Art Praxis
As Tactical Ritual Process

Sacerludus: sacredgame

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PhD in Fine Art
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Abstract

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Sacerludus, a performative (textual) art work in its own right, provides a self-reflexive ground against which to analogically consider art praxis as a tactical ritual process.

Drawing on the distinction between Ritual (generatively, subjunctive ‘as-if’ in character), and Ceremony (descriptively, indicative ‘as-is’ in character), Victor Turner’s work on ritual liminality is applied as core theoretical concept: this generates the seeds and models of future society. Alongside the socio-political bias that liminality carries in bricolaged, makeshift and sensory orchestration, de Certeau’s concept of tactics is enlisted to reinforce potentials of counter-cultural resistance and subversivity.

‘What is Ritual?’ is considered before dealing with art praxis in its situated, exhibitional contexts, as they draw on ritual tactics. Art praxis and production is proposed as a subjunctively performative, ritual occasion, in opposition to the traditional conception as indicative, autonomous object. The contemporary form of installation is explored to reveal its incarnate implications for performative participation.

The ritual approaches tactics and processes adopted in conceiving and executing the works are articulated, before, in a form of post-scripted lettering, the contexted concerns of the submitted works are addressed. Sacerludus concludes that the framework of Ritual can be productively foregrounded in art praxis, as in its subversive-loading, it engages a participatively inclusive, generatively resistant process for contemporary aesthetic production.
Acknowledgement & dedication

FROM:
The Author

TO:
(on the pilgrimage)
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Terms
Terms

The word ‘ritual’ can be used as either a noun or an adjective. To avoid confusion, I will adopt the following convention throughout, except in the case of quotations from other authors where their usage is preserved.

**Ritual**: (capitalised) noun: distinct events, types of activity & social objects.

**ritual**: (uncapitalised) adjective: possessing ritual aspects.

As is not surprising given that this research is practice-led, I will be discussing ‘practice’. However, I will be using two terms:

**praxis**: used in relation to my own work or that of others where there is a specific nuanced understanding or interpretation of practical work in the world, with a transformative potential and intent, and sometimes with political content.

**practice**: used in general discussion of art works and context in a neutral sense (but which may nevertheless, in specific cases, also may include works with a nuance more towards the sense of praxis above) or where used by cited authors in their text.
Prefacatory
Prefacatory

‘Such is the wonderful fact which the liturgy demonstrates; it unites art and reality in a supernatural childhood before God.

That which formerly existed in the world of unreality only, and was rendered in art as the expression of mature human life, has here become reality. These forms are the vital expression of real and frankly supernatural life. But this has one thing in common with the play of the child and the life of art – it has no purpose, but it is full of profound meaning. It is not work, but play.

To be at play, or to fashion a work of art in God’s sight – not to create, but to exist – such is the essence of the liturgy.’

(Romano Guardini, n.d.)

Nominal (the title of this submission)

The title of this thesis contains the word, ‘Sacerludus’. This derives from the two Latin words, ‘sacer’ (‘holy’ or ‘sacred’) and ‘ludus’ (‘school’ or ‘game’). Why is this appropriate to this submission?

There are several reasons. It is, firstly, a partial appropriation of the title of a definitive book on the history of Christian worship by Bernhard Lang, ‘Sacred Games’, (Lang, 1997), in which he likens such worshipful rites to a series of ‘games’. Secondly, it is also the name ascribed to a form of Dionysian dance. The former is often regarded as being highly regulated, regimented or serious, while the latter would tend to the former’s (near) opposite: wild, chaotic and excessive.

It is in the quote above from Romano Guardini that I find a meeting of such seemingly polar opposites, particularly as he identifies the common strand of ‘playfulness’ in both ritual and art forms that do not claim conventional, functional, everyday ‘purpose’, yet nevertheless are regarded as achieving important (if as yet undefined) material effect on human life and society.

Given that this thesis seeks to explore the commonalities between Ritual and art praxis I thus have chosen to adopt this word as I explore these oft-regarded discrete
fields, each with their own histories, character and practices, so that Sacerludus becomes a fusion of two fields, each which posses their own particular ‘rules’, conventions and tactics, even as they overlap.

**Structural (the structure and form of this submission)**

The structure and form of the thesis text of Sacerludus is an appropriation and adaption of elements of the Bible (the Apocrypha and New Testament), as both a formal structuring device and a catalytic model. What is the logic behind this decision?

Broadly, I have used the Biblical model as an analogical device, a mirror held up to both ritual and art practice to examine their similarities as well as dissimilarities. Beyond this, there are three more specific reasons. I regard the Biblical model as offering a methodological catalyst; as a personal (or personally-implicating) catalyst; and as a conceptual and practical model around which the approach and textual elements of my research might be clarified and structured.

By borrowing these Biblical precedents, I intend to use text as a sculptural, performative material, to underscore the bias of authorship in its point of departure and also the way in which the assembled, composed nature of this research has both been generated by, and has generated, reflective, physically-manifest works in a processual series. I aim to implicate the text into the convicted material of the research. So, rather than being regarded as a dispassionate, autonomous textual object (with assumptions of objective superiority and detachment), this thesis, appearing as text on the surface, nevertheless resists being defined solely as such. It stands alongside the visual artworks as a (younger) sister, as equally a visual art work as they are.

It leans instead towards the inherently conditional and elusively-open status of any conventional art object. In the process, it claims a register tending towards the personal and proscriptive rather than the impersonal and prescriptive, while still seeking to elucidate patterns and tactics shared by art and ritual work in order to reflect on and generate a series of experimental, physically-located praxis works, which might also be understood as ‘games’.
a) General concept

The Biblical text is the source from which many significant ritual practices and indeed contemporary ideologies are derived. In this generative sense, I consider it an appropriate model for Sacerludus as my research seeks to identify similar ritual practices and their sources of inspiration, even if they do not necessarily share the same declared origin.

Thus I use this fragmentary, Biblical, model as:

(i) a *methodological catalyst* for tactical ritual art praxis.

(ii) a claimed, *personal catalyst* and influence on the research praxis of Sacerludus. In this sense, I acknowledge the researcher’s complicity and the conditional nature of any ‘objective’ research;

(iii) a *conceptual & practical model* with regard to tactical elements, forms and content to initiate a dialectical process in developing a framework of ideas and propositions.

This essentially is a pragmatic approach to integrate motivation and critical form.

Sacerludus is not intended as an apologetics for religion, religiosity or Ritual as such. Rather, it draws on the residual potential and still substantial presence of these categories in society and art practice. It harnesses the existing fragmentary, scriptural production to create a new fragmentary work to build a dynamic argument for a particular approach to praxis.

It would arguably have been possible to have chosen other similar foundational texts as model structures, but I’ve made this choice to draw together insights into my area of concern – the presence, process and potentiality of Ritual in relation to contemporary visual art practice and production.

b) Conceptual comments

The Bible (‘The Books’) are a collection of diverse texts, by diverse human authors (known and unknown), made for diverse reasons, for diverse audiences.
Some parts repeat or restate others, altering or expanding them. Some are improved, updated, supercede or are themselves superceded by others. Some positively contradict, some positively affirm others. Some are fragments, or fragments of fragments. Some are relatively complete in relationship to the author’s intention.

There is no consistent style: at times this is stark and spare, at times, dense and impenetrable.

In the entire Bible, there is wide range of literary form: poetry, myth, legal regulations, lists, history, songs, proverbs, sexual allegory, prophecy, dream. All make subsequent demand on the reader to understand and interpret them appropriately. Fundamentalists tend to gloss over and actively obscure these facts. Others ascribe to these fragments a claim of genre consistency and literal truth.

So while it is debatable that the Canon of the Bible itself was originally intended to form a ‘Grand Narrative’, one such has been generated from it. I would offer another view that it is better understood as the record of a particular tradition’s groping, experimental responses to the questions, shapes and possibilities of existence. My Biblic text thus uses different generic registers in a similar groping process, albeit on a significantly lesser, minor scale.

Archaeologist Colin Renfrew offers a reading of visual art’s function which would not be a million miles away from such an understanding:

‘Over the past century or so the visual arts have transformed themselves from their preoccupation with beauty and the representation of the world into something much more radical… a vast, uncoordinated yet somehow enormously effective research program that looks critically at what we are and how we know what we are – at the foundations of knowledge and perception, and of the structures that modern societies have chosen to construct upon those foundations.’ (Renfrew, 2003, p.7)

In this sense, I propose a broad understanding of the two traditions of art and Ritual as pursuing a common quest towards ultimate meaning (also made explicit in Renfrew’s subtitle: ‘What Are We? Where Do We Come From?’)… to which the avant-gardist attitudes of resistance and doubt (‘Where Are We Going?’) may be added.

Significantly, the Bible is written from the margins. The narratives of the past tend to be written by the powerful, the hunter rather than the lion. But here we have a
subversive narrative of slaves on their exodus way, through the marginal, forgotten places of desert and exile, to the prisons and basements of empire. As such, it is the shadowy reverse of the classical Empire story – of privileged status quo built on a system of slavery, violent force and totalitarian hierarchy, a story tragically however not consigned to the past, but recurring throughout history even to the present.

c) Structure

The constituent parts of Sacerludus are:

i) Apocryphal (or ‘The Hidden Books’): The original Apocrypha is an inter-
Testamental collection of writings which were either originally excluded from the Canon, discovered after it had been fixed, or reckoned to have historical or theological value of a secondary nature.

Apocryphal will deal more squarely with Ritual itself, as the question ‘what is…?’, lays the groundwork for the subsequent exploration and applied tests of major characteristics shared by art practice.

This section should thus be seen to resemble the original books, as troubling words, not precisely in ‘The Book’ (of Art Discourse), but as if it is ‘inside as a certain outside that is not truly incorporated’. (Taylor, M.C, 1999, p.17)

ii) Gospal: Matthean, Marcan, Lucan, Johannine. Here I address commonalities of ritual characteristics in art practice, to re-frame and create an analogical understanding of art praxis as tactical ritual process. In this sense, a breaking in-to the field of art practice. Each Gospal addresses a particular ritual aspect of art practice, discusses it briefly in a broad conceptual manner and ends with brief reference to how the tactics identified and used in specific works of my own have addressed these, even if they (and other works) have also dealt with other issues.

iii) Actual: The original Acts is the story of the early followers of Jesus, the ‘primitive’ Church. Here, the specific approaches and tactics I have followed in my research praxis will be set out.

iv) Epistolic: Like the originals, which were addressed to specific situations (churches), these – here though more accurately missives-after-the-event
– describe the specific artworks produced during Sacerludus, as realised proposals and experimental resolutions, addressing specific issues, audiences and contexts.

**v) Apocalypso:** The original book (also known as Revelation) is the record of a visionary dream. My Apocalypso will be embodied in the final exhibition of Sacerludus, as the point of ‘revelation’ to my examiners. As an imaging of what is to come, it evades the present, and so in this sense falls outwith, and indeed is essentially absent from Sacerludus the text. Here, Apocalypso is merely the vaguest of outline and proposal, intimatation and un-incorporated notice of what’s to come.

In the original Apocrypha and New Testament, the order in which the books are commonly presented is arbitrary. While to a large extent there is a chronological logic, this is not strictly the case. The same holds for Sacerludus. While preceding the the Apocryphal and the Gospal sections, the Actual and Epistolic sections should be understood as both chronologically and practically precedent (in terms of the original physical works at least). Despite appearances otherwise, the last should be regarded as first (sic).
Introductory
Introductory

‘A work of art changes the way we look at the world when it creates an epiphany. Knowing more about the life of the artists or the technique he or she used is useful, but it does not cause a revelation. To deprive art of its immediacy is to deprive ourselves of this chance of possible transformation.’

Francesco Bonami (Bonami, Widholm & Van Eyck, 2005, p.18)

Discerning Ritual

In the vast space of the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall, broods a giant grey steel structure, at its centre, a dark black box on stilts. It is 13 metres high and 30 metres long. Its internal pitch blackness can be accessed via a ramp. The creator says: ‘the darkness will hold the function of purgatory. People can walk in it slowly step by step. You will start to touch darkness. You will come to the border when you will have to say if you want to go further or not… and touching the subject of disappearing; to create the question mark of “how far I can go?” ’ (Balka, 2009)

1. ‘How It Is’, 2009, Miroslaw Balka

‘How it is’ by Miroslaw Balka, poses an existential question, quoting the title of Samuel Beckett’s novel in which the narrator crawls through a vast expanse of mud, reflecting on what his life has been. Similarly, in the artwork there is the notion of a purifying limbo — after death, but before judgement — which derives from the gospel of Matthew. From these sources, Balka fashions a religio-secular ritual, a mini-pilgrimage. We confront the darkness (or fate?) made ominous by the box’s form, a
reminder of gulag transportation or more recent human trafficking. Discomfitted, at the top of the ramp, do we step into the mysterious, questioning interior, a valley dark as death? Do we find nothing in the enveloping darkness? Or something? Is there enough faith to face either fear?

Or... a call goes out to 500 volunteers to take up their shovels and walk: formed into a line, very slowly, imperceptibly, they move a massive 1600 foot sand dune a distance of four inches from its original location. The creator says: ‘Sometimes, to make something is really to make nothing; and paradoxically, sometimes to make nothing is to make something.’ (Alýs, 2002b)

2. ‘When Faith Moves Mountains’, 2002, Francis Alýs with Rafael Ortega and Cuauhtémoc Medina

‘When Faith Moves Mountains’ by Francis Alýs with Rafael Ortega and Cuauhtémoc Medina, questions human manipulation of the environment and the power of collective action, while literally re-enacting the imagery of a saying of Jesus, in ritual form:

‘Your faith is too small. I tell you this: if you have faith no bigger than a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain: “Move from here to there!”’, and it will move; nothing will prove impossible for you.’ (Matt. 17: 20)

Credible, incredible, possible, impossible. What’s more miraculous and potent, moving mountains or managing a mere mustard seed? Beyond the ephemerality of the event itself and the photographic and video documentation, Alýs proposed that the art could only be fully realised in the subsequent, repeated re-telling of the story, a ‘real fiction’, so becoming part of local history and a contemporary myth.

As a late-comer in life to the art world – 10 years ago – and with a background of working in the liturgical/ritual renovation of out-moded patterns and practices of Christian worship in both Scotland and beyond for the last 30 years, it’s perhaps not unnatural that I pick up on reflections on faith and belief in works such as the two
above, and see there ritual practices at work.

As one who also still sometimes feels a (relative) outsider, largely since I haven’t grown up through the period of adolescence in the art world’s embrace and so with art talk, thought and visions permeating my existence, it has long struck me that the whole enterprise of art itself is an enormously faithful phenomenon – with the widespread trust that there is something very valuable to discover, attain and learn from colleagues, tutors, artists and institutions; the sacrifices and commitments that have to be made in struggling with ideas, logistics, skills, physical graft, the details, funding, applications and, above all, work when you don’t know where it’s going; the perception that for many, art is something they have to do – a vocation.

Of course, this isn’t a rose-tinted picture of spectacular, undying, love and devotion. Rather, as often as not, it’s a love-hate affair, but this merely confirms the view of a calling, as opposed to a ‘conventional’ job, occupation or profession. Indeed the habitual parting words of a non-religiously inclined colleague in my MFA cadre was ‘Keep the faith’.

So, that’s faithful people. But it has struck me that there are other significant commonalities with faith when practice, works and institution are considered.

Faith springs from a root – a seed – an experience, words that make sense, actions that work, thought, intuition, trial, error, emotion and decision, a continual negotiation of what is and what might be. But faithfulness is only authentic faithfulness, when it is incarnated. Above all it’s an embodied conviction, as opposed to theologically-correct thinking... a practice, seen, exposed, experienced, and engaged.

A theological faith manifests itself in practice. Its context is everyday life, applied and enacted. However, its particular manifested form is Ritual. In art, practice manifests itself similarly, in artworks contexted in the exhibitional opportunity.

Both do their work at a remove from the conventional seriousness called ‘normal’ life. In their own odd ways, special and set apart, they are regarded in different ways as ‘sacred’. This special seriousness they exude makes them examples of the enduring, human tendency of focused, ‘pointless’ pointedness – functionless, though not purposeless – more akin to play.

This playfulness in which they are committed has a pointedness: action in the world,
aiming to discern pattern and reveal purpose, to understand the meaning (or some would contend, meaninglessness) of the created world. Humanity has turned to both for millenia… serious enterprises to discern serious truths.

At their root, many would claim, both Ritual and art practice possess common characteristics, a ‘hope of transcendence or the possibilities of the human spirit’ (Elkins, 2004, p.ix). In the eyes of their adherents, both continue to be committed to the cause of addressing the condition and profound mystery of human experience in the world, with emphases on the kind of epiphany and transformation that Bonami describes above. It is through their physical products that this work is carried out, by which fruits they are known. With this active inflection towards change in mind, I will use the term ‘praxis’ when describing my work contexted as the kind of Ritual soon to be explored.

Of course, art and religious expression have not been easy bedfellows in recent times. Hence the kind of ritual commonality that I identify in artworks such those above are rarely foregrounded specifically as such in either artistic – or theological – discourse.

One of the initial spurs to my research was this perception that Ritual was significantly absent from the visual arts discourse (even if I perceived the opposite in actual artists’ practice). Many non-art disciplines are being enthusiastically appropriated and widely engaged as valid frames through which to analyse art. Politics (particularly feminist & Marxist), psychology, anthropology, archaeology, ethnography, mathematics and physics are but a few… but the same reader would be hard-pressed to find significant fore-grounded and explicit mention of either religion (or its subset and formal expression, Ritual) as a crucial, specific category or interlocutor.

Talking about religion, Mark C. Taylor notes this puzzling paradox of the last century’s cultural interpretation:

‘…while theologians, philosophers of religion and art critics deny or suppress the religious significance of the visual arts, many leading modern artists insist that their work cannot be understood apart from religious questions and spiritual issues.’ (Taylor, Mark C., 1992, p.4)

And in the contemporary period, it is James Elkins who perhaps most explicitly identifies this gap in his specific and dedicated survey, ‘On The Strange Place Of Religion In Contemporary Art’, (Elkins, 2004). He explores the repressed position of
religion with regards to art practice, stating:

'It is a state of affairs that is at once obvious and odd, known to everyone and yet hardly whispered about.' (Elkins, 2004, preface)

Ultimately, he re-affirms this denial (if ambiguously) as being acceptable, having stated at the outset that his survey will 'close with suggestions for ways to talk in between art and religion'. So:

'(i)t is impossible to talk sensibly about religion and art and at the same time address art in an informed and intelligent manner; but it is irresponsible not to keep trying….' (Elkins, 2004, p.XII)

is followed by…

‘…the name God does not belong to the language of art in which the name intervenes, but at the same time, and in a manner that is difficult to determine, the name God is still part of the language of art even though the name has been set aside’ (Elkins, 2004, p.116)

Certainly, it was only as recently as 2009 that it was still possible for a publication (also edited by Elkins and others) to claim to be the first monograph to begin to bridge the contemporary gap between 'religionists' and art scholars (Elkins & Morgan, 2009, p.i.).

Donald Kuspit does not shy away from naming the name, in terms of 'spirituality', making a plea for its need in the face of determinism and the conventionalisation and banalisation of the avant-garde (Kuspit, 2003). Nor does Demetrio Paparoni's 'Eretica' (Paparoni, 2007) – in its title, nicely indicating this discursive problem for art (the title translates as 'heretic', which is interestingly also the feminine) – even though it is less puzzled by the omission itself, framing its discussion, again in terms of 'spirituality'. And in a recent editorial in Frieze, Dan Fox puts his finger on the continued search for spiritual fulfilment in secular art, claiming that:

‘Art is a faith-based system that, to paraphrase philosopher Simon Critchley, combines “an uneasy godlessness with a religious memory”’. (Fox, 2010, p.15)

As to discussions that deal with Ritual specifically, the works which grant something of equal standing with other specified frames of reference, there are few. There are Adam Geczy's brief chapter in 'Art: Histories, Theories & Exceptions' (Geczy, 2008)
and Cynthia Freedland’s ‘But Is It Art?’ (Freedland, 2001), even if the latter raises Ritual only to ultimately then dismiss its legitimacy as a frame.

Susi Gablik too rises to the challenge, albeit again framed mainly in terms of spirituality rather than religion. In The ‘Re-enchantment Of Art’ (Gablik, 1991) and ‘Conversations Before The End Of Time’ (Gablik, 1995), she sees the contemporary situation as being one of transition, with art and spirituality moving closer, particularly through a renewed interest in purposefulness, positive social alternatives and above all, compassion (a core concern of religion). In her work, Ritual, is an example of of the ‘periphery’ and the ‘margins’ to which we must look to find the core of new directions for our culture.

Admittedly while this relative absence was my initial impression, this has become less of a puzzle as my research has proceeded. Rather Ritual’s relative ‘neglect’ in visual art discourse can be more accurately attributed to the fact that the term ‘Ritual’ tends to act in a disguised form, as a kind of subterranean current and often subsumed into the more general and broadly neutral category of ‘performance’, where its presence is more widespread and explicit. This is due to the greater similarities in explicit formal and processual approaches. ‘The Artist’s Body’, a survey of performance art (Warr & Jones, 2003) is a prominent example in mainstream visual arts that devotes a specific section to its discussion.

However, I will suggest in the rest of Sacerludus that Ritual continues to be even more significantly to the fore in many artists’ visual arts practice, even if its specific naming is sporadic and so largely disguised in discussion and interpretation. Indeed, with Tobin Siebers, we might talk of the ‘Return to Ritual’, (even if he mainly deals with the particular issue of violence), citing Sam Mendes’ ‘American Beauty’, Marc Quinn, Damien Hirst and Matt Collishaw (Siebers, 2003).

As such, the case is made for a renewed and raised consciousness of Ritual’s tactics and effects when we also take into consideration the wider context of contemporary developments such as the rise of the curator, art tourism, calendrically re-occurring Bienniales, the advent of Relational Aesthetics, the increasing return to performance/theatre and even (I will argue) the significant consolidation of installation as a sometimes seemingly sine qua non.

All of these press different aspects of ritual practice into circulation (though space here will not allow extensive exploration of all of these areas). Where such investigation is appropriate as it converges with my praxis, I will seek to marry these
with my concerns, particularly in the Gospal sections.

**The research problem**

Hence, the problem I’ve identified as the thematic, driving force of this research.

‘Sacerludus’ (or ‘Sacred Game’) aims:

- to identify the central architecture, dynamics and formal tactics of ritual practice;
- to find the common features mirrored and utilised in contemporary art practice;
- and to articulate an analogical reading of art praxis as a tactical ritual process via the practical artworks that are this submission (both the Epistolic works and the text itself).

As opposed to theoretical articulation, my emphasis will be on application and a poetics of praxis.

**Assessing this research**

Sacerludus sets out to achieve a bricolage of fragmented partiality, via an archeology of source concepts, applied approaches to and tactical turns in praxis. In its privileged foregrounding of the category Ritual as its primary lens (excavating the possibilities of its resistant and generative character), Sacerludus combines it with art praxis. This is a distinctive emphasis. Rather than only discussing ritual aspects of a work on a more theoretically analytic level, here I set about a testing-by-showing particularly in the application of significant formal tactics of Ritual: an excavation and pursuit of a kind of incarnated mechanics in order to understand and incorporate these into a ritual art praxis.

The physical manifestations of this practice-led research are analogous to a blind man’s stick (of whom, more in due course). This physical mode of exploration is thrust out before him in his processing of and towards knowledge, through the
darkness of the unknown environment ahead. His embodied action is the means, a staging-on-the-way and not the end to his journeying. As he moves he processes, stopping briefly he reflects, making some conclusions, he sets off again.

Importantly this escapes the ‘purity’ of Cartesian objectivity, by actively admitting the embodied nature of the researcher, the artist and the viewer. Implication is involved, in that to a significant degree, a researcher both already ‘knows’ something of where s/he is going (the problem), yet also does not know what s/he is looking for or may find, operating by necessity from a degree of initial intuition and hope.

All knowledge is partial, in both senses of the word. It is constructed from pieces, fragments. It also involves an embodied position, or bias. Exposing the false dichotomy between the ‘hot’ and ‘cool’ ways of knowing (the supposedly ‘rational’ and ‘irrational’), Wendy Wheeler sees that a (‘hot’) passionate, committed curiosity – one that derives from tacit skills that we can’t fully describe in orthodox language – as being present when

‘…we read books, or while away our time with other relevant pursuits such as programmes of laboratory or field research, but what we are actually doing, no matter how well we try to disguise this fact from ourselves, is having faith in the rationality of the problem we have discerned, and waiting for a way forward to present itself to us.’ (Wheeler, 2006, p.89)

This is an act of faith, of believing, an authentically creative, doubtful yet hopeful disposition. It is an acceptance of specific situations, at a particular time, in a particular place in order to explore them further. It is analogous to assuming and playing a role, trying it on and out, believing in it for a time to test its fitness, if in the end only to recognise its limitations or failings. To a considerable extent, one largely finds what one is looking for, even though, in the process the sum total and qualities of that initial belief will be modified, added to and expanded. Though partially ‘known’, the destination nevertheless, is essentially a new one when known about.

By asserting the fragmentary nature of its construction, Sacerludus acknowledges that it is a foray, by implication, incomplete: the historical bounding of the examination context ‘completes’ and temporarily stabilises it.

Through its balance of textual to physical material, Sacerludus seeks to underscore the problematic, unstable (and hence, generative) nature of practice-led artistic research, as well as its resultant potency as a site and process of distinct knowledge.
As in Ritual, so in art praxis.

