psychological and emotional impact of sensory and intellectual choices made in the design.

With *Songs of Ourselves* my immediate desire was to create a very strong sense of place in each environment that the audience moved through. The design of the 'set' and the way in which the audience was invited to traverse it was linked to the necessity to entice, lull and dislocate them away from any sense of heading into a conventional theatrical experience.

An over arching meta structure for *Song of Ourselves* could be seen to reflect some of Grimes and Van Gennep's stages. I began by creating a sense of comfort and welcome (*communitas*), which was then thrown into disarray with an outdoor procession in firelight and an uneasy sound track (dislocation). The next space in the first chamber of studio 45 increased the sense of dislocation but with it bought in an element of expectation, surrender and cohesion (pre transitional). As the audience moved further into the installation a sense of meditation and deepening of subject matter created a stronger contextual framework (pre-liminal) for the moment of fire lighting and tea light boats (liminal), until finally in the last chamber food and drink were shared (incorporation and integration) as a releasing process.

As with any event that moves from theory to practice there were inevitably uncontrollable elements which may have hampered or augmented the efficacy of this design. The foyer was one such area that became a looser adaptation of my original design, this partly due to the last minute absence of a performer who was unable to attend, and also because of the influx of new energy in the final week of the event's birth as the crew of 20 first year production students came on board. It was important for me to encourage within the students an attachment and ownership of the piece – to feel as much a part of the family as the performers as their role shifted boundaries from crew to performer to ritual stage manager. The hot towels, which were intended to be presented piping hot to each audience member, harkened to rituals of foot washing and welcome. They are also luxurious and comforting and quite unfamiliar in most theatre settings. Sweet peppermint tea was offered rather than alcohol as a soothing fragrant tincture. The sweepers then set up a language of gesture, which the audience could rely on throughout the performance for guidance, and gathered them into a 'boat' and transported or at times swept them from space to space.

Another example of this important design of dislocation in *Song of Ourselves* is exhibited in the decision to use a labyrinth walk of fire. When walking a labyrinth with a group one is forced to space oneself in relationship to others, and in doing so can see a pattern emerge where you pass familiar faces on one turn and then cross distantly at another. The whole group evolves and shifts within the complex geometric pattern and whilst walking the audience member becomes aware that they are creating the image for others just as others are creating this image for them. Walking in single file creates a sense of being at once alone and part of a continuum whilst the mesmerising beauty — and potential danger — of the candles ensure that attention is partly kept honed on the simple act of walking within the set path. The external self of the outside world is chipped away as the participants surrender to a pattern that is bigger than self. Through being physically involved the audience are transported into a physically meditative and reflexive state of *communitas*.

2.0.3 The Liminal Zone

Figure 8. The Manna Gum Archway, *Song of Ourselves*

One of the classic taxonomies of ritual design is the liminal. Similarly to Turner and Grimes, Cameron strongly supports the theory that rituals, celebrations and ceremonies have within them liminal states or zones which 'move individuals and communities from one state to another'.[43] The experience of which enables the individual to gain insight or obtain a special state of mind. Nearly all scholars in ritual studies would agree that the process by which this liminal moment is achieved would necessarily involve states of dislocation or disruption to the participant. This zone is concurrently physical, temporal and contextual. The Liminal zone could be seen as the moment of reckoning. A process of enactment to echo the changes in psychological or spiritual state is a vital part of the liminal process. This enactment is replete with use of symbols which refine and exaggerate the change and physically demand a dislocation or separation from one state in order to gain another.

[43] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 15.

In a funeral ceremony, for example, it is most important to transform the flesh of the dead, to physically stress the separation, for many reasons (hygiene among them). This can be done by burying or cremation, dismemberment or mummification whatsoever the specific cultural code. An important liminal moment occurs for both the deceased and the mourners when the first fire is about to be lit or the first sod of earth thrown on top of the coffin. The dead person is about to become physically completely inaccessible whilst those in relationship to the deceased must transform their physical as well as their psychological relationship. In order to do so it is vital to physically mark this severance with a symbolic act of change. A more joyous example would be the moment when rings and oaths are exchanged in a traditional Western wedding ceremony. Although signing the register is a moment when this union becomes a legally binding one, the uttering of oaths and putting on of rings is a more ancient and still more poignant representation of union than that of the legal formality. It is often also accompanied by the declaration to the congregation of the newly weds as (conventionally) husband and wife and the encouragement to seal this union with a very public and highly symbolic kiss. In this ceremony one can observe a series of symbolic liminal moments which aid the passage of transformation.

Victor Turner developed Van Gennep's original theory of the tri-fold structure to ritual, and examined liminal phenomenology to conclude that such states are often accompanied by a 'parallel passage in space'.[44] These parallel passages are not only true of the liminal spaces or moments within ritual, but of much of the rite itself. I would go further to suggest that what is a liminal moment for one individual may not be shared by another, and thus the whole work must hold within its design the capacity for a multiplicity of shifts. The space must echo or work in parallel with the content being enacted.

The liminal points designed into *Songs of Ourselves* were many and varied. Audience and performers were continually traversing new territories — physically and contextually — from the warm comfort of the foyer to the disarming outdoor procession to the garden walkway; from the contemplation of fire-lit shrines, interrupted by a distress flare with a whispered soundtrack acknowledging Indigenous elders, to squeezing through an arbour archway into the serenity of the labyrinth chamber; from a walking meditation into and out of the pattern of tea-lights into unknown territory in the next chamber of spiralling red fabric. Finally everyone was implicit in the design, and thus the ritual, voluntarily offering up their candle carrying boats to float upon the trough of water. This final space was even then transformed once again as audience and cast and crew joined together for drinks and food and began a ritualised exiting process from the event. This evolving relationship of spatial and contextual changes was a way of leading the audience towards the

[44] Turner, V. (1982). From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play. New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications. p. 25.

moment of personal commitment in floating their boats and then of finding their way back out into the world again. Transformation as a spatially recurrent motif served to augment the symbolic function of the ritual. Each liminal zone was designed to disrupt and realign the audience and to steer them away from an experience in which they could sit back and simply observe. For its efficacy it was vital that the audience become willing and active.

If we can accept that rituals are designed to achieve 'special states of mind' via the creation of disruptive states, then it is incumbent upon and highly advantageous for the ethical practitioner to be aware of what is likely to be occurring cognitively during these experiences. Due to the confines of this study, and my lack of scientific expertise, I cannot presume to cover the breadth or depth of information in this arena. However, it is important to touch on the topic with an awareness of its powerful implications for the design of ritual and indicate possible avenues for further research.

2.0.4 *Communitas*

'There is some Eternity in our ephemeral lives, only it is very difficult for us to discover it alone.'
Katzantsakis *Zorba the Greek*

Figure 9. Candle Boats, *Song of Ourselves*

As cited earlier in this thesis, Richard Schechner suggests that ritual is said to:

> 'Short circuit thinking… stimulate the brain into releasing endorphins into the bloodstream… yielding a relief from pain, a surfeit of pleasure.'[45]

He goes on to say:

> 'Oceanic feeling of belonging ecstasy and total participation that many experience when ritualising works by means of repetitive rhythms sounds and tones effectively tune to each other the left and right hemispheres of the cerebral cortex.'[46]

[45] Schechner: The Future of Ritual p. 233

It is ritual's potential for procuring 'oceanic' or transcendent experiences that contains their compelling power. This sensibility contributes to the participant's perception of being in a shared and precious moment. With some events I have worked on in the past, the show has been performed on one, quite specific and culturally significant night of the year after months of preparation. The quality of being a 'one off' experience itself can facilitate an atmosphere of communion and transcendence in which one is part of a community in celebration. Part of my inquiry lead me to explore whether, through the elegance of the design of the 'meditation', such experiences of communion and transcendence could be experienced in repeated events, whilst not diminishing the heart of the mediation's focus — in this instance — reconciliation. Some experience of this sublime or numinous moment that I attempted to design into *Song of Ourselves* may have been achieved fleetingly for some and potentially not at all for others. The illusive and personal nature of this sense of *communitas* prompted me to distribute an anonymous questionnaire at the end of the event in order to assess the audience's experiences. This to my mind seemed the only way of ascertaining whether there had been any moments of transcendence in the event and particularly if so, how the design of the event may have augmented or created in space a parallel physical manifestation of that experience.

2.0.5 Biogenetic structuralism

Given the centrality of ritual and religion in most human cultures it is not surprising that there has been much scientific study of the neurological functioning of ritual behaviour. Whilst I cannot claim to have anything but a passing understanding of the science involved, and do not have the means in this dissertation to study the field in depth, I shall give a brief précis of some of the major findings and theories of biogenetic structuralism.

Renowned scientists such as neurologist V.S. Ramachandran, ethnologist Charles Laughlin and neurologically trained psychiatrist Eugene D'Aquili have examined brain function and ritual. One enquiry into the structure and functioning of the brain and the perceptible effects of ritual has given rise to the field of study known as 'biogenetic structuralism'. Laughlin and D'Aquili first coined the term in 1974 in their co-authored treatise *Biogenetic Structuralism.*[47] Cliff Guthrie, in his paper *Neurology, Ritual, and Religion: An Initial Exploration* defines biogenetic structuralism as an endeavour which:

> '…seeks to apply knowledge to the evolution and structure of the human body to various human or cultural behaviours" and that it "seeks a holistic understanding of the universe as it

[46] Ibid pp. 19 – 20.

[47] Laughlin, C. D., and D'Aquili, E. G. (1974). *Biogenetic structuralism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

presents itself to the mind through experience and is comprehended at the theoretical level through the activities of science.'[48]

Guthrie examines Laughlin and D'Aquili's thesis which he observed as having taken up:

'…the structuralist theory of Claude Levi-Strauss, and intentionally married it to an evolutionary point of view. That is, it argued that the culturally universal, invariant structures of language, time and space, dreams, feelings, and some psychopathologies arise from brain structures that are the product of human evolution. To the classic Levi-Strauss/Chomski idea of the existence of "deep structure" within the unconscious that affects human cognition and behaviour they therefore add that these structures are related to specific parts or neural pathways in the brain itself. The human brain is genetically predisposed to organize its experience in particular ways and to develop along predictable paths in a process they called 'neurognosis'.'[49]

This theory of Neurognosis suggests that religion and belief structures are results of evolution as much as other more visually obvious biological attributes, and that the structure of the brain has evolved by repetition of natural selection, along specific neural pathways to result in a hard wired receptivity for experiences which are often found in ritual and religious experience.

Guthrie goes on to note that in a central chapter of *The Spectrum of Ritual: The Neurobiology of Myth and Ritual,* D'Aquili and Laughlin assert that ritual accomplishes two important biological feats:

'First, it coordinates the neural systems and functions of ritual participants to allow for group action. Ritual behaviour for most species seems to be a way of overcoming social distance between individuals so that they can coordinate their activity in a way that would help the species survive. Mating rituals are the most obvious example of this, but ritual activity before coordinated group attacks or hunts are also common. Wolf packs go through ceremonial tail-wagging sessions and group howls, and ritual aggression among primates establishes social order and rank for possible battle. The rhythmic and repetitious nature of ritual stimulation, through ear, eye, or bodily motion, increases a sense of unity of purpose between individuals. Further, it leads to coordinated arousal or discharge of the brain's limbic system, leading to a sense of profound unity within the participants. The second biological achievement of ritual is that it causes cognitive development or socialization within the individual organism. Ritual is "a mechanism for entraining and transforming the structure of the neuromotor subsystems in the developing organism." In short, it teaches the younger members of the species what is important and how to behave.'[50]

In this light ritual could be described seen as evolutionarily adaptive; an activity which overcomes social distance by means of patterned sensual behaviours which function to transmit information deemed essential for survival whilst concurrently creating a sense of deep wellbeing. Further to this thinking, if we create myths, gods and belief structures to make sense of seemingly inexplicable experiences and of our environment then:

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[48] Guthrie, C. (2000). Neurology, Ritual, and Religion: An Initial Exploration In http://www.geocities.com/iona_m/Neurotheology/Neuroritual.html (Ed.).

[49] Ibid

[50] Ibid

> 'we need a way to make the myth real to us, and that is the fundamental reason why we connect ritual to our myths. One way of describing rituals, then, is that they are motor actions to enact the reality of the mythic structure of meaning our brains instinctively produce.'[51]

However, the persistence of ritual and religion in the scientifically and technologically driven Twenty-first Century suggests that ritual and religion's power lies in more than a patterned device to explain phenomena. Guthrie notes that Laughin and D'Aquilli suggest that ritual behaviours stimulate the hyperarousal and/ or hyperquiescent systems in our brains, which in turn stimulate the limbic system regulating our emotions[52]. If their theory is correct then as these experiences are often intense and pleasurable an ineffable experience of transcendence may ensue.

[51] Ibid

[52] Ibid

3.0 Ritual Practice

'Find ecstasy in life; the mere sense of living is joy enough.' Emily Dickenson

Figure 10. Thanakoupie and her flag at Bouchat

3.0.1 Background to the Design for Meditation on Reconciliation

In September 2006 I was invited to participate in 'Navigators' a project involving a group of 12 artists based at DAS Arts in the Netherlands and 12 postgraduate students from the VCA. This project was inspired by the first European landing on Australian shores in 1606 when a small Dutch vessel, the *'Duyfken'* (little dove) moored at what has now become known as Pennyfather River just north of Weipa, northern Cape York.

The journey North had been meticulously organised and blessed our group of 'Navigators' with an itinerary that included entrée into communities and lands that remain occluded for most tourists and whitefella Australians. We travelled overland in four-wheel drive trucks with camping gear and guides from Cairns, up past through the Daintree Forest to Cooktown and then further north and west into the tropical savannah of Northern Cape York.

The journey was profound and deeply affecting. For many of us this was the first experience of remote Aboriginal communities. There was much discussion with our International visitors – both in preparation before leaving Melbourne and also whilst on the road – about the cultural differences we would face and the need to follow Aboriginal protocols. A source of enduring difficulty that arose between the two schools was the different perception of what it meant to follow 'protocol'. Meetings continued to get more frequent and more heated as the tour progressed, with Indigenous members of our team feeling disrespected and attacked and many of us disheartened and confused.

The European cohort seemed to display an innate inability to grasp the subtlety of what behaviour was appropriate, down to simple respect for physical boundaries — at times at their own peril in crocodile country. Eventually our European colleagues despaired of what they perceived as our deprecating ways and took umbrage with what they saw simplistically as prohibition.

I for one, recognising the irony, felt colonised by their disregard for our customs. The lack of respect out of ignorance alone could not have been to blame for these were well educated and sophisticated individuals who had been given a lot of background information and advice. However, none (but one) of them were from colonised 'New World' countries. They simply had not experienced the colonial confusion of longing and belonging acting on their psyches. Of course the Dutch are indigenous to the Netherlands, the Serbian to Serbia, and so on, and I felt that this lack of understanding had more to do with lack of experience, and perhaps compassion, than a lazy intellect. The experience of finding solidarity amongst the Australian cohort — at very least a shared respect and understanding of the importance of protocol — I found to be inspiring and hopeful. It suggested to me something valuable which many of us must carry around in our psyches — albeit perhaps unwittingly — which recognises and respects the first peoples of this country as the traditional owners and that we shared some degree of awareness of the wrongs that have been (and are) committed against them. This solidarity was upheld when we returned to Melbourne to create the final performance piece for that project.

A significant meeting for me was made on the tidal shores of Bouchat, Albatross Bay, half an hour's drive North from Weipa, where I met Thanakoupie. 'Aunty Than' is the traditional owner of this land and she vehemently clings to her language and culture with passion and often startling strength in what is clearly a rapidly ailing body. [53] Thanakoupie is also a highly renowned and respected ceramicist recently awarded the honour of Emeritus Artist for 2007 by the Australia Council.

Our contingent was welcomed to country one Sunday morning down where the freshwater stream meets the salt water. We gathered and were sung hymns, both in English and 'language', by a group of ladies then in a gesture of purification, each of us bent forward to have cool water poured over our heads and a hand placed upon it in perhaps blessing or acceptance. It was an intense and moving ceremony. It was gentle yet disruptive. The whole group became humbled and 'soft' as we

[53] The term 'Aunty' or 'Uncle' is often used to denote respect for an elder and does not necessarily represent a blood relationship.

were offered the bounty of the land and sea and the freedom to come and go within it. This ritual was in that moment, and if only for that day, transformative and unifying. [54]

Whilst staying 'on country' with Aunty Than, a flag that she had designed appeared flying from a pole stuck into the sand. As I chatted to Aunty Than about her design and she described the symbolism of her flag it struck me that the work that I had been doing in Neil Cameron Productions had been concerning itself with similar themes and for similar spiritual aspirations.

The flag is simple and elegant belying the great complexity of issues surrounding both its wider theme of Reconciliation and the individual 'sub themes' within it. There are four horizontal bands of the colours red, black white and ochre. The significance of the colours she told me as follows: Red for the sacred/ initiation, Black for Death, White for birth /cockatoo, and Ochre for happiness and dance.

The structure of the Flag's design as she described it to me felt like a language that I had some understanding of — here was a very significant place of meeting. I began to incubate notions about creating a work based on Reconciliation and utilising these themes to create a ritual performance. The next step was to seek Aunty Than's permission to use the themes and colours, if not the literal symbol of the flag. I had begun to dream up a design and had developed a good deal of what I felt could be an appropriate response and reaction to Than's flag. I wrote her a letter and then chatted over the phone and received an in principle 'yes' — or so I thought.

I would point out that at this time I was also in consultation with Aunty Joy Wandin Murphy who, aside from being a generous and respected friend, is also senior elder of the Wurundjeri people and on whose traditional lands this event was to take place.

Experience had taught me that everything would need to be run past Aunty Joy for her approval, permission and judgement. Aunty Joy looked at my design for some time, which was basically an aerial map, and then described her emotional journey and responses as she 'moved' through each stage of the design. I was amazed at the detail that she gave me as she imaged her way through the ritual and visualised and felt her passage. Of central importance was my inability to comprehend her meaning when she got to the section that most fully embraced Aunty Than's flag. Here she said: 'I don't know this part, it's not my country'. This was to have huge resonances for me later.

[54] Footage available in the public domain at: http://www.dasarts.nl/weblog/?m=2006&w=37 or refer DVD support material: Traditional Welcome Bouchat

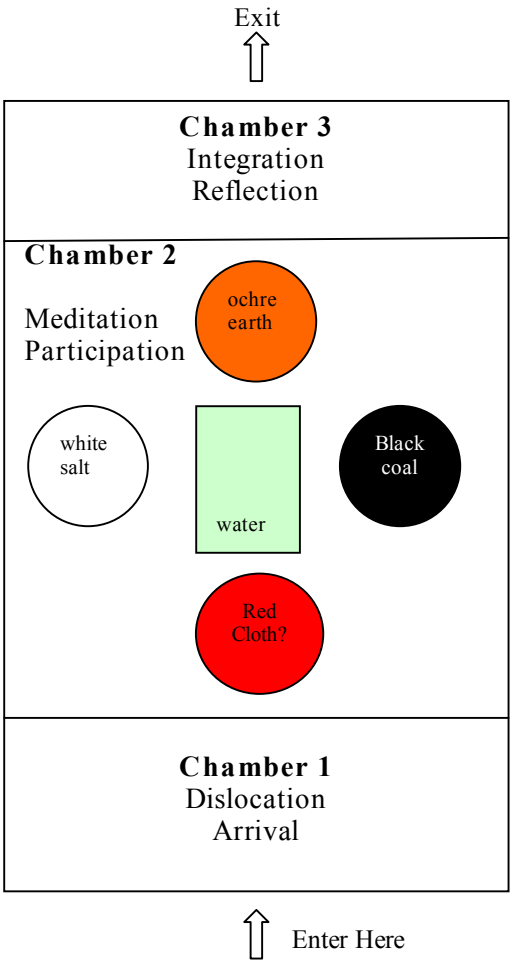

Figure 11 First draft design for a meditation on reconciliation

I met with Aunty Than in Sydney in mid February 2007. She listened as I talked about the project as I envisaged it and then she voiced what were growing concerns for her about my using her flag. After a few hours of talking, I came to a deeper understanding of what the flag represented for Aunty Than. For her it was a visual symbolic representation of her country. If I was to make representation of her country many thousands of kilometres away from it in actuality, then it was necessary to make sure that the spirit world would be happy with that. Certain ceremonies and propitiatory gestures would need to take place in Melbourne, which could only be performed by Aunty Than and dancers from Cape York in order to placate the spirits and keep her country safe.

Given that the aluminium giant Alcoa was starting to mine in land directly adjacent to Bouchat there was a very real threat to her country. To bring Aunty Than and dancers down from Cape York would have had huge repercussions on budget and also my autonomy in designing the piece, and although it could have been an amazing process of reconciliation and potentially a beautiful collaboration, I felt that it was not the project I wished to pursue for my Masters piece. I was also

aware that this was the gentlest way that Aunty Than could release me gracefully, and enable her to keep hold of what was clearly her intellectual, artistic and spiritual property.

Under the caveat of requirements which Aunty Than made, as it was clear she would withdraw her permission to use her flag without them, I went, quite literally, back to the drawing board. In the way of this type of work I was unsurprised to find myself unsure of where to go forward from here, acknowledging to myself that Reconciliation would never be something easily tackled, in real life or in ritual, and that there were significant lessons for me to learn along the way. I ruefully re-appraised Aunty Joy's comment 'it's not my country'. This quite literally was true. A vital ingredient when making cross-cultural work is to have the ability to listen, to be flexible and willing to change, and to understand that one's own cultural paradigms and matrices will be challenged and should not in any way dominate the outcome or processes.

In her paper on the Marrugeku Company's creative process, Rachael Swain describes their work as being born in an intercultural laboratory. In this collective the central processes, values and understandings of the group stem from this formative time together: 'processing paradox, pain and complexity through lived experience'.[55]

She goes on to describe the challenges of such work:

> 'how differently we have to listen and look to make this work. I have to contemplate what I am being told and how I have to listen just as hard for what I am not being told. There is a constant sense of being blindfolded and having to find my way through an unknown terrain by my other senses.' [56]

Echoing my own thoughts and experiences she goes on to say:

> 'like reconciliation, Marugeku's intercultural work is a process and a goal, and like reconciliation, the only way forward is to go through the pain.'[57]

Feeling bereft and stuck, I kept searching through literature on Reconciliation and immersed myself in reading, and then one night I literally dreamt up a spiral of red fabric. It was a strange nocturnal visit — something that after much conscious thought and work the unconscious released. For a few days I wrestled with the spiral of red. Then I submitted, surrendered and began to design around it at the centrepiece, the foundation stone of my *axis mundi*.[58]

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[55] Swain, R. (2006). Telling That Story: Marrugeku Company's Creative Process in Western Arnhem Land. *About Performance no. 6* Dept Performance Studies, University of Sydney p. 16.

[56] Ibid p. 31-32.

[57] Ibid p. 35.

[58] Translated as 'Centre of the World'

3.0.2 Form and Content

In his summing up of the Introduction to *The Future of Ritual*, Schechner makes this comment on contemporary Ritual Theatre making:

> 'To reuse, recycle, archive and recall… to seek roots, explore and maybe even plunder religious experiences, expressions, practices, and liturgies to make art… is to ritualise; not just in terms of subject matter and theme, but also structurally, as form.'[59]

This supports of one of my central questions about the differences in process between designing ritual and creating contemporary performance. It is a question regarding approach towards form and content. As a result of Schechner's premise on the 'recycling' of content and the 'structural' process of ritualising, I decided to explore the possibilities of designing a ritual without meaning (no prescribed content) in a series of laboratories. I wanted to examine whether ritual could exist purely as 'form' and have meaning attributed latterly — should the audience wish to make associations.

3.0.3 The Laboratories [60]

'It is better to light one candle than to curse the darkness' Traditional Chinese Proverb

As part of my research I made lengthy lists analysing commonplace rituals and rites of passage.[61] I found repeatedly that each ritual had a very strong sense of 'why' it was enacted, and that a very good number of them had equally strong relationships to time and place of enactment. I decided to set myself a series of tasks to challenge some of these findings, to see whether content, time and place were essential, and in doing so set up a series of laboratories in which these questions were played out. My final laboratory was one in which the audience took part. Their involvement was vital to the central focus of my thesis in creating an embodied space.

Lab 1. Performance style

I gathered together a group of trained performers and as they arrived I washed each of the participant's feet on their entering the space. This activity set the tone of each laboratory. Commencing with this ancient, and pampering ritual indicated both the nature of the realm we were to investigate together and also gave all of us the first hand experience of enacting a ritual together. This foaming footbath was performed as a gesture of thanks to a group of trained performers who I could not financially recompense. It also provided a ceremonial transition from

[59] Schechner: The Future of Ritual p. 19 - 20

[60] Refer DVD 2004 Ritual Laboratories

[61] Appendix Two

the rest of the day's activities into a time and space marked for this exploration. It was a dislocating activity as well as concurrently one of realignment.

I next led a series of performance style workshops including kinaesthetic warm ups, running and stamping exercises, Suzuki method and 'school of fish' movement. Each of these exercises concentrated on opening the individual towards that sensitised improvisational space where timing and locating the work inwardly is crucial, and where individuality melts in and out of a strong sense of 'group'.

Lab 2. Locating emotional receptivity in performance style

For the next session, after the foot-bathing ceremony, I introduced a fairly random group of objects and asked the performers to create a death ritual together. The objects included a plastic lei, rice, eggs, teabags, fabric strips, an axe, and half a dozen cardboard crowns. I gave the actors ten minutes to prepare something and then watched their performance.

I observed a recurrence of gestures and movements, rhythms and focus. There was repetition of movements, recurrent use of the motif of encircling things and spaces, use of symmetry, a strong personal sense of role in the 'ritual', symbolic representations of unity (in white headbands), and a symbolic attribution to objects which were used or placed with significance and focus. The result was a very powerful piece of theatre which was very ritualistic in execution. However, this piece remained most strongly in the realm of theatre rather than ritual for me. Perhaps this was because the person signified as 'dead' was most obviously alive, and the actors were not attributing this death in memoriam of anyone specific. Death remained symbolic itself rather than actual. The performers were also struggling to create a ceremony from the initial brief within a short time frame. I feel that in time, with deeper work on symbolic language and content, we could have created a piece which transgressed the boundaries further into ritual, however, this was not my aim at this point. Locating an emotional and physical receptivity to the theme of Death and to the objects offered and to ritualising was the goal.

Most interestingly when I asked them about the use of each object, down to the seemingly arbitrarily chosen tea bags, the performers had attributed symbolic weight to each one of them and could describe exactly what they represented and why they were used. My conclusions here were that content immediately added not only a unifying element and common goal, but that it also provided narratives within which objects could be used to symbolise moments of importance in the stages of the 'ritual'. Most poignantly, each performer knew that when the candle was snuffed out that the designated person had finally crossed through the liminal zone and was now perceived as dead.

Lab 3. Space and Object

For the third session I gave the actors a few objects and asked them not to tell anyone what the ritual was that they were creating. They could discuss it between themselves but were not to divulge its meaning to anyone else. The result reminded me of travels to 'foreign lands' where I could see that the ritual enacted meant something to the participants, I could sense that something was happening that had great meaning for them in how they placed objects, made gestures and performed, but in most cases I had no idea what was going on. I felt excluded from the experience — although pleasurable to watch — and was left baffled as to meaning. The objects in themselves offered little hint to the precise nature of the ritual.

Lab 4. Objects without shared meaning

My fourth experiment led me to hand out objects and then tell each group to construct a ritual without discussing what they were doing and without having any content ascribed to what they were enacting. I gave them candles, teabags and garlands and a few minutes to organise themselves in silence — allowing movement and objects to determine their ritual. The result was confusion for all of us. The performers floundered trying to pick up what each other felt was going on and soon each object became heavily laden with meaningless meaning. It resembled Byron Bay in midsummer on a full moon. A lot of lighting of candles, and even more moments of holding things up and looking purposefully at the object then repeating someone else's action. This was often executed falteringly, with little conviction, but with a hope that repetition would engender something 'ritualistic'. Importantly, the performers felt that the performance was the thing of focus and mentioned that they were struggling to keep united in the performance with little sense of what was being ritualised. They were struggling to find a group focus in what was clearly an open improvisation. Without a shared notion of content, objects were not able to function as symbols and the whole sense of ritual fell apart. This strongly indicated that in practical as well terms as well as by definition there is no such thing as a symbol without meaning.