The Text-as-text alone is less than a (w)hol(e)y book.

Text-as-text-alone does not have the final word. The word must become flesh… and the rest is (admirable) history.
Methodic
Methodic

‘Perhaps the best way of encapsulating the gist of an epoch is to focus not on the explicit features that define its social and ideological edifices but on the disavowed ghosts that haunt it.’ (Zizek, 2000, p.3)

This research is practice-led, and so in creative tension with the conventional academic notions of objectivity and detachment.

Few would suggest that the making of artwork is reducible to a strictly rational method, even though the use of art theory may sometimes give the impression that this is so. Artist’s processes may possess rigour and systematic enquiry, but equally they are complemented as much by chance, hunch and even sometimes, whim. Certainly art-making is a form of ‘situated knowledge’, similar to what Pierre Bourdieu calls being ‘in-the-game’ where strategies need not be rigidly pre-determined, but allowed to emerge and operate according to specific demands of action and movement in time… ‘because knowledge of the conditions of production comes after the fact and occurs in the domain of rational communication, the finished product, the opus operatum, conceals the modus operati.’ (Bourdieu, quoted in Bolt & Barrett, Estelle, 2007, p.4-5) In this sense, this research is hermeneutical rather than empirical.

We might say that art-making or working relates broadly to theory in the same way that Ritual relates to theology, though of course, in both fields working-out and thinking-about as often also diverge. Both elements play their part, but this research privileges art praxis/Ritual as the primary terms, with theory/theology taking a supporting, if crucial, role. My concern in Sacerludus leans to showing-by-doing rather than merely talking-about-doing. This text which might at first sight be regarded solely as the latter, also functions as an audience member, an interpreter, a co-worker to and critic of the documented Epistolic works, or perhaps better as Tim Etchells might say, ‘a witness’, ‘a part of the work and not an undertaker to it’ (Etchells, p.23). It also partially functions as documentation, but even then only as the same-but-different submitted digital recordings and representations, which are but one form of trace of the ephemeral original occasions. In this way, the text also stands as another, related work alongside and in dialogue with the Epistolic others.
a) Apocryphal approach

The initial, apocryphal work, ‘Flatable’, was constructed with a degree of non-intentional planning and hence low-level of theorisation – one reason being that as it was pre-PhD, thus weightier consideration of this aspect of process was not to the fore in my mind. The preconceptions were simple: given that the exhibition was overseas, to make a work with cheap, simple materials, which could be constructed quickly, with the cues for its form and content being taken from the temporal and physical site-specific context. Hence, I would discover what to do when I got to Cologne, a large degree of embodied knowledge being implicitly assumed as a generator of what would be my subsequent art praxis.

With ‘Flatable’ thrown out before me, the path along which it led me (now in the context of the PhD process) then offered itself as the first staging-post for my research which could be considered reflectively and critically.

I then subsequently proceeded by applying the attitude of pedagogical praxis that I had been used to applying in my non-art work in liturgy, essentially that of liberation theology (supplementing it as the research has developed). Robert McAfee Brown describes how

‘...the starting point for liberation theology not all the topics theologians write about, but the here-and-nowness of what is happening on street-corners or at soup kitchens or in the far reaching decisions made by politicians and generals, such as “Shall we go to war or not?” ’ (McAfee Brown, 1993, p.52)

This consciousness gives praxis a nuance that distinguishes it from the more neutral term of practice. It involves embodied implication and complicity, consciously or unconsciously. It enacts a dialectical succession: praxis-reflection-praxis, which then repeats, as if in a spiralling loop, a process that is never-ending, caught between action and reflection together on a journey.

The critical contribution of embodied or incarnational knowledge is also emphasised, shifting accidentally and intentionally, tangentially and determinedly, from body to head, action to contemplation, mistake to discovery, yet embracing all of these.

The term praxis contains an inflected position that stresses a concern for transformation:
‘Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.’ (Marx, 1945, no.11)

‘There is no true word that is not at the same time a praxis. Thus to speak a true word is to transform the world.’ (Friere, 1972, p.60)

Likewise it contains – and particularly appropriate for a research context – a pedagogical motive: ‘education’ deriving as it does from ‘educare’: ‘to draw out’.

The translation of the title of this research – ‘sacredgame’ – points to the ludic principle I have used, to reflectively test insights gained at each stage of work. By the question, ‘how can this be done?’ – the dramaturg, Jerzy Grotowski identifies this as the essential dynamic (‘A method is the consciousness of this “how”’, Grotowski, 1967, in Bial, 2004, p.190) – here, it becomes ‘how do I materially construct a ritual-art process?’ However, aware of the danger of avoiding the temptation of too-fixed or detailed a conclusion, with the risk of descending into stereotype or cliché, Grotowski formulates it in the negative, ‘what must I not do?’

Adapting these ludic and falsifying principles, by identifying a relatively small range of ritual tactics (materially-grounded forms or practical ‘hows’, eg. scripting and scoring, keying and framing), I apply these in different ways in successive works as ‘sacred games’ or ‘constructed situations’ (Stiles & Selz, 1996, p.702), hence trying, testing and modifying them via a series of alternating dispositions and contexts through the series of Epistolic works.

The initial embracing act has been to cede context and temporally occasional scope in order to define a brief – followed by the forming of semi-open script-scores as broad maps of possibility, which were nevertheless subsequently riffed or improvised upon to realise the final works. These fragmentary applications meld with the fragmentary form of Sacerludus’ text to complete the research.

Sacerludus is situated partly within the context of the relatively marginalised place of religion/ Ritual in contemporary art discourse, so this approach of building from fragmentary, marginal clues might also be justified. Indeed, if Dan Fox is correct in describing that in the art world ‘(r)eligious conviction is taken to be a sign of intellectual weakness’ (Fox, 2010, p.15) – one might even say, ‘criminal’ weakness – I’d argue that using an embodied approach allows conviction its place. Broadly though, I propose this to highlight the crucial role that belief and faith of any kind play in any kind of human acting and knowing, particularly art and ritual praxis.
These then may be regarded as a set of ‘charges’ or ‘offences’ laid before my praxis. In this light, it will be judged as either innocent or guilty.

Sacerludus does not aspire to the quality of any kind of ‘gesamtkunstwerk’ or total-work. It is intended as a form of analogical, archeological survey that gathers similarities in the respective fields of art and ritual, to piece the fragments together, and trace the outlines of an alternative perspective on art praxis. It aims to build to a critical mass (sic), the formulation of a foregrounded ritual field that pre-forms a certain type of art which is then per-formed.

b) Tactics, strategy & de Certeau

As such an archaeology of practice, Sacerludus deals with Ritual as a category by which to analyse and understand art praxis. In this sense, it proposes ritual praxis as a bricolaged tactics in the way that Michel de Certeau describes everyday practices as evasive modes used by ordinary folk – ‘unauthorised’, appropriated forms in relation to the authority and control of strategies.

3. Michel de Certeau

De Certeau conceives strategies as:

‘…the calculation (or manipulation) of power relationships that becomes possible as soon as a subject with will and power (a business, an army, a city, a scientific institution) can be isolated from an “environment”. A strategy assumes a place that can be circumscribed as proper (propre) and thus serve as the basis for generating relations with an exterior distinct from it (competitors, adversaries, “clientèles”, “targets” or “objects” of research).’

(de Certeau, 1984, p.xix)
Strategies are the framework of the ‘propers’, the approved worldviews and ideologies of the status quo or the powers-that-be. Within these, we live our everyday lives.

De Certeau’s concern was to articulate the immense variety of largely invisible, everyday ‘ways of operating’ which ordinary people (or ‘consumers’) use to negotiate their way through the given, structural order. However, they are not merely passive ways of coping or necessarily merely tacit knowledge and action which, unexamined, would tend to conservatism. When a spiral of critical reflection is brought into play following initial practice, an understanding of possibility-otherwise appears (as opposed to habitually prescribed sameness). A stance of resistance even in the midst of complicity can be attained. And in the case of religious or artistic practice (contexted in canonical tradition, institutional forms or norms) the past is never purely recreated and often subversive. Resistant stances against the meaning and intention of the dominant order do occur.

In the art world, the contemporary concern for ‘The New’ as elucidated by Boris Groys (in Kabakov, 2001, pp.338-56) and the repeated resort to transgressive modes articulate such resistance to what is (or was). And in at least two examples from monotheistic religions – the empty seat at the meal, awaiting the Messiah’s return (in Judaism) or the prayer, ‘Your kingdom come,’ (in Christianity) – similarly proclaim a fundamentally favourable orientation towards change. Lodged in the heart of their very identity is a permanent dissatisfaction and resistant stance vis-à-vis the present order.

Tactics are engaged at the interstices of this strategic order, as practices of intentional ‘making do’ (bricolage), these makeshift re-phrasings and re-uses of marketing structures at times moving into critical form that amount to deviousness, fantasy or laughter.

Whereas the ‘proper’ amounts to the creation of a place (that is, a victory of space over time), tactics rely on time to achieve their (relatively) fleeting, yet persistently recurring resistance. Using the analogy of speech, if the ‘proper’ of the dominant order is language in its definitive forms and structures, tactics is enunciation, with its local dialects, slanging, spontaneous modifications, slippages, stutters, improvised pauses and performances.

In operational terms, Ritual makes a comparable shift out of the apparently victorious domain of structure and place, into a fleeting time – tacticality set-
apart from, yet still related to, ordered mundanity. As such, ritual practice is an ennunciatary one that shares characteristics of de Certeauan tactics, which are

‘…a calculus which cannot count on a “proper” (a spatial or institutional localisation), nor thus on a borderline distinguishing the other as a visible totality. The place of the tactic belongs to the other.’ (de Certeau, Michel, 1984, p.xix)

This transitory time belongs to the marginalised, the immigrant, the stranger, the dispossessed, the weak, the least and last.

c) Turner’s Processual Symbolic Analysis

In the sections where I deal specifically with Ritual, the theoretical methodology adopted to analyse the structure, form and content of art praxis and its contexts is ritual theory, in particular that developed by the influential Scottish anthropologist, Victor Turner.

Turner’s work has notably been appropriated into the discourses of several other disciplines outside anthropology, including those of theatre, literature, film, communications studies and pedagogy. However examples of such application remain understated in the domain of visual art.

Turner used the terms, structure (the domain of strategy that de Certeau describes) as against anti-structure and communitas to theorise the context of Ritual and its relationship to society. In addition, he developed a core concept of the liminal (or liminoid) to describe the central transformative stage and dynamic of Ritual.
Liminality and its dynamics will form the underlying core concern to this research, with reference to the generative, future-conditional – ‘as-if’ – character and tense of liminality, as distinct from of the descriptive past-(im)perfect – ‘as-was’ or ‘as-is’ (which always is past, at the moment of its enunciation), the tense of scientific enquiry and documentary; the emphasis of this thus being the mode of knowledge as privileging imagination over mere definition.

d) Moving methodology

As noted earlier, the text of Sacerludus is not strictly linear but dialogic – a re-presentation of its moving-back-and-forth between hunch, practice and reflection. This aims to describe something of the existential nature and the messiness of art praxis conjoined with reflection. The chronological succession claimed (if not then exactly presented in the order of the books of Sacerludus) is that it is from praxis that appropriate methodology and emerging theory have been confirmed, which in turn have in-formed and formed the shape of subsequent praxis.

Sacerludus resists the classification of theory or praxis as ‘pure’, valuing instead impurity, infection and promiscuous engagement, according theory its role as faithful servant, co-worker with and evangelical witness to praxis, rather than as master or ultimate arbiter of knowing. This research is the wedding, an embodied knowledge in holistic action.
Flatable
Flatable

In previous ‘books’, I briefly sketched the background to Sacerludus. However, in advance of my application to join the PhD programme, I made a work which was to prove seminal for the thematic concerns of this research.

‘Flatable’ is an apocryphal work, falling outside the chronology of the PhD, a description of which is here framed as if one of the forthcoming Epistolics, and appropriated into the text as an illuminatory origin.

Sender & audience

FROM:
A Chief Mourner and his cortège, who lamented, processing slowly through the concrete interior of the Deutzer Brücke, Cologne on Maundy Thursday.

TO:
The people who had gathered for the opening of a group exhibition of a Scottish-German exchange. The show was entitled ‘Spän’ (‘span’) and the opening was on Thursday 17th April 2003. It ran until 16th May 2003.

Issue to be addressed & concept

The Deutzer Brücke, like any bridge is an architecturally liminal space, a form creating a passage, a kind of limbo between here and there. It exists between boundaries. It is an engineered, architechttonic response to a physical separation, a stretch of water. It is a created, linking way to a distant location, a foreign shore, a crossing to be crossed, a processual form that effects a transition, ‘bounding’ between different physical conditions.
This bridge, constructed in the 70s at the height of the Cold War, was designed not only as such a transitional form, but as a political (indeed military) boundary, with details specified to recognise this. Within its western section a network of metal conduits and frames was incorporated which would enable explosives to be quickly installed and detonated to destroy the bridge, should there ever be a western advance by Soviet forces. It embodies a readiness to prevent hostile incursion into West Germany (as it was then). Here was an example of ideology manifesting itself in physical form.

Four weeks earlier, the UK along with the USA, had crossed a political threshold, the ‘bridge’ from peace-at-home to war-abroad, to reach the shores of peace-in-a-far-off land. ‘Operation Iraqi Freedom’ (or ‘Operation New Dawn’) began on 20th March 2003, as Coalition forces began their assault on Saddam Hussein’s regime, to locate and destroy that regime’s capability to use the weapons of mass destruction that it possessed (sic).

Formulation of thesis of the work

Immediately on arrival in Cologne, responding to both the physical context of the exhibition venue and the war-time situation, I had conceived an initial work – an installation of polythene inflatables, in varying degrees of inflation and deflation.

On eight concrete saw-tooth forms running along one side of the bridge’s interior, were placed seven, transparent, human-scale ‘body-bags’. The eighth saw-tooth remained vacant. Sequentially, the body-bags were progressively deflated (over the course of the exhibition, the air gradually escaped until all were completely deflated).
On the floor, a few feet away, as if discarded, were two ‘flags’ – objects of secular ritual worship – again of similar polythene ‘bag’ construction, though uninflated. Clear and blue polythene was used, the latter set along the edges of the flags’ rectangular ground, protruding outwards, as if flayed… the flags of the UK and USA, the two major players in the Operation Iraqi Freedom Coalition. The blue shapes were derived from the same-coloured elements in these flags.

The red and white elements in both were omitted. The ‘flagpole’ elements of the flags too were made out of clear polythene, but in their limp, flaccid state resembled severed umbicilal cords, conduits of life, now airless and deathly.

During the construction of this initial phase of work, I became aware of the acoustic and atmospheric properties inherent to the bridge’s three-chambered interior.
A quarter mile long concrete box, with gently curving floors, it evoked the image and ambience of a vast crypt or mausoleum. Acoustically it possessed a long reverbration time or echo, so much so, that virtually anyone – on entering and speaking – heard their voice modulated uncannily. They were invariably tempted to shout, sing or whistle to play with the acoustic.

Additionally, cars, buses and (notably) trams travelled on the road above. The internal sounds were constantly supplemented by the regular noise created by these vehicles’ wheels. Those produced by the trams consisted of an eerie range of blips, boings, rumbles, surges and whispers. At maximum volume, they resembled the screams and roars of aircraft taking off. It was as if the aural landscape of air bombardment to which the Iraqi people were being subjected thousands of miles away was itself bursting into the exhibition’s space.

From these observations, the creation of a second, acoustically performed work became inevitable. This work could thus respond and appropriate both the physical architecture and an image that the setting visually evoked.

**Physical & practical description**

The acoustic performance took place on the night of the exhibition’s opening. Led by myself as ‘Chief Mourner’, eight of us walked slowly from the centre point of the bridge, westwards then eastwards, returning finally to the point from which we had started.
All of us wore dark clothing (with the exception of one kilt). Six each carried an eight foot long black pole. The remaining two carried the deflated flags.

We walked, singing two songs. I sang the lead, Emily Bradshaw (a classical opera singer, who had arrived two days earlier to visit her sister Katie, one of the other artists) contributed an improvised, soaring vocal accompaniment above my melody line. The rest of the cortège provided a hummed ground line. Our song was naturally augmented by any sound made by the audience-participants and the vehicles overhead. All were modulated by the bridge’s echo.

The two songs, Scots traditional, were of lament and concerned historic military campaigns. Both came from the Scottish borders and dealt with incursions into Northumberland in northern England.

The first, the ballad ‘Otterburn’, somewhat ‘heroic’ in register, relates the August 1388 campaign of one Lord James Douglas, 2nd Earl of Douglas (and his ensuing death) during a Scottish incursion into England. Douglas was killed, but this merely added to his ‘glorious’ reputation and the prestige of his house, one of the foremost among the border fighters of Scotland.
The second, ‘The Flo’oers O’ The Forest’, reflects on the aftermath of the disastrous battle of Flodden Field of September 1513, particularly focusing on the emotional and social plight of the widowed and orphaned. The battle was fought in Northumberland, when an invading Scots army under King James IV confronted the English army of Thomas Howard, Earl of Surrey. The English were victorious, the Scots decimated. In terms of combatants, it was the largest battle between the two nations ever recorded.

I was subsequently invited to make a second performance, which took place on the closing night, the ‘Finissage’ of the exhibition. The content and script of the first performance were replicated, though on this occasion only four of us made up the cortège. In the video documentation of the work which has been submitted as an Apocryphal source, the sound recording of the original performance has been reproduced, along with images from both performances.

**Discussion of the work & conclusion**

In its conception, intent and forms, Flatable raised significant issues:

- here was a work that was as much a *movement* and a *performance*, as a static object or series of objects;

- in this performance, there were distinct, *ritual aspects and features*;

- the work was *an orchestration of multiple media*, not merely a representation in a single medium;

- these aspects responded not only physically, but also temporally, to
situational contexts;

the work, through its form, produced an involvement of the audience that differed from a more conventional one, in that they became more akin to viewer-participants;

the work assumed an identification or bias with those who are the casualties or victims of powerful ideology (and one of its own Rituals, warfare), raising the question of the relationship of artistic practice to ideology.

More technically, it pointed up an idiosyncratic feature that would recur through my work:

the foregrounding of the apparently non-visual material of sound as a potent and evocative sculptural material.

These issues identified the basic terrain that the subsequent research of Sacerludus would explore: a kind of ritual archaeology of art praxis. It was these I would reflect on over the summer of 2003, becoming the seed-vocabulary of forms, contextual responses and intents which re-appear in the subsequent Epistolic artworks of this text.

**Doxologic**

12. *Floo’ers O’ The Forest*, melody, Scots traditional

‘Dool for the order sent our lads to the Border,
the English for aince by guile wan the day.
The flooers o’ the forest, that fought aye the foremost,
the prime of our land lie cauld in the clay.’

(Elliot, Jean, 1727-1805, ‘The Flo’oers O The Forest’, verse 4)
What is Ritual?
Generally
What is Ritual? Generally

From ‘Flatable’ arose a concern to explore Ritual in the context of art praxis. So we move now, and throughout the rest of ‘Apocryphal’, to ask ‘What is Ritual?’ – to discern the dynamics and form that might be analogically applied to art praxis.

…………

Everyday life is ritual… adjectivally.

Humanity maps out and traverses every 24 hours in this way. Habit and routine, repeated patterns of action and practice are followed in the home, on the bus, train or in the car, in the office and factory, on the phone, in cyberspace, in legal system and parliament, in club, pub, concert hall and street.

But Ritual is not everyday life. It, like art, is distinct from the ordinary.

What will concern us in Ritual is a separate, clearly marked-off time and space. A ‘special’ time and place, ‘set apart’ from quotidian reality and experience. Rather than a causal continuum, a deliberate discontinuum.

Victor Turner notes that the distinction between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘secular’ is primarily a feature of most, largely Western (so-called) ‘advanced’ societies, where work and leisure are regarded as rigidly separate areas. In ‘traditional’ societies, there is not this distinction. Another set of terms for these distinctions, operative primarily in sociology, is ‘differentiated’ and ‘undifferentiated’. Turner cites Dumazedier on this point (Turner, 1982, p.35ff).

It’s in the context of religion that Ritual, as this distinct, symbolically-loaded occasion, is most readily identified. It speaks of and to something that is itself ‘special’, extraordinary. It communicates ideas and values, displaying fundamental orientations to these. It moulds, transmits and receives stories, character, identity and practice. Yet such information and practices tend to the non-functional, in that they are more play-like and not designed to achieve functional practical, everyday economic or mundane ends.
But special, set-apart sacredness is not merely religious. It is equally present in secularity. There are many state ceremonies that possess such qualities – Remembrance, Bastille and Memorial Days, and weddings being the most obvious. And with daily frequency, the surgery, schoolroom, sports stadium, law court and laboratory enact significant ritual and distinctive events that cannot be solely reduced to pure functionality alone.

**Two important characteristics of Ritual**

Defined in its broadest sense, Ritual is, in this regard, any prescribed system of procedure. Its forms pervade all of human life by which humanity negotiates its way through each day, often unconsciously.

These are symbolic forms that indicate who we are, what can be expected of us, what we treasure and what we reject. By them we educate ourselves, bring up children, show respect or disrespect, offer protest to or compliance with institutions.

This should not surprise us. Anthropologists relate how no known human society has ever existed without Ritual being present (Rappaport, 1999, p.1). But to avoid being diverted into the seductive immensity of the entire field of ritual phenomena, we must narrow the area of concern.

Christopher Alexander offers a broad description of Ritual from which we begin:

‘Ritual defined in the most general and basic terms is a performance, planned or improvised, that effects a transition from everyday life to an alternative context within which the everyday is transformed.’ (Alexander, 1997, quoted in Bowie, 2001, p.153)

Two important characteristics emphasised here are *performance* and *transformation*.

**a) Performance and the public domain**

In performance, there are several crucial factors that will concern us. It implies:

* an action,
* by an embodied person,
over a particular temporary duration of time
and that there is an act of showing to others (as well as to the person themselves).

While Alexander’s definition could be applied to many examples which would be located more accurately in the private realm, the forms of Ritual that will concern us are those public in nature, where their symbolic significance relates to others (an audience, witnesses or fellow performers). These take place in a social, public context and derive from and refer more pointedly to social relations, understandings and beliefs.

This distinction allows us to draw comparison between such Rituals and those most visible parts of art practice which occupy a similar public domain: the exhibitional context and the role of the artwork within it. Here, we deal with revelatory practices… showing, demonstrating and making visible what otherwise would remain hidden or unnoticed or occupying a private, invisible realm.

b) Transformation and efficacy

This aspect of Ritual draws attention to a dynamic, dialectical process. That which was (or is) becomes the focus of potential change, into what might (or will) be. The same too applies to the person(s) themselves who engage in the ritual act.

Everyday life is temporarily left behind or exceeded and this initiates (to lesser or greater extent) a special passage of space and time that is separate, where words or actions, even if superficially similar to those in an everyday context, become loaded with altered, symbolic meaning. Elements and actions, which were previously functional, are shifted into non-functionality and playfulness.

However, this non-functionality should not be taken as frivolous or escapist. The question is whether purposefulness or pleasure are most privileged. There may be significant elements of pleasure present in a performance (the ‘entertainment’ of the performing arts ), but as Richard Schechner points out, in Ritual there is a heightened degree of purpose – seriousness – present. He calls this efficacy (Schechner, 2002, p.71). This is largely dependent on purpose and context.

He maps a spectrum of characteristics by which a performance can be judged as Ritual. This charting is never totally definitive, but offers useful markers. The more
the purpose tends to transformation, the more it leans to efficacy.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Efficacy/ Ritual</th>
<th>Entertainment/ Performing Arts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Results</td>
<td>For fun</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Link to transcendent Other(s)</td>
<td>Focus on the here and now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Timeless time / the eternal present</td>
<td>Historical time and/ or now</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer possessed, in trance</td>
<td>Performer self-aware, in control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virtuosity downplayed</td>
<td>Virtuosity highly valued</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Traditional scripts/ behaviours</td>
<td>New and traditional scripts/ behaviours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transformation of self possible</td>
<td>Transformation of self unlikely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience participates</td>
<td>Audience observers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience believes</td>
<td>Audience appreciates, evaluates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criticism discouraged</td>
<td>Criticism flourishes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collective creativity</td>
<td>Individual creativity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


We might note some art practice developments over the last century that indicate a heightened rituality… the depreciation of the idea of artistic ‘genius’ and downplaying of virtuosity in favour of process, often implying automatic, unknowing and trance-like action; the increase in performative forms; re-quotation and re-working of canonical works; new understandings of the audience’s agency in the completion or creation of the artwork.

However, at this point, it is sufficient to establish that, in as much as both Ritual and art practice share this characteristic of setting apart, in either sanctuary or exhibitional location, they occupy a commonality as practices that aim – at least within their boundaries – at efficacy and transformed reality, by self-consciously displaying possibilities that do not hold in quotidian life.

The order of everyday life is challenged temporarily. The assumptions, beliefs and ideologies that lie behind the status quo are suspended and interrogated. Its legitimacy is placed in question.

Faithfulness and doubt, belief and disbelief, affirmation and rejection come into play in the emergence of such questioning contexts. Whether we consider these as religious or secular in nature, what is at issue is the relationship of the structurally-ordered present and the as-yet-unstructured future, the alternativity of tactics and
the surety of strategy.