Lab 5. Shrine building - personal devotional object/ space

This laboratory was an exploration of creating an intimate 'sacred' space. I gave two people very different poems to use as inspiration in whatever way they desired, and one person was left with free reign. The results in such a small sample were inconclusive, however it was notable that the text inspired spaces held a special significance which the builder wished to communicate with the viewers. There was a reverence with which each builder presented and approached their shrine. This sense I perceived to be transmitted to the viewer by particularities of placement of objects and through the signalling of (probably) unconscious gestures. Whilst with the scale of this experiment I could not draw an irrefutable conclusion that content in the shrines was an essential part of their

success in creating a sense of 'sacred space' it certainly pointed towards this. The piece which was designed purely upon aesthetic placements whilst lovely to look at, did not appear to hold any significance other than its patterning and as such reminded me of time obfuscated symbols on cave walls from ages past. The meaning was lost and any sense of the sacred obscured.

Lab 6. Candles and projections

This final lab was a play with light and projections. At this stage I was interested in how to transform space with firelight and to see how projections may work in concert with this aesthetic. Fire has a strong symbolic quality as does 'light' (which is discussed later in this thesis). Notions of illumination of the heart, mind and spirit go hand in hand with its practical eradication of darkness.

Lab 7. The Showing

The showing of work was the laboratory in which the audience became involved as active participants. It was my first use of the labyrinth pattern in tea-lights (a very much smaller, abbreviated version). There were a series of shrines that I set around the space including excerpts of text or poems which were appropriate to each shrine's content.

The shrines were of significance to me and each was complete, existing in its own poetic. There was very little formal performance in this event. The audience walked into the space, into the labyrinth, and past the shrines to finally light a candle and place it in a bowl of sand, before sitting in a bank of seating. I gave a small talk on my work and at this point and then asked the audience to fill in anonymous questionnaires. The results were unanimous in the audience's sense of engagement in a ritualistic event and many people commented on feeling a calming effect responding to the aesthetic power of the placement of shrines and poems. Most people responded strongly to the use of fire and the labyrinth walk finding it a grounding, unifying and paradoxically ethereal experience.

The results of these laboratories pointed towards the realisation that in order to create more than just a sense of ritual that there must be a collective focus, something to ritualise, and that this must have some level of import to the participants. Otherwise, the results could be simply described as dance or movement theatre.

Ernabella Choir – Adelaide Festival 2004

At this point I would like to reflect on an event I attended when I first commenced my Masters studies and visited the 2004 Adelaide International Festival of the Arts. It was the year that Stephen Page was Artistic Director and there was a wealth of Indigenous art and forums programmed.

A pivotal event for me was attending a choral performance of elderly Aboriginal people, the Ernabella Choir, singing Hymns in Pitjantjatjara language. It was a moving and fragile experience to see such weathered faces and elderly frames sing quavering melodies in language having travelled many thousands of miles from their traditional lands.

When asked why traditional music was not played with the translated Hymn text the choir leader pointed out that with Indigenous art forms, because of their ritual significance, form and content are inseparable. If extant traditional music were played images would be evoked in the minds of the indigenous congregation, which had nothing to do with the Lamb of God or of Christ's suffering and much to do with land and dreamtime imagery. The Christian content (the hymn text), he stressed, only has context in the Western Harmonic form.

I found this concept, so tacitly expressed, to have a profound influence on my inquiry. Such a line of thought — that form and content were inextricable — I found to be contrary to the majority of contemporary performance theory and practice that I was in contact with. A well accepted process of making theatre is to explore content and then decide what form it should be expressed in. I was curious to explore whether within ritual performance such a separation could be quite so surgical.

Ritual and ritual theatre is often described as a form in itself; however, I feel it would be more accurately described as a mode. Theatrical forms could be described as an arrangement and style of performing, an aesthetic choice perhaps primarily, wherein the content is artfully displayed. A mode of behaviour or performance suggests an action which is determined by a mindset or intention, here the aesthetics serve to augment and support the mindset and certainly do not intend to create an intellectual inquiry or debate. A ritual mode is a manner or approach which is taken consciously in relation to some topic or content. To ritualise, an active state, suggests that there must be something which one intends to emphasise or mark as significant.

Thus within the ritual mode it is possible to utilise different forms of theatricality — dance, song, puppetry, movement, procession — but the mode in which the content and the form it takes is presented must adhere to the sensibilities required of the specific ritual. Different theatrical forms are certainly evidenced in rituals around the globe from Balinese Shadow puppetry to African trance dances and European passion pageants — to name a few. In this way ritual mode can be seen as

the meta-form for an arts practice which encompasses a multiplicity of forms but is consistent in that the focus of each form is to emphasise the content as being of central importance to the group enacting it. Never does the form outweigh the importance of the content or stand alone as 'art for arts sake'.

3.0.4 The Ritual Object - Symbol, Semiology, Meaning and Post Modernism

In imaging the divine or when plundering extant ritual forms, understanding the function of symbol is of prime importance. Symbols could be described as the language of ritual. Indeed they are its very building blocks. As with any language, symbols or iconic signs accrue associative connotations from both the verbal and non-verbal realms (i.e.: the senses and emotions). When combined with belief — or suspension of disbelief in a theatrical context — they can create very powerful and highly personal responses in participant and witness.

When designing for theatre any object chosen will have its own associations. A leather lounge chair will evoke different moods; emotions, memories, thoughts and sensations compared with a chintz upholstered one. Similarly when designing the physical and symbolic landscapes of ritual, objects will be chosen for their ability to communicate and invoke states of being.

Although objects can be symbolic so can gestures, actions, qualities, spaces, positions, words and times. Thus, when designing, and especially when attempting to create a new form, there is a blurring of the definitions of design as the whole event is in a real sense designed concurrently with the visual language which embodies it. The performer, investigating the sublime moment with movement, gesture and spatial proximity (a visually 'designed' communication), becomes as much a 'ritual object' or part of the visual design of the work as the more conventionally perceived elements. In *Song of Ourselves* for example, the performer who lit the fire picture 'Sorry' became a symbolic vessel performing a function that was necessarily a symbolically shared one. The fire lighter, having taken flame from the dancers who had performed a dance of harmony and celebration of difference (one dancer a non indigenous woman and then other an indigenous man), then circled the audience before slowly lighting the fire picture. This action was performed with only the calls of crows and a humming chant by the performers heard and complete focus was given to the act rather than the individual the fire lighter could be seen to be a ritual object — although an animate one. [62]

[62] This crow call was used symbolically resonating both with the local fauna of the area and also with local Wurundjeri creation stories in which 'Waa' the crow spirit has a significant role.

In order to create communally reflexive experiences, one of the most powerful tools in creating 'new ritual' is to develop an understanding of the relationship of symbols and their semiology. There is a wealth of scholarship on semiotics, symbol, sign and signifier and their semantic relationships. Semiology could be loosely defined as 'the science of signs in general'.[63] Theorists such as Ferdinand de Sausurre (founder of the term 'semiology'), Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes have each explored and defined the field in detail, however it is Victor Turner's notion of 'comparative symbology' that I find most useful in the context of ritual design. He defined this field as being 'narrower' than that of semiology and 'wider than (the field) of symbolic anthropology'.[64]

I find Turner's annexed grouping particularly helpful as this gaze is not so concerned with linguistics as with the effects and experience of 'the non-verbal symbols in ritual and art'. Comparative symbology examines symbols in isolation and their relationships in juxtaposition, their cultural context, the concepts and values that they represent and the feelings and aspirations associated with them by the cultures using them.[65] Symbols are used in ritual, I believe, because they appeal to more than simply our intellect. They are sensory, dynamic and iconic, laden with layers of meaning. These meanings have in contemporary times often escaped our understanding; a decaying of belief systems is echoed by dissipation in our symbolic systems too. Nonetheless, paradoxically, many symbols still retain a presence and power within our culture although sometimes original contexts may be obscured or supplanted with new associations and meanings.

Importantly, Turner notes that symbols come into being having been drawn from 'cultural genres and sub-systems of expressive culture' he goes on to add: 'symbols are essentially involved in social processes (and I would now add psychological ones too)'.[66] The very stuff of symbols is that they talk to us in a way which is culturally appropriate and specific, drawing on both verbal and non verbal, oral and literate forms extant within that culture in order to create or provoke a set of desired feelings, understandings or states of being in the viewer.

Grimes reminds us that:

> 'we humans are symbol-driven animals, acting not only on the basis of what things are or do, but by what they mean. Symbols are tools with which we discover, construct and communicate meaning.'[67]

[63] Turner: From Ritual To Theatre p. 21.

[64] Ibid p. 20.

[65] Ibid p. 21.

[66] Ibid p. 21.

[67] Grimes: Deeply Into the Bone p. 71.

As we hanker to create meaning and attach narratives to ourselves and to the people, places, beings and things which construct our world, then it follows that when ritualising — the very act of assigning significance — we are compelled to utilise symbols. Symbol and metaphor are integral to the language of ritual, and it is with repetition of enactment that our ritual sensibilities grow and develop our understanding of this language.

In his thesis Cameron outlines many of the difficulties that face a designer of 'new ritual', including perhaps the most confounding, which are the effects of post modernist theory on notions of 'meaning' and on 'symbols' and the loss of their 'textual frameworks'; the meta-structures in which those symbols and meanings once had belonging.[68] As cultures shift, change and evolve so too do their symbols.

In describing the use of symbols within the ritual designs of Neil Cameron Productions, Cameron suggests:

> 'These forms do not try to replicate the coherent, integrated past narratives from which the symbolic elements come, rather they carry new expressions of still familiar symbols and representations in new formations, or assemblages, that are able to speak to the communities for whom the event is designed.'[69]

With the increasing secularisation of society and absorption of once sacred symbols into popular culture where these symbols take on new significance (eg. Madonna - an iconic name and suggested role - sporting a large crucifix as fashion fetish), it is clear that the designer of new ritual cannot use symbols with any reliance on past contexts or previous 'cultural narratives'.

> 'The challenge in the contemporary context is how to produce such a metalanguage of myth, symbol and representation when the extent of shared cultural meaning seems to be so much less than it was, yet when the abundance of cultural symbolism and representations is so overwhelming.'[70]

I find this analysis to be insightful and helpful to the designer of contemporary ritual. It is particularly pertinent for my research into the design for a meditation on reconciliation as the entire endeavour was a cross-cultural one. Careful and considered selection of imagery, object and symbol was necessary in order to prevent — quite literally — mixed metaphors. My own symbolic impulses I felt had to be gauged and appraised by my Indigenous advisors. This as much for being part of the nature of reconciliation built into the process of the piece, where adherence to appropriate protocols and permissions were heeded, as for making sure that imagery was actually

[68] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 18.

[69] Ibid p. 18.

[70] Ibid p. 18.

communicating the same set of associations to both cultures and successfully traversing into the realm of ceremony.

Of further interest to me are Eliade's notions surrounding the choice of objects and gestures for their function in ritual behaviour. Objects, he suggests, are seen to be of no 'intrinsic' symbolic or spiritual value, but rather are infused with meaning in the ritualising process because of their usage. Objects are receptacles of meaning and gestures acquire meaning only insofar as they are repetitions of a primordial act.

> 'The crude product of nature, the object fashioned by the industry of man, acquire their reality, their identity, only to the extent of their participation in a transcendent reality. The gesture acquires meaning, reality, solely to the extent to which it repeats a primordial act.'[71]

Implicated in these primordial acts, are the objects and gestures which constitute the symbolic, embodied nature of ritual. In considering a 'sacred feast', 'sacrifice' or 'communion' the chosen food, its presentation, its stylised ingestion or offering appeals to a sensory comprehension that, I believe, is linked to its symbolic one. The 'food' itself may be perceived to have no inherent property and is significant only so far as significance is thrust upon it. The power of the sensate, nonetheless, bears great significance in choosing the symbolic item — it is an intuitive 'felt moment' in which a certain receptiveness of being is required in order to discern — not simply intellectually — what item is 'just right'. For example, when one attends a funeral it would be rare to choose just any flower to lay on a loved one's grave. One may remember that they liked a certain type of flower, or that something about a particular flower reminds one of them or captures a quality sympathetic with one's feelings towards the deceased. It could be possible that there is something about the quality of a particular flower, apprehended by sight or smell perhaps as much as 'appropriateness', that signifies it as meaningful. In the context of the enactment of a ritual or rite, one not only views the ordinary object (the food, the flower etc.) transformed into the sacred but one also behaves differently towards it.

While to a certain degree it is true to say that objects acquire their meaning because of their usage (and clearly in this context Eliade is concerned with creating a possible philosophy of a specific era and culture), and that certainly for many cultures notions of repeating a primordial creative act is sacrosanct, however, I am not convinced that this is a complete explanation of the significance of ritual objects and symbols.

I suggest that the role of sense and sensibility in the choice of objects, the absolute often unconscious primary gesture before the use of the object, is a complex and varied process of

[71] Eliade: The Myth of the Eternal Return p. 5.

discernment. Although it is true to say that the 'symbolic' qualities of an object are not inherent, and that sometimes literally any object will 'do', I do believe that there is a counter argument to acknowledge that, in some instances, no other object will do.

My design for *Songs of Ourselves* needed to be as intact symbolically from the base up as any temple would be. It also needed to be open and considered as communication across cultures was of distinct importance. Symbols and metaphors which recur in numerous cultures can be valuable starting points, but as ever, caution must be exercised and thorough research conducted.

One of the most obvious metaphors for reconciliation is the bridge. I was tempted to build something which audience and crew would both need to cross, and yet budgetary concerns curbed my enthusiasm for this as costs for materials and builders would have quickly blown out. I started to play with the notions of pathways and cross roads. Indeed, it seems that white Australia is forever sitting at the crossroads with our white blindfolds on — unsure which way to go, forward together, backward, or to sidle sideways crablike. I kept the concept of three main chambers which the space would be divided into. I saw the chambers functioning in three different ways. The first space was to create dislocation or perhaps more accurately disruption and realignment. The second was to house the meditation, with the final chamber being a place for integration of the experience.

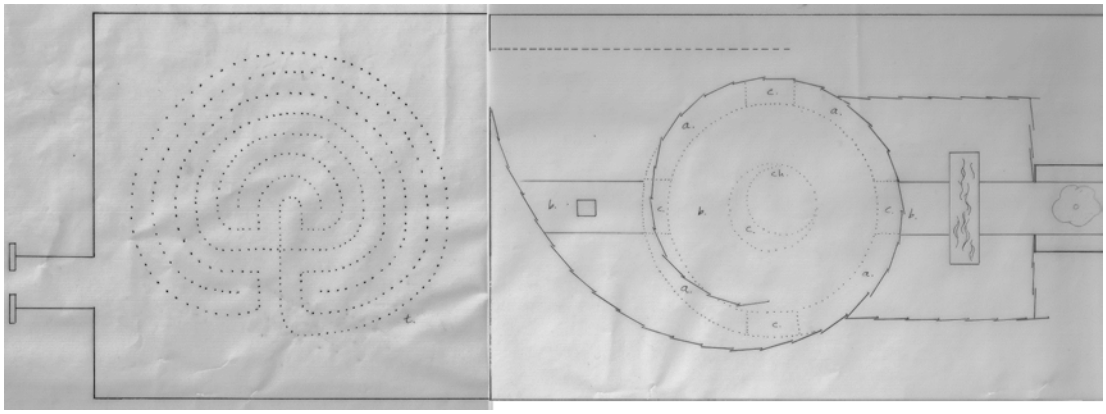

Figure 12. Blueprint for Studio 45, *Song of Ourselves*

The first chamber, as before, housed the labyrinth. The second and much larger space was where I started to sketch in the crossroads. The door leading to Sturt Street offered itself as the perfect gauge for the width of these paths and created a strong thrust through the centre and out of the building. The overlaying of geometrical shapes and patterns continued until I had a blueprint of the space with a cross roads lying underneath a circle within a spiral that was drawn up according to

the golden mean.[72] In installing the design in the space a blue chalk line was used to lay out the geometry. I observed how this activity echoed Tibetan monks laying out the geometrical yantra of a sand mandala.[73] Echoing Eliade's notions of an *imago mundi*, I found myself forced by sheer necessity to enact a process that for centuries has been adopted as part of the very bedrock ritual of sacred design. This, for me, started the creation of a sense of cumulation of meaning in Studio 45.

I shall describe the space in more detail later in this dissertation; however, here I wish to look more closely at the most prominent symbols utilised in Songs of Ourselves.

[72] Doczi, G. (1994). The Power of Limits: Proportional Harmonies in Nature, Art and Architecture. Boston and London: Shambhala. pp. 1 – 5.

[73] This was a process which I had observed during tour management of The Gyuto Monks of Tibet in 1999.

3.0.5 The Elements

The World is large,
but in us
it is as deep as the sea R.M.Rilke

Figure 13. 'Sorry' fire picture and candle boats on the water trough
Song of Ourselves

A contemplation of the elements, and their symbolism is extremely beneficial to a maker of new ritual. Most cultures around the globe honour them in their rites and rituals, from Tibetan Buddhist and Hindu *pujas* to high Roman Catholic masses or Indigenous ceremonies. There is an undeniable and fundamental awareness that the elements procure. We breathe air to live; it circulates through our blood that is coloured red with iron just as the earth. We cannot survive without water and are told that 80% of our body is made up of it. Fire is found in the electrical impulses, the firing of synapses, in our limbic system. Each of the elements formed an integral part of the design in *Songs of Ourselves.*

Earth

Earth held significance beyond its symbolism as matter from which we are all made or as signifying a grounding influence. Earth in a ritual about reconciliation could not help but have poetic and political resonance with issues like the declaration of *terra nullius* and the Aboriginal land rights movement. [74] One highly significant symbol which was reproduced over and again in *Songs of Ourselves* was that of former Prime Minister Gough Whitlam pouring earth into Vincent Lingiari's hand. Many Australian's would recognise the iconic moment captured by Mervyn Bishop, but few actually know the significance and details of the story. Part of the charter of *Song of Ourselves* was to provide information about such historic events — which the cast learned along the process — and which the audience could read about on the walls of the final chamber. The image of hands

[74] Literally meaning 'no one's land', *terra nullius* was used to justify British sovereignty of Australia as an empty land without, so it was believed at the time, civilisation. This term became pivotal in the Mabo and later Wik high court decisions

and earth passing through them was repeated from the outdoor shrines and the earth altar to the blindfolded figures seated in the central ceremonial space.

The nine cubic metres of sand that was used in *Songs Of Ourselves* was chosen in two shades for further symbolic reasons. Dark red earth is often identified with the 'red centre' of the country, but as most of us still dwell on the coastal fringes, the paler shade was used to suggest beach. Together they could be seen to give a symbolic resonance of the entire country.

Water

Water was used in the meditation on reconciliation in more subtle ways. The warmed, moist handtowels used in the foyer space of *Song of Ourselves* served to perform a casual cleansing ritual and gave a soothing start to the event. Water was also used to create a metaphorical landscape upon which to float the candle boats. Here water could be seen as a metaphor for the unfathomable future — a fluid reality coming into being. Water, often a symbol of the subconscious and emotional realms in the human psyche, is also undeniably one of the most precious commodities on this the driest continent on earth. In utilising water at the focal point of the ceremony, in conjunction with fire in the candle boat ceremony, the multi-sociative resonances of water served to focus the importance of this activity.

Air

Perhaps the most ubiquitous and yet illusive of the elements, air had a stylised representation in *Song of Ourselves* by burning incense and smoking fires. This scented air brings attention to the olfactory senses and further serves to dislocate the audience in subtle ways. In many meditations a focus on breath is crucial and at moments in *Song of Ourselves* breath was suggested by a whispered soundtrack or encouraged in the silence of watching the fire picture burn. These private moments of attendance were provided for the audience to engage with on a subconscious — if not conscious — level

Fire

Fire is one of the most potent of symbols that can be used in ritual. It is often seen as a symbol of transformation and destruction as well as one of generative and healing powers. In Indigenous cultures throughout Australia, fire has special significance, varying from clan to clan, but essentially signifying the hearth, family and centre of the community. [75] Fire is used in smoking or cleansing and healing ceremonies and has countless other ceremonial uses.

[75] Langton, M. (1999). "The fire at the centre of each family": Aboriginal traditional fire regimes and the challenges for reproducing ancient fire management in the protected areas of northern Australia, *FIRE! The Australian Experience*. University of Adelaide: National Academies Forum. pp. 3 – 24.

As we observe annually, fire plays an important and at times terrifying role in our landscape; transforming acres of bushland into infernos whilst concurrently bringing with it a generative force that many plant species require for successful germination and survival. Throughout time and in every culture, mankind has harnessed this most unruly of elements to create the hearth upon which food is cooked, around which community gathers for warmth and as the tool with which the darkness is tamed. We use fire to cremate our dead, to burn our refuse and to light our ceremonies. Candles on a cake symbolise our years upon earth in little fiery sparks whilst every four years an Olympic flame traverses the globe in a highly symbolic relay.

As previously mentioned in this commentary, fire has held huge personal significance for me having worked for many years on the annual Woodford Folk Festival Closing Ceremonies. After months of preparation a central bonfire would consume an image built over it — often 15 metres high and exquisitely decorated — in a ceremony sacrificing something precious in order to make way for new beginnings. The profundity of being able to release an object, which was observably a labour of love, to be transformed into ashes serves as a metaphor for many of life's journeys. This sacrificial moment was one of the steps towards achieving a transcendent state.

> 'Without a feeling of loss there can be no transcendence to the future'.[76]

The role of fire in *Song of Ourselves* was multi layered. Most often it was used as a symbol of the life force and as an agent of change. Fire and smoke was also used to purify and guide, from the simplicity of a fire torch illuminating a singer to the message of a marine flare's warning and a brazier burning leaves which the audience passed by. Tea lights created a real and symbolic pathway of light to follow highlighting the inner quest for illumination. A duet was danced honouring qualities of harmony and union which was enlivened and tethered by the generative and potentially dangerous power of fire in small flaming pots. The final burning of the 'Sorry' fire picture was a moment of meditative release in which audience and cast were united and a commonly held hope was offered up with sincerity. Finally the tea light boats gave voice to each individual's presence and symbolised their life essence and aspirations for change.

[76] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 112.

3.0.6 Symbolism in Song of Ourselves

A significant impact on the cognitive processes at play in rituals is explored in Neil Cameron's thesis where he makes reference to Arthur Koestler's term 'biosociative thought'. [77] Cameron expands this idea into what he terms the 'multi-sociative' or syncretic thought processes triggered in ritual design. [78] Simply put, an awareness of this unconscious process of creating meaning out of gathered symbols is to be put to use when designing rituals as choice of symbol and context in relationship to other images and symbols carries significant weight.

> 'The aim is to create a dense cultural environment which allows each member of the audience to take out of it what s/he will at whatever level. However, it is vital that the event makes overall symbolic sense to the artistic team and, although participants and audience may not perceive a symbolic cohesion, there is a central group that does. This is vital to the integrity of the whole experience. The symbolism must not be thrown together haphazardly without a careful interlocking, and this is especially true when using the symbols of other cultures.'[79]

At this point I shall give a brief analysis of some of the other recurring symbolic motifs in *Songs of Ourselves.* The basic building blocks of visual design could be categorised as colour, texture, mass, number, line, space, shape, and light (among others) and all have symbolic signification attached to them in rituals. In favour of brevity, I shall not focus on every single item designed, and many design choices have been already discussed, but only on those which held the most vital significance. As previously discussed, symbols are the language of ritual and as such each object gesture or motif used was chosen for its appropriate signification and particularly for its ability to assist in embedding the audience as part of the design and to assign the space with the power of being performative and symbolic itself.

The Tree

Trees have multi-sociative resonances in most cultures with examples such as the 'tree of life', tree of knowledge, or the 'family tree' abounding in many mythologies and belief systems. In this era of environmental degradation the tree is often a symbol of the fragility of the planet.

Trees were an important symbol in *Song of Ourselves* and beyond these syncretic references above made further significations. The archway of trees, built to mark the liminal zone transitioning from outdoors to indoors, were representative of manna gums. The manna gum is sacred to the Wurundjeri people and is used in many ceremonial roles including welcome and smoking

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[77] Ibid p. 24.

[78] Ibid p. 25. Cameron citing Ladislav Segy : " …unconscious mental ability to unite harmoniously several manifold, originally different, often simultaneously occurring, overlapping, diverging, sometimes inconsistent, concepts, relationships between things, actions and emotions".

[79] Ibid p. 52.

ceremonies.[80] A central dead tree at the heart of the seated ceremonial space in *Song of Ourselves* served to highlight the degradation meted out to Indigenous peoples and the landscape. Over the successive performances, this tree was slowly resurrected with each ceremony, as the Indigenous performers created their own ritual of draping it wish fresh boughs. A small sapling in the very final space, fully leaved and green, symbolised hope for the future and celebrated the regenerative power of Nature.

The Boat

Boats have strong metaphorical power in rituals. They can symbolise a journey of the spirit as well as of the body, they can remind us of the final journey we all make across the river of Styx and in Australia they remind us of the first fleet as well as the intrepid journeys of refugees. In *Song of Ourselves* the audience were swept along in a stylised boat by the sweeping performers as they all set off on the journey of the event together. Finally, each participant launched their personal candle boat, a simple representation of the self, as a symbol of the pledge in which they shared individually and which could be instantly collectively observable.

The Hand

The shape of a simple hand outlined is a simple and powerful allusion to humanity. Many cultures have used this basic motif for this simple but powerful signification and it can be found in cave paintings and artefacts around the globe. The shape of a hand reminds us of what things unite us and divide us from the animal kingdom and that with its use every culture has fashioned and shaped the world, crafted objects and made culture.

Blindfold

Using a blindfold and connoting sightlessness equates with lacking intellectual and emotional vision and insight either as a result of one's own or enforced blindness. Blindfolds can suggest a foolhardy or ignorant frame of mind. It did not come as a surprise, during my research, to discover that ANTAR (Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation) use this symbol in their events as well.[81] Clearly, it is an appropriate symbol. In *Song of Ourselves* the blindfolds represented many of these qualities, foremost among them self imposed ignorance and lack of compassion. The audience each had a blindfold draped over their individual chairs along with their candle boat. The blindfold signified the blindness that we all at times share, as well as holding within it the possibility of release from past — it lay untied and open as if offering choice along-side the candle boat and its signification.

[80] Permission to reference manna gums and perform a stylised 'smoking' had been granted by Aunty Joy.

[81] ANTAR white blindfold events

Red fabric

The 170 metres of red cotton cloth, which formed the spiral wall, was symbolically red. The colour red was used here to signify blood and life, highlighting the visceral realm rather than the spiritual realm. In the context of *Song of Ourselves* it also served to symbolise Indigenous blood shed over the years of colonisation — a continuing act. In shepherding the audience along a red corridor and into a circular chamber of red cloth (where they finally sat for the central ceremonial sequences of *Song of Ourselves)* these resonances of blood and of individual implication arose. This was highlighted by newspaper cut out figures which were strewn along the path and which the audience could not avoid stepping on.

Figure 14. The central circular chamber, *Song of Ourselves*

Seating

Small black stools, spaced equally around the perimeter of the central circular chamber, made stable and yet potentially fragile seats. The stools had no backs to lean comfortably upon. Their shape demanded that the audience sit in a mode of anticipation rather than relaxation. The stools were also spaced close enough to create a sense of community but far enough apart so that each individual could be seen and could not hide or relax from observation. Lights were trained individually on each seat and kept illuminated throughout the duration of the show, even if almost imperceptibly, in order to augment this atmosphere. In seeing each other illuminated and part of the picture, in the round, the audience were invited to perceive each other as part of the design and part of the set and part of a community. The implication here is that they may realise that they were creating this picture for others as well.

Curtained walls

The walls of Studio 45 were all curtained off to obscure the confines of the building. This meant that the audience were never entirely sure where the actual limits of the building were and added to a sense of hovering in space and time. I have discussed the symbolism of the red curtaining above, however when the red curtain lifted to reveal the final chamber and the two fire-pot dancers, the walls in this section graduated from black through shades of grey to white. This graduation symbolised the process of illumination and coming into clarity. The white walls were symbolic of a hopeful future and a created a pure and light state in which to launch the candle boats.

Costume

Costumes in Song of Ourselves were kept simple. This was partly because of the large cast and budgetary constraints. However, the more I considered the costuming the more I came back to a simple and humble image, nothing heavily ornamented would work in this context. I reluctantly, at first, chose an all white and natural fibre design. Natural fibres were necessary due to the use of fire and after much experimentation with other colours, I kept returning to white. This non-colour seemed to hold a simplicity and reductive humility within it where other hues became suggestive and carried a more loaded symbolism. Another layer of meaning was that in many Asian cultures, white can often represent grief and sadness and this did not seem unsympathetic to the tenet of the event. Production crew from VCA scoured wardrobe for white natural fibre garments, and as a result each cast member cobbled together their own 'look'. The results were that in spite of the meta-message of the everyman (collectively being clad in white) on an intimate level each individual had styled their own costuming to reflect themselves. They were simultaneously representing community and individual.