Theological/ideological beliefs lie behind and inform the context of ritual acts. But as these are addressed in the passage that is Ritual, they become temporarily de-stabilised and fluid. Different theories of Ritual offer varying understandings as to what the means of working out intention are, as well as the nature of the consequences of this ‘make-believing’. Some seek to evoke alternative possibility, others do the same only to withdraw such an interpretation. Such is the difference (if nuanced) between the particular terms ‘Ritual’ and ‘ceremony’ (discussion of which follows).

The consequences inherent in artists’ practices similarly run the gamut of these intents where and when they evoke alternative imagining, perhaps strangeness, sometimes inversion of quotidian reality or attempt shifted perception… or on the other hand, simply re-confirm, re-establish and re-iterate what was, what is (and evermore should be…).

**Past and future: ceremony and Ritual**

Having commented on this feature of transformation, we must further narrow the field of concern to exclude one type of ‘ritual’, which do not aim at transformation, but preservation: ‘ceremony’.

Paul Connerton delineates two types of the generic term, ‘ritual’: ‘ceremony’ for those of a conservative type; and ‘ritual’ for those of generative, transformative nature (Connerton, 1989, p.41-71).

Ceremony is ‘confirmation or ratification’ – essentially a commemoration or a re-enactment that refers *backwards* to some past, prototypical event. It represents myth, and does so by granting it a status as being beyond any kind of change. In ceremony, a community is reminded of its identity and in the performance physically re-embodies this.

But possessing this backward orientation to the past, ceremony tends to represent or mirror the ideological, mythical foundations of the status quo in which it is situated.
Examples would include Remembrance Day, royal Jubilees, French celebration of Bastille Day, May Days, Olympic Games, Cup Finals and the Tour de France. We might also include the art world’s increasing obsession with biennales, of course ‘reports’ on the international artistic scene, but in their prestige and promotion, also significant articulations of national claims to creativity and the myth of signature art.

Ceremonies tend to be recent, invented and are implicated in the developing processes of Modernism, even though the capitalism that propels them essentially defines their nature as palliatives or compensations.

‘Although the process of modernisation does indeed generate invented rituals as compensatory devices, the logic of modernism erodes those conditions which make acts of ritual re-enactment, of recapitulative imagination, imaginatively possible and persuasive…

The clothes people wear, the machines they operate, the workers who service the machines, the neighbourhoods they live in – all are constructed today to be dismantled tomorrow, so that they can be replaced or recycled. Integral to the accumulation of capital is the repeated intentional destruction of the built environment. Integral too is the transformation of all signs of cohesion into rapidly changing fashions of costume, language and practice.’ (Connerton, 1989, p.64)

Such ceremonies are created but almost as quickly undermined by the ideological myth of apparently unassailable consumption and spectacle.

While it may certainly contain similarly re-enacted forms, Ritual, in the sense that Connerton describes, differs in that it contains an orientation towards the future. Ritual is a series of ‘transformative processes’ which contain a critical attitude to what is, that is open to the possibility of ‘that-which-is’ being able to become ‘that-which-might-be’. This fundamentally challenges a sometimes prevailing assumption that all ‘ritual’ is merely a mirror and re-symbolisation of structure.
Ceremony is an indicative form: ‘as is’. The dynamic operating here is largely unidirectional, in that the ideology of the prevailing social system or structure is ‘expressed’ or ‘reflected’. It is confirmed, remains static and unchallenged. Here belief in ‘what is’ is assented to.

On the other hand, Ritual is subjunctive, proposing an ‘as if’. This is a hopeful form, reciprocal and reflexive. It assents to belief in the existing order, only at the same time subjecting it to critique and explicit or implicit questioning.

When we hold this latter category of Ritual alongside art practice understood as praxis, this identifies an attitude of resistance. This temporarily-induced, conscious suspension of belief will be what concern us henceforth.
What Is Ritual?
Turner &
definitions
What Is Ritual? Turner & definitions

So to Victor Turner and further definition.

Turner initially studied poetry and classics, but after serving as a non-combatant in the 2nd World War, began graduate studies in anthropology, developing a particular interest in ‘social drama’, primarily via a life-long study of the Ndembu tribe of Zambia. This influenced the rest of his career during which he explored Ritual and rites of passage.

His notable contribution has been an expansion of Arnold Van Gennep’s influential three-fold structure of rites of passage, specifically in his insights into the liminal phase.

Turner’s definitions

Turner formed two definitions of the passage-like process that is Ritual. His initial formulation in 1967 was as follows:

‘prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers.’ (Turner, 1967, p.19)

This was succeeded, in 1979, by a significantly revised formulation:

‘prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in invisible beings or powers regarded as the first and final causes of all effects.’ (Turner, 1982, p.79)

This revision’s significance lies in the shift in his understanding of how and where Ritual operates, which takes in the so-called ‘developed’ Western world, following the now-accepted, anthropological understanding that Ritual is not merely a characteristic of so-called primitive societies and cultures – as had previously tended to be the view – but rather is a much more prevalent and wide-spread presence
wherever humanity lives and breathes, even in the ostensibly secular, ‘developed’ world.

**Alexander’s expansion**

While convinced by the core of Turner’s definition, Bobby Alexander claims there are two major problems with it. He offers some qualifications and expansions.

**a) Ultimate concern**

Alexander contends that ‘supernaturalism’ is but one possibility of a reference to worldviews by which a culture derives meaning.

Turner’s second definition begins to allow for the consideration of supra-human (ie. greater than the individual) forces and powers, which are not necessarily ‘religious’ in the traditional sense. These forces and powers generate and are, in turn, modified by Ritual. Alexander proposes that Turner’s definition is too reliant on his work with regard to the context of Ndembu ritual.

Appeal to the ‘supernatural’ is about the relationship to a particular world view and its influence on societal ethos, lifestyles and the production of meaning. However, Alexander cites examples of religion (eg. Buddhism), that don’t require belief in the supernatural. He thus suggests the substitution of ‘ultimate concern’ for ‘concern about cosmic or ultimate reality’. This allows the consideration of modern, secular Ritual deriving from institutions, which in his view holds notions of value, transcendence and transformation of the everyday, structural world to as great an extent as do conventional religious examples.

**b) Relaxed formality**

Alexander’s second difficulty with Turner’s definition is that it seems to stress formality too much.

He echoes Ronald Grimes, who is concerned with how Ritual originates, proposing that Rituals are not always generated in a pre-meditated way, but often come to birth spontaneously:
‘Unintentional, non-goal orientated actions such as playing and gambolling, as well as pre-conscious habits and mannerisms, must not be excluded by definition from ritual, since they are the seedbeds of ritualising. Ritual does not originate solely in, nor is it exhaustively explainable by, conscious actions and theological rationale.’ (Grimes, 1982, p.54)

However, spontaneity and improvisation are not only present at the source or origin of Ritual. They are often also present as characteristic, pre-mediated and dynamic elements within its formal architecture. Conventional definitions of Ritual stress ‘invariance’ – codes which are rigidly restrictive – as being a defining ritual characteristic. Certainly this a strong characteristic, but does not exclude freer action within it. Grimes’ view challenges the notion that Ritual is only ‘ceremony’ and that it is static and purely repetitive re-statement of tradition. While Turner tends to emphasis Ritual’s generative, alternative, worldview-forming tendencies, Grimes argues rather that Ritual always also contains a degree of ceremony and confirmation of what is. It always possesses degrees of complicity, even with this tendency, so it is a question of degree and inflection in specific cases (Grimes, 1990, in Ashley, 1990, p.141-46).

This qualification is important if we are to look at correspondences between art and Ritual, particularly with reference to many recent examples. We can recognise, with Turner, Ritual’s primary motivation as one which aims to liberate itself temporarily from the limits of the normal existence of social structure, as does art.

Here it is the desire to transcend and then re-configure which is crucial (Turner, 1974, p.260; and 1982, p.52). Indeterminancy lies at the heart of Ritual and its role as a process of social change. This loosens the hold of everyday’s roles and statii.

To support Alexander’s expansion of Turner which moves beyond the purely religious, Roy A. Rappoport, in his magisterial survey, ‘Ritual And Religion In The Making Of Humanity’, gives another crisply concise definition of Ritual as:

‘… the performance of more or less invariant sequences of formal acts and utterances not entirely encoded by the performers.’ (Rappaport, 1999, p.24)

Here he confirms the comprehension of Ritual as being more than purely religious behaviour, at least in the conventional sense. Indeed, he notes that this particular definition has been used, in fields as diverse as psychiatry, sociology and even be applied to the study of animal behaviour.
What it does show is that Ritual is characterised by significant degrees of form and structure. Rappaport notes that this is not to say that its formal elements are unique to Ritual, but that their deployment within its structure are. Through the subsequent relationships generated, we find Ritual’s meaning and power.

**Prescribed formal behaviour**

We might note that in all the preceding definitions, there is no mention of symbol. This is not a problem in the context of either Turner’s or Rappaport’s surveys, as they subsequently and extensively explore a complex range of elements and nuances, but given the clearly central role that the symbolic plays in art, we might attend briefly to another definition. And we can unpack Turner’s phrase ‘prescribed formal behaviour’ a little more, particularly in the light of the name sometimes given to his theory of Ritual – ‘Processual Symbolic Analysis’ (Deflem, 1991).

One of the other definitions most frequently cited by anthropologists is that of Stanley J. Tambiah. Here he includes the symbolic element:

‘Ritual is a culturally constructed system of symbolic communication. It is constituted by patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts, often expressed in multiple media, whose content and arrangement are characterised in varying degree by formality (conventionality), stereotypy (rigidity), condensation (fusion) and redundancy (repetition).’ (Tambiah, n.d., quoted in Bowie, 2001, p.155)

These can also easily be understood as characteristics concerns of artworks in – and even despite – the tendency artists have to play with such boundaries in provocative, contradictory ways.

Formality (conventionality) refers to communication by means of symbolic form according to the codes relevant to that particular genre. Rappaport also likens this, if not totally synonymously, with ‘decorum’ (Rappaport, 1999, p.33).

Stereotypy (rigidity or invariance) refers to the specific fixing and manifestations of these codes. High Modernist debates about what makes a ‘painting’ as opposed to a ‘sculpture’ deal with these particular concerns explicitly; later discourses, such as the Expanded Field of Sculpture or postmodern muxing perform a similar concern, through an awareness of the combination of a wider range of codes, engaging them in bricolaged relationships.
Condensation (fusion) refers to the property of multiple meanings. This points to the ability of Ritual (as in art) to carry and communicate on several levels concurrently, explicitly or implicitly, with the possibility of meanings that contradict or at least appear to contradict each other being present in the same work. Again, the much-vaunted elusiveness of meaning possessed by artworks bear testimony to this property and indeed, its desirability.

In architecture, similar terms would be Lindsay Jones’ ‘superabundance’ (soon to be discussed) or Robert Venturi’s ‘multivalence’ (Venturi, 1977) as this paradoxical ability to allow a message to be simultaneously communicated and disguised. The art object’s ability to achieve this is also well understood, evoking through literal description, metaphor, analogy and psychological association all at once.

Redundancy (repetition) refers to the process of re-stating and re-articulating forms and codes to underline or exhaust by multiplication. However, we have to understand this in a slightly more sophisticated way, as in different media the same message is never identical – a spoken greeting, a wave of recognition and a welcoming kiss each carry the same general intent – however, each is subtly inflected, adding its own generic meaning to the communication transmitted. Turner calls these ‘magic mirrors’, a repetition that is a reflecting that produces alternatives.

Repetition, of course, has been an enduring concern explored in artworks of the last 50 years, in both Modern and post-Modern periods. The multiple, serialism, collage, the found object and installational appropriation reveal art practice’s interest.

The tri-partite structure of Ritual

The three phases of the ritual structure identified by Van Gennep are constituted by:

1. Pre-Liminal (stage of separation from the everyday)
2. Liminal (stage of transition and transformation)
3. Post-Liminal (stage of incorporation of experience and reintegration)

This structure was initially derived from observation of rites of passage in ‘primitive’ cultures, but was applied by Turner in relation to various aspects of Western culture.

Another anthropologist, Bruce Lincoln, has flagged up a problematic aspect of Van
Gennep & Turner’s structure – mainly when applied to traditional rites-of-passage – as being essentially overly-masculine in nature. He proposes a (similarly tripartite) framework, derived from examination of female rites (Lincoln, quoted in Bowie, 2001, p.152):

1. Enclosure
2. Metamorphosis/ magnification
3. Emergence

This differs in terms of who does what to whom and the mode in which they operate, in that in Lincoln’s analysis it is men who are active in the experience, with women essentially passive, their bodies and souls coerced, manipulated and marked, often through fear or violence. In many rites, women are disempowered and gain no independent status, learning instead specific, passive attitudes in relation to men and society.

So, to expand the three stages slightly…

**a) Pre-liminal**

The basic action of this phase is *gathering* and then *setting-up the setting-apart* of the central phase of liminality. Here, everyday life, time and space begins to be left behind. Dependent on the particular ritual form, this is achieved in a variety of ways by different media, whether special words, gestures, embodied actions, objects, architectural forms or lighting.

**b) Liminal**

The Latin word, ‘Limen’, means ‘threshold’. This central, passage-like space is initiated as ritual participants pass through this in an action of ‘keying’, ‘framing’ or ‘altaring’, which is achieved via aural, visual, embodied or physical tactical forms.

Turner’s interest was in this central phase of liminality. He recognised that in this transitional state individuals were *‘betwixt-and-between’*, in an important sense no longer attached as before to their society or their previous roles. As such they were *temporarily* a kind of non-person, residing in liminal ‘anti-structure’.
This state is opposed to ‘structure’, that is normal, quotidian, everyday day life with its responsibilities and roles. In the context of Ritual, ‘anti-structure’ possesses alternative symbolism and ideology. In the terms ‘structure’ and ‘anti-structure’, we find broad correspondence with de Certeau’s ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’.

Anti-structure in turn is characterised by ‘communitas’, an equality among individuals, a form of relating emphasising the non-differentiation of the basic common humanity.

Turner formed a conviction that it is in this central phase that the initial appearances, intuitions, seeds and models for future forms of society are often generated. Contrary to the Emile Durkheim’s view of Ritual as essentially conservative (ie. ceremony) which simply mirrors and acts to re-affirm and strengthen the existent power structures and roles of the status quo, Turner concluded that through liminality, Ritual was much more ambiguous in this respect, possessing critical, resistant and ultimately generative power.

c) Post-liminal

Following the suspension or limbo of liminality, this phase returns (or re-aggregates) the ritual participants to the context of everyday structure. Whether they are returned as identical or transformed in role, status or psychological inclination depends on whether the process has been Ritual or ceremonial in nature. Formally, this phase is often merely a re-statement, reversed or otherwise, of what occurred in the the pre-liminal phase.
What is Ritual?
Crisis & telling
non-violence
What is Ritual? Crisis & telling non-violence

Social drama: breach, crisis, redressive action & re-integration

Turner has further elucidation of Ritual’s role in what he calls ‘social drama’, that is its location in and relationship to social reality. He became frustrated with the more functional, positivist approach to anthropology, with its tendency to dehumanise and dislocate the human subjects it was studying.

He reckoned that what Richard Palmer calls the ‘key to Modernity’ - the advent of perspective – was responsible for this. Through rationalisation, the world is spatialised, and the eye in relation to this new arrangement becomes abstractly located. The world certainly becomes observable and measurable (‘if it happens you can count it’)…

‘(t)he spatialisation of vision has metaphysical and epistemological implications… the overemphasis on space and extension divides the world into observing subject and alien material objects in the world… words are seen as mere signs for the material objects in the world… time itself is perceived in spatialised terms… it is regarded as measurable, as a linear succession of present moments… the perspectival model makes man the measure and measurer of all things… technologised rationality harmonises with the protestant ethic – God places his blessing on the individualistic, competitive person (implicitly male) who exercises restraint and represses desire in the interest of more ‘rational’ goals: power and control… History, perceived as a straight line that never circles back on itself, becomes the story of man’s gradual self-improvement through the exercise of reason.’ (Spindler, George, 1978, quoted in Turner, 1988, p.73)

This is the victory of strategic space over tactical time that de Certeau identified. Here, of course, Turner perceives the danger in models where society becomes based on abstract ideology (strategy) rather than social reality (strategy-negotiated-by-tactics).
The researcher’s provisional position, as located both-in-and-outside the very situation they are observing, is seen as being neutral, superior, indifferent and disembodied, when in fact it retains partiality, a degree of immersion and certainly, embodiment.

Instead Turner came to comprehend a social system (or ‘field’) as a set of loosely integrated processes – some patterned and some persistent; not a straight line of history, but a series of recurrencies. This is what he calls ‘Social Drama Analysis’.

In this, he uses theatrical terminology to describe social crisis situations. The justification is that these events don’t merely involve people doing things, but that they are also trying to show others what they are doing or what they have done. In addition to this demonstrative aspect, there is also a self-reflexively critical element too, a theatrical as well as exhibitional character that is shared, indeed highly valued, by art.

Further re-inforcement comes from Erving Goffman (Goffman, 1959), where he argues that all social interaction involves wearing masks and playing roles (with the associated notions of rehearsal, performance and reception). In normal life we are ‘players’, pointing to an increased – one may say, doubling – of such playing in Ritual. This underscores Ritual’s typical intensity.

Turner defines social dramas as units of the social process, arising in conflict situations (Turner, 1974, p.37-41). Moreover, these situations and how they are dealt with are the means by which people negotiate movement or change of status in the social order. Four successive phases are involved:
Breach of regular, norm-governed social relations.

Crisis when the breach is often heightened, and which possesses threshold, liminal characteristics, being a phase of instability.

Liminal phase
Instability, distanced replication, critique.

Redressive Action
advice, mediation, arbitration etc. (in the context of formal juridical and legal machinery) follows, and similarly is liminal… distanced replication and critique of the situation is enabled, and may take metaphorical, symbolic form in some kind of ritual process. Another way to describe this is ‘mediated interruption’.

Reintegration
of the disturbed social group or, if this fails, there is the manifestation and solidifying of unreconcilable schism between the antagonistic groups. Either new relations are established or the schism is formalised.

### 15. Social drama: the 4 phases (Turner, 1988, p.34ff)

Turner’s understanding of the social drama – within which Ritual occurs – is as an aggregate: a complex sequence of symbolic acts, but most importantly, a dynamic in that this sequence is performed – a process, not a smaller, standardised stable unit or act. This is a shift away from a reductive functionalist view, a ‘post-modern’ turn. He reinforces this by continually utilising processual qualities: ‘performance’, ‘move’, ‘tagging’, ‘plot’, ‘action’, ‘crisis’, ‘schism’, ‘reintegration’ etc.

In Ritual, Turner sees transformative revealing (rather than mere ‘expression’) and importantly, articulation of the contradiction of normal cultural processes, an example of strangeness, a ‘making-new’, as-if-for-the-first-time. This can be seen as a tactic shared with art, in the de rigeur ‘shock of the new’ and alienation of the image.

I suggest that vis-à-vis art, the identification of an issue from which a work arises is analogous to a transformative revealing, contestation or breach initiated by a group. Formal reproduction of a contested situation is temporarily objectified and offers the potential for critique and resolution of understanding.

However, whereas a Ritual endeavours a resolution of an issue between groups, an artwork tends to intimation of possibility – if it is tactically ritual in character.
course, we can reiterate that it merely tends to ceremony if it is merely indicative in character.

There is also the tendency of many contemporary artists to de-construct and demonstrate self-consciousness about the act of making. Here, communication itself reveals insight about the communication system as a formalised, ritualised act, in this demonstrative self-reflexive sense.

However, this also highlights one significant feature of contemporary art practice which distinguishes it in other regards from Ritual. In art practice, the subsidiary – or the means – is often privileged over the focal – the processual intent. Thus detail comes to the foreground, occupying most attention.

This has the effect of effacing or relegating the background meaning. Exposing one's means implies disguising one's intent. So it is not unexpected that so much contemporary art is read, if incorrectly, as being ultimately nihilistic, lacking in meaning. Yet this is a feature of a Modernist legacy which privileges mere form over content as the end point of art. The consequence however is that this luxury of apparent meaningless also risks a debilitating powerlessness, superficiality or worse, complicity.

But the post-Modern turn away from grand narratives also privileges the deceptively meaningless, the marginal, the anomaly, the incomplete, the exception… paralleling the likes of slips of the tongue, mispronunciations and stutterings of language via the same enunciative principle that de Certeauan tactics possess.

Expressed otherwise, this turn moves from 'the pure' to 'the contaminated', from primary concern with the abstract system or arbitrarily fixed structures of Modernity, to concern with those embodied, fluid phenomena that occur in the actuality of individual life as it negotiates the social space: performance, process and flux, rather than presentation, product and fact.

Crucially, any attempt to fix a social relationship carries within it implicit acknowledgement that there are many alternatives, that such relationships are malleable. This is the core of Turner's idea and emphasis that Ritual can have stabilising, ordering, conservative characteristics, but also those that are destabilising, disordering and generative.

An oft-quoted objection, is that Ritual is merely 'empty' repetition and essentially
backward-looking. Turner’s contention is that Ritual (as opposed to ceremony) is fecund and future-embracing, a move from the ‘what was’ or ‘what is’ to the ‘what if’ or ‘as if’. In recognising the bounded reality of structure, the possibility of an alternative is also strongly, if implicitly, affirmed.

In surveying the contemporary moment, Turner believes a time of crisis (a crossing or decisive meeting point) of religion, Ritual and science – previously antagonistic fields – is upon us, which requires these respective insights to be combined and empowered. Here, I contend that art practice (when it then becomes *praxis*) be enlisted alongside the above.

As in the view of Turner and others, it is impossible – particularly when we regard art praxis’ recent heightened concern with context – to be ‘neutral’ or truly autonomous. Any publically manifested action is a smaller element within a larger whole of site, power relations and matrices of meaning.

Claimed neutrality is an implicit siding with the status quo and the interests of the powerful. Some degree of unavoidable complicity is present (otherwise we would be discussing ‘revolution’), but this is not the case with regard to intent. Of course, this is the meaning of ‘subversive’, a term of impurity, complicit but seeking to discern and manifest alternatives… ‘in the world, but not of it’ (John 15: 19).

Regarding art praxis as a tactical ritual process creates a distinct articulation of this kind of resistance, if we take each art work as addressing some crisis that requires resolution.

**Ritual as more than mere communication: telling non-violence**

We have already noted that, before anything else, Ritual is a species of performance – it does not exist unless it is performed, embodied as *a form of communication* – within the social drama. Tambiah’s earlier definition articulates an understanding of Ritual as such a form. But it is necessary to press further: it is *not merely an alternative form of communication*.

In the specific field of Communication Studies, Eric Rothenbuhler examines communication in all its forms, to discover to what extent these can be considered
as ritual phenomena. In ‘Ritual Communication’ (Rothenbuhler, 1998), believing that Ritual is necessary to humane living together in even secular society, he establishes Ritual as:

‘...the voluntary performance of appropriately patterned behaviour to symbolically affect or participate in the serious life.’ (Rothenbuhler, 1998, p.27)

... the ‘serious life’ being that which commands ultimate value, echoing Alexander’s expansion of Turner’s definition and to what it relates. So, present are the following elements:

1. A formal mode of action…
2. that emphasises symbolic action over instrumental action, and…
3. relates to social relations and social orders.

Again we find the same basic characteristics as those described by Turner, Alexander, Rappaport and Tambiah. In this, Rothenbuhler is initially closer to the commemorative emphasis of Durkheim and Bloch, who regard Ritual as an indicative symbolic language alone. However, Rothenbuhler ultimately positions himself as debunking this position, as an empirical tool elevated to the status of a creed.

He focuses on the everyday actions of life, in their ritual aspects: the most mundane activities (smiles, nods, turn-taking in conversation), as well as more complex aggregates (dress codes, positioning, tools) which fuse into even more complex forms of characters, roles and ultimately social organisations.

All are markers of identity and intention which serve to maintain the social order. Crucially, for Rothenbuhler, here Ritual is not only the power which binds the social order, but also actively stands in creative opposition to the alternative form of coercive force. Without Ritual, there would be greater resort to violence in order to negotiate living. By resorting to Ritual, we find ourselves making a telling commitment to the tactic of non-violence.

Ritual is then importantly inflected as a form of creative, compassionate action, as opposed to one that is negative and destructive. Nevertheless it also refers to a positive emphasis of the etymological root of the word ‘religion’, which derives from the Latin: ‘to bind’, with its implications of constraint, as well as those of cementing or causing to adhere together – an ideological social glue.
Both ritual action and Ritual event are thus forms which contribute to the moral regulation of life, inhabiting the world of ‘oughts’ – promises, obligations, responsibilities, the world of ‘might’s’ – that Turner’s liminality stresses. But Ritual, in being form, is more than mere thought.

Rothenbuhler is persuasive regarding the moral dimension of Ritual in all its forms. However while he tends to stress its binding, he also highlights its optionality. This shares Turner's later adaption of 'liminal' towards 'liminoid', in contemporary society, taking account of the optional nature of the performative genres, contexted in the 'developed' world's distinction between work and leisure.

Rothenbuhler maintains that in Ritual all forms are communicative, but more that Ritual is:

‘one of the strongest forms of communicative effectiveness.’ (Rothenbuhler, 1998, p.53)

Ritual is a form that by dint of its embodied nature is often more persuasive in its consolidation and development of beliefs and attitudes for its participants than other forms. But it is not just any form. For his part, Rappaport develops this further by claiming that Ritual is:

‘not simply an alternative way to express any manner of thing, but that certain meanings and effects can best, or even only, be expressed or achieved in ritual.’ (my italics) (Rappaport, 1999, p.30)

When Rappaport offers an emphasis that:

‘… the transmitters of ritual’s message are always among their most important receivers,’ (Rappaport, 1999, p.51)

again we are talking about showing something (by word, image and performance), but also showing something about the Ritual’s participants. These two modes of generating meaning are self-referential and canonical, declarations of free will and free-association. The personal is political.