Figure 15. Four of the cast members, *Song of Ourselves*

Materials

Materials used in Song of Ourselves were necessarily and purposefully natural where possible. I have mentioned the need for a sparse aesthetic and one which would harmoniously house the content of the ritual, and so I have discussed the use of sand, the elements and natural fibres. Other natural materials included the paper and bamboo archway and the wooden shrines along the walkway. Natural materials require the maker to enter into a particular dialogue with them when making. If the object is to retain some of their natural quality and not be completely dominated, then there is a conversation which must occur in which the maker finds out what the material 'wants to do'. Then by working with this natural propensity the artist can build or design in sympathy with the material. This approach echoed some of the main themes of the ritual in honouring the natural world and respecting other cultures.

Light

Light was used both practically to illuminate and symbolically as guide towards inner illumination. This intention was carried throughout the event whether by use of fire or candescent light. Light led the audience from space to space, drawing them through the labyrinth and then along the spiral of red fabric to find their seats. I have already commented at length on the symbolism and significance of fire and when discussing light this must be considered.

Music

The musical journey of *Song of Ourselves* was complex and highly textured. Music often creates the heartbeat and pulse to rituals, like many performative forms. It was vital that the right tone be set at each stage of the event and hence attention to musical design was as important as any other element. Importantly it further served to cohere the group of performers as they practised drumming and chanting together over successive weeks of preparation.

Tania Bosak and Gus Macmillan led the musical direction of Song of Ourselves. Tania has had vast experience as a professional drummer and in particular has studied Korean Traditional Drumming (including ritual trance drumming). Tania's interest in ritual and chant coincided well with the project and she brought with her considerable expertise and knowledge about rhythm, repetition and the ways in which these elements can transport and shift consciousness into a state of receptivity. Much has been written about the powerful effects of rhythmic chanting and ritual trance drumming, and particularly how sound waves interact with the brain to create a feeling of wellbeing, however unfortunately, this topic is far broader than I have scope for within this commentary.

Gus Macmillan created the sound design for Song of Ourselves. Gus and I worked closely in getting just the right sensibility for each space and activity. Eventually Gus came up with a diurnal arc of

sound which started at sunset in the outdoor area, moved through a timeless zone in the labyrinth then on to moonrise in the red spiral to the darkest moment of night in the central chamber. At the end of the ritual sunrise was evoked in sounds of birdcall and gentle rain as the candle boats were offered up.

Sorry

The fire picture 'Sorry' was the central symbol in *Song of Ourselves*. The act of burning the word served to sear its importance and fragility into the minds of the audience as they watched it flame up, burn brilliantly then start to flicker and die. The importance of saying 'Sorry' has been a long and bitter political argument in this country often touted as being simply symbolic and therefore unnecessary. It has also been seen as an admission of guilt (rather than of responsibility) and has been shied away from because of the discomfort that any such admission may procure. In some ways 'Sorry' has been viewed as a Pandora's box which once uttered will undermine the very basis of Australian society and the status quo.

However, few people have not experienced the healing qualities of an apology at some time in their lives. Saying sorry is difficult to do when fault is found in one's actions and it requires humility and a commitment to change to give a sincere apology. In burning this word at the highlight of the event, those gathered who wished to take this stance of regret and responsibility could participate in a ceremonial moment which our political leaders at that stage were unprepared to do.

Food and drink

One final but equally important symbol was the symbolic act of sharing food and drink. This activity, often tacitly performed, in this instance became a symbolic action of community. Most celebrations around the globe include sharing food and drink, and often special foods are prepared to augment the occasion. One of the first year production crew took on the role of ceremonial food chef and voluntarily made it her duty to assemble sandwiches and finger food rather than to rely on commercial catering. This sensibility made the food a personal gift to the project and served to support the sense of care that was being taken in the ritual. This area where food was shared also served as a zone of realignment. Eating and drinking have grounding and consolidating effects on us and in being able to relax and chat the audience were being prepared for their journey out of the ceremonial space and back out into the world.

3.0.7 Time and Repetition

Do I dare
Disturb the Universe?
In a minute there is time
For decisions and revisions which a minute will reverse. T.S Eliot

When creating rituals of any type — whether in the theatrical or everyday realm — the appropriateness of timing is a powerful and at times paradoxical element which has an illusive energy. There is a qualitative aspect to time that can be utilized to great effect. Whether timing takes cognisance of the season, the date, diurnal rhythms or is simply an awareness of appropriateness of the minutiae of timing of gesture, in an improvisational sense and a spiritual sense, there is a deeply understood sense of there being a 'right time'. The paradox lies in the fact that the moment cannot be pre-empted nor does it fit within the formal constraints of 'timing' so frequently alluded to in theatre. Our experience of time is acted upon by ritual, 'rituals concentrate, and thereby consecrate, time.'[82]

This 'right moment' has infinite manifestations and can be repeated — yet only at the right time. The 'right time' I believe is in this ritual moment is one of internal alignment when the act/ rite/ meditation transcends the ego and a humble gesture ensues. When the bride and groom exchange vows there is sometimes a fumbling over words, and perhaps even a mispronunciation of their own names, as the gravity of these oaths are shared. This is the moment when the solemnity and seriousness of the rite comes to the point of threshold crossing. It is the moment where one leaves behind one's single identity and submits to union with the other. It is a moment of sacrifice. This is often the moment too when there is not a dry eye in the house.

Of significance is this quality in a ritualised performance that can create a sense of being in a 'real' moment for both performer and audience. It is a witnessing of something that has not been rehearsed (with all the inherent perceptions of attaining a state of 'perfection') yet may have been repeated. It is a moment marked by a visible relaxation of ego or status and the quality of focus in the participant, often a palpable image of humility, is capable of potent visual significance. The sensibility such a focus creates contributes to a mutual perception of being in a shared and authentic or un-contrived moment.

One of the most crucial aspects to the enactment of any ritual is that there is space designed within it to allow for ambiguity and therefore for individuals to process their own meaning from the assemblages presented. Symbols because of their multi-sociative possibilities tend not to tie meaning to one inviolable truth. This need for ambiguity was also why in *Song of Ourselves* English

[82] Grimes: Beginnings in Ritual Studies p. 65.

language was almost entirely absent up until the pivotal moment of burning (and in this context of expressing) 'Sorry'. In using language very sparingly, I hoped to design a ritual that avoided being didactic and was open to be interpreted as each individual wished. However, this need for ambiguity also exists not only in representative terms of symbol and visual design, but also in the handling of time.

> 'In the context of transcendence celebrations, however, the artist must produce a structure that allows ambiguity; must encourage a flexibility of sign and activity without descent into anarchy and damage or, on the other hand, "killing" the true moments of transcendence with too much control.'[83]

Mircea Eliade's writings have been foundational to my thinking about time and designing ritual. His exploration of the origins of ritual, from the perspective of a philosophy of history, provides a framework demonstrating the centrality of importance of ritual to humanity. Although to modern ears some of his terminology may be unpalatable ('primitive man'), I nevertheless find that his conclusions are of value and worth further pondering.

In examining what he terms as 'archaic' or 'primitive' man's propensity to live in an awareness and celebration of natural cyclical growth patterns, demonstrated in rituals and rites, Eliade elucidates a pattern of creating or paying obeisance to archetypes. This focus impacts on both the physical world (in terms of ritual design and behaviour) and on the psychological or 'spiritual' world, which in turn guides and impels the ritualising force. These archetypes he stresses are not to be considered in the Jungian, psychological appreciation of the term, but rather, seen as 'paradigmatic models' or 'exemplary models' whose actions were faithfully reproduced.[84] This, he purports, was deemed vital to the health and endurance of the society. As a foundation place in the evolution of ritual behaviour throughout time, I find this intuitive invocation of the 'divine within' and the linkages to the surrounding world inspiring. I suggest that this points to an inherent quest within mankind, almost a 'hardwired' attraction towards numinous experience, the 'precious moment', where historical time is subordinate to a sense of the eternal.

Eliade goes on to present the notion of 'renewal' as not simply a cosmic cycle of growth, but simultaneously as a non-linear experience of history. He puts forward the theory that 'primitive' or 'tribal' man lived/ lives in a recurrence of mythical moments rather than being embedded in a sense of chronological historical time.

> 'Now let us turn to human acts… their meaning, their value, are not connected with their crude physical datum but with their property of reproducing a primordial act, of repeating a mythical example. Nutrition is not a simple physiological operation; it renews a communion.

[83] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 109.

[84] Eliade: The Myth of Eternal Return: pp. 6 – 11.

> Marriage and the collective orgy echo mythical prototypes; they are repeated because they were consecrated in the beginning ("in those days", *in illo tempore, ab origine*) by gods, ancestors or heroes.'[85]

Of course, according to Eliade, one does 'fall' from this plane of transcendent archetypal enactment from time to time — but the very cyclical nature of this view of time allows for the moment of annihilation of the past, and consequently, one of rebirth. One can transcend one's personal history by passing through systematic 'rebirths'. This paradigm allows for the possibility of forgiveness not simply of others or the fates, but importantly of the self. One's past is obliterated in rites which cyclically metaphorically sweep one's slate clean. I find this idea to be of considerable fascination as it creates a possible pattern for 'escape' or transcendence - from the current tyranny of inevitable 'progress' — thus echoing the very foundation of what I see as one of the central functions of Art.

In contrast, Eliade describes the future as the 'descending arc of contemporary history':

> 'Individually, each is free to withdraw from this historical moment and to console himself for its baneful consequences, whether through philosophy or through mysticism… the historical moment, despite the possibilities of escape it offers contemporaries, can never, in its entirety, be anything but tragic, pathetic, unjust, chaotic as any moment that heralds the final catastrophe must be.'[86]

> 'Any other situation of modern man leads, in the end, to despair. It is a despair provoked not by his own human existentiality, but by his presence in a historical universe in which almost the whole of mankind lives prey to a continual terror (even if not always conscious of it).'[87]

By enacting the repetition of a mythical or archetypal example which was held to have happened 'in the beginning' (*ab origine*), or 'once upon a time' (*In illo tempore*), one achieves the abolition of time.

The imitation of archetypes and repetition of paradigmatic gestures:

> '…not only reproduces the initial sacrifice revealed by a god *ab origine*, it also takes place at that same primordial moment…every sacrifice repeats the initial sacrifice and coincides with it.'[88]

> 'Through the paradox of rite, every consecrated space coincides with the center of the world, just as the time of any ritual coincides with the mythical time of the "beginning". Through repetition of the cosmogonic act, concrete time, in which the construction takes place, is projected into mythical time, *in illo tempore* when the foundation of the world occurred. Thus the reality and the enduringness of a construction are assured not only by the transformation

[85] Ibid p. 4.

[86] Ibid p. 13.

[87] Ibid p. 162.

[88] Ibid p. 35.

> of profane space into a transcendent space (the center) but also by the transformation of concrete time into mythical time.'[89]

For Eliade 'Archaic' man dwells in a non-linear appreciation of time. And indeed this is to my mind is a possibility when experiencing particularly resonant artworks.

Song of Ourselves endeavoured to create this abolition of time, if only fleetingly, in utilising devices like the labyrinth and the final fire and tea-light ceremony. Drumming and repetitive chanting added to the sense of timelessness and created an aural landscape echoing the psychological intention. The timing of the end of the ritual was kept fluid to allow for any sense of this non-linear experience to persist. There was no finale marking a definite end for symbolic reasons as well. The process of reconciliation in our society I see as being far from achieved and it felt that a correct way to leave the subject manner was to leave it hanging as a presence needing completion and attention in the future. The transition from the candle boat ceremony into the more casual ritual of sharing food was intentionally blurred as this allowed for the possibility of the experience of an internal paradox of an incomplete completion. This was a gently disruptive state.

This experience prompts me to allude to one of the most ephemeral and intangible experiences of timing and ritual in the experience of synchronicity. Time and again events or images would seem to conspire to assist in the creation of *Song of Ourselves*, and receptivity to these experiences can assist the designer. Rehearsals for drumming practise were held in a local Uniting Church. On the first rehearsal we found that the very same labyrinth pattern we were to use in *Song of Ourselves* was painted on the wooden floor of the transept.

The timing of *Song of Ourselves* was similarly synchronous with the very specific political climate of June and July 2007. This was when the then Federal Government introduced its highly controversial and divisive policy of Intervention in the Northern Territory Indigenous Communities.[90] This political act served to further consolidate the commitment of cast and crew and would have been influential on most of the audience, regardless of their own political stance towards it. As designer, the synchronicity in the timing of the Intervention served to focus my determination that symbolic ceremonies such as *Song of Ourselves* are of contemporary importance.

[89] Ibid p. 20 – 21.

[90] The policy of Intervention was announced by the Federal Government on 21st June 2007

3.0.8 Sacred Space – the Axis Mundi

Figure 16. Yggdrasil: Old Norse representation
of Axis Mundi as an Ash Tree

Landscape — both the man-made and the natural — has unfathomable and distinct effects on a culture and its poetics. Cultures evolve and grow from their geographic roots in relation to specifics of seasonal experience, topography, climate and flora and fauna.

I have found that an awareness of 'place', an acknowledgment of the tensions that exist whilst being 'on country', and awareness of the interplay of time with histories, stories and traditions of that place can foster very powerful art making. These histories may not follow a pattern or form palatable or comprehensible to the Western gaze, being ingrained with spiritual language and mythic references, but being born of the land have undeniable value.

I return for one moment to the Ernabella choir leader. Later on in his presentation he went on to say that if we were to take Descartes famous declaration 'I think therefore I am' (*Cognito ergo sum*) as a pinnacle signposting of identity in Western philosophy, then to begin to understand Aboriginal cultures one must replace the word and the concept surrounding 'to think' with one of ' to sing'. *Canto ergo sum.*

Friedson in *Where Divine Horsemen Ride - Trance Dancing in West Africa* has acknowledged a similar phenomenon in West African culture.[91] Here, however, he replaces sing with dance. He goes further to suggest that *'I dance, therefore I am'* recharts Descartes' philosophy as an ontology of the body. Could it be that an understanding of the nature of being in Australia, rather than being perceived through intellect alone, might be similarly recharted as an ontology of song — voice and story, body and mind? This is an expressive mode and an alchemical one that contextualises

[91] Friedson, S. M. (2005). Where Divine Horsemen Ride - Trance Dancing in West Africa. In A. a. K. Hobart, Bruce (Ed.), *Aesthetics in Performance : formations of symbolic construction and experience*. New York: Berghahn Books. p. 109.

humanity within and in relationship to wider creation as opposed to an intellectual stance which recognises and views the self as alone at the pinnacle of creation.

> 'A danced ontology moves us out of an interiority that projects a vision of certainty into a world that calls the body to recognise itself in the contours of musical experience.'[92]

The choir master's declaration suggested to me that the very bedrock of Indigenous Australian culture, a civilisation that is the worlds oldest, lies in the central importance of song, not simply as music but as story as well. Story is infused with spiritual and mythical allusions and is not simply a secular fable, thus in engaging song there is a fusion of body, mind and soul.

If we can agree that Culture derives and evolves from the land of its birth; if it is embedded in a sense of place and illustrated through the observation of flora and fauna, geology and topography, climate and season, then a culture which has endured the significant peculiarities of the driest continent on Earth for over 50,000 years must have a highly sophisticated sensitisation wherein 'song' and 'songlines' have vital significance regarding survival in this land which lies far beyond a Western oriented gaze.

If thought embeds those of us who are raised in the West in Western Culture then how very radicle it is to our thinking selves to abandon this rationale for a culture whose basis lies in the voices and stories of the land. It is for this reason that I am convinced that non Indigenous culture has a lot to learn from Aboriginal cultures about how to live on, in and with the fragile balance of this country. We need to learn how to add our voices to the song.

It was for these reasons that in designing *Song of Ourselves*, inclusion and representation of flora and fauna was of paramount importance. A celebration of the land was part of my intention as I recognised that the love and care that most Indigenous elders exhibit for the land along with their requests to respect the land, and come to care for it as they do, is an important aspect of reconciliation. I had gathered video footage from my travels from South Eastern Tasmania to North Western Cape York and then projected it onto a screen behind a solo dancer. This dance was an intentional homage to the seasons, the land, ancestors and the elements and intentionally highlighted beauty and diversity. Here the human figure, significantly a whitefella, was juxtaposed in relationship to and with the landscape. This was an image of the white woman not so much lost in the bush, as in so many late Nineteenth Century paintings, but in concert and conversation with it.

[92] Ibid p. 109.

The piece preceding this one (a woman clawing at clay on a rickety table) was an intimate performance of the fine balance and fragility between creation and destruction. If reconciliation is about bringing disparate things into harmony then this child-creator image exemplified the difficulty and magnitude of the task. Here we played with several archetypes and creation myths and in the end she played with clay like a god forming the planets. This was another reminder of the base chemistry we all share.

It was soon clear that in order to house all these complex and vulnerable zones which I wished the audience to experience and traverse that I needed to design my own secular sacred space. In my research, I came across Eliade's theories on sacred space. Eliade extrapolates, from his extensive study of the foundational beliefs of many cultures around the globe, that most mythological systems and religions proclaim for every terrestrial phenomena, whether concrete or abstract, a celestial precedent. Thus temples and cities have divine models and only the wild and uncultivated places — assimilated to chaos or pre- creation — occur without prior design. Wilderness, when needed for human activity, is transformed through foundational rituals, from chaos through creative act, to ordained space.

In this way Eliade notes many archetypal images (eg. the holy city) recur throughout different cultures mirroring this same impulse — to create a replica of the divine image and to sanctify the space, in accordance with primordial gestures of creation. In this way — by making things 'sacred' — he suggests they can endure the test of time. Often a foundational stone is laid which symbolically locates the 'centre' of the world.

Eliade further points to a commonality of the depiction of a 'sacred mountain' — a place where heaven and earth meet. In a sense, he suggests, every temple becomes a sacred mountain creating an *axis mundi* – a meeting point of heaven, earth and hell. Further there is the concept of the *'imago mundi'*, the sanctuary that reproduces the universe in its essence. There are innumerable extant architectural examples from Gothic cathedrals to Persian ziggurats and the meditational tool — the mandala — which is a stylised geometric evocation of just this notion created in 2 dimensional artworks as well as 3 dimensional sculptures and sand paintings.

> 'The Javanese temple of Borobudur is itself an image of the cosmos, and is built like an artificial mountain (as were the ziggurats). Ascending it, the pilgrim approaches the centre of the world, and on the highest terrace, breaks from one plane to another, transcending profane, heterogenous space and entering a 'pure region'. Cities and sacred places are assimilated to the summits of cosmic mountains.'[93]

[93] Eliade: The Myth of the Eternal Return p. 15.

It is my belief that this notion of the centre of the world, the zone of the sacred, aligns the participant in a receptive state with the aim of achieving a sense of centred-ness. One is not only physically reminded that one is at the (mythical) centre of creation, but also that in this numinous moment, literally in the zone of eternity, one perhaps becomes the archetypal 'every person' or even more audaciously an embodiment of divinity.

Questions began to emerge: 'Is it possible to create a symbolic centre in a theatrical space where such a dramatis personae is made of the audience?' and 'can the space act as performer?'.

Studio 45

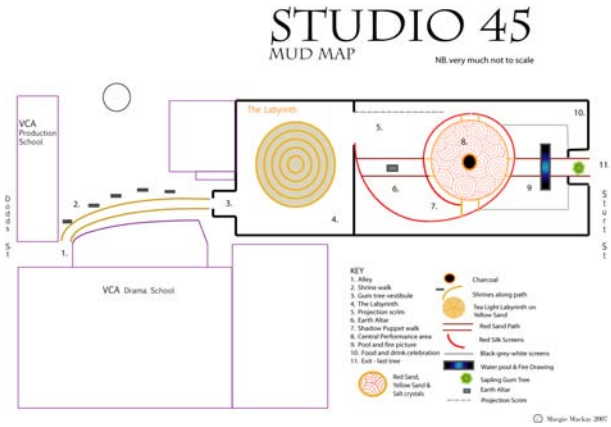

Figure 17. Studio 45 Mud Map, *Song of Ourselves*

I decided that I wanted to create a work on campus in the largest space I could find. Studio 45 held several resonances for me as my *axis mundi* after the Navigators experience, and practically it would also be a venue in which I could safely use fire, which was an important priority.[94] An added attraction was the garden walkway to the building and the possibility of blurring the indoor and outdoor worlds a little to create a truly site-specific piece. I was conscious throughout the design process of not attempting to appropriate Indigenous cultural imagery nor to use inappropriate Western symbols or decorative motifs, which would only serve to undermine the piece. Hence a sparse aesthetic and use of natural materials where possible was required.

Theatre as Secular Temple

According to Grimes a ritual maker:

> 'treats objects and spaces as animators of the behaviour that transpires around them; objects and spaces are not rendered inert backgrounds for human activity.'[95]

In participating in such animating and animated spaces, the alignment and attainment of a balance achieved within oneself is a deeply 'felt' experience – particularly when married with and augmented by the focused embodiment of ritual practice. I began to see studio 45 as a secular temple and played with ideas of bringing the outside inside, metaphorically, physically and spiritually.

If one is to consider theatre space as capable of being transformed into a secular temple then the qualities within a temple structure and design are of importance to note. Bastin in *The Hindu Temple and the Aesthetics of the Imaginary* suggests that:

[94] In some ways choosing Studio 45 was expiation for the disappointment and dislocation of that event which had burned into many of the cast's psyches

[95] Grimes: Rite out of Place p. 92.

> 'the essence of temple aesthetics is reflexive self awareness designed to bring into existence and hold in place the presence of a deity.'[96]

If, in this phrase, we remove 'the presence of a deity' and exchange it with 'a spiritual experience' we come closer to a secular interpretation of sacred space, which could then also be applied to the transformed theatre space of Studio 45.

Bastin paraphrases French philosopher and aestheticist Mikel Dufrenne, stating that the temple differs from other aesthetic objects due to:

> 'the way it draws the spectator into its form so that the aesthetic experience includes the spectator…there is no frame separating the artwork from the world of the spectator because the artwork becomes that world, drawing the spectator into a kind of dance.'[97]

Echoing an earlier point made in this paper, Bastin notes that 'The temple as a whole is thus as much of a ritual as the ritual it contains' going on to express the numinous expression in a temple as being:

> 'Like a ritual, it strives to create the conditions of possibility through engaging the primal fantasy that projects into existence that undifferentiated moment prior to space and time.'[98]

Bastin poetically labels the *yantras* (blueprints which underlie each statue or mandala) in a Hindu temple as 'instruments of capture'[99]. As mentioned earlier in this commentary, I designed a detailed pattern of symbols and spaces which were captured in the blueprint design for *Song of Ourselves.* This was then laid out in the space to scale, '*yantra-like'* with blue chalk. I have already alluded to the cubic metres of sand, the metres of cloth and the central red chamber, the lighting, seating and the final ceremonial space in the previous section of this dissertation; however, there is still some detail to discuss about the mesmerising form of the Labyrinth and its power to draw the spectator in to this 'kind of dance'.

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[96] Bastin, R. (2005). The Hindu Temple and the Aesthetics of the Imaginary. In A. a. K. Hobart, Bruce (Ed.), *Aesthetics in performance: Formations of Symbolic Construction and Experience*. New York: Berghahn Books. P. 101.

[97] Ibid p. 92 - 97. Mikel Dufrenne is particularly noted for the 1953 work The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience (*Phénoménologie de l'expérience esthétique*).

[98] Ibid p. 96.

[99] Ibid p. 93.

The Cretan Labyrinth

Figure 18. The Labyrinth, *Song of Ourselves*

Having examined some of the Cretan Labyrinth's potential in the Showing of 2004, I decided to continue to explore it and used it as a starting point for my design in Studio 45.[100] Labyrinths can be found around the globe and in numerous cultures from China to Pre- Colombian USA. Hopi Indians had many patterns, as did the peoples of Peru, Egypt, Greece, Britain and in Scandinavia over 600 stone labyrinths survive to line the shore of the Baltic sea, to this day.[101]This meditation tool fitted my aim to have the audience physically involved in an action that was a reflexive experience for each individual; creating an image for them of being a part of a whole whilst remaining connected to their own path as an individual.

A labyrinth is recognised as a form of sacred geometry combining the circle with the spiral in a meandering but purposeful path. Walking a labyrinth could be seen as a metaphorical journey to one's centre and then back out into the world again. As such labyrinths have long been used as meditation and prayer tools. Many Gothic cathedrals in France and England have complicated maze patterns laid in their stone floors; most famous among them is Chartres Cathedral, which in 1230 had a forty-foot diameter labyrinth set in the nave.[102]

I first walked a Labyrinth when directing a community event in Vermont, USA. A renowned Welsh labyrinth diviner had been commissioned to create a Cretan pattern labyrinth on the property on

[100] DVD: Showing 2004 and refer http://www.geomancy.org/sacred-space/labyrinths/using-labyrinths/using-7-circuit/index.html

[101] http://www.veriditas.org/about/rediscovery.shtml

[102] http://www.bc.edu/bc_org/svp/st_org/pdp/chartres.htm

which the event was taking place. [103] Lynn expertly dowsed his labyrinth with a whipper snipper into the long summer grasses on the upper banks of the Winooskie River. At the centre of his labyrinth a circle of compressed grasses revealed the overnight sleeping spot of a fallow deer. This project was beset with such strange synchronistic occurrences.

During the event, in a moment of inspiration, I sent the audience off to walk the labyrinth following a guide with a fire torch. It was a moonlit night and the effect was quite mesmerising. As an onlooker the effect on me of the pattern of figures emerging and disappearing and passing each other in single file was almost as profound as on those taking part. A complex dance of relationships was enacted whilst all were on the journey to a central point and out again. The group coalesced at times only to split off into a long tapering line as the chambers of the labyrinth snaked back and forth upon itself. The group eventually walked in a measured and calm way — slowly coming into rhythm and pace with each other as the shape and symmetry of the labyrinth demanded a continuity. Finally, just as they were emerging from the labyrinth, a coyote howled.

The image of these figures crossing and counter-crossing in torchlight, stayed with me and seemed to present a subtle method of inspiring a centred and calm receptivity within an audience. This calm and centred-ness was an essential quality to attempt to invoke in *Song of Ourselves* as I realised that what was to follow, in the more ceremonial aspects of the ritual would, require a receptivity not necessarily part of a more conventional theatre experience.

In placing this Labyrinth on Aboriginal Land I was aware that I was utilising a sacred form that was pre-Christian and yet had also been absorbed within some aspects of the Christian tradition as well. This suggested to me that part of the labyrinth's power lay in its aesthetic of inclusion. This meditation tool, which derived from the ancient roots of my own Western culture, was arguably ancient enough to remain intact as a tool un-diluted or owned by contemporary politics and religious schisms. On a visual level, the pattern in tea-lights I found to be resonant and sympathetic with Indigenous dot paintings, and yet remained in no way derivative. Here was a place where two seemingly very different cultural expressions and aesthetics could potentially meet.

A walking meditation also seemed to be a complementary allusion to the Indigenous experience of 'walkabout'. Walkabout remains mysterious and ineffable for most non- Indigenous Australians. My understanding of it is as an ancient practise, still practiced today, of being in and with country in a timeless zone of receptivity and solitude. The suitability of the single file labyrinth walk made itself doubly clear after the event itself when cast and some crew went on a walk held by the Koorie Heritage Trust: 'Walking Birrarung' and led by Fay Ball. This activity was one we has decided to do

[103] Lynn Hartwood

as a group activity and in the spirit of keeping learning about Indigenous history after *Song of Ourselves*.

At one point in the walk, Fay asked us to walk across a grassy patch of land. At first we did so as a herd of cows might and trampled our way across the space indiscriminately. Fay then asked us to go back and walk in singe file. Fay noted to us that this was a traditional way of travelling through country so as to travel lightly and not destroy delicate plants and habitats that might later be relied upon for sustenance. The difference in the experience was profound. Walking in single file we each remarked on how alone but part of a whole we felt, and also that there seemed to be an economy in expenditure of energy in following in someone else's footsteps. At one point, one of the cast members declared: 'It felt like that walking the labyrinth'.