Briefly, we might find further support for this form of activating demonstration in an example of the critique afforded by feminist and queer theory of the way the ritualised acts can confirm or resist the form of violence of the strategy that is historic androcentrism. The work of Judith Butler builds on Simone de Beauvoir's claim that the embodied person is contingent to a very specific cultural and
temporal location,

‘a manner of doing, dramatising and reproducing a historical situation.’
(Butler, 1988, quoted in Schechner, 2002, p.131)

As opposed to being a static biological fact, and conceptualising gender identity instead as a series of culturally performative acts (or roles played out) that are repeated and through which gender is constituted,

‘(this) repetition is at once a re-enactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established; and it is the mundane and ritualised form of their legitimation.’ (Butler, 1990, in Counsell & Wolf, 2007, p.76)

The sum of individual actions become internalised and gendered modes emerge as only a historically contingent public action and reality. Out of a recurring, repeated ritual flux, a nevertheless mutable, temporarily fixed stability of position and identity appears. While the orthodox ritual series of androcentric pedagogy acts to inculcate an acceptance of its codes and values, by naming these, feminist/ queer critique introduces the possibility of resistant action into the same ritual series, enuciatively standing against the malevolent coersion it identifies. A new, visionary song finds its way into the repertoire as a standard, akin to the centuries-old proto-feminist text of Mary’s Magnificat (Luke 1: 46-55), singing of the world inverted (the powerful brought down, the humble lifted high, the hungry filled, the rich sent empty away…). Another order and history (herstory) is proclaimed and claimed, another more truthful fiction created. This is the form of performative enunciation that participants in Ritual (as opposed to ceremony) show and bring into embodied being.

In sum, Ritual articulates a crisis and seeks resolution, engages structure and strategies – while acknowledging being conditionally bounded by them – yet responds with alternatives and tactics that point to excessive reality. More, if taken seriously, in claiming Rothenbuhler’s view of it being an alternative to coerson and force, Ritual is a fundamental orientation towards non-violence, not passivity, but actively transforming.
What is Ritual?
Liminality
What is Ritual? Liminality

Van Gennep and Turner identified the liminal stage as an existential time and space, ‘betwixt-and-between’, neither one thing nor the other and created by a variety of forces:

‘Liminal entities are assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualise social & cultural transitions. Thus liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to the wilderness and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.’ (Turner, 1974; p.260, 272)

Liminality & framing

The entry into this, the limbo-dance of liminality, is achieved by an action of framing (or keying).

Art practice is intimately familiar with the action of the frame substituting a ‘standing-in-the-place-of’ that is Cartesian representation. This reduces the artwork to an object. In the ritual sense, framing, on the other hand, enables re-presentation, or better, re-presencing. In this respect it is actively performative rather than passively objective. Within this framing the object becomes a dynamic element in dialogue with others.

Framing then indicates a passage of transformation, cueing a temporary, fluid time and space, where instability, ambiguity, contradiction, inversion and variability reigns. Framing is in itself a micro-form of structure, and while initially created in the realm of structure, nevertheless introduces its opposite, granting the non-functionality of playfulness and license in order to destabilise and subvert. Once through this framing, liminality is established, with a trusting, believing adherence to the subjunctive 'as-if'.

If we turn to the mid-20th century shifts in sculpture (as a visual art example) that Rosalind Krauss describes in ‘Passages In Modern Sculpture’, we find
'(o)ne of the striking aspects of modern sculpture is the way in which it manifests its maker's growing awareness that sculpture is a medium peculiarly located at the juncture between stillness and motion, time arrested and time passing. From this tension, which defines the very condition of sculpture, comes its enormous expressive power.' (Krauss, 1977, p.5)

... a very condition that is ‘betwixt-and-between’, a powerful liminality.

**Liminality, structure, anti-structure & communitas**

Such liminality is found in social drama as well as in the performative aspects of Ritual itself. Central to Turner's concept is the dialectic between *structure* and *anti-structure*, or as he terms them otherwise, *structure* and *communitas*.

**a) Structure**

As we’ve seen, structure here refers to the normal, ordered condition of being and acting in society according to laws, conventions and customs, roles and responsibilities. It has a cognitive quality, and consists of a set of classifications that provide a model for thinking about social and physical environments.

**b) Anti-structure/ communitas**

Turner uses ‘communitas’ (the Latin term) as opposed to ‘community’ to distinguish a form or modality of fluid social relatedness from the more fixed and conventional ‘area of common living’ (Turner, 1969, p.96). So, communitas refers to the relationship between concrete, historical, idiosyncratic individuals, when they

‘are not segmentalised into roles or statuses, but confront each other rather in the manner of Martin Buber’s “I And Thou” [...] something that arises in instant mutuality, when each person fully experiences the being of the other’.’ (Turner, 1969, p.132)

Communitas possesses existential qualities and involves the whole human being in relation to others. In a real sense, its role and action, being less visible than structure, is more often than not unremarked and unnoticed except in the period of its very
immediately real experience. It deals with the individual in inclusive, general mode within an unstructured, homogeneous model of society. We might simplify this by saying we here are dealing with ‘basic humanity’.

Structure needs anti-structure and communitas. Turner contends that one cannot exist without the other, and more, that no society can exist without this dialectic. Form cannot exist without formlessness, order without chaos.

Communitas’ presence is crucial in allowing structure to function. We might note that a structural entity such as the Declaration of Human Rights would be meaningless – and this means not pursued or acted on in practical terms – unless it is undergirded by conviction springing from some instance of actual, embodied communitas itself.

However, structure is the more enduring, of greater duration, due to its relative rigidity, whereas communitas (at its most essential, at least) is more fleeting, largely due to its spontaneous, fluid and free nature. It can rarely be sustained for prolonged periods.

To sustain a state of being implies taking measures to ensure it – by its nature, an act of structuring. Hence the importance of framing in creating liminality. A make-shift(ing) form of structure for a shift-making passage. Despite this though, communitas possesses a high degree of intensity and potency.

Turner elucidates three types of communitas:

1. **Existential or spontaneous:**
   These are fleeting, momentary relating, which Turner approximates to ‘Happenings’ (Kaprow) or which William Blake might have called “the winged moment as it flies.” A rave, fans’ celebrations in the aftermath of their team’s cup final victory or those at the announcement of Barak Obama’s 2008 election victory would also fall into this category… a generalised feeling of ‘We’, togetherness and unity.

This first type, falls definitively outside structure, and is the type which characterises Ritual’s liminality. There are two other versions which fall within quotidian structure:

2. **Normative:**
   In order to maintain communitas over a longer period, some degree of social
control, mobilization and organisation of resources are required, resulting in the *beginnings* of a social system.

3. **Ideological**:

Utopian models of communitas, based on those of the first existential character; this type implies a larger scale and hence more structuring and control.

We could characterise existential communitas as inward or internal, given its more intimate character, while ideological communitas tends to a more outward form, in its attempt to define conditions in which the inward intimacy might be able to flourish. In pre-industrial societies this spontaneity appears to be more often than not associated with mystical power, originating from the divine or the ancestors. In post-industrial societies, the source of such sentiment is harder to define, but nevertheless occurs on the margins of structure (a night out with friends, a meal, the kindness of a stranger) and often in the context of the performative arts genres.

Directed outward in this way, structure tends to be practical, matter-of-fact, worldly-wise. Its aim is predictability and control; while communitas is hard to grasp, often fecund, speculatively generative, producing imagery, symbols and ideas of a philosophical nature. Significantly it works this creation, in Ritual and art, when embodiment is consciously experienced, and when it is inter-relational. A levelling and equality is perceived between persons.

Turner points to a correlation between the marginal (and by implication ignored or under-valued) and a generosity of vision when he lists the relationship of the ideal structure-less domain of communitas as having:

> ‘a fairly regular connection… between liminality, structural inferiority, lowermost status and structural outsiderhood on the one hand, and, on the other, such universal human values as peace and harmony between all men (sic), fertility, health of mind and body, universal justice, comradeship and brotherhood between all men (sic), the equality before God, the law or the life force of men and women, young and old, and persons of all races and ethnic groups (and)… the persisting adhesion between equality and absence of property.’ (Turner, 1969, p.134)

Turner stresses this is more than Durkheimian ‘solidarity’, which depends on creating a distinction of ‘us’ and ‘them’, ‘in’ and ‘out’. Spontaneous communitas possesses a levelling of experience and feeling of ultimate equality. These qualities are intrinsic. They are mainly pleasurable, inducing positive feelings, boundary-
lessness, even intoxication.

Such qualities stand in stark contrast to structural life where we are bounded and limited by difficulties, decisions and group responsibilities (at the expense of what might be our own inclinations). Sacrifices have to be made in the conquering of physical and social obstacles, often unwelcome tasks have to be undertaken. ‘Work’ is involved.

The quality of fascination that communitas carries can often be perceived as ‘magical’, containing a feeling of endless power.

An echo of this is seen in art when, on completion of a work, the artist may experience feeling of surprise, discovery, making a leap beyond previous capability or insight. Often there is a feeling that the work has been made by another. From a viewer’s point of view, in an echo of the ‘magicality’ of the artist’s actions, the question, ‘how did/ could they do that?’ might come.

But untransformed power cannot be channelled easily or in consistent form into normal social life with all its obligations and practical details. For that, lucid thought and consistently sustained will are required.

But structural action on its own has a tendency to turn arid and mechanical… unless people are, occasionally

‘immersed in the regenerative abyss of communitas.’ (Turner, 1969, p.139)

A balance has to be struck, between power (structure) and fertility (communitas) if a person’s life, or that of a group or culture, is to be healthy. In possessing this latter characteristic, we can lay claim to one of Ritual’s – and ultimately art praxis as tactical ritual process’ claims to social health.

**Liminal importance**

Turner presses this significantly further:

‘Communitas breaks through interstices of structure, in liminality; at the edges of structure, in inferiority. It is almost everywhere held to be sacred or “holy”, possibly because it transgresses or dissolves the norms that govern structured and institutionalised relationships and is accompanied by
experiences of unprecedented potency…

Liminality, marginality, structural inferiority are conditions in which frequently are generated myths, rituals, philosophical systems and works of art.

These cultural forms provide men (sic) with a set of templates or models which are, at one level, periodic re-classifications of reality and man’s (sic) relationship to society, nature and culture.

But they are more than classifications, since they incite men (sic) to action as well as to thought. Each of these productions has a multi-vocal character, having many meanings, and each is capable of moving people at many psycho-biological levels simultaneously.’ (Turner, 1969, p.128-129; my italicised comments)

Communists might identify elements of this as ‘the dictatorship of the proleteriat’ – admittedly only a temporary state, between the capitalist society and the classless, stateless and moneyless communist society. Equally, Turner’s emphasis on inferiority also evokes a distinctive Judeo-Christian theological concept of ‘agape’ — love, with a specific drive to universal beneficence, ‘which moves outwards from the guts’ (Taylor, Charles, 2007, pp. 247 & 741), or as Slavoj Žižek terms it, ‘political love’ (Žižek, 2010, p.98). This is also the love of Liberation Theology’s ‘bias to the poor’, the kingdom of heaven where ‘(t)here is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female… all one in Christ Jesus’ (Galatians 3: 28). In this we find communitas delineating a view of the world seen from the viewpoint and inclusive of the weakest and least.

And it often appears in art, literature, theatre and film with the ubiquitous proposition that the ‘truth’, signs of ultimate value and insight reside in the experience of the outsider.

This privileging of the identity of the weak, the least, marginal and excluded transforms their ‘unimportance’ into that of the most important in a place and time where all are humbled, and truth, wisdom and insight which challenges the past and the status quo is delineated. In liminality and in particular, in the action of communitas, again and again humanity is returned to this awareness of agape through embodied experience. This marks and leaves no one the same. Strenuous reactionary effort may be made by structurally panoptic power to resist this transformation, but tactical resistance to such desire always finds ways to negotiate structure’s strategy.
Liminality’s dynamic

In liminality, the status of space-time and role are marginalised — a spatial and temporal threshold-phase appears in which participants are ‘neither here nor there; betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention and ceremonial’ (Turner, 1969, p.95).

The liminal phase temporarily levels all involved. Status, rank, property and accustomed roles are suspended. Homogenisation, egalitarianism and comradeship are magnified as all are conditioned by, and at the mercy of, the liminal occasion and what it might produce.

In Ritual, lowliness and sacredness become privileged and interwoven. The movement takes participants into a society of relative non-differentiation distinct from the previous mode of human inter-relatedness which was marked by conventional differentiations and heirarchies. These latter are present in all human society, but more marked in industrial, ‘developed’ societies such as our own, with its characteristic separation of people in terms of ‘more’ or ‘less’. Hence, the world is turned upside-down.

16. ‘World Turned Upside Down’, pamphlet

By contending that it is in liminality that the seeds and models of future cultural form are created, Turner identifies the least and marginal as the primary agents of that crucial act of creation, a role of potentially counter-cultural and political significance.

Ritual, as opposed to ceremony, aspires per se, to this ‘bias to the poor’ and the future, whereas ceremony essentially controls and maintains order in the vested interests of the powerful. Of course, ceremony might elevate the marginal, but it is
still a means of controlled, merely temporary license… a freedom given, only to be taken away again, heightening the awareness that order must prevail. This would be true of cyclical and seasonal calendric Rituals in the main.

And when we come to liminoid ritual activities – that form of the liminal in industrial, ‘advanced’ societies, of which art and theatre are but two – Turner identifies that these are more frequently change- and movement-orientated.

**High, low, relatedness, authority**

Turner identifies a dialectical process at work, whereby the total social life of humanity involves – and more requires – successive experiences of high and low, equality and inequality, homogeneity and differentiation. Individual and group are never in a totally stable state, but are involved in an ongoing process of negotiation and transition of status and role.

It would be false to say that there is no authority active in the liminal phase, as – in traditional situations – participants would be submissive to the authority of the ritual elders. In the case of a liminal art situation, the elders’ role shifts – held at different times by the artist, the curator or even the viewer-participant. In each case, as this authority is in effect licensed by the previous quotidian society, the participants submit to no less than the totality of society.

In Ritual this submissiveness is often characterised by silence, or in another sense, participants become a *tabula rasa*, a blank slate. What might subsequently be written on this slate may be, in the re-aggregation stage of Ritual, either the re-stated, previously-held role and status or a totally new formulation.

The weak and inferior may re-learn how to resume their previous state, but even if this is the case and no transformation occurs, their action and experience in liminality, through its memory of de-stabilised intensity, has the lingering potential to teach structured society an alternative truth. Liminality often initiates this pedagogic dialectic. Another possible world can be imagined, in the midst of what is.

In traditional Ritual, Turner describes how these pedagogics of liminality appeal to a mystical spirituality in…

‘… a condemnation of two kinds of separation from the generic bond of
communitas. The first is to act only in terms of the rights conferred on one by the incumbency of office in the social structure. The second is to follow one’s psychobiological urges at the expense of one’s fellows. A mystical character is assigned to the sentiment of humankindness in most types of liminality, and in most cultures this stage of transition is brought closely in touch with beliefs in the protective and punitive powers of divine or preternatural beings or powers.’ (Turner, 1969, p.105)

Appeal to such supra-human powers (or Alexander’s ultimate value) tends towards an engagement in mystery.

**Liminal tactics**

Liminality possesses a variety of characteristics different from that of the status system and Turner draws up an indicative, partial list of oppositions, which while not exhaustive, shows the generic characteristics. The forms in which these oppositions may be manifest in liminality can be multiple and various and to greater or lesser degree (Turner, 1969, p.107).

Again Turner notes that many of these characteristics point to those of the religious life in the Christian tradition (though also undoubtedly of other great world religions, as well as secular society in many of its utopian phases and generic aspirations). In the case of the Judeo-Christian tradition, being an ‘Exodus-people’, pilgrims through this world, ‘in the world, but not of it’, point to this traveller-like, transitional status as being a *permanently* liminal one.
<table>
<thead>
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<th>Liminality</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>Heterogeneity</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Distinctions of wealth</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Avoidance of pain &amp; suffering</td>
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<tr>
<td>Degrees of autonomy</td>
<td>Heteronymy</td>
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17. **Liminality contrasted with the status system** (Turner, 1969, p. 106)

The contemporary artist has increasingly come to be regarded, by themselves and others, in similar terms to those in Turner’s table above. In characteristic mode, artists invariably seek to avoid definition, claiming a license of aesthetic/cultural freedom, adopting persona or ‘hiding’ behind the artwork (‘It’s the work that’s important…’). Similarly, with regard to the art work itself, the processes, interpretations given, the strategies of obliqueness, obscuring and contradicting that are frequently employed could be said to have become some of the most definitive characteristics of a contemporary artistic method.

So in terms of the above oppositions, it is not too hard to draw parallels between
contemporary artists’ adoption of many of these oppositions as core tactics in much of their work.

Liminality in all its forms, and particularly when read into art practice, shares many of these, Ritual’s potentials. Through the laying bare of contradictions between ‘what-is’ and ‘what-could-be’, new models become imaginable, and the participant in liminality can make a choice for the contradictory option, which in the most radical sense, is ultimately beyond the control of any structural power to subsequently or fully control.

18. ‘Meat Joy’, 1964, Carolee Schneemann

These aspirations or intents can be found behind many artworks too, in the likes of Carolee Schneemann’s ‘Meat Joy’ (1964), with its appeal to a primitive spontaneity, though admittedly to a mythically-imagined Edenic state.


Thomas Hirshhorn’s ‘Bataille Monument’, which focuses on the Surrealist philosopher, while challenging the middle-class values resident in fine art festivals (in this case, Documenta), by locating the work in a low-income, largely immigrant suburb of Kassel, wriggles into a forgotten space (a low-income housing estate)
defined by the socio-economic forces that to a large extent benefit the otherwise firm-handed strictures and structures of the internationalised institution.

Or Edwin Wurm’s ‘One Minute Sculptures’ (2002), where a one-minute liminality of (often-perverse) sculptural pose is performed by the traditionally invisible viewers (the lesser ‘non-artists’ who nevertheless become artist and product), the prop-like object utilised becoming a form of plinth-like framing and role-inversion.

So, as Turner characterises it, liminality is characterised by the subjunctive mood, ‘what if’. This is a ludic mood. What makes up the familiar world can be taken apart and re-assembled, in a potentially unlimited range of playful, creative, child-like and innocently new combinations.

Art, whenever it faithfully adopts this liminal, playful, generative mode is characterised by this mood and intent even when its purpose sometimes seems more descriptive. When it seeks to make the ordinary strange, grotesque, weird, or uncanny it can show as if through ‘new’ eyes, making all things new. This subjunctive mode is a prevalent characteristic of much contemporary art. Proclaiming an option for the rebellious, childish and foolish is also a declaration for the weak, the powerless, the marginal… ‘unless you become a child, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matt. 18: 3)
What is Ritual?
Significant formal tactics
What is Ritual? Significant formal tactics

As we prepare to leave behind these Apocryphal background discussions and move to specifically concentrate on where specific ritual tactics are present in recent examples of art practice, I should crystalise the particular formal tactics which will be of primary concern in the Gospals.

Framing & keying

We've already identified the presence of the ‘limen’ in Ritual. This threshold, framing and its subsidiary, keying, both indicate and activate liminality.

Physical, architectural form is perhaps the most significant factor external to Ritual that sets the encounter apart as being ‘special’ and distinct. Other subsequent embodied formal means may be employed – verbal invocation (‘Let us worship God’), significant silence (the post-orchestral tuning-up, the hush induced by the theatrical or cinematic curtain’s muted parting) or hesitation (the actors’ or dancers’ taking the stage and momentary freezing), particular gestures or movement. This may involve the engagement of particular objects, either by dint of their particular identity, arrangement or in conjunction with specific embodied action.

What is regarded as ‘real’ or ‘make-believe’ rests on this frame-keying action, as does what is work and play, what is conscious and unconscious, what is remarkable and unremarkable, what is sacred or profane. This frame-keying articulates the patterning of the particular, subsequent strip of actions as being significant performance.

‘A systematic transformation is involved across materials already meaningful in accordance with a schema of interpretation, and without which the keying would be meaningless.’ (Goffman, quoted in Counsell & Wolf, 2007, p.27)

That this systematic transformation is operating, is expected and acknowledged by (self-)aware participants. Thus, what happens is understood as reconstituted.
Erving Goffman uses the term, ‘frame analysis’ (Goffman, in Lemert & Branamana, 1997, p.149-166) to discuss the myriad, complex phenomena in social life, within which we play different, appropriate roles. The extent to which we master the relevant roles for particular situations defines how we are regarded and how we regard ourselves. These are reliant on keys and cues for recognition.

Cues establish beginning and ending, what is ‘within’ and ‘without’. Any objects or activity contained within may be only slightly altered from normal usage. However, how participants understand this activity is utterly transformed. Participants hold a suspended disbelief or faith (the two depending on each other) in what is happening, caught-up or carried-away to varying degree, with a sophisticated, self-reflexive awareness of what is play, what is seriousness and also what intention is operating. A very particular form of flow is possible which can be described variously as dreaming, fantasy, imagination… another ‘finite province of meaning’.

**Scripting, scoring & restoring behaviour**

Someone other than the performer in most cases creates the script-scoring, the subsequent ‘prescribed formal behaviour’ of constructed, orchestrated, multi-medium ritual performance.

While there can be significant degrees of pre-definition, again this however does not exclude greater or lesser degrees of executed spontaneity, whether unconscious slippages, stutterings or intentional nuancing or improvisation occur, even within versions produced by one performer. No performance is identical to another.

Within redundancy and stereotyping, significant qualities of indeterminancy and ambiguity remain. The most fixed of traditions is not simply a static entity but a dynamic process, as different minds, bodies and contexts induce increments of change.

One of Turner’s collaborators, Richard Schechner describes ritual scripting as ‘Restored Behaviour’ (Schechner, 1985, p35ff). He likens it (in theatre) to re-arranged or re-constructed living behaviour, often treated as a film director would a strip of film.

‘restored behaviour is symbolic and reflexive: not empty but loaded behaviour multivocally broadcasting significances.’ (Schechner, 1985, p.37)
‘Performance means: never for the first time. It means: for the second to nth times. Performance is “twice-behaved behaviour”.’ (Schechner, 1985, p.37)

Thus restored behaviour of any type means that groups or individuals have ‘the chance to re-become what they never were but wish to have been or wish to become’. The past, as the present, is never static, but in the act of re-storing or re-membering, always being transformed or recycled. In ritual genres this happens in intensified form.

The ‘truth’ or ‘source’ of the original behaviour may be lost, ignored or contradicted in the process of its re-staging, even while this truth or source is apparently being honoured and observed.

This produces a generative process, an element in a rehearsal process which produces a new entity. While restored behaviour can be seen as another term for the experimental re-assembly of theatrical rehearsal, it also can be applied to the artist’s studio practice, as a re-iteration of the preceding investigative behaviour occuring again in the subsequent stage of exhibition.

The rehearsal/ studio narrows the range of choices, while playing with possibilities; and the script is built for the time of performance. The ‘score’ in music functions similarly, in that this script is then accepted by those involved as that which will be made to happen. Schechner sees this as a ‘Ritual by contract’.

Schechner states that restored behaviour is the main characteristic of performance, on a spectrum from the less-choice of Ritual to the more-choice of aesthetic theatre. Even if there is no rehearsal, implicit rules for improvisation will be acted on and an analogous process will occur.

Restored behaviour is ‘out there’ or ‘distant from me’ a role-playing, but also one which analogously replicates the attitude of an apprentice who learns from a master (here incarnated as the script), at first without questioning, merely accepting the teacher’s traditional authority, but thereafter improvising with an increasingly self-confident license.

If framing-keying and scripting-scoring are our critical conceptual terms, we can also make particular note of other more specific, subsidiary tactics involved in their execution.
Sensory orchestrating

As with any of the performative genres, Turner emphasises that Ritual is rarely, if ever, an application of one particular medium, but is an orchestration of media and that

‘(c)ertain sensory codes are associated with each medium.’ (Turner, 1988, p. 23)

For Ritual, as for art, any and all media are fair game as ritually, sculptural elements. Turner describes how the successive offering of a variety of ‘sensory codes’ in a ritual bricolaging, shifts it into the experiential – that is, holistic – whole-body realm. Forms of recitation, bells ringing at different points, types of inflected movement and gesture-making, types of incense, costumes and masks, candles, genres of song, sound and silence – the utilisation of these and many other materials and objects produce a wide grammar and vocabulary of messages and cues.

As when instruments in an orchestra are played (or we may further inflect, played with), the full meaning of ritual media become realised only in performance of the relationships. This is the point at which the blueprinting of scripting-scoring is exceeded and a new phenomenon appears. Abstracted Cartesian representation cannot reductively comprehend this, as it could a script or score alone. Instead the embodied Ritual escapes into the liminality of incarnated re-presenting. Experience is highlighted – implicating and uniting script, media, players and congregation in a collective, ludic ambiguity.

Slumbering strange-making

A distinctive characteristic of ritual liminality is the creation of strangeness… oddity, uncanniness, a type of knowing-unknowing. This is a form of playfulness at work, the sleight-of-hand that allows the all-too-real world of structure to be left behind and the temporality of the ‘as-if’ to become a believable passage of in-dwelling.

This playfulness is double-sided, in both senses. The activity of ritual participants is a form of ‘fun’, a childish, foolishness in its focused intensity on a structurally functionless activity. It’s from this that the mistaken objection that Ritual is ‘empty’ – that it has no purpose in the ‘real’ world – springs. This objection, however, is only valid if all action and behaviour has to be measured as to its fitness to the service of instrumental, rationally-defined ends.
This playfulness is also antagonistic, in the sense of its trickery – it as often makes fun of individuals, institutions, ideas and ideologies. Much of this is achieved through juxtaposition and inversion, what Turner calls an ‘odd-jobbing, bricolage style’.

In passing, perhaps the most prominent example of inversion with which we might be (ritually) familiar is the bread and wine of Christian ritual – the re-enactment of Christ’s appropriation and then total inversion of the previous, pagan practice of sacrificing actual animal or human flesh and blood; previous actuality inverted into symbolism. ‘This is my body’ – bread; ‘This is my blood’ – wine. An example of the same operational dynamic in visual art: ‘This is a pipe’ – a painting of a pipe.

Hiro Ishibashi, with reference to Noh, the form of classical Japanese musical that is widely-quoted in Ritual studies, states:

‘(a)ll the stage directions of the Noh are very subtly designed to make the intellect slumber without leaving any impression of artifice.’ (Ishibashi, Hiro, quoted in Morrow, n.d., p.171)

The orchestration of elements opens up the embodied, sensory depths that are normally repressed in quotidian life. Noh shares with many other ritual forms this
stripping-down, isolation and re-combination of elements to create this uncanny strangeness – a subtly slight shifting from the familiar that is nevertheless anything but either slight or familiar. A diminished distancing of otherness here produces an distinction-with-intimacy that seduces our otherwise alertness about the details of the experience, transferring and transporting these critical faculties to focus on the meaning of what lies beyond them.

**Occasioning allurement**

Ritual creates an alternative space and time for its appearance. Some re-assessment in recent architectural theory of this physically more-encompassing artistic form adds further insight about the interaction between persons, objects and the deployment of Ritual’s liminality.

We find a move towards located performativity in art discourse, with its recent, increased awareness of ‘situation’, context, site and relational aesthetic:

‘At some point in the late 1970’s we crossed an important threshold; we moved beyond site into places… one might say that a site represents the constituent physical properties of a place – its mass, space, light, duration, location and material processes – place represents the practical, vernacular, psychological, social, cultural, ceremonial, ethnic, economic, political and historical dimensions of a site.’ (Kelley, Jeff, n.d., quoted in Harding & Büchler, 1997, p.6)

In this, Jeff Kelley articulates the turn in art practice (as in science and other disciplines) from ‘site’ to ‘place’. He points to the shift away from defining art as only object. Contextual, site-specific and installational works carry this concern into relationship and performativity.

In art practice we can quote the words of the Glasgow Artist Placement Group’s oft-quoted maxim, that ‘the context is half the work.’ (Harding & Büchler, 1997, p.7) … the other, unprivileged half.

In architecture, and particularly with reference to ritual architecture, Lindsay Jones has argued against the recurring, conventional misconception of understanding architecture as object or an objective condition. Instead he argues for viewing it as a set of relations; a relational concept.
To understand ritual architectural space-and-form alone is to lose much of its meaning. Its full meaning derives from the specific interaction between people and architectural constructs... space-plus-form-plus-participants and their performing together.

Jones understands not monuments, but 'monumental occasions' which are based on largely unconscious processes of interpretation. These constitute a hermeneutic negotiation:

‘...it is not the buildings but human experience or apprehension of buildings that holds our attention...from this perspective, the locus of meaning resides neither in the building itself (a physical object) nor in the mind of the beholder (a human subject), but rather in the negotiation or the interactive relation that subsumes both building and beholder in the ritual-architectural event in which buildings and human participants alike are involved.’ (Abramovitz, Anita, n.d., quoted in Jones, 2000, p.41)

Activity – or rather, interactivity, mutual performance – is involved. Understanding arises from a situation, a constructed, located and performed event, rather than an objective or static entity:

‘the concrete construction of momentary ambiances of life and their transformation into a superior passional quality...a methodical intervention based on the complex factors of two comportments in perpetual interaction: the material environment of life and the comportments which it gives rise to and which radically transforms it.’ (Debord, Guy, 1957, in Harrison & Wood, 1996, p.694)

Jones identifies what he calls, the ‘quality of allurement’ (Jones, 2000, p.74ff) that catalyses individuals and communities to interpret some architecture as ‘sacred’, or we might say more broadly, ‘special’.

If we think of architecture (and similarly, the artwork) as autonomous objects alone, we conceive of the people as an audience, passive observers or administered consumers rather than participants.

Along with Jones’ insight, we have to repeatedly re-iterate the insight of reception theory, that art is not art unless it is seen or experienced. In this sense, architecture and art can then be understood as an interactive conversation, a ritual game, in which all players have considerable investment:

‘...first, the stone, wood and iron of the buildings themselves, which
together are imagined as one ‘player’ in the hermeneutical game; second, human beings, heavily burdened with expectations, traditions and religious opinions, imagined somewhat more easily as additional players; and third, the ceremonial occasion as the activity or game (or conversation) which actually brings buildings and people into a to-and-fro involvement with one another.' (Jones, 2000, p.49)

This to-and-fro involvement has to be activated. The artwork (or aspects of what the viewer gathers of its concept, process or history) has to stimulate this involvement, otherwise it will not be ‘seen’, but merely over-looked, passed by as unremarkable. It has to stimulate, seduce, interest, intrigue, provoke, puzzle and its ability to find its life is dependent on the qualities of allurement that it carries. This is not reductive definition, but opening to elusive, particular experience.

The event of exhibiting art, like architecture in this sense, differs from a genre like advertising, in that the latter primarily aims to reveal itself immediately to the viewer. But architecture and art work demand a duration of attention, a privileging of time, duration, and this through allurement. Again we are privileging time over space, effectivity over efficiency, fun over functionality.

This durational, ‘wasteful’ demand moves us beyond the functionally immediate communication of a message, through the durational demand, making artwork an act of occasional processing. The tactic of delayed-revelation is adopted and a length of time, a slowness, a form of strip-tease is performed in which complexity of meaning, allusion and evocation are triggered. A demonstration is made as opposed to a statement.

The extension of time, into the specific quality of occasion, utilises allurement as motivation which sustains attention – an attention that is embodied and holistic rather than merely intellectual.

Jones also uses the term 'superabundance’ to describe this multi-layering of meaning. Robert Venturi uses a similar term of ‘multivalence’ (Venturi, 1977). In this, he deals with the ‘condensation’ or ‘fusion’ specified by Tambiah. This mutivocality arises from the limbo-like, undefined status that liminality bestows on ritual elements, the ‘magic mirroring’ dynamic of overflowing that Turner identifies.

It might be noted that I have not included above, the ‘Shaman’, as a formal role,
catalyst or tactic of Ritual. This is not accidental, but merely a recognition of the already considerable, wide-ranging discussion of this aspect of ritual in art discourse. However, of more interested to me are less sacerdotal infatuations. To concentrate on this kind of priestly-role as if it were where Ritual is primarily located is at best partial and can be a hindrance, deflecting, and in the end, effectively (dis)missing other more significant collective roles and forces at work. Instead I privilege the more habitually overlooked or neglected roles of the 'ordinary ones' – those not conventionally claiming such overt, mystical power or status – with their tactical dynamics and elements as they appear in communal engagement to create effectivity in art practice, as in Ritual.
Matthean: Art praxis as Temple frame-keying & script-scoring
Matthean:  
Art praxis as Temple frame-keying & script-scoring

Here in the Gospals, rituality and art will be read as analogical sisters, sharing common traits, tendencies and tactical processes. Before looking at more relatively subsidiary concerns though, we must turn first to context – the institutional arena and the alluring, monumental ritual occasion of art – the exhibition.

The Temple

a) The Ritual of artwork: reception, exhibition and context

One of the most explicit works to address art and situate it in foregrounded ritual terms is ‘Civilising Rituals’ (Duncan, 1995). The institutional Temple of art and the exhibitional occasion is Carol Duncan’s subject.

In her survey of various public art museums and collections, Duncan acknowledges how constraints are placed on art institutions. Whatever their stated aims or potentials, art museums must function within given ideological and political limits. Importantly however, she notes that the content is not always entirely subject-to or reducible-to sociological, political or ideological descriptions, even though these are still present to significant degree.

Duncan acknowledges she is merely recovering an older perspective on public art museums, one more explicitly held in earlier historical periods of their development.

The museum demands specific kinds of attention of its visitors, and manifests its own kinds of time and space.

It does this by scripting or scoring a ‘dramatic field’. The architecture frames,
setting its contents apart from everyday space and time. It codes and designs for contemplation. Appropriate decorum is expected or required. As in supposedly ‘primitive’ folk Rituals, the world is turned upside down: liminality is created and given a central position within the institution.

The conventioned spaciality alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated, ‘Once upon a time’ creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales. Duncan’s analysis acknowledges Turner’s ‘liminal’, the place of ‘betwixt-and-between’ the normal, day-to-day cultural and social states and processes of getting and spending.

Duncan clearly states what she believes is a renewed perspective, namely that these display-and-reception institutions are ritual structures. Those who perform these Rituals are those who visit the museums. We might thus liken them, in ritual terms, to the congregation.

Let’s unpack the metaphor further… The directors, who conceive the policies, ‘evangelistical’ mission statements (or devotional plans), play the role of bishops, presbyteries or spiritual directors. The curatorial staff, who conceive and design the practical framework – which in ritual terms, would be called the liturgy – assume the responsibility of the priest (or curate, from which ‘curator’ derives: ‘the healer of souls’). The ‘liturgy’ is physically set up and enabled in turn by the administrators, security staff, imitating the church wardens, readers, hospitality committees and altar boys or girls… and so on.

This is not her description, but Duncan does make another comparison which is consistent with this comparative pantheon.

On the artist’s role, she quotes Benjamin Ives Gilman, who compares the relationship of museum visitor to the artwork – and by extension, to its creator – as a ‘profound spiritual revelation’, akin to the ‘sacred conversations’ depicted in Italian Renaissance altarpieces. Here, images of saints living in far-off centuries
are miraculously gathered into a single imaginary space (often contemplating the Madonna).

24. ‘The Maestà Altarpiece’, 1308-11, Duccio di Buoninsegna, Siena Cathedral

Metaphorically, the modern aesthete is cast as a devotee who pursues and achieves a kind of secular grace through communion with artistic geniuses of the past – spirits or ‘saints’ who offer a life-redeeming sustenance and insight. It’s a significant borrowing from a distinctly Roman Catholic conception, but a fair description of how contemporary museum visitors and artists relate to the greats of the past, with admiration and thoughts of emulation.

Duncan then again quotes Gilman:

‘Art is the Gracious Message pure and simple, integral to the perfect life, (its contemplation) one of the ends of existence.’ (Gilman, Benjamin Ives, quoted in Duncan, 1995, p.17)

The sophisticated hierarchy of persons above are enlisted in this saintly project, both expecting and delivering the possibility of a worldview-confirming or transformative revealing. At this point of exhibitional occasion, art appears as a kind of confessional denomination, a believing that requires personal investment and hermeneutical effort, an assent to the possibility of enlightenment or even ascension.

Physically and metaphorically, the museum activates a quasi-pilgrimage towards contemplative enlightenment, pilgrims trudging, shuffling and snaking their own wandering tracks through the choreographed stations of devotion. Even in its strategic control, the institution must concede power to the tactical hermeneutic re-interpretation of the pilgrims.
Beyond the bounded walls of any specific museum, we might also recognise the increasing contemporary efforts of museum-creation as national, civic magnets – pilgrimage centres designed to significant extent to attract nonlocals. Much of this civic motivation aims to optimise opportunities of economic extraction for highclass hoteliers, restauranteurs, boutiquiers and local traders. The museum shop operates in contemporary imitation of the indulgence seller, dealing holy artefacts. Livelihoods are at stake as much as art, with that cruelly judgemental deity, The Economy, neither sleeping nor slumbering (and particularly not on the seventh day).

b) The White Cube

‘Inside The White Cube’ (O’Doherty, 1986) finds Brian O’Doherty even more emphatic than Duncan on the ritually-ideological work of the museum’s daughter, the gallery. He points to how this highly controlled, homogenous context aims at an exclusion of the outside, everyday world, setting apart a kind of ‘eternity of display’.

There are few, if any windows (and preferably none). With daylight removed, the ceiling becomes a (heavenly) light source. The walls are painted a uniform white. Any artwork placed within this clinical space is free of any infection by the quotidian, ‘untouched by time and its vicissitudes’.

In this ‘eternity of display’, the gallery’s purpose is a quasi-religious one and any artwork (and by implication, artist) that is so fortunate to be admitted to this otherworldly space acquires a limbo-like status, preserved with the appearance of life, even though one ‘has to have died already to be there’. Again sainthood is offered.

Here we experience the political power of a ruling elite and the worldview to which they subscribe. Their claim to power is sought by ‘seeking ratification from eternity’, borrowing essentially religious means to serve this end: ‘sympathetic magic’ in the form of Ritual.

The ideology in action O’Doherty identifies is the Cartesian concept of ‘the Eye’, the reductive visual faculty divorced from all other senses. This disembodied ideal is deposited in the persona of Spectator, a passive, pliable entity, also sometimes called ‘the Viewer’, ‘the Observer’ or ‘the Perceiver’.

Like Duncan, O’Doherty draws our attention to the ritual decorum required of this character – he is sure the Viewer isn’t female – who does nothing other than
look, while refraining from talking in a normal voice (hushed churchy tones perhaps allowed). Neither does he laugh, eat, drink, whistle, dance or make love. Or as Thomas McEvilley suggests in the Foreword:

‘In return for the glimpse of ersatz eternity that the white cube affords us – and as a token of our solidarity with the special interests of a group – we give up our humanness and become the cardboard Spectator with the disembodied Eye…. (w)e accept a reduced level of life and self.’ (McEvilley, Thomas, quoted in O’Doherty, 1986, p.9)

This cardboard cut-out identity is one encoded by a particularly excisory kind of power, reified in the anally-retentive and ubiquitous installation shot, purged of any visible human presence. The white cube, as the symbol of the ideology of the temporal powers-that-be, in O’Doherty’s words, ‘devours’ not only the art object, but the artist and her followers, by imposing its ideal, Platonic image of the world. This is only possible where the claim of both artwork’s and artist’s autonomy is enacted, leaving both theoretically ‘free’, yet materially, completely dependent on the gallery’s supposedly neutral (yet apparently cannibalistic) space.

O’Doherty also particularly attends to ‘that sacred 20th century dimension, space’…

‘If art has any cultural reference (apart from being “culture”) surely it is in the definition of our space and time.’ (O’Doherty, 1986, p.38)

This all-encompassing, defining power, with its voracious, devouring appetite, sets a circumscribed liminal making-whole on all that is placed within the exhibitional frame. We find a de Certeauan ‘strategy’ at definitive, controlling work.
Arising in the time of the quasi-religion of Late Capitalism, the pervasive influence of the white cube appropriates previous transcendental principles, substituting its own closed order of values, celebrating them through its sacramental tool: the disinterested, nihilistic, consuming market.

O’Doherty’s disagrees with a common objection to ‘art-as-Ritual’ – articulated by Cynthia Freeland – that in art there is no community of common belief (Freeland, 2001, p.4).

‘The white wall’s apparent neutrality is an illusion. It stands for a community with common ideas and assumptions… The wall is our assumptions…. The white cube is usually seen as an emblem of the estrangement of the artist from a society to which the gallery also provides access. It is a ghetto space, a survival compound, a proto-museum with a direct line to the timeless, a set of conditions, an attitude, a place deprived of location, a reflex to the bald curtain wall, a magic chamber, a concentration of mind…’ (O’Doherty, 1986, p.79-80)

This common belief may be more reductive than a traditional religious one, but is held to be equally present. In effect, the Spectators are thus shaped into a congregation standing in deferential alignment to a consuming ideology. As a congregation, as varied in personality as any traditional religious one, they willingly submit themselves to a tightness of framing, an encoding of performance by others, and a susceptibility to the myths carried by the gallery’s ritual form and liminal passage.

We might paraphrase Mark C. Taylor, vis-à-vis the devouring Cartesian panopticon of Capitalism:

‘the ritual reinforces the community’s proper relationship to Go(l)d.’

The arenas of the museum-gallery are often regarded as ‘archive’, a supposedly neutral, scientifically-categoric term, but Duncan and O’Doherty seem to contest this. These ritual structures are, to them, more intentionally-loaded. They do not merely record, document or re-stage everyday reality, but continually work a commemorative ritual of mythical artistic origin and precedent, enacting assumptions, bias and ideologically shaping controls. Such ceremonial instances may be prevalent, but if we interpret the institutional exhibition space as Ritual, we also have the possibility of calling on Turner’s Ritual as definitively generative of alternatives. We do not have to be pessimistically resigned to passivity.
Of the artist, Hans Haacke describes an implication in ideology, but an equally present subversive capacity:

‘They participate jointly in the maintenance and/or development of the ideological make-up of their society. They work within that frame, set that frame and are being framed.’ (Haacke, Hans, quoted in Harrison & Wood, 1996, p.904-905)

Scurrilously, he may be suggesting a confidence trick in process, but equally he realises there is also both binding and (potentially) resistant, defining power present. Another ‘con-fidere’ – believing – is optional. A dialectical process, such as Turner describes, is present in this ritualisation. Such questioning, doubtful disposition to the institution is made explicit in Broodthaers’ exposure of the museum’s fictional power in ‘Musée d’Art Moderne, Département Des Aigles, Section XIXème Siècle’ (1968) and other works.

Daniel Buren’s painted stripe-works, have declared intent to reveal the context (‘container’) in which they are located, exhibiting questioning through distancing – even if we nevertheless doubt his claim that the container’s effect on the work is slight, being more convinced by the assertion that the context-is-(the-other)-half of the work.
The frame of the museum-gallery nevertheless has other participants (perhaps less susceptible to the lure of artistic eternity than the compliant artist) in the agency of the spectator – the same word as O’Doherty uses, but here defined in a quite different way from the idealised and compliant passenger:

‘the creative act is not performed by the artist alone; the spectator (sic) brings the work in contact with the external world by deciphering and interpreting its inner qualifications and thus adds his contribution to the creative act.’ (Duchamp, Marcel, Sanouillet, Michel and Peterson, Elmer, ‘The Writings Of Marcel Duchamp’; pp.139–40; quoted in Galenson, 2009, p.182; my italicised comment)

This, Marcel Duchamp’s observation, adds strength to the conception of the now ex-viewer, becoming a viewer-participant, now a collaborator in the faithful act of creating art. As a valued member of the ritual artistic congregation, her interpretation will, inevitably, elude totalising orthodox definition.

Our understanding of art practice has shifted to significant degree from an object-practice to one of ritual occasion, carrying potent ideological, socio-political meaning. As such, the range of actors, embodied participation, ideological control and contested knowledge come to the fore, with the complementarily catalytic action of the viewer-as-collaborator, the viewer-participant…

29. John Cage

In addition, since John Cage’s ‘4.33' (1952) we have had to long admit other phenomena experienced by the embodied viewer as part of the art work – the sensory elements (sounds created by air conditioning, the perfume or sweat of nearby people, relative heat or cold, the movement of fidgeting bodies, awareness of the pressure of our feet on the gallery floor, the passing of time).
Playing in the Temple

In Sacerludus, two works in particular address aspects of the contested ritual arena of the museum-gallery.

30. ‘Four Friends Yellow’, 2005, Graham Maule

‘Four Friends Yellow’ responds to the ‘devouring wall’ of O’Doherty by offering other cultural artefacts, via sound, as ‘wallpaper’ and ‘furniture’. The performative installation derives inspiration in large part from Erik Satie’s attempt at achieving unnoticed ‘Musique d’ameublement’/‘Furniture Music’, (1917-23).

31. ‘Carrelage Phonique’ - ‘Musique d’ameublement’/‘Furniture Music’, score, 1917, Erik Satie

A moving, action of furniture-arrangement, shielded from the eternalising function of the museum-gallery by a dust sheet of protective obsolescence, yet under which a choreography of domestic furniture shifting occurs. A recurring displacement activity. The artist is not a ‘spectator’ persona looking at the art around (nor are the distracted others), but instead is obsessed with the objects and a wandering, performed line through songs, stories and poems of four non-visual artists: poets, writers, musicians of local origin. A personal, ritualisation of repetition and self-
chosen cultural remembering appears as an interval in the surrounding narrative of the museum-gallery.

‘DeluSilencio’ finds itself (accidentally) set within an archive, Richard Demarco’s Skateraw home, in spitting distance of Torness nuclear power station, both power sources’ legitimacy resting in faith in archival long-term storage of their gift(ed) products. On the anniversary (to the silent day) of the rupture of nuclear containment that was the Chernobyl accident, the working constructs a ritual narrative of thresholds – Big Bang, morning, accident, loss, memory and sleep. The furniture of ‘Four Friends Yellow’ re-appears. The audience are called to a mouth that is other than that of the walls. The light of creation, electricity and consciousness goes on, stays, goes off. A blind man surveys a lunar-lit landscape. A seeing engineer blindly manipulates the sound of disaster (or salvation?). Ritual incantation of illumination, the natural and technological worlds interplay, perhaps as celebration, perhaps as lament, perhaps as warning, perhaps another desire.
Marcan: Art praxis as ritual tactics of performance
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Art praxis as ritual tactics of performance

Performative practice

In the middle of the 20th century, previous Romantic and Modernist conceptions of the artist, the artwork and the agency that produced art began to wither.

Concerted resistance to the modernist conception of art’s autonomy and the artwork’s objecthood began – belatedly after Duchamp – to reach a critical mass through the 60s with Fluxus, Happenings, Minimalism and Performance Art building on the precursors such as Dadaism and the work of the likes of Duchamp, Klein and Manzoni.

Other significant experimental lineages, notably in music, contributed to this turn, appearing in the practice of Cage, Stockhausen, Xenakis, Duckworth, Busotti and Cardew as they explored notions of indeterminacy, graphical images, scripted performance and heightened awareness of space within the work.

New emphasis began to be placed on the roles of agents other than the privileged
‘artistic genius’ in the production, reception, dissemination and interpretation of art. Broodthaers, Buren, Haacke and other institutional subversives began to critique the previously unremarked political forces and institutional contexts in which art works were placed. Land artists exploded expected artistic locations. Feminist artists challenged entrenched gendered assumptions and histories.

The Modernist notion of art history had been a long train of material objects. Here, a theorisation effect reduced a more complex process into one about mere product, data being perceived as better than action.

Michel de Certeau describes what had made this conception possible:

‘(o)only that which can be transported can be treated. What cannot be uprooted remains by definition outside the field of research. Hence the privilege that these studies accord to discourses, the data that can most easily be grasped, recorded, transported and examined in secure places.’ (de Certeau, 1984, p.20)

He points up the relative ease of analysing an object-product as opposed to a practice-process. A reductive operation, it ignored for analysis large swathes of agency and context.

However, this approach has become fundamentally problematic and so today typically processual terms like ‘change’, ‘place’ and ‘time’ can no longer can be dislodged or frozen out. The stream of actions that make up a system of production can no longer be omitted. It has become widely accepted that data comes about through the specific agency of ‘players’ or ‘actors’.

34. ‘Prost N. 5’, 2008, Michelangelo Pistoletto

The negotiation that produces the art work is shared by more than the artist alone.
As importantly, the viewer, critic, the curator, the other players in the life of art – embodied agents – must be taken into account as contributors to the meaning of the now expanded work.

Thus today we understand art practice as a collective agency, contextually-situated and producing a complex, temporal process. As a communal enterprise, the notion of the work of a machinery has diminished and a ritualised procession (or ‘liturgy’ ‘the work of the people’) comes to the fore.

A de Certeauan tactical practice appears, negotiating its evasive ‘wandering line’ amongst the strategic ideologies, an appropriative riffing and playfulness that defines a new understanding of the art practice as produced by what we might call a ‘congregation’.

By taking on board both duration and process, an audience (or congregation) is both necessarily present and implicated. Art does not happen unless it is seen, experienced. Art practice becomes a ‘performance’ – one of the most fundamental factors that must be satisfied for any entity to be discussed as ritual.

This is the argument of Barbara Bolt, in ‘Art Beyond Representation’ (Bolt, 2004). Formal and semiotic readings in isolation are able to create the impression that art/art working is the artwork itself, but she argues that de Certeau’s insight allows the possibility of understanding a new ‘art of practice’ that the Modernist history and theory had missed.

She enlists Heidegger’s conception of art, as a ‘mode of revealing’, which values the causal chain of means and ends, and in turn, values the relationship between the elements (objects, artists, materials and processes) as all being equally responsible for the emergence of art.

Moving from the conventional, signifying view of art-as-representational, Bolt argues for:

‘…creative practice, (as) a dynamic material exchange (that) can occur between objects, bodies and images. In the dynamic productivity of material practice, reality can get into images. Imaging, in turn, can produce real material effects in the world. The potential of a mutual reflection between objects, images and bodies, forms the basis for my argument for the deformational and transformative potential of images. This performative potential constitutes the power of imaging.’ (Bolt, 2004, p.8) (my italics).
Art production then, according to Bolt, is a definitely performative entity, a dynamic material exchange, similar to Lindsay Jones’ ‘monumental occasions’ vis-à-vis architecture and the efficacy claimed for ritual liminality claimed by Turner. As the activators of this process, bodies become the dynamic, not inscribed by language, but a language in themselves, producing ontological effects.

The essential conditions of rituality appear – a collectivity, public performance, transformational potential and efficacy (the potential to ‘produce real material effects’). The institutional critiques of the 60s and 70s establish and admit an acknowledged relationship to ideological belief, with the necessity to discern what is complicit and what is resistant to these ultimate concerns.

‘The “re” of representation suggests that to represent, is to present again… Latour claims that, in western culture there have existed two vastly different regimes of representation. In the first regime – a regime that he relates to early Christian and Medieval understandings of representation – the re-presentation is presented anew as if for the first time. It involves presenting again and anew. In the second regime, which he equates with Cartesian understandings of re-presentation, the representation stands in the place of an absent object.’ (Latour, Bruno, n.d., quoted in Bolt, 2004, p.15)

Thus Cartesian representation is a re-placement, not a re-newing, re-presentation or re-presencing. As a standing-in, it is substitutionary, and enables such functions in the political field of one person representing, standing-in for another or others, as an analogue or copy for something beyond itself. This mode dominates our view of the world. Face-to-face re-presencing is de-privileged in favour of distanced observation, the body in favour of the intellect, the potential of loving intimacy in favour of careful, distanced management.

Turning to Heidegger again, Bolt continues that this objectification holds a danger, as it establishes a frame that fixes, rather than frees… and produces the objectification and mastery of the world by man (sic) where he (sic) is the centre dominating any other centres.

‘In the world of representation and man as subjectum, representing is no longer self-unconcealling as with the Greeks, but is rather a laying hold of and grasping. Heidegger claims that in the epoch of Cartesian representation, assault rules. The regime produces violence.’ (Bolt, 2004, p.21)

Wrapped up in this dominating worldview, humankind has risked dangerous self-satisfaction, no longer viewing itself as being open to the world. What-is can no longer be experienced as Being, but has to be represented by simulations of Being.
By leaving behind the understanding of art as a succession of objects or data, this allows us to escape such Cartesian reductiveness and move to an understanding of performance as a freeing re-newal. From this it is not too difficult to follow, we move in contemporary practice to privilege re-presentation (not representation), performance and process.

Bolt chimes with Turner’s comments on Ritual’s subjunctive, future-possible aspect ... the re-presentation is presented anew as if for the first time. It involves presenting again and anew, ‘(A)s if’ being the future conditional tense, a term of possibility, potential and imagination.

So we have to understand that this performative re-presencing holds as much in supposedly indicative objects as much as in performative works. One of the most elegant and poetic of enactments is that of Robert Morris’ ‘Column’ (1961), staged first in a curtained, distinctly theatrical setting and then later in more conventional sculptural form in a gallery.

35. ‘Column’, 1961, Robert Morris

The object itself performs within its theatrical frame, obedient to its script-score, invoking the inevitable time of existence and decay, here fast-forwarded: it stands for three and a half minutes; it then collapses, followed by another three and a half minutes. The curtain then closes.

So taking art to be performative, even in its supposedly non-performative objectivity. The monumental occasion of exhibition sets this up, but we can also look closer at perhaps the two most crucial and regularly recurring formal tactics of Ritual as they have appeared in recent art practice: the frame-key and the script-score.
The frame & key: a litany of saints & holy relics

Sophisticated examples of framing occur consistently in art practice. By focusing attention of the boundary, the edge, it is possible to then consider what is going on within-and-without and the relationship between what is privileged-and-unprivileged. To say anything, we must ‘unsay’ everything else. To see anything, we must do likewise.

The picture frame is ubiquitous in two-dimensional artwork. In sculptural practice, base, plinth and pedestal perform the same function: making special, raising the art object, both physically and conceptually, above the level of the everyday – an ‘altar-ing’. Brancusi’s articulated plinths are examples of this increased ritualisation as they become as equally a matter for the artist’s attention as the ‘real’ artwork itself.

Bruce McLean’s ‘Pose Work For Plinths’ (1970) point-up the artist’s performative frozenness, subverting their institutional function of setting-apart, highlighting the artist too as ritual participant.

Brush handles and bottles become minimal supports for human, gestural artworks in the scripted ‘One Minute Sculptures’ (1997-98) of Edwin Wurm. And Manzoni’s ‘Socle Du Monde’ (1961) too – it’s been argued, gives art its jotters – by setting
the whole world apart as a single, special artwork, as if echoing the liturgical proclamation that ‘the earth is the Lord’s and everything in it’… even if here, the ‘Lord’ doing the creation is the artist himself.

The traditional staging of theatre works this plinth-like setting-apart via the frame of proscenium arch. In film too, as in the ‘black box’ of video artworks, the carefully staged darkness is more than merely the execution of a functional requirement, particularly when gentle dimming and whispering curtains are involved. Expectation is evoked, a new alternative worldview and narrative will be opened.

Duchamp, as we should not be too surprised, exhibits one of the earliest examples of framing, by way of ‘altar-ing’ – both in terms of the object’s manipulation and original display upon a plinth – in ‘Fountain’ (1917).

The action of artist and plinth elevate the quotidian object, so it gains more than mere literal, analogical significance as it echoes a Madonna gestalt. Attention is drawn to the play of institutional sacredness, now finding an unlimited range of found-object sources as potential ritual elements.
Some other works employ what appears as more conventional framing modes: the planar frame, the container (as box or room) or threshold.

Often this frame is focused upon in order to exceed and challenge its ideological implications. Saburo Murakami, in ‘Breaking Through Many Paper Screens’ (1956), sets up the frame as a definitive, if very fragile, element, then proceeds to burst through it, by rupturing the series of such planes with the momentum of his tensile, running body. The artist’s personality violently re-aggregates itself back into the everyday, escaping the artwork.

Robert Morris’ ‘I-Box’ (1962), framing his own (male) image – as opposed to that of the previously more traditional (female) subject – reversing that tradition of the canvas as the site of artistic individual inscription.
41. ‘Touch Cinema’, 1968, Valie Export

‘Touch Cinema’ (1968) by Valie Export operates by playing out gender-role cliché, theatrically staged by enveloping Export’s naked breasts, coquettishly concealed within the portable frame of a box, keyed by her inviting smile, if nuanced by ironic resignation. This ritualises the viewer-participant, the artist conceding a significantly progressing passivity, and not accidentally, pointing up the political, critically-gendered charge.

42. ‘Corridor Installation’, 1970, Bruce Nauman


43. ‘Seedbed’, 1971, Vito Acconci
The visitor to the gallery and the artist himself are framed in separate private and public sub-spaces within a larger (private-and-public) one, in Acconci’s ‘Seedbed’ (1971), raising liminal ambiguity. A breaking-in of the usually secluded, invisible studio (or private, masturbatory fantasies) into the gallery? Who is other? Who, the object of desire or disturbance? What is the nature of our shared curiosity?

‘Imponderabilia’ (1977) by Marina Abramovic and Ulay makes the work a frame within a frame, architraved by their own bodies in a doubled architectural doorway of naked flesh, between which visitors have to squeeze. The distancing effect that is normally associated with the frame is turned on its head by the formalised, though uncomfortable intimacy of its passage. Once through this liminality, where does the visitor, flushed by this intimacy go? Perhaps the transient moment of entry is all there is.

44. ‘Imponderabilia’, 1977, Marina Abramović and Ulay

A length of rope delineates the existential, yet mobile, boundary in ‘A Year Spent Tied Together At The Waist’ (1983-84) for Linda Montano & Tehching Hsieh, imposing a liminal (un)reality of closeness, through this portable frame, setting up
the inevitable personal tensions and (un)predictabilities that will arise from it.

Another given limit to the framing device is the geometry of space. In Barry Le Va’s ‘Velocity Piece’ (1970) he opts for taking an imaginary line for a run (as opposed to a walk).

Here, the imposed boundary of the wall, as the body crashes into it is doubled by the framing of the video representation. Similarly, Nauman’s ‘Walking In An Exaggerated Manner’ (1967-68) uses repetitive action along an inscribed, linear shape to make it increasingly strange. In both these works, the video lens adds another level of framing in order to document.

A previous version of Le Va’s work did not in fact possess video imagery, being presented as an audio installation of two speakers. In this sense, the framing, in Le Va’s mind, was ‘an activity – the durations, stereo and acoustics of a particular space/place’ (Kaye, 1996, p.43). The frame of the wall material in its inherent acoustic itself, allied with the stereo effect, created an audience response: heads ping-ponging back and forth with the stereo movement, even in the absence of visual cues, ‘people came in and sat down – and instead of just hearing it – they watched it… (they) literally did watch something but there was nothing to see’ (Kaye, Ibid., p.46).

It is through yet another framing device (a fish-eye lens) that Tracey Emin could be seen, additionally incarcerated, stressing boundedness, for three weeks in a room, in
More recent artworks have begun to deal with less quotidian frames, often loaded with sociological, political, relational and economic resonances. Along with these concerns, there has been an increasing ritualisation of the previously passive audience role, nuanced significantly towards that of viewer-participants.

Christine Borland’s ‘To Be Set And Sown’, 2002, takes the memorial form of park seating dedicated to those who have died. Inspired by the work of Rev. Mark Jameson in the mid-16th century and his unrealised proposals for a ‘psychic garden’, which was to be planted with plants (taken from his self-annotated copy of Fuch’s ‘Herbal’) possessing ecbolic (ie. abortion-inducing) properties, the work creates its frame in these seating-forms (nuanced into mortuary slabs with ceramic head rest/drains bearing images of the specific plants Jameson studied).

It repeatedly stages, also in a plinth-like (sacrificial) altar-ing action, a partial
implication upon each person who sits there, consciously positioned between the frames of knowledge of those times, the church and the university library.


As if suggesting these socio-political practices are themselves so many sculpted frames and forms created by hot air, visitors to the installation are invited to transgress these inflatables – ‘lines in the sand’ – as if in a playground sandpit and slide over, undefined except by their desire for freedom of movement and association.

Not dissimilar in its adoption of a child-like playground (or perhaps here fairground) precedent – yet still framing – Carsten Höller’s ‘Test Site’, 2006, focuses more on the formal and experiential properties and thrill-inducing betwixt-and-between of the ‘slide’ itself (not wall, floor, ceiling or stairs, thus not static but acceleratingly moving; part fear, part excitement) even while it also directs the attention to the tendency towards entertainment, fun and spectacle in the art context (here the Tate Modern’s Turbine Hall).
As is their wont, creating bizarre double self-portraits, Beagles and Ramsay’s ‘The Black-Pudding Self-Portrait’, 2005, combined in its exhibitional context the discarded ritual elements (greasy skillet, knives, plates and refrigerator) and the unconventional frame of the work: the skin of two black-puddings, whose ingredients contain their own blood – this being the interface, the crossing of which (along with the duo’s invitation to cross it, by sampling the delicacy) positioned this work as a ritual occasion. Time Out’s reporter attested to how this ritual frame was not crossed over on two evenings, when visitors refused to indulge in (what they may have interpreted as) ‘cannibalism’. On a third occasion however, this was not the case… (Herbert, 2005).


An ingenious use of the ubiquitous visibility jacket becomes the framing device in Kelly Large’s ‘Our Name Is Legion’, 2009. The frame becomes portable and multiplied, borne in the ‘planned volcanic lava flow of adolescents moving through the grey streets of Sleaford’s town centre’ (Ashton, 2009, p.9).

53. ‘Our Name Is Legion’, 2009, Kelly Large
While bestowing a homogenous form of identity (‘us’) and alienation (‘them’), and addressing the supposed, contemporary stigmatisation vacillations over what to make of the transitory state of youth, Kelly’s work enacted frustrated ritual in its tension via a moving human sculpture of the poles of attitudinal safety, comfort and danger, a dérive-ing mass, made doubly public while still symbolically separate.

Ai Weiwei states that his ‘Sunflower Seeds’, 2010, ‘is a tool to set up new questions to create a basic structure which can be open to new possibilities’. The acknowledged structure of (fake, porcelain) sunflower seeds fills the floor of Tate Modern’s vast Turbine Hall, making this plane the crunch-time and place of a ritualized, amazed walking and not-quite-or-perhaps-quiet suspended, humble believing – either that the seeds are or not what they appear to be, or that it’s permitted to walk on an artwork (or perhaps, even more pointedly the handiwork of 1600 workers and 30 stages of production). Traditionally symbolizing ‘the people’ in paintings of Chairman Mao, the sunflowers appear wherever Mao walks, supporting the revolution, spiritually & materially.

The material content of this frame posits the sunflowers awaiting (in still seeded liminality) for the honoured walker, elevating the worth-ship given subjects, while also reminding them inversely of the global system of production and relative wealth distribution that enables they, and the artist, to enjoy the privilege of experiencing and making the work.

Returning again to Duchamp, in ‘Twelve Hundred Coal Bags Suspended From The Ceiling Over A Stove’ (1938) he addresses the physical framing of the gallery-box, its expected content. He modulates and fashions it anew, turned upside down. Again the threshold is made ambiguous, in his design of the two doors into the gallery – revolving doors – sometimes inside and outside.
The exhibition space is meant to be clean and pristine... except it’s not. Coal bags are falling on my head... except they’re not. How long before...? With this work, O’Doherty claims there is ‘a seepage of energy from art to its surroundings’ (O’Doherty, 1986, p.69). Henceforth, the venue is situated occasion, the art-objects increasingly ritualised elements.

In this work, and indeed (as a bridge to the next section below), Duchamp re-writes the very script of gravity itself, pre-dicting the quality of scripting-scoring of framed context itself.

**Repetition, script & score: another litany of saints & holy relics**

A script-score is, in many ways a different form of frame, yet primarily a preparatory intention and guide for Ritual rather than what causes Ritual to appear. Only on performance is it is exceeded and script-scored performative liminality appears. What script-scoring does is encode pre-seeding, with extensive implication for repetition, doubled and restored behaviour. Frame-keying does not intrinsically contain this degree of presence carried by duration, even if it creates elements of scoring. Script-scoring increases portability and application, implying in time and space, a conceptually open, even endless potential series of durational events, whereas frame-keying physically locates and limits.
Script-scoring as an intrinsic art ritual tactic recurs more regularly and explicitly from the 60s and onwards, with the advent of Fluxus ‘Event Scores’. George Brecht’s ‘Drip Music’ (1959) is on one level, simply the words, ‘a source of water and an empty vessel are arranged so that water falls into the vessel’, though it might be noted that this deceptively simple, apparently constricting instruction nevertheless is pregnant with the spontaneity of chance and indeterminacy.

Brecht later created ‘Water Yam’ (1963), an ‘artist’s book’, liminality further emphasized by its boxed presentation.

Later, the form of the individual score was pressed into a scored occasion, the Fluxus ‘concert’, which could include any of a number of scores, though Brecht, for one, did not care if his scores were ever performed (that is, whether they became

‘Cut Piece’ (1964) by Yoko Ono shifts emphasis from the spontaneity of the object’s conditions into a relationship between persons and the varying responses of the viewer-participants, prompting spectra of reluctance, care, hesitant or enthusiastic engagement on their part.

Other everyday activities have been ritualised – physical ‘scoring’ of the walked-upon earth in Richard Long’s ‘A Line Made By Walking’ (1967). The frame eventually appears in the walked line’s length and imprinted form.
Evidence of controlled scripting in the physical making of work ‘alone’ is present in ‘Equivalent VIII’ (1966). Even though methodical in nature, and theoretically exclusive of spontaneity, Carl Andre’s reductive repetition can be re-arranged in any combination of the units in subsequent exhibition. Minimalist works replicate this serial dynamic.

The three-word terseness of Alison Knowles’ ‘Make A Salad’ (1962), carries even greater potential complexity than it would initially suggest, implying an extension of the the work beyond that strictly specified, i.e. that it be eaten, perhaps to a band playing (perhaps, a Mozart duo for violin and cello, as at the Wexner Centre in 2004).

Some performative works, not necessarily or initially intended to be staged have become script-scores for future repetition. Marina Abramović’s ‘Seven Easy Pieces’ (2005), (Abramović, 2005) draws together a ‘greatest hits’ of works that have become regarded as seminal. Such revisiting of the canon as this invests a commemorative rituality, retrospectively ascribing a narrative of near-‘sacred’ origin to the first work.
An explicit tri-partite ritual sequencing is evident in John Newling’s ‘The Preston Market Mystery Project’ (2006-07). A tight brief defines processual stages and outcomes: a gathering of mysteries at the ‘Insurance Stall’ in the market; a presentation of the words via an evening reading, ‘Voicing Mysteries’; the culmination in ‘The Knowledge Meal’. Beyond these public stages, lies a further formula that, only eventually, will generate a ‘constructed mystery’ text work that hangs as a composite, mysterious petition, original only in its destination.

The three-year work, ‘No Ghost Just A Shell’ (1999-2002) by Pierre Huyghe & Phillipe Parreno, operates through web-based HTML scripting. It takes a virtual manga character, Annlee, and offers it as a script-score upon which other artists can riff, mix and ‘deejay’ (as Nicholas Bourriaud would have it).
At first, freely available and addressing the transgressive, copyright-busting possibilities of internet liminality and software manipulation, each incarnation was ‘a chapter in the history of a sign’, an act of salvation which ‘rescued her from an industry that had condemned her to death’ (No Ghost Just A Shell, 2002).

And then there are appropriated historical events as script-score realisation. Researched, re-worked and directed they become art performances. Jeremy Deller’s ‘The Battle Of Orgreave’ (2001) and Rod Dickinson’s ‘The Milgram Re-enactment’ (2002) take an original event as script-score, greater in-scale than lines on a piece of paper, yet with negotiations of pre- and re-definition.

Here, persona are appropriated, roles played (in the main) by others than the originals; Deller’s work in fact features some of those who had actually been present at the original ‘Battle’. Slippage and idiosyncratic interpretation are present alongside the quasi-documentary act, within the frames of heavily restricted, re-staged limits: locations, chronology, actions. The video medium of their reproduction becomes yet another frame.

Perhaps the most obvious examples of ritual script-scoring are where ritual forms themselves are explicitly appropriated and become interpretatively re-ritualised.
Seminally, there is the ritually scripted 'gadji beri bimba' glossolalia of Ball’s *Magical Bishop* (1916). The action and presence of precursive scripted-scoredness was foremost in his mind at this time:

‘(t)he artist who works from his freewheeling imagination is deluding himself about his originality. He is using a material that is already formed and so is undertaking only to elaborate on it.’ (Ball, Hugo, n.d., quoted in Goldberg, 1988, p.56)

In the performance, Ball quickly noticed the inadequacy of his originally intended delivery, and spontaneously appropriated a sacerdotally-toned recitative, feeling it was the only fitting performative mode to adopt.

Yves Klein’s three occasions of ritualised salesmanship in *Zones Of Immaterial Pictorial Sensibility* (1959) entwined the economic transaction of art value with spiritual value, the stages of approach (offer) and receiving (exchange), being formed into a triadic structure by a final demand of renunciation (giving away).
Moving from Environments to Happenings, Allan Kaprow’s work began to explicitly recognise the viewers’ roles as significant contributors by their forms, colours and actions,

‘…(a) never-ending play of changing conditions between the relatively fixed, or “scored” aspects of (the) work and the “unexpected” or undetermined parts.’ (Kaprow, 2003, p.11-12)

While appearing anarchic and primitive, in its stereotyped battle-of-the-sexes roles – playing, the imagery of their respective ‘tower’, ‘nest’ and combative actions – ‘Household’ (1964) was situated in a civic tip. It realised a ritualised sequence of tensions and conflicts. The audience circled the area, watching, as if another tribe, before eating jam sandiches. After a ritual burning of a jam-smeared car, the female performers sped off, leaving the rest of the participants, in meditative fire-gazing mode.

Not dissimilar, Schwarzkogler’s ‘Script For A Wedding’ (1965) – obviously a script – performed with the frame of the camera in mind. A handful of invited guests witnessed the artist chanting in ritual engagement with a chicken, dead fish, animal entrails, pigment, scissors and a knife.

Similarly, Wolf Vostell’s versions of ‘You’ (1964) was a bricolaged composition of life-cycles and chosen or forced ‘processing’.

69. ‘Household’, 1964, Allan Kaprow

70. ‘Script For A Wedding’, 1965, Rudolf Schwarzkogler
Both exhibited contorted versions of inescapable ‘facts’ of secular and historical ritual ubiquity. Betrothal and the 20th century’s scapegoating ritual – the consolidated spectral, killing machine of the concentration camp.

Then, more ‘mundanely’, there is that other ubiquitous tactical ritual form, the meal – a great favourite of de Certeau (de Certeau, Giard & Mayol, 1998) – found in Judy Chicago’s ‘The Dinner Party’ (1974-79), in its celebration of feminist heroines and saints.
Whereas Chicago’s work frames and scripts by plate setting and seat position, everyman and everywoman are literally invited in a more recent take by Rikrit Tiravanija, a gallery-cum-diner the setting, in ‘Untitled (Tomorrow Is Another Day)’ (1996).

Again turning to Jeremy Deller, his ‘Procession’ (2009) takes one of the more publically demonstrative and recognisable of secular ritual forms – the gala day – in a genuine yet also tongue-in-cheek celebration of incredible diversity of tactical creativity and expression found in people’s everyday life, hobbies, pastimes and quirky associations, a veritable celebration of everyman and everywoman.

Linder Sterling’s, 2010 ‘Your Actions are my Dreams’ similarly envelops the preparatory and production stages of an appropriated, improvised Allantide procession, led in turn by a white-clad lady wearing veil and antlers (followed by a black-clad rider on a white horse) and a white horse-skulled, black ribboned figure.

It plays with its chosen, archaic oddity in its troupe of elaborately costumed characters, traditional, musicians, guisers and dancers, though tending to a more cultish performativity, less democratically-involving than Deller’s work with its central, shamanistic character.

More politically focused on their target of critique, Plastique Fantastique’s ‘Black Mass For Partial Objects’ explicitly stages a ritual pilgrimage of exoticised normality to challenge globalising consumer culture. Their scripts are formed from a series of
liturgical inversions, quasi-pagan sacrificial rites, following a classical tripartite pattern of ritual: in this instance, pre-liminal (‘SHOW-PING to gather thee GOODS!’, ‘the taking of the MASS-BLACK FARMA-SUITIC-KILL!’ to key liminality (‘WE OOO-BLIT-ER-RATE the BOUGHT’, ‘SELL-I- BRATE the brilliance of the NEW!’, ‘affirm the STILL-NESSS of the transformed THING!’), ‘Welcome GROANEE-SICASTI-KASTEE! (All cheer and welcome the demon)’), re-aggregating in the traditional post-party show.

Conversely, Reverend Billy, Savitri D & The Church Of Life After Shopping semi-ironically appropriate a series of contemporary US Christian religious forms to position themselves inside and against globalised consumption, local displacement and ecological crisis, in pre-scripted forms of powerful weakness: demonstrations in shopping malls, ‘wayside pulpit’ posters, ‘church services’, declamatory ‘preaching’, ‘healings’. Inverting the perceived religious tendency to po-faced piety and passive conservatism, instead laughter, contradiction and absurdity are turned to memorable effect.

‘The First Woman On The Moon’, 1999, Aleksandra Mir, is a commemorative yet transformative as-if re-staging or gender-shifted restored behaviour in its performing
as-if-someone-else (here women landing on the moon on the 30th anniversary of that by solely men).


‘Warm Up’, 2006, by Aileen Campbell, focuses on one part of the ritual process, the pre-liminal, if not the pre-pre-liminal script of rehearsal. The discomfort of imposed, additional physical activity on top of the necessary, conventional scale-scaling of the tonal range in advance of the performance ritual becomes itself pressed into an uncomfortable, excessively evocative series of images and aural disturbance for the artist and her voyeurs.

79. ‘Warm Up’, 2006, Aileen Campbell

But even discomforts can be ritualised as a scoring in a more positively declared way. Clearly enjoying the business of lamenting a little more than the Psalmist(s), The Complaints Choir – founded by Tellervo Kalleinen & Oliver Kochta-Kalleinen and manifest in Helsinki, St Petersburg and Birmingham among other cities – give voice to an assemblage of both mundane and global gravity, their performatives making transformative virtue out of disappointment and loss (Complaints Choir, 2010).
‘State Britain’ (2007), by Mark Wallinger, recreates another specific lament, the iconic anti-war protest of Brian Haw whose makeshift encampment outside the UK’s House Parliament was banned from being able to demonstrate within a ‘zone’ of one kilometre from the seat of government through a parliamentary edict (the Serious Organised Crime And Police Act, 2006).

Literally re-siting the tented and placarded materials of Haw’s installation outside structural authority’s declared limit (with a line representing the exclusion zone’s circumference literally inscribed through the gallery space – a small part of the work in fact still straddled and even legally, problematised this), Wallinger re-scored the ‘normality’ of war back into the ‘zone’, re-situating the liminal passage, in effect, in all other parts of the UK.

As a small postscript, beyond such examples, we might note another, not immediately obvious, form of scripting-scoring which is present in contemporary artists’ practice. This is the attempt to circumvent their own, learned or standard responses, to make work that is unpredictable (ie. un-scripted), even as if it has been made by someone else. Surrealist’s automatic writing and drawing (‘The exquisite corpse’) are a precedent here, a modest form of Schechner’s restored behaviour; ‘me behaving as if I am someone else’, or ‘as if I am beside myself’ or ‘not myself’ or even multiple me’s.
This is a tactic by which a strangeness is achieved and a degree of ‘encoding’ by a theoretical ‘other’ than the performer/ artist is achieved.

In the case of painting, sculpture or writing, as in theatrical performance, actual behaviour is rarely shown as it is being behaved. What is shown are versions of a previous ‘script’, a version of something else that has pre-existed, even while something new might be subsequently revealed.

**Playing with frame, key, script & score**

The works of Sacerludus began with ‘Notations 1-6’, an experimental process to examine the possibilities of script-scoring to both confirm and evade the strictures of encoding and assumptions of outcome.

82. ‘Notations 1-6: Space BLOOD NOT SO SIMPLE’, 2003, Graham Maule

Drawing on the actions of chance redolent of Cage and Cardew, both in the creation of the initial visual ‘manuscripts’ into which performance would mutate as final work, indeterminacy played within conventions of code, format and allowed time. A deteriorating sequence of controlled involvement followed a tripartite, ritualised process of scoring, losing and then re-assembly. The eventual work as destination was put into question by its display as a framed, altered and ‘altared’ music stand-as-performing-repository, relocating the site of performance into the liminal phonetic of the ears, head and imagination. Still, it offered the possibility of pregnant, performatively ‘new’ re-petition and re-presencing, re(ally) a staging.

‘Fern 04’ arose from a chance encounter with an ‘other’, in this case an animal. A scripting from the dog was sought. A tensile negotiation, with a framing of expectation, activity, fetching and chasing. A ritualised learning from a failure, wondered and wandered around the identity and worth of the teacher, of whether play was instruction or instruction was play. Which key did we perform in?
An invitation in capture, re-presencing and reception, to mean dancing and motionlessness, a waiting to apprehend, chase sight-of, over-look or stand-under. Dog forward, backwards? The imposed frame of the camera aimed to miss, to partially define, only sound continuously evading evasion. Taken further into looped, loping time, taken out and returned, then again as if it might be for an eternity.
Lucan: Art praxis as incarnate sinner-saintliness
Lucan: Art praxis as incarnate sinner-saintliness

Briefly now, we return to the ritual exhibitional occasion and examine it in terms of a distinct type of Ritual, the rite-of-passage. If read as such, what does it reveal about what is going on for the persona of the artist herself? What kind of stabilising or transformation is being effected? Is she foregrounded in an explicitly performative way, or is the tendency is to nudge her to the margins, work done, becoming an evasive, shadowy figure?

Below I explore the issues of exposure and enclosure as she becomes significantly the object of this Ritual.

The incarnate sinner-saint

The artist is ‘sinner’ – a culprit in the incarnation of the issue, breach or crisis in question, on their own account or on behalf of scapegoated others. Her produced work states, examines and attempts resolution of an issue, a problem in the social drama. From the time of putting the finishing touches to the exhibition to its taking-down is one suspended in liminal limbo.

This is a period that closely resembles a rite-of-passage, where non-status and indeterminancy reign. While the spotlight is on, there is, paradoxically, nevertheless a darkness or obscurity. For a period the artist has license, in a manifest sense through her work, to live outside the law and the the everyday world of structure, as in traditional liminality. Being given license means controversy becomes an accepted norm in this liminal phase. Will it transform the artist’s status, will elevation into the pantheon of art be granted by structural, artistic authority? Will it render the status of ‘saint’? Or will it return (re-aggregate) her to a regular life, devoid of fame, unremarkable by comparison?
In this light, the threshold or ‘limen’ of the most ritualistic (and in this sense, repetitive) art event – the ‘Private View’, ‘Vernissage’ or ‘Opening’ – becomes strongly analogical. It is the formal entity, framed by the museum-gallery, then keying the entry into the liminality of a rite of passage. Bruce Lincoln’s feminine perspective on the stages of Ritual are apposite here.

The European usage, ‘Vernissage’ (literally a ‘varnishing’) points to the ending or ‘sealing’ of a stage in the process. This parallel’s Lincoln’s ‘enclosure’, which in traditional rites of passage often involves a special tent or temporary construction being erected, set apart from the settlement of ordinary life, and in which the initiate is, in turns, secluded and instructed in the roles and responsibilities of their coming status. There can be no return to the previous status. In art, there is more significant doubt over the outcome… elevation is not guaranteed. From this point, will the artwork be seen as great or will the artist be regarded as a duffer?

Tangentially, we might note the even the traditional Western fare offered to participants in this Ritual, take on a ritual character. ‘Canapes’ – from the French, ‘canopy’: an appetizer of bread or toast with a savory spread (babylon.com, 2010)… another echo of the tented enclosure; or ‘hors d’oeuvres’ (from the French, ‘without extras’; or literally, without work… served before or outside of the main courses of a meal) are the ‘simple food’ invariably served. Along with wine, this closely parallels the elements of the Christian communion Ritual.

‘Private View’ too, hints at enclosure, and certainly separation. But what, or rather, who is viewed? We might more immediately think the artwork is the focus here, but it is as appropriately the artist herself.

Only the privileged, by dint of their authority in the artworld (the elders’, the wise men and women) or the close intimates of the neophyte tend to be invited. Coming to view the artist/ work, offering their encouragement for the ordeal to come, the artist is shifted into a state of passivity, at the mercy of tradition, opinion and critique, again a characteristic of Ritual.

The other frequently used term of the ‘Opening’, points to the performative nature of the process, as a staging of the evidence of the artist’s research, an event, a gap to be filled by bodies, objects and images interacting. Additionally, we find the characteristics of the ‘limen’ or threshold – that central stage in a ritual process – a widening of possibilities rather than yet-fixing of autonomous entities and their meanings.
Eventually, though, the artist and the artwork will be judged. This will be either by the quasi-juridical machinery of the art world’s opinion, or more fundamentally, by its physical deterioration (either intentionally by its maker or unavoidably due to the limitations or incapacity of the institutional framework of the museum-gallery).

After the liminal phase, comes re-aggregation and return to the quotidian world. The artist is either returned to her former status, or elevated to a new state of regard and repute, perhaps propelled even more significantly on the way to eventual sainthood.

**The ghost at the feast**

At any Opening, in whatever location, the museum, however, is a ghost at the feast. In a discussion of the impossibility of the ‘New’ in art (Groys, Boris, in Kabakov, 2001, p.338-355), Boris Groys takes on the notion already raised via O’Doherty, that the museum is the graveyard of art, a place of the dead that subjugates, ideologises and formalises both art and ‘reality’.

The museum is not secondary to reality. Rather, the opposite holds: ‘reality’ being only defined by the contents of the collection therein. Hence any change in the museum in turn affects our conception of ‘reality’.

Modern and contemporary artists have increasingly been very well aware of the museum and its gathering task, since its rise at the end of the 18th century. With the advent of commodity consumerism and art’s increasing envelopment by it (along with virtually all other areas of living), this trend has become magnified. While dinosaurs certainly did not set out with an intention to appear in natural history collections, such an aim remains a profound, if repressed, desire for the majority of artists.

The artist has an incentive to become a ‘saint’, with the complimentary consequence of her work being enshrined in the canon. It becomes a central aim in her *modus operandi*.

The museum is interested in what is outside itself, that is, objects and situations drawn from real life… Groys contends this is why artists want to make their art look real and alive. The subsequent institutional-processing automatically transforms live matter into dead matter, manifestations of present life into evidence of the past.
Old forms, styles and conventions become unnecessary to reproduce.

The artist is caught in a paradox:

‘… if an artist says (as the majority of artists say) that he or she wants to break out of the museum, to go into life itself, to be real, to make a truly living art, this means only that the artist wants to be collected. This is because the only possibility of being collected is by transcending the museum and entering life in the sense of making something different from that which the museum has already collected… if you repeat already collected art, your art is qualified by the museum as mere kitsch and rejected.’ (Groys, Boris, in Kabakov, 2001, p.340)

This reinforces Duncan’s comments:

‘The museum is, in this respect, like a church: you must first be sinful to become a saint – otherwise you remain a plain, decent person with no chance of a career in the archives of God’s memory.’ (Groys, Boris, in Kabakov, 2001, p.340)

Martin Luther certainly wasn’t thinking about art when he proclaimed ‘sin boldly…’ or ‘let your sins be strong’ (Luther, 1521), referencing the epistle (2nd Peter 3: 13):

‘If you are a preacher of mercy, do not preach an imaginary but the true mercy. If the mercy is true, you must therefore bear the true, not an imaginary sin. God does not save those who are only imaginary sinners. Be a sinner, and let your sins be strong (sin boldly)… We will commit sins while we are here, for this life is not a place where justice resides. We, however, says Peter are looking forward to a new heaven and a new earth where justice will reign.’

But if we substitute ‘museum-gallery’ for ‘place’ and ‘justified recognition’ for ‘justice’ in the second last sentence above, the parallels with Duncan’s comments are nevertheless fascinating. The bolder the artistic ‘sin’, the greater the mercy, the more compelling the ‘saintliness’.

Groys’ argument is of course built on the fact of the material stabilisation possessed by the museum’s infrastructure which relates to the artwork object. However, I would argue these museological aspirations induce a similar dynamic in any situated exhibition, acting upon the reputation and honour of its maker, and thus upon the artist-as-potential-saint.

The more recent contemporary practice of using unconventional, ‘non-art’ spaces to stage art may appear to escape this analysis. But the museum-gallery’s definition
of ‘what-is-art’ flows out to condition exhibitional occasions even in non-traditional, non-art spaces. Desire for status remains largely in play.

Also, the same ritualising codes largely apply. The manipulation-into-liminality and out-of-quotidian expectation are present. A shop no longer sells food. A warehouse no longer stores furniture. A rooftop is no longer unvisited and merely keeping out the rain.

The encoded script and decorum of serious expectation (if somewhat relaxed) nevertheless still derives from the museum-gallery’s precedent.

Indeed, the staged performativity of non-conventional venues is often emphasised to greater extent. The content of the conventional Opening’s content is extended. A special, one-off performance is advertised, a band performs or a DJ turns the evening into a club night. The latter in particular, turns the ‘audience’ into a congregated assembly, often ritually dancing in celebration of a new epiphany of art.

This already 50-odd year practice has by now become something of a tradition, an accrued characteristic of precedent and point of encoded reference.

And in this the artist is subject to the judgement of ultimate approval – perhaps later ascending into the museological pantheon – or its opposite, not disapproval, but dis-missal (exclusion-from-the-Missal, this being the liturgical book which contains the texts and instructions for Mass’ calendrical celebration). The artist’s hymns and fame are no longer sung.

The blaze, burst or flicker of publicity, the being-made-public in any exhibitional context, even in more temporary and less (apparently) ideologically-ridden spaces and times, confers a similar signifying, symbolic equivalent for the duration of its exposure. Even though such exhibitional occasions can only offer a sub-saintly status, in many if not most cases there is still present a hope that graduation to subsequent saintliness may have thus been made that little bit more likely.

The artist has willingly submitted herself as an acolyte, in the role of a liminally suspended player, to a rite-of-passage and ritual judgement.
Playing with sinner-saintliness

This liminal instability and transformation of status is addressed in several of Sacerludus’ works by way of adopted persona, where I become other-than-myself, yet at the same time a reflection of parts of myself.

In addition, the recurring adoption of transitional structure and pilgrimatic procession complements a tactical privileging of the character of the liminal least, deflecting an obsession with victory towards a concern for victimhood.

The first of two works which implicate these concerns is ‘Fern 07’. The performative ritualising of viewer-participants by a male-and-female pair of artists… or perhaps merely manifestations of bisexual liminality. Two characters of the artist-as-gangster, confidence-trickster, dealer in deathly dis-Missal are raised and thrown into flux. They bark, bounce balls off the wall, dance before and with their dog, the ‘other’ character from the previous work ‘Fern 04’. Outside the room’s window, bigger ears attend. Pre-recorded musicality introduces another dog and a vocative frame – if complaint – a puncturing score within the wordless aggression, turning it to intimacy and playfulness, bounding training in deferential devotion. Yet within the liminality, which will in the end become a further Opening itself – an opening-as-end rather than as opening-as-beginning – with sacramental wine and sweet-bred-meat (for that is what pedigreed dogs prefer, whether coming or going), a transition is effected.

‘Himmel’ plays with obscurity and revelation, extra-planetary simulation and silent internal audio. A Warholesque(?) image is blind, ultimately cannot see. He must sing, dance, stutter, hesitate and mistake himself with morse-coded probe. But emergence into his role is delayed. Too long, boredom might re-direct attention to participative friends, who are drinking and laughing. Eedjit, eerie sounds for the ear make up half
the work, does the context-as-half-the-work, sound half as good? They go, relatively unnoticed.

85. ‘Himmel’, 2008, Graham Maule

But he notices the boundaries of what will define him, by touch, pushing, accepting space as it defines his extent. Yet the ephemeral wireless radiology might touch the cheek, cheekily, puncture planetary perspective, an intrusion into others’ personal space (chookie), something beyond or within regard. An absurd gesture of offering on the white-cube altar, bathed in elevated incandescent light doesn’t do a trick. What a shame the shamen dies. Varnished – sorry – vanished in the fabric of the framing-altar he goes. Or is it solely shrouded slumber? Certainly, it is a re-covered strip-teasing, back into a re-aggregated residue – machines, wires and words on paper scraps of script. They, under, stand.
Johannine: Art praxis as ritual incarnation
Johannine:
Art praxis as ritual incarnation

In this final Gospel, I want to look at ritual tactics of embodiment and participation – incarnation – to explore a further shift from objective-obsession and the myth making of individualism. Are there 20th century innovations (beyond those of performance and body art) that carry formal implications for reading art-practice-as-ritual-process and art-as-ritual-community?

Incarnate installation

The second half of the 20th century saw the innovation and increasingly ubiquitous utilisation of the installation. Nicholas Oliveira, Nicola Oxley and Michael Petry offer the definition that installation is:

‘An artmaking that rejects concentration on one object in favour of considering the relationship between a number of elements or things and their context.’ (De Oliveira, Oxley, & Petry, 1994, p.8)

We might enlist another from Clare Bell, paraphrasing Rosalind Krauss’ definition of sculpture (‘the deployment of bodies in space’):

‘The propulsion of space onto bodies.’ (Bell, Clare, n.d., quoted in Royal College Of Art, 1997, p.10; my italics)

O’Doherty has already spoken of space-as-sacredness, but here ‘propulsion’ further reinforces his understanding that an ideological form of preaching is being performed. But in the end, it is an act of interpretation that defines artistic meaning in a hegemonic response:

‘Certainly installation has been invaluable in getting us to the point where Duchampian commonsense is widespread. Who could argue persuasively in these days that the identification of a work of art, as art, let alone the apprehension of its possible meanings, is anything but the invention of the viewer? Works of art have no intrinsic artistic quality. They are sites of projection and the ultimate context lies in the imagination of those who

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confront them.’ (Watkins, Jonathan, quoted in Royal College Of Art, 1997, p.26-27)

These latter two conceptions make clear again that viewer-participants, while subject to ideological forces, become privileged, engaged bodily and carry out and away their agency and the experienced artwork into their (re-aggregated) everyday life. But they themselves also exercise a tactical response, retaining a subversive interpretive power that may have the final word. The installation sets up the context, the viewers become akin to pilgrims, moving through, in response to but also against the scripted context, from their common, shared experience, generating their own meaning in the epiphany.

Installation, by drawing on the insights of Minimalism so despised by the High Modernists, embraces theatricality as a primary constituent. The museum-gallery’s eternalising effect creates a liminal space and time in which the enlisted actors perform a twice-behaved behaviour triggered by the confrontation with a constructed reality that is not the reality it was.

Whether the subjunctive ‘as-if’ of Turnerian ritual transformation or the mere ‘as-it-is’ mirroring of a more indicative understanding is achieved depends on specific detail: the competence of the artist’s execution, the memories, desires and previous experience of the viewer-participant, as well as other, pure accidents. We cannot definitively say that every installation will be efficacious as a Ritual, or is a Ritual itself, but we might reasonably claim that installation is an approach to making art as a form of Ritual.

Ilya Kabakov is one of the foremost practitioners of installation. He points to a particular concept of framed holiness. In Amei Wallach’s words, Kabakov sees a lineage:

’(t)he first stage was the icon, a sacred object; the second, the fresco, a panoramic narrative; the third the painting, a window out of the narrow human world, which Renaissance perspective opened onto landscape. Installation was the fourth.’ (Wallach, 1996, p.77)

This historic line, where Kabakov sees a collapsing together of two- and three-dimensional genres, describes a framing action that increasingly draws the viewer in, ritualising as it attracts and allures. He sees any installation as only a personally-inspired view of the world. In no way can it be regarded as documentarily indicative. It is a ‘capsule’ – in the same way that the contemporary home is no longer, as in
the past, a reflection of the city with many inhabitants. Instead, it is increasingly a
privatised space, more akin to an externalised material expression of the internal
world of a person’s ideas and values, a form of realised imagination. It is within this
expression that an installation visitor is fixed, yet free to move, to leave, hence a
mover and traveller – both master and captive of the work (Kabakov, 1995, p.261-
66).

But Kabakov’s work suggests this installational holiness, a move towards being
wholly-incorporated, is achieved through two particular dynamics.

One is totality, a heightened degree of immersion and hence, degree of conviction
stimulated. Kabakov’s term for this kind of work is not merely ‘installation’ but
‘total installation’. He is concerned with the viewer’s immersion and participation,
distinguishing him from other artists, who are equally keen to construct an
environment to surround the viewer, but still allow the viewer to engage in a more
limited way. The exit into the next gallery or a corner of the next work is invariably
visible. Degrees of believing, according to the artist’s thoroughness or desire, will be
conceded.

In total installation, the transition between first and last frames of entry and exit are
controlled, so that it functions as spectacle of a totally different world in itself.

Kabakov describes this experience as self-reflexive, immersion accompanied
by distance. It is a paradoxical relationship with a mechanism of ‘double’ action,
whereby the illusion is experienced and simultaneously reflected upon – the self-
reflexivity of Ritual, that not merely does things, but shows others what is done or
being done.

Kabakov claims that in the comparable art forms of theatre and cinema, there is no
such possibility. The viewer is immobilised, passively fixed in a chair – and a distance
is created. This comment is justified in the case of conventional seated theatre, if not
in examples where the viewing arrangements are more unconventional.

This is not the case in installation (even if it includes video projection or theatrical
performance). Participants can move and wander; they can witness others’ responses
to the artwork (as can some examples of theatre). In cinema, identification with a
character immerses and the self is temporarily forgotten. The installational actor is
oneself, providing a double identification with the character-actor that is oneself. A
self-reflexive suture is created.
So with his ‘double’ action, Kabakov (and Ritual) requires belief and doubt simultaneously. In this condition of enquiring faith, déjá vu, or as he terms it, ‘epistemological thirst’, we are thrust back to the beginning, to

‘an initial epistemological act, the act of forming a self-consciousness.’
(Kabakov, quoted in Wallach, 1996; p.85)

The ‘double action’ takes place in the context of the presentation of the specific ‘Word’ (the artwork or propositional statement from the author) and corresponds to the response given once one is enveloped by the liminal staging, whether the conclusion of that response is ultimately or merely temporarily believed.

The viewer-participant leaves and partakes in another crucial act of creation, as they become multipliers in the interpretation and communication of the artwork’s developing meaning. Using small-scale or anonymous acts and means produce work-as-rumour… whether Richard Wentworth’s rice-grain (Wentworth, quoted in Royal College Of Arts, 1997, p.37-38), Lucy Skaer’s smuggled butterfly pupae placed the one of the courtrooms of the Old Bailey (Black, 2005, p.37) or Francis Alÿs’ conception, who, cited by Nancy Spector,

‘… understands this process as the fabrication of a myth, which, rather than being about the perpetuation of political or cultural values imposed from above, requires the direct interpretive participation of the audience, who must determine the work’s meaning in relation to its own experience’
(Spector, 2006)

making clear the merely catalytic role of the artist and the epiphanal witness: that only those who receive, the audience-turned-evangelists can truly perform and contribute.

The other crucial factor in installation for Kabakov is light, that most theatrical tactic of phenomenological and emotional keying. Deriving from the Russian cultural correspondence of the colour white and light, from icon to Malevich, it stands for enlightened self-knowledge, he cites two types:

‘in the first instance is belief, and the holy white light with its deep meaning… The viewer who is a believer sees one painting, the one who does not believe sees another. The choice is the viewer’s’ (Kabakov, quoted in Wallach, 1996, p.45)

Light is a palette, an armoury of inflection. Documentarily-realist, fictionally-cartooning, ominously-spotlighting or uncannily-subduing, it imposes its radiation,
laying out the possibility of singing differently emoted versions of the same song, or
telling a joke as a tragic narrative.

But even so defining, this light also is ambiguous. While it emanates from a source, a
centre, it draws edges, it has gradations. By its use, it implicates its shadow, darkness.
The iris can be filled or fooled. Surfaces shift. In focus or dispersion, total immersion
or droplets of luminence, both illumination and obscurity are harnessed:

‘(m)uffled light… encourages the emergence of a semi-awake-semi-dream
state. This state, like no other, activates our recollections, flows of fantasies,
associations, analogies, all arising to the surface of our collective memory.’
(Kabakov, 1995, p.300-301)

In ‘The Communal Kitchen’ (1992), a vertically inclined octagon displays a multitude
of ordinary kitchen utensils and objects, fixed high on walls and ceilings. Lower, at
eye level along the walls, is a folding screen of interior views, ‘voices’, fragments of
overheard domestic conversations.


This most ordinary space comes to resemble the apse or chancel of an Orthodox
curch, holy relics and inscriptions enlivening the walls. It is through the extra-
ondinary totality of its ordinary elements that it engages the viewer-participant’s
shuffling moves, flooding them in an utilitarian, un-inflected light, surrounding and
enveloping those who enter it in communal domesticity.
Kabakov’s ‘Life Of Flies’ (1992) creates a satirical, institutional display of documents and findings from ‘an international meeting of scientific experts’, focusing on the simple fly as a measure of all things. Four chambers seem to exhaust all aspects of this insect, the lowest of the low, yet elevating it as a proper subject for contemplation.

Kabakov included sixty commentaries, imagining the range of responses from people of all roles, expertise and none. Placed in the last room was a drawing of a single fly, illuminated by only those lights in the centre, as if on an altar, the commentaries hung in shadow and obscurity, catalysing and inviting further interpretations.

The dream-like, liminal totality of Mike Nelson’s ‘The Coral Reef’ (2000) is made explicit too in the following description provided by Matt’s Gallery:

‘This hinterland of the outsider is a parallel world where the rules of society and its economic structure are distorted. Within this given scenario the reception acts as a decompression chamber or preface to territory beyond,'
and the first intake of the imaginative intoxicant which will allow belief in a structure which is obviously a sham.' (Matt’s Gallery, 2000)

Again believing is required as another world is evoked, suspended in the creative contradictions of apparent similitude, yet obvious artifice. This lack of fixed meaning opens up a participative performance,

‘allowing differing routes and varying conclusions by the visitors, who fast become the players in this elaborate set.’ (Matt’s Gallery, 2000)

Like Kabakov, it is dingy light that leads and cues the viewer-participant on their labyrinthian, dream-like detours through dimmness, stumbling, hesitant not sure of what lies around the next corner.

Such cued-response is present in Olafur Eliasson’s ‘The Weather Project’ (2003-04), if bathed in gorgeous light. Reviews of the work and personal reports frequently speak of the activation of collaborators as opposed to mere viewers in its engagement via its mirrored ceiling. The documentation of the work performs a visually-cued (ceiling-mirrored) liturgy, a ‘work of the people’, in a very explicit sense. As an act of aesthetic participation, an act of self-reflection is literally and embodiedly enacted, responding in turn to others’ patterning poses.

On light, and as light relief, Martin Creed’s ‘Work No. 227: The Light's Going On and Off’ (2004) elegantly tightropes the extremes of light into a simple manipulation of revelation and concealment.
It is the cold light of day that is important in Milan Knížák’s ‘Demonstration For All The Senses’ (1964). And the city is appropriated, situationally as the found-object and framing score. Also entitled ‘ceremonies’, this was, rather, intended to be more generative of a renewed way of understanding and experience. The pilgrimatic work led its participants through the streets of Prague, each given an everyday object to carry.

The serial incidents of slightly shifted reality by the artist and his co-organisers’ staged actions – a chair falling from above, a musician playing bass lying in the centre of the street, a man staring at then breaking a window, cars and motorcycles circling – ritualise the participants. Knížák considered this liminality only the first part of the work, the second being the following fortnight during which the strange insights of the first phase would be re-aggregated into normal life as a result of this evaluative dip in the container of art. The same light pervades both parts, blurring the boundaries between art and life.
But there are two other significant tactics raised in this example of Knížák’s work above, and a third hinted at. Here, tactics that supplement and move towards a Kabakovian totality of effects are used. Kabakov’s totality rests on a ‘rich’ vocabulary of material objects, space and light to immerse his witnesses, whereas Knížák employs ‘poor’ materials of action, sound, altering, juxtaposing and nuancing. These are tactics that Sacerludus’ Epistolic works extensively use… which I shall term incarnate body, incarnate uncanny, incarnate voice.

**Incarnate body**

The first tactic is the presence of the artist in the work, as a catalyst, an invitation to the viewers to transform passivity into embodied participation. An enacted identification that is super-cinematic, the artist’s body becoming a score for others to responsive tag, follow, evade and perform with.

Movement, voice, posture and alignment are the main tactics. A pilgrimatic route taken by the performing artist can be an invitation to follow, becoming a co-pilgrim, a simple shift from stasis. The body is no longer aligned to maximise one sense alone, sight. Other senses cease being restrained or dormant.

A loud voice maintains a distance; a whisper invites intimacy. Obscured perspectives invite a re-alignment of vision, a choice to witness or ignore. Subdivisions, scale or multiples of space cue relocation to re-engage. The process begins to more deeply resemble ritual procession, faithfully following the one(s) who make(s) the way.

**Incarnate uncanny**

The second tactic is the degree of manipulation to which a space or object is subjected, tending to a shifted *similarity* as opposed to exotic or extreme distinction (a Freudian distinction between ‘heimlich’ and ‘unheimlich’). The former is the ambivalence that is the uncanny – discomforting, confusing and de-stabilising – somewhat in the register of the kind of ‘Christological’ identity that Groys ascribes to the found object, the new that is difference without difference, emergence of the Other in the medium of the Same (Groys, Boris, in Kabakov, 2001, p.338-355). The response is unresolved and projectile, involving a dialectic of doubting-believing. Reality itself has to be continually questioned and thrown into doubt.
The exotic extreme, on the other hand, produces spectacular image and effect, a distancing and an extremity of emotional reaction or fascination, but it does not tend to fundamentally put structured reality under question. It is over there and then, not here and now. While it is un-missable, it is ultimately dis-missable, sometimes over-laying an unnecessarily over-narcissistic image that draws power and prestige to itself, rather than, more modestly disseminating it democratically.

**Incarnate voice**

Use of embodied, vocal musicality is the third tactic. The incarnate body speaks, hums, moans, sings, stutters. Human-generated sound becomes a prime sculptural material, as does its absence: silence – the two modes analogous to light and shadow. As opposed to recorded or even instrumental sound, human vocality carries an heightened authority when employed on its own. Hearers become deferential, allowing it its place, in a way that they do not to technologically-produced and even human-plus-technological sound. As a ‘poor’, durational form, minimal, stripped-down and imperfections exposed, its presence underlines duration and return of the lesser which is more compelling. It is a tactical singing-do, making-do. The vocal sound can at various points operate an immersive action, carrying the hearers’ senses and imagination away from other more visual or physical characteristics of the situation, sometimes involuntarily pulling their attention away from the spacial and visual aspects of the work. At other times, through conscious decision (or equally possible, degrees of boredom), a dialogic tension is exercised, through both the performer’s and the hearer’s agency.

Sound, in particular, is invasive, image-generating material, in that it re-locates impetus from what is outside the viewer-participant’s experience to that which is within. Sound produces visual and physical associations within mind and body. Whereas vision is essentially frontal, limited to an essentially uni-directional 180°, and optional in that it depends entirely on where a person is currently directing their eyes, sound operates from an omni-directional 360° and tends to the non-optional. Without significant conscious effort to obstruct it, sound tends to being imposed on the hearer, irrespective of their immediate choice. Of course, conditions of blindness or deafness create exceptions to this. High degrees of suggestion, evocation or encoding are achieved, if of an open-ended, indeterminate nature.

By extension, the use of sound heightens the fact that any image-making activity
is less the (traditionally conceived) preserve of the artist-performer than that of the mind of the viewer-participant. The location of the image moves from being understood as merely external and observable into the internal space and time of the brain – itself a triune, liminal, bricolaged entity, a connecting network of reptilian/paleo-mammilian/neocortex layers – as Turner has pointed out (Turner, 1988, p.156-177). Additionally, the associations generated are subject to emotions triggered. In this respect, sound itself operates as a key to activate a form and period of ritual liminality and indeterminancy.

While sound, being invasive and omni-directional is relatively inescapable and so commands attention, it may only act initially as such. Rather, it operates more ambiguously so, as it also releases images and associations which are essentially outwith the definitive control of the artist or sound producer. The moment of power-exercised can give way as suddenly to one of power-lost, a transfer that is a liminal action of equality and homogeneity. Mere image-form which depends on the orientation of bodies and reception of light via the eye becomes subordinate to this fluid imagined-form arising from the body.

Sound, in this sense is not merely aural, but also physical and tactile in that it can be felt, a crucial material and means towards achieving an expanded and participatory sculptural understanding.

Particularly relevant to Sacerludus is the frequent appropriation of pre-existent songs, a type of auditory found-object. An earlier tradition is incorporated. Another’s experience, imagination or narrative appears as an encoding element of performance. The content may be apposite and carefully chosen for the site and occasion, but it may also contain significant degrees of tangentiality, even irrelevance, which contribute to an elusive indeterminancy and multivalence or super-abundance. Another time and place, a sub-chamber within a vocalised installation opens up.

**Playing with ritual incarnation**

The Apocryphal ‘Flatable’ realised these installational tactics, with later works building upon its tentative hunches.

While not the only work to respond to the issue of incarnate installation, ‘Maris Piper’ is the most explicitly faithful to the aspects described above. Tripartite ritual structuring, in both phase and physicality are spotted in industrial luminance, with
harsh, long and deep shadow. An em... (reluctant)... bedded beginning springs slowly up from tubers, pierced by domestic grid-ation. The part that is devotedly mine, a miner, carrying his own light on and in his head and in his mouth.

A digger, dug out of his slumber, projected into displaced redundancy, pursues an enforced plodding, pilgrimage hirpling hereafter. From strangely familiar subsistence, there are next more boxes to tick – here a central passage, streamlined into grid-locked, anonymous, human-frame-processing machination. Of course, there is the song of homing, of the journey, of getting by and getting there. The messages to be delivered, to be found in the store. The final aggregate could be the blues of containment – singing, suffocating through the walls, filtering, fining, finishing is all-encompassing at every point of the flattened, linear globe. Or in the dark when the lights go out, fateful survival, fatal desire or remembered repose, a repository of dreams?
Actual: 
Art praxis
as a tactical
ritual process
- an apostolic
succession
Actual:  
Art praxis as a tactical ritual process - an apostolic succession

Having made a broad examination of ritual tactics and forms (in the Apocryphal section), but before applying these to various aspects of contemporary art practice (in the Gospal section), here in Actual, I aim to form a bridging chapter from the Gospal to the Epistolic.

Here I will outline the specific ritual tactics I have drawn on to create the specific, physically manifested artworks of Sacerludus, which are about to appear in more Epistolic mode, bounded by descriptive text (even if these texts are partial memory), a returning to quotidian order, which falls in the tension between pointing at the realised wall of constricted works they are hoping to apprehend.

The Epistolic section is the specific, ‘made-real’ tactical world of this research., whereas this Actual chapter outlines the broad vocabulary of tactical approaches that have then been applied in the succeeding section's particular artwork productions.

Sacerludus’ produced works have all been conceived as investigations which respond to Turner's notion of Ritual as a response to a breach or crisis, of which addressed issues are manifestation, points of departure, calling out for attempted resolution.

These issues have varied: sometimes primarily an artistic issue, (such as the consequence of the frame in ‘Fern’); or a societal issue (such as attitudes to and treatment of immigrants in ‘Maris Piper’); or response to a calendrical, historical fact (such as the anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in ‘DeLuSilencio’).

So, to summarise and point-up the false(ifying) teeth of my research …
General tactical approaches

I have framed research praxis itself as being liminal/liminoid, as a tensile Turnerian entity ‘betwixt-and-between’. The Epistolic works in particular, though to an extent this text itself too, have been set up as a series of ‘games’ to play with the elemental vocabulary and tactics of Ritual in the context of an art praxis as a ritual process, a testing of these tactics for their productivity as well as limitations, as a setting-up of the conditions for a ritual art tactical process, rather than a definitive proof of it.

In the broadest terms, the tensions between, chaos (including the presence of varying degrees of play and improvisation), at one extreme, and order (utilising scripting-scoring as a form of control as well as legitimated license) at the other, have been brought into play.

The articulation of power relations has been of particular attention in order to emphasise how Ritual – as opposed to ceremony – contains essential critique of the status and distinctions in quotidian life of the status system. Shifts from structure to anti-structure are particularly present in the works: state-to-transition, status-to-absence-of-status, uniform-clothing-to-distinction-of-clothing, distinction-of-rank-to-absense of rank, pride-of-position-to-humility. In these shifts, I have come to understand practice, as more pointedly, praxis… the setting up of conditions, games that offer and test the possibility of transformative efficacy and increased participation of viewer-participants. Such shifts amount to an articulation of desire, understanding that a lack or limitation or present state is not a stable one, even if it appears so. However, it’s important to say that this claim is for these tactics as possibility, rather than achievements. Different works achieve these to greater as well as often lesser extents.

Through appropriation of found-objects or material (including musical, liturgical, symbolic and gestural elements), anti-structural shifting has also been highlighted, eg. from secularity-to-sacredness, technical knowledge-to-sacred instruction, speech-to-silence, disinterestedness-to-curiosity.

This structural-anti-structural dialectic has not produced extremes of intensification. Nuance is more prevalent. Process, through the dynamic of uncanniness, the unease of slight and sometimes near-imperceptible difference, has thus been preferred over extremities of product-like fixity. Hence each work has focused on a contingent tactic of enacted, structured improvisation as opposed to rigidly determinist theory. By this means, an emphasis on art working (open process) as opposed to artwork
(closed product) is implied, means-testing as opposed to destination-reaching.

Though taking what many regard as the rigid, pre-ordained form of Ritual, I hold that this is not an easily defined form of work. Instead, it is more elusive. In Ritual, occasions are created which produce difficulties in fixing and documentation. An occasion-al process appears rather than an event-ual product. The possibility of commodification is problematised, and both embodied experience and means other-than-the-visual are privileged. Rumour too is introduced, as an equally appropriate possible form of description and definition.

Roles & personae

As this research has progressed, so there has arisen a growing awareness of the possibility for embodying the artist's intention and identification with particular positions in relation to the issues chosen for exploration. This conscious feature is an attempt to recognise what Goffman and Turner, in particular, describe as Ritual’s intensification of the roles we play even in quotidian, structural life – forms of reflexive, critical doubling. We might also regard these too as masks, or as Anthony Howell suggests – ‘being clothing’ – describing how the mimicry implied by costume or adopted behaviour can achieve travesty (a pretending to be another person or thing), camouflage (a hiding behind or within) or intimidation (appropriating a part of something larger). These tactical nuances may be used to either intend or defend or attract (Howell, 1999, p.15ff).

By introducing a persona-role as one catalyst in many of the artistic Rituals of Sacerludus, these works articulate the appropriated viewpoints implicit in any artwork. The illusion of the disinterested artist is challenged, by inserting the artist, albeit in modified form, into the artwork itself. The ambiguous condition of the artist’s supposed power over the work is made explicit, and at the same time, his powerlessness at the mercy of the work’s action. A spectrum of dialogical engagement is manifest and the artist releases power and agency to the viewer-participants.

Particularly in the later works (‘DeLuSilencio’, ‘Fern 07’, ‘Himmel’) the character-roles appear in transition within the works. They address questions, experience uncertainty and shift their roles. No longer pure observers, they become ambiguously infected by the dynamics and demands of the processual script.
Movement rather than fixed statement predominates and the character-roles chosen reflect this. In ‘Maris Piper’, the Potato Miner, as emigrant/imigrant makes a journey from known to unknown, here to there and past to present. In ‘Four Friends Yellow’, the Househusband is also a furniture mover, his context and identity ambiguously nuanced. In ‘DeLuSilencio’, the Blind Man transforms chameleon-like into the Engineer. In ‘Fern 04’, the dog, Fern, is continually addressing and evading the frame of the camera. In ‘Fern 07’, the Gangster-Shepherds shift into faithful pet-like, even servile mode. In ‘Himmel’, the Blind Man is in turn invisible and visible, still and dancing, intimate and aloof, probing and prostrated.

**Specific ritual tactics**

a) **Script-scoring**

A predominant tactic employed in most of the works is the script-scoring. Each was consciously conceived as processual occasion, re-presenced and structured by successive states of action.

Rappaport’s similar term, encoding, is also operational. Its implication of pre-dicting by other than the performer(s), can be said to operate, if often ambiguously.

Dependent on the persona appropriated, each could be said to impose degrees of behavioural implication arising from that identity, even if these are then modified by the way they are then artistically deployed.

The habitual use of musical and textual elements of others’ authorship introduces another form of external encoding, as do the physical qualities of the sculptural elements in each installation. This is further reinforced by the recurrence of several of these, creating a form of tradition within the praxis itself.

We can then consider these tactics as articulations of Schechner’s restored behaviour (or twice-behaved behaviour).

On the other hand, script-scoring is often challenged. Points for improvisation are deliberately incorporated. Different script-scores are designed with varying degrees of definition.
With regard to the situation of the viewer-participant, in later works ‘Fern 07’ and ‘Himmel’, increased encoding comes into play.

Use of script-scoring implies a recognition of the dialogic nature between tradition and innovation, as a gradual, processual movement. It also enacts the binding (religio) of authority while subjecting it to the subversion of ritual critique and occasional disruption. Similarly, it operates as a methodological tool of composition, to enact part of Tambiah’s definition of Ritual as ‘a constructed system of symbolic communication… constituted by patterned and ordered sequences of words and acts… expressed in multiple media.’

b) Frame-keying

Given the significance of liminality, frame and key, as the primary and subordinate tactics, creating operational start and end points of phasing, have received significant attention in the works of Sacerludus.

The particular elements which create the liminal frame vary throughout the ritual works of Sacerludus. These elements may be the given of the exhibitional context itself, reflecting the concerns of Duncan and O’Doherty. However, elements more specific to each of the works themselves were used and broadly fall into the following element types:

- space/ architecture/ artefact;
- vocality/ audio call;
- movement/ gesture;
- stillness.

The out-key (or de-activation) has often, though not necessarily, been a reiteration of the in-key (activation).

In ‘Maris Piper’, the Potato Miner, lying still on the ground, switched on his headlamp and and sang a chant before raising himself off the ground. The out-key was merely a mirrored reversal of lowering himself to the ground, ceasing his song, and extinguishing his lamp. The in-keying took place within bright light, whereas the out-keying was in darkness.

‘Four Friends Yellow’’s liminality likewise utilised a mirrored series of actions. The
dust-sheet over the blue furniture marked a physical enclosure, activated on entry and reinforced by the switching-on of the standard light. The reversal indicated the out-keying.

‘DeLuSilencio’ was set within an arrangement of furniture again, but this time the switching-on of the light was the initial in-keying, followed by sound reinforcement in the form of recording. The out-key, was effected by stilled movement, followed by a partial removal and laying down of costume: the Blind Man’s dark glasses and white stick.

Being in a form other than a performance, in this case a video, ‘Fern 04’ relied, in the first instance, on the liminal effect of the video’s frame. However, because of the nature of the dog’s movement, the frame is repeatedly exceeded. This passing-out-of-vision is another level of liminality, a kind of liturgical, serial waiting… for visibility and invisibility, presence and absence, arrival and departure. This produced successive versions and inversions of the expected place of liminality.

‘Fern 07’ proceeded by a projection of the previous ‘Fern 04’ film. As this commenced, it appeared on a wall along which many of the viewer-participants were already standing. Thus, the image was not easily visible, so they immediately moved, more or less as one, to a better position. This communal, anticipatory movement performed an in-keying. A second reinforcement of this was the entry of the two Gangsters, in silence, and moving in a way to ‘command’ and possess the space, introducing their ‘authority’. To end, the Gangsters came face to face, paused, froze position for around ten seconds, then unfroze, moving as one out of the space. A fairly long pause followed, without the viewer-participants moving. This was only broken by one of the Gangsters re-entering the space with a trolley of wine and canapes.

The Tastatut performance of ‘Himmel’ featured an extended period of around 10 minutes, when the Blind Man was invisible under the table. Gradually electronically-improvised sound and vocalisation keyed-into the central liminal phase. A subsidiary in-key of embodiment, was the Blind Man’s stick appearing suddenly from below the table and tapping quickly on the wall behind. Unexpected, this caused squeals of surprise. The out-keying was similarly extended, with the gradual revealing of the electronic equipment infrastructure, previously hidden under the table by the white cloth. As this was slowly pulled up and wrapped round the Blind Man’s body, he returned to invisibility, if in semi-visible, modified form. The audio of the initial electronic sounds were mirrored by that of a lullabye. Finally, a sustained silence for
around half a minute accompanied by the stilled image of the now-shrouded Blind Man operated the gradual out-keying.

c) Repetition & redundancy

Posture, words, sounds and movement are the elements which the works of Sacerludus repetitively employs.

The limping of the Potato Miner in 'Maris Piper', the tapping of the Blind Man’s stick in 'DeLuSilencio' and ‘Himmel’, use repetition to underline the character and status of the persona. In the obsessive furniture shuffling in ‘Four Friends Yellow’, a normally hidden, psychoanalytic presence is made visible.

In practical terms, repetition provides both something to do (a motive) and a way of articulating difference – a repetition of an action might not be exactly the same each time it is performed (Howell, 1999, p.37-39). Compositionally it also functions as a form of visual ground-note, motif or base which recurs to found the works and reinforce persona-traits, attract or distract attention.

‘Mapping’ and ‘sounding’ the space through tactile movement and gesture, discussed below, in later works, have come to operate a repetitive function, to highlight and articulate that liminality is a bounded place and occasion and to reinforce the multiple orchestration of media and sensory codes beyond the merely visual.

Sacerludus also engages both sculptural objects, characters, and to a lesser extent, script-score elements themselves. These are a repetitive stereotypy spanning a series of works, rather than within one work alone. The mini-tradition of sculptural repetition is introduced by the carrying over of common sculptural elements – table, chair, standard lamp, ironing board being the most apparent – as well as persona recurrences (the Blind Man and singing personae) also achieve this.

d) Stereotypy & rigidity

Most repetitive action is expected to be in the form of a strict, rigid and stylised re-iteration, which often gives a near-mechanical impression. However, my register has tended to a formalised informality, controlled, but with space for slippage and loosening.
Throughout the works, posture and movements were kept simple, with slight formality and stereotyping, in a conscious effort to demonstrate ritual uncanniness, an avoidance of the notion of ritual exoticism (which creates the misapprehension that Ritual is alien to and absent from contemporary society).

There are examples, increasingly in the later works, where stereotypy is stronger, particularly the ‘mapping’ of space which features in ‘Fern 07’ and ‘Himmel’. These refer back to the frame’s presence, and are derived in a small way from such ritually stereotyped action such as the limit-establishing of Scottish boundary-marking rituals, such as South Queensferry’s Burry Man celebration, Border town Ridings, the field of sport play. The bolt-throwing of the Stalker, in Tarkovsky’s films, ‘Stalker’ (1979) and the pool-pacing walk of Gorchakov and ‘Nostalghia’ (1983) are similarly ritual in their measured encompassing.

These mappings are also complemented by the use of ‘sounding’, (present from ‘DeLuSilencio’ on) through vocalised and musical action, a form of ‘radar’ to emphasise the sonic aspect of the physical context and its boundaries.

This sonic testing is derived from a common habit among blind people who click their tongue or make a similar sound, in order to hear the echo, and thus guage the ambient dimensions of the space they’ve just entered.
Likewise, both for those without sight or without hearing, the importance of tactility – laying or running their hand along surface forms – is important to test, establish and appreciate where they are. They tell of how they need to ‘do’ something to make a space ‘come alive’, of the need ‘to be an actor to really make something live’. Thus, it is also an assertion of being fully embodied and present.

**e) Formality & conventionality**

In terms of structural form and convention, the tri-partite phasing of pre-liminal/liminal/post-liminal is engaged throughout. This provides formal architectonics to the overall structure. However, the Sacerlus performances, while scripted, are in effect, also partial proto-Rituals, so do not in all respects refer back to previous script-scores exclusively.

Formality/ conventionality also refers more precisely, within a work, to the accepted conventions of sequencing and timing of a particular action or element. The frame-keying element is the predominant articulation of formality within each of the works, the calling sound or action (and its inverse at the end of the performances) being the most commonly used examples.

**f) Condensation, superabundance & multivalence**

The major example of this in Sacerlus appears in the orchestrated, concurrent layerings and sequences of sound, movement and stilled image-making… or sensory orchestration.

In ‘Fern 07’, an extra-spacial element of two large triangular ‘ear’ shapes operated both as a sub-text, as well as a layered condensation. They danced outside the window, in concert with the dancing of the Gangster-Shepherds and the ‘Fern 04’ projection of the dog. The layers of image – dog’s tail, dog’s ears, projected dog’s image, song about a dog, and the ‘Reservoir Dogs’ themselves created an abundance of reference. In terms of space and layering of inside, in-between and outside, all were present. The Gangster-Shepherds’ phases of engagement and separation, both with each other and with the viewer-participants, also created distinct points of focus, making it often impossible for all the action taking place to be simultaneously or visually encompassed.
Within and without the ‘Fern 04’ video itself, another form of this layered awareness – that is, visibility current with invisibility – featured. Both ‘Ferns’ used the frame and what exceeds it to establish this. This invisible layer is found too in ‘Himmel’ where for much of the performance little, if anything, happened visually.

g) Pilgrimage

Many of the works have been conceived as forms of pilgrimage, quasi-dérive or physically enacted processes of change and journeying. This appropriation references pilgrimage – a ritual practice which Edith and Victor Turner point to as being distinctly the possession of ordinary people (Turner, Edith L.B. & Victor W., 1978). In this tactic, there are significant degrees of tactical evasion and self-determination, largely out of the control of strategic, structural authority. Encounters along the way and the meaning of the ultimate destination cannot be predicted. While the option is made to be subject to this process, by its nature, the pilgrimage form nevertheless emphasises that structural authority does not ultimately retain all claims on correct interpretation. In this way, pilgrimage disperses power, escaping definition, easy documentation, and also, ease of commodification as an experience.

In terms of movement through place and time, the linear sequencing characteristic of pilgrimage is often imitated in the ritual artworks.

‘Maris Piper’ proceeds in a linear fashion through three stages, taking place within the linear, liminal context of a bridge’s tri-partite internal chambers.

‘Four Friends Yellow’, is more spiral and tightly bound, but reflects cultural production in a contained movement of object-players within an institutionally demarcated area.

Likewise ‘Fern 04’ explores circularity via the returning movement of a character (the dog, Fern) around an essentially static camera operator. The video is, in turn, looped and thus extended indefinitely into a potentially perpetual processional movement, into and out of the limiting frame of the viewfinder and succeeding screen of projection.

‘DeLuSilencio’ enacts a processional liturgy of time that evokes an imagined linearity from initial creative conflagration to indefinite half-life catastrophe.
‘Fern 07’ using juxtaposition of behavioural states, enacts a more attitudinal transition, from authority to deference.

And ‘Himmel’ performs a progression which radiates from a single point outwards only to recede to that point at its close.

h) Occasional context

One of conventional Ritual’s features – though more prevalent in ceremony – is its focus on recurrence itself, in the celebration of seasonal and calendrical events, or in the repeated re-visiting of lectionaries of sacred texts. The art world is not free of devotion to such forms of ritual return. In encompassed form, in its biennales and major retrospectives, not to mention the continuity of any institution’s exhibitional programme: in focused form, in artists’ practice of re-quotation and re-formation of and from the Canon.

In Sacerludus, a conscious tactic in several works has been the appropriation of a prevalent practice of the mass-media. Often ‘news’ is created via features on historical anniversaries, these treated as occasions to address issues thrown up by such historical ‘ghosts’. This tactic has been utilised for the potential to reflect on unresolved and still-live issues through re-presencing.

One example is the contemporarily ubiquitous situation of refugees and emigrants that emerges in ‘Maris Piper’. The date on which ‘DeLuSilencio’ was to be performed, offered another: the (appropriately) accidental and unplanned opportunity to reflect on the anniversary of the Chernobyl nuclear accident 20 years previously.

Materials

The artist’s physical embodiment has been used as a foundational material, through the active ingredients of movement, posture and gesture. Inevitably, degrees and possibilities of emotional resonance and identification become introduced between the performer and viewer-participants. This too finds support in terms of the musical and textual fragments selected and the particular sequences and the points at which these appear.
By stilling a movement, the awareness of time’s progress, previously less explicit, is heightened as duration. A sculptural articulation of the relationships in which the body and object are frozen also occurs. A form of documentation within the work becomes itself part of its performative flow. When silence is harnessed alongside this stillness, it reinforces image-perception. The inverse happens too, when the lack of such definitive stillness is in effect disguised, or attention to the apparent lack-of-image is displaced while transitional movement is taking place.

This inter-relationship of action and stillness incurs sculptural rhythm. Articulation of a succession of discrete passages, with varying degrees of intensification, energy, attention and media-use produces embellishments of duration and emphasis.
EPISTOLIC
Notations
Notations

Sender & audience

FROM:
An Artist, who having visually created a series of scores or manuscripts, then, as a relatively incompetent instrumentalist, interpreted these scores; and who subsequently became an audience member.

TO:
Four Instrumentalists, who responded to the scores; and the viewer-participants who subsequently viewed, read and listened to the final manifestation of the process.

Issue to be addressed & concept

In the 20th Century, we find an early and consistent upsurge in musical-art works exploring Ritual. These explorations challenged the prevailing assumptions about many aspects of the ‘performance ritual’ (Schwartz & Godfrey, 1993, pp.136-37), and by implication its relationship to theory. Among other issues, the physical context of the performance, the role expectations of performers and audience, codes of decorum, means of interpretation and the tensions between prescribed control, chance and improvisation were investigated.

Formulation of thesis of the work

In my initial research, I examined one of the earliest arenas of this kind of questioning