3.0.9 Enactment and embodiment: the phenomenology of ritual

Ritual is optional. You can choose not to engage in it, to simply dabble or go through the motions, or to participate wholeheartedly. If one does chose to engage, whether by conscious choice or simply by being swept up in the moment, regardless of your degree of conviction it is inevitable that ritual will demand a physical commitment of you. Particular to the enactment of ritual there is what Turner describes as a notion of attendance. If your degree of commitment is strong then you will perform the ritual with focused attendance. One of Turner's definitions of ritual reveals this sensibility:

> 'Men and women, of a given group or culture, wholly attending, in privileged moments, to their own existential situation.'[104]

Importantly, where you sit or find yourself placed, what your sightlines are or what you choose to focus upon will inevitably create physical sensations which will in turn effect your experience of a ritual and your ability to enter into that state of attendance. Grimes observation of this phenomena is useful for the designer of ritual to bear in mind; he notes that:

> 'My body does not always follow the tracks laid by my theories, and since the study of performative modes such as ritual and drama involves bodily presence, I could not merely ignore my own physical responses.'[105]

> 'all the senses, not just seeing, must be developed for studying ritual.'[106]

Hence, in designing a ritual one must account for how it is likely to be experienced by the senses, along with all the other design criteria previously discussed, whilst allowing the ritual to have an inbuilt ambiguity and freedom which will allow for individual experiences and assignations of meaning.

> 'If structure is too insistent then the spontaneous nature of transcendence is gone and if there is too little structure then chaos and confusion can emerge.'[107]

As has been previously noted, ritual performance, and indeed ritual design, could be described as a mode of informed and sensitised improvisation. It operates within a score or shared language and there is a sense of an appropriateness of gesture. Gesture is at times imbued with strong iconographic resonance and not simply to be viewed as aesthetic expression. Grimes stresses the role of the imagination and spontaneity in creating ritual, as well as their ephemeral nature, seeing

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[104] Turner, V. (1984). Liminality and the Performative Genres. In J. MacAloon (Ed.), *Rite, Drama, Festival, Spectacle*. Philadelphia: ISHI Press. p. 23.

[105] Grimes: Beginnings in Ritual Studies p. 11.

[106] Ibid p. 14.

[107] Cameron: New Alignments in Ritual p. 107.

them as 'choreographic actions; they exist in the moments of their enactment and then disappear'.[108]

To enact a ritual one must inhabit and embody the action with gestures that are, on many levels, a visually 'designed' communication. This awareness serves to signify to the 'performer' who is enacting as much as to the audience perceiving. With the shared experience of this 'moment' there is a unity created with those participating and those witnessing. Once again, it is necessary to stress that the performer, investigating the sublime moment with movement, gesture and spatial proximity, becomes as much a 'ritual object' or part of the visual design of the work as are the inanimate elements.

Ritual, similarly to most theatre, contains performative roles. These are immediately evident in religious ceremonies; however, they are also a necessity within secular designs such as *Song of Ourselves.* The designer of the ritual performs the function of the ultimate guide in plotting out and assigning ritual tasks to those who will take on a ceremonial role and who will assist them in clarifying their communicative activities. The cast members in *Song of Ourselves* had multiple ceremonial roles they oscillated between. At times, they acted as guides for the audience indicating physically where to go, what to do and where to sit or stand. Then at other moments they became ritual makers and enacted and brought into being the very ritual they were leading the audience through. The crew, often completely invisible to the audience, also held an important ceremonial role. In a piece of new ritual sensitive timing of lighting and audio cues are as vital as in any piece of modern improvised theatre. However, the crew's role transcended that of pure technician, as they too by choice entered into the formation and enactment of the ritual and treated it with a certain attendance. Prior to the event each evening a dedicated crew would sweep all the sand and re-set the tea-lights with care and precision and further, by their suggestion, play music that would set a tone for cast and crew in preparation of the event. The sensitivity with which these tasks were performed and their attendance to details made of them ceremonial crew who held some very practical components of the ritual in their hands.

Importantly, however, it is vital not to carry these roles into the realm of everyday life and to assert authority where it does not belong. The ritual practitioner must remember that these roles are purely ceremonial and part of the fiction that surrounds the subjunctive mode of ritual. In *Beginnings in Ritual Studies*, Ronald Grimes expresses this observation thus:

> 'However serious our stride and tone, however fundamental our rhythms and ultimate meanings, we are pretenders to office; our work is dramatic and therefore fictional.'[109]

[108] Grimes: Deeply Into the Bone p. 7.

In 'Rite out of Place' Grimes goes further to suggest that if we were to consider what the currency of ritual would be it would doubtlessly be 'performance'. Certainly, the production, consumption and transfer of the wealth within Ritual requires a performative state in which both those enacting and those receiving the rite are physically implicit. Grimes goes on to suggest that the economic unit of this performed ritual is that of the 'gift' which:

> 'assumes the necessity of loss, even of deliberate and celebrated loss, of sacrifice of giving up what you would rather keep… what creatures have to lose in the gift economy is their lives. What the people have to lose is their false sense of themselves as superior'.[110]

An example in Australian Indigenous culture of such a gift economy can be found in the 'Welcome to Country' and 'Acknowledgement of Elders and Ownership' rituals that are more and more frequently prefacing official meetings and gatherings in Australia. These rituals are of supreme contemporary importance. Unfortunately, as with any ritual, if not attended to with sincerity and contextual understanding they run the risk of becoming tokenistic and in time meaningless.

I have been through many traditional Welcome ceremonies and in every case, when welcomed by a traditional owner; I am time and again struck by the magnitude, sincerity and generosity of the ritual. Safe passage across country including all that it offers in sustenance - the enjoyment of 'everything from the tips of the trees to the roots in the earth' are offered time and again. I hear I am always welcome to come back, that I belong here, that I am part of this place now too, that I should care for it and carry it in my heart when I travel away, and feel welcome to return to enjoy the land once more.

This generosity is an entrenched cultural more, and as a central ritual in Indigenous culture, it teaches us how we are to behave here not just for felicity between people but importantly in our attitude towards the land. When earth is described as 'mother' Western thought conjures up multi-sociative images from a panoply of examples throughout the ages. We think of everything from earth-mother goddess types, to the 1950's housewife in a crisp apron, to questionable examples in Desperate Housewives and eventually of course of our own 'mommy dearest'. We are taught to think analytically and to compare and contrast from an early age. In this postmodern age we find it increasingly difficult to think in archetypes which suggest some 'absolute'.

To see the Earth as archetypal Mother is to anthropomorphise her as the great provider; the selfless nurturing, all loving generator of life; the one who sings us to sleep with lullabies, which is challenging in our increasingly urbanised technologically framed existence. We lose our humility and forget that what we need to lose is our sense of self-importance, our superior intellect and be

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[109] Grimes: Beginnings in Ritual Studies p. 47.

[110] Ibid p. 154.

mindful of ineffable forces that have brought our beings into existence. This is an important acknowledgement within these welcome ceremonies.

In *Song of Ourselves*, I wished to posit an acknowledgement in a poetic form whilst utilising the outdoor space leading to Studio 45. I felt it important that the first voice to be heard would be that of an Indigenous woman. In seeking out this person I was led to Fay Ball, a Wirradjurri woman with a strong and compelling voice. I had envisaged a song sung in language — perhaps even a traditional calling in song. However, aside from the probable concern of protocol for a non Kulin Nation person singing in language, there was the primary issue of loss of language for Fay. Like many Indigenous people, particularly from southern states of Australia, she was not taught the language or songs and dances of her people. Fay's generous offer of one of her own compositions felt like a doubly appropriate solution. The song sat a little uneasily with some people and I think this tension is exactly what sits uneasily in mainstream non-indigenous culture today. It is not a bad thing to feel uneasy, as there is much to be uneasy about. In the mainstream there is an enduring dismissal of people who associate themselves with their Indigenous heritage and culture despite the lack of appearing 'black' and not having what they consider to be the appropriate cultural signifiers of language and traditional knowledge.

Fay's song — sung in the liminal zone of the alleyway — was a formal introduction to *Song of Ourselves* and on walking through the gateway to the shrine walk there was an unspoken commitment by the audience that they would be travelling along this unknown path of reconciliation together. The shrine walk was intended as both a space for memorial and for recognition.

The soundtrack played a vital part in this space — a whispered litany enmeshed in an unsettling sound-scape —was a poetic acknowledgement of country, ownership and elders. This was no *terra nullius* that the audience had stepped into. The design of this section of the ritual intended to create a sense of subtle uncertainty in the audience. The shrines, created by a group of Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists, represented some of the more significant people and movements in recent Indigenous history but did so in symbolic imagery. The shrines were created with much care and concern by the group of artists engaged and it is doubtful that the audience knew of their exact relevance (until the end where they could read about them on the walls of the final space). The strength in these shrines lay in their collective voice (there were five shrines in total all illuminated by fire torches) and in the ineffable expressive forms with which the visual arts so deftly communicate.

4.0 Reflections on the meditation

> 'Studying ritual will be fruitful if we recognise that we can only articulate its meaning after we have been grasped by its sense.'[111]

Performers

One of the greatest challenges in creating *Songs of Ourselves* was finding performers who were willing to give freely of their time and talents. Coordinating schedules is never easy, even for more professionally resourced productions, and the complexity of people's lives meant that very little time could be allocated to the entire ensemble. This affected the design of the piece quite radically as a series of vignettes with soloists or small groups evidently became the practical way ahead. In anticipation of this, I designed *Song of Ourselves* meticulously and knew in which spaces I needed particular types of performance. However, it was very much a case of matching artist's skills, sensibilities and availabilities with these vignettes.

Any success of the piece lies largely in the commitment that this group of individuals offered *Song of Ourselves.* No work of this magnitude is possible without the dedication that the ensemble gave to the ritual and the content of it.

Audience

The audience numbers for *Song of Ourselves* were designed to be kept at a modest twenty-five per event. Due to the number of people involved, more people wished to come along than I had anticipated and in the spirit of inclusion I decided to allow larger groups each night. This decision my have had some practical ramifications on sightlines, seating, and negotiation of the labyrinth however I felt it was important not to turn people away.

The anonymous questionnaire distributed at the end of each performance of *Song of Ourselves* asked some pivotal questions of the audience in regard to the research topic.[112] From a poll of over 35% of the total audience numbers, the results were remarkably similar in tone and response which gave a clear record of the outcomes to be measured.

Most respondents classified the event as a ritual with only a minority seeing it as performance art or theatre. Some individuals interpreted this question in order to describe internal responses the event had aroused within them; including comments like 'moving', 'spiritual', or 'enlightening and empowering'. Two people suggested that the category of event was one 'as yet to be defined', one went on to suggest it could be described as an 'alternative worship – ceremony'. From these

[111] Grimes: Beginnings in Ritual Studies p. 17.

[112] Appendix Three

responses one can assume that most people recognised the event as a ritual, or experienced emotions which are often conjured up in the experience of a ritual.

The overwhelming response to question five regarding their personal involvement was that most people regarded themselves as an active participant. Many people ticked all three of the first boxes suggesting that this sense of participation and of witnessing was a shifting experience throughout the event and that at times the distinction between these states was blurred.

The all but unanimous response to the third and sixth questions regarding the space they most enjoyed or the space they responded to most strongly revealed that the labyrinth was unquestionably the most evocative and affecting space in the ritual. Those questionnaires that did highlight other spaces alluded to either the central chamber and the 'sorry' fire picture or the candle boat trough. It is interesting to note that all these spaces mentioned have in common the use of fire. These were also the spaces which were designed to instil an experience of reflexivity and *communitas*.

In questions six and seven, describing how these spaces and their design affected them, the respondents made frequent allusion to very personal experiences ranging from uncertainty to elevation. Focus and awareness were often described as 'feeling at one' or of a 'connection to spirit and land' whilst concurrently experiencing a 'sense of sharing' with the other participants.

Fewer respondents answered question eight regarding their responses at being asked to wear and bring certain things. This may have been largely because of the sudden surge in audience numbers by word of mouth who did not receive the instructions via written invitation. Those who did fill in this question noted that the request prepared them to be active and involved and that it added to the invitation a sense of 'belonging' and triggered 'curiosity about others'. This sense of inclusion and anticipation gained from the simple request to wear something red and to bring a small cup prepared the audience for their involvement, giving them ' permission to look at each other' and to identify with the ritual with some sense of 'ownership'.

Answers to question nine echoed the duality of responses to question five. Most people felt that they were both part of a group experience but also felt that it was important to note on the questionnaire that they also felt individually implicated and personally engaged.

Answers to question ten revealed that respondents unanimously felt that a ritual was being enacted. Revealingly, the elements that made this so for most people were those that involved the use of fire. Time and again the three main areas in which fire was used as a source of deepening and focussing the ritual — walking the labyrinth, watching the 'Sorry' picture and launching the

candle boats — were highlighted as the most ritualistic moments of *Song of Ourselves.* Other respondents made reference to the musical score of drumming and chanting interspersed with silence and stillness and that this along with the lack of narrative structure were strong ritualising elements.

Question eleven asked for some description about how these ritualistic elements affected the audience. Most respondents answered this briefly, but remarked about a shift from feelings of disquiet or being 'un-nerved' and 'sad' to being 'soothed and empowered'. Without more detailed responses to each segment of the ritual it is impossible with any certainty to attribute these shifts in emotion to each particular stage in the ritual. However the complexity of the emotional responses, particularly in those that referenced use of fire, suggest that these important shifts were experienced as a result of the design rather than in spite of it.

Revealingly, most people expressed an importance of ritual in their lives, many of these stressing its role in giving meaning and structure to life events. In question twelve, many described ritual as providing a 'healing and comforting' function; enabling a sense of belonging and connection; remembrance and acknowledgement. A good number of respondents remarked regretfully upon a sense of the loss of ritual in contemporary society and in their personal lives.

Most of the questionnaires included messages of gratitude for the experience. This was a humbling response and served to remind me of the great responsibility incumbent upon the designer of ritual. Hearteningly, it pointed to the desire in many fellow Australians to enact a personally meaningful ritual acknowledging our Indigenous peoples and apologising for many injustices.

I could conclude from audience responses, as well as those from cast and crew, that *Song of Ourselves* as an experiment in designing a transcendent ritual was a success. It is clear that the design of a reflexive experience can to some extent be mapped out and constructed along intellectual, artistic and pragmatic paths. I am convinced, however, that a vital component is that of personal conviction and commitment to the design of the ritual and its content. Ritual as a form must be treated with awareness and responsibility whilst its content must ultimately be served and brought into clear focus. This is not to be mistaken for the suggestion that in order to design a ritual the designer must have passion and commitment for its content. Rather, that ambivalence towards the content's representation will dilute the efficacy of the ritual to generate a quality of transcendence and potentially risks the creation of a tokenistic result.

Having a personal commitment or belief in the content, on the other hand, will assist the designer of new ritual and augment their efficacy in communicating with this form. Similarly, an audience may attend a ritual which deals with content they feel personally committed to, but without that

ritual being designed with attention and competency the audience are at risk of finding the ritual unfulfilling and shallow. Rituals are capable of failure, no matter how well intentioned their designer or participants. Without an awareness of the language and building blocks of ritual, its structures and meta-structures and ritual's historical uses and contemporary significance, the designer risks dabbling in a form which is open to abuse and misunderstanding.

The practice of designing and enacting rituals is an ancient tradition which links us back to pre-history and in its most basic forms to the animal kingdom. Ritual is an inherently reflexive mode of behaviour that is enduring, vital and important to us for what it reveals to us about ourselves, each other, and the world around us.

I would like to finish this dissertation as it began, quoting from Walt Whitman. For me, these phrases grasp much of the illusive poetry and power of ritual.

> Stop this day and night with me, and you shall possess the origin of all poems;
>
> You shall possess the good of the earth and sun- (there are millions of suns left;)
>
> You shall no longer take things at second or third hand, nor look through the eyes of the dead, nor feed on the spectres in books;
>
> You shall not look through my eyes either, nor take things from me:
>
> You shall listen to all sides, and filter them from yourself.
>
> Walt Whitman *Song of Myself*

Appendix One: *Song Of Ourselves* – event summary

1. Procession of audience to alley for song of greeting. The audience were met by a group of performers who 'swept' the pathway for the audience to follow. They walked outside and travelled up an alleyway where Wiradjurri woman Fay Ball, illuminated by a fire torch, sang a song of greeting.	 The Ensemble
2. Walking through shrine garden installation. The audience processed along a garden path past 5 large shrines. These were created by visual artists to celebrate and commemorate some significant people and events experiencing an anniversary in 2007 (NAIDOC, '67 Referendum, Bringing them Home Report, Eddie Mabo, Vincent Lingiari). This pathway was lit by firetorches and a soundscape included a whispered acknowledgement of country.	 The NAIDOC shrine
3. Smoking and entering under the manna gum archway The audience were then ushered under an archway of stylised manna gums and were smoked with gum leaves as they approached the doorway of studio 45. This was a place of acknowledging forbears and ancestors.	 Fay and Kasila
4. Walking the Labyrinth The first chamber in Studio 45 was completely blanketed with sand and had a 1200 year old Cretan Labyrinth design picked out in tea lights set in the sand. A bowl at the centre of the labyrinth had a projection of stars, galaxies and the moon shifting across the surface of the water. A single gum leaf floated on top. A slowly evolving sound scape set a tone of mystery and depth and the audience slowly moved into and 'walked' the labyrinth.	 The Fire Labyrinth
• On exiting, a group of performers playing Tibetan Bowls ushered the audience through a doorway and into the next chamber of red wall hangings.	 The Tibetan Bowl Players
5. Earth Altar performance piece This short piece was a solo performance created on themes surrounding balance and imbalance, creation and destruction and as a central poetic made use of clay and earth.	 The Earth Altar
6. Dance/ projection of the elements A second solo piece of Butoh inspired movement cycled through the 4 elements, the four compass directions and the seasons. Accompanying it was a projection of images from the Australian bush, from Northern Cape York to south Tasmania. This piece was a homage to the love of land and longing/ belonging.	 Element Dance

7. Shadow puppetry To create a sense of lightness, the red fabric walls leading into the second chamber were transformed into shadow puppet screens which enabled a light-hearted moment with puppets of Australian flora and fauna, and finally more ominously the arrival of a boat. Following this image a cascade of bodies flowed down the red cloth and the audience had to pick their way over silhouettes of tiny cut out bodies lying on the path. The audience were led along past the puppets til they entered the central chamber.	 Eddie Mabo Shrine
8. Central chamber The central chamber had walls of red fabric and the floor covered in sand. In the centre of the space stood a dead tree – its roots surrounded by a circle of charcoal - underneath it two figures sat wearing blindfolds 'washing' their hands in the earth. Audience seats were in a circle and over each small black stool a calico blindfold was draped ontop of which was a small white origami boat with an unlit candle inside. Here, a vocal and percussion piece of growing intensity was performed by the ensemble. At the climax a minute of silence was held and then two Indigenous women entered with clapsticks and performed a simple cleansing.	 The Central Chamber
9. Dance renewal and hopefulness As a thunder clap pealed out a whole section of the walls of the red chamber lifted and a new space was revealed. Here an Indigenous male dancer and a Non-Indigenous female dancer then performed with fire pots in each hand in a gentle dance of union and difference. They danced infront of a trough of water behind which a small but verdant gum tree was placed.	 Remnants of the fire picture
10. Lighting of the Sorry fire picture At the end of this dance a firelighter rose and took flame from the dancers and then lit a fire picture that was suspended over the water trough. The picture was the first English word in the work and was simply "Sorry". The audience and performers watched the picture ignite, blaze and then slowly dwindle as the ensemble performed a choral and cello accompaniment. This took several minutes and the warmth of the fire lit up everyones faces as they sat in silence.	 We are the ancestors
11. Official Acknowledgement and Candle boat ceremony As the fire finally died, the Indigenous performers involved gathered and after an acknowledgement formally of traditional owners, introduced themselves and their own heritage. Then the singer Fay invited the audience to bring forward their boats (whose candles had by now been lit) and to float them on the water. As the audience came forward and bent over the trough they could see the words "We are the ancestors of Tomorrow" floating in the water.	 Tea Light boats
12. Mulled wine & finger food When this ceremony was over and after the last boat had been added, the audience were invited to join the cast and crew 'backstage' for some food and drink. This was an extremely convivial atmosphere and in this casual setting there was also a lot of information for the Audience to read about many Indigenous issues, Reconciliation and also aspects of the design of the show. The complete event lasted one hour.	

Appendix Two.

Type of Ritual	Reason/ why	Time/ When	Site/ Where	'Audience' active	'Audience' passive	NOTES
Rites of Passage… Marriage	Legal & or religious union desired by protagonists for emotional &/ or economic reasons.	Arbitrary: Usually date chosen as significant for emotional &/ or practical significance.	Traditionally (in West) held in church. Now held anywhere … usually chosen for significance by couple.	Must be legally witnessed - congregation often asked to pledge support…	Gifts given - often of significance to 'home-making' …dancing & feasting traditional	Strong reason Site & time: significance… Low level witness participation
Christening/ Baby Naming ceremonies	Baby/ child considered of age to be presented by parents to community - child accepted & considered part of community.	Arbitrary: Whenever the parents consider it appropriate…	Trad. In church… Now held anywhere parents consider appropriate - often chosen for significance.	'God' parents or equivalent pledge their commitment to child's wellbeing.	Gifts given -	Strong why Site & time: significance… Low level witness participation
Initiation	To induct initiate into the culture of a group/ society/ stage of life.	*Often when subject turns a certain age. *New person arrives.	Arbitrary: Differs according to groups 'rites'.	Witnesses may participate in physical aspects of rites - performing something 'on' the initiate. Essential that the initiation is witnessed.		Strong reason Site & time: significance… Varying level witness participation
Funeral / burial	Deceased person to be committed to 'eternity' - (disposal of the dead).	Arbitrary: but most often within the first week of death.	Church, funeral parlour, crematorium, cemetery…	Eulogy given by close friends &/or family. Flowers laid on casket & at grave.	No need for legal witnessing. Often 'wake' held as part of ritual mourning dead & celebrating their life.	Strong why Site & time: significance… Low level witness participation
Religious Ceremonies (Eg: Easter, Xmas, Ramadan, Hanukkah, Diwali, Baptism, circumcision, etc, etc…)	Most religious festivals are observed to uphold the tenets of the particular belief system. It is also worth noting that these events can be seen as possible times of personal transformation, as the individual is inspired to emulate an aspect of the favoured deity or embody a new aspect of being.	Dates which correspond to seasonal &/or astrological confluences are commonly chosen. Often date marks an event which has import & occurred at specific time. Dates can also be chosen to supplant one belief system onto extant ceremonial times from earlier religions.	Church, synagogue, temple, & often the family home. Ceremonies occur in significant sites chosen for their relevance to the cosmology the belief system is invested in. (Eg; 'Uluru', Mecca, Ganges River, etc.) The ritual site demarked By paraphernalia of faith.	Different traditions have different levels of activity & types of action. Common ones are: Prayers, Burning candles, Sacrifices/ offerings, incense, devotional music, ceremonial clothing, Ceremonial food,etc.	There may be very specific modes of behaviour & ritual cleansing/ bathing… laws & taboos which must be observed & practiced (ritual)	Why, When & Where all important aspects in these rituals Often congregation very actively participating

Mundane rituals Shower/ bathing	To cleanse the body.	Time is unimportant- only influenced by the individual's desire to cleanse - so they choose the 'right time'.	*Bathroom *River *Sea, etc. Mostly where ever full or partial immersion in water is possible.	Usually only self involved - unless assisting someone (aged, a child etc.) Or in religious ceremony.		Even though there is no underlying 'subtext' to the morning shower, there is definitely a feeling of the 'right time' to perform this ritual.
Coffee /Tea drinking	To mark the start of another day. To wake oneself. Cultural convention. Satiate a level of addiction. To punctuate the day. To take a brief break from one's work. To mark/ 'celebrate' sharing time with someone, etc, etc.	Not important for 1st cup but usually within a few hours of first waking. Morning Tea/ afternoon tea… Smoko At whim.	Not important - however often home or workplace, or cafe.	Either solo or joint activity of drinking		Ditto above… Many strong reasons for taking part in this ritual… marks a banal liminal moment, but nonetheless there is 'transformation'
Shaking hands	To greet someone either unknown previously, or just encountered for the first time that day (formal)	When meeting someone for the first time…	Wherever the meeting takes place.			Strong why. Site not fixed. A sense of it being appropriate at particular time & place - eg. would not be done 15 minutes after meeting that person
Friday night at the pub…	To meet up with friends/ workmates & to relax & mark an end to the working week.	Friday night	The pub	Drinking & debriefing/ gossiping/ chatting-up….		Why, Where & when very much important even though the reason seems very banal - a common ritual.
Seasonal Ceremonies New Year: Hogmanay, Losar, Hanukkah, Asian NewYear…	Celebrate the turn of the New Year & the end of the old. To mark the passage of time	New Year	Global experience (although calendars & customs vary)	Diff traditions have diff methods. eg Drinking, dancing, feasting, fireworks, festivals, sending of cards, chasing bad spirits away….		
Pagan ceremonies: Beltane, Samhuin, etc. (could be linked in with religious ceremonies)	Held to mark the passage of the year - to pay homage to the energies of natural world & to celebrate harvest/ welcome summer/ etc. etc.	Seasonally & astrologically timed feast days & festivals… specific times of day may be significant (sunrise/ sunset, midday, midnight)	Significant sites were/ are favoured, however, few remain accessible. The 21st Century rise of Wiccan belief has encouraged rites to be held in both domestic & 'natural' surrounds… ritual zone often demarked..	Very active…		

Appendix Three:

Song of Ourselves Audience Questionnaire

Are you Male or Female?

1. What term/s would you use to classify this event?
2. Do you feel the event was a success? What would be your criteria of evaluation?
3. Which part of the event did you most enjoy?
4. Which part did you least enjoy?
5. How would you describe your involvement :
    a. Active / participant
    b. Passive / witness
    c. In-between / mixture
    d. Unsure
    e. (in your own words)…..
6. Which space did you respond to most?
7. Can you describe your relationship/ experience of the spaces.
   ie. What moods were evoked indoors or outdoors and your place in them.
8. What did you think / feel about being asked to wear certain colours and bring certain things for this event. Did this effect your experience do you think… if so how.
9. . Did you feel part of a group experience of a personal solo process?
10. .Did you feel a sense of ritual being enacted? if so, what elements made this so for you & if not why not?
11. Can you briefly describe the way these elements/ sensations affected you?
12. Do you feel ritual has importance in your own life? If so – why and what does it provide for you.
13. Any Other comments?

Results of Audience Questionnaire

Number of male 9 Number of female 28	Total Number of participants who submitted a questionnaire 37				
1. Term most commonly used to describe event:	a. Ritual/ meditation/ spiritual / ceremony 17	b. performance art or hybrid ritual and theatre 9	c. theatre 1	d. personal/ emotional description 8	e. unsure 2
2a. Was the event a success	a. Yes 36	b. No 0	c. unsure 1		
2b. Criteria of evaluating success most commonly mentioned	a. Pace & design as a whole 7	b. participation 10	c. engaged/ moved 12	d. unsure 1	e. none given 7
3. Most enjoyed	a. Labyrinth 15	b. music 3	c. fire/ sorry /boats 5	d. All 10	e. other 4
4. Least enjoyed	a. Movement pieces 5	b. shadow puppets 2	c. outside 2	d. assorted other 9	e. nil 19
5. Involvement	a. active/ participant 18	b. passive / witness 1	c. in between 15	d. own words 2	e. unsure 1
6. Space most responded to	a. Labyrinth only 19	b. Labyrinth/ Sorry fire 6	c. Sorry Fire /boats 5	d. Red fabric 3	e. all spaces 4
7. Most commonly used terms to reference and describe experience/ relationship with spaces.	a. physical journey 4	b. sacred/ meditative/ spiritual 7	c. mixture: uneasy /dislocated then calm & safe 5	d. relationship to country and indigenous culture 4	e. No answer 17
8. Responses to being asked to wear red & bring things	a. simply enjoyed it 3	b. part of a group/ heightened awareness of event 10	c. anticipation 3	e. did not know 10	No answer 11
9. Group or solo process	a. Group 10	b. Solo experience 2	c. both 16	d. other	No answer 9
10a. Feeling that a sense of ritual was enacted	a. Yes 28	b. No	c. not sure	d. other	No answer 9
10b. Elements most commonly used to describe what gave a sense of ritual	a. fire/ use of elements 15	b. music /sound & silences 7	c. complicity & sense of Journey 4	d. specified actions and inclusion 2	No answer 9
11. Most commonly used terms to describe how people felt effected	a. Moved/ emotionally engaged 10	b. responded to apology 3	c. reflective state 8	d. disoriented 2	No answer 14
12. importance of ritual in audiences own lives:	a. important 22 22	b. not important 2	c. would like more 3	d. unsure 1	No answer 9

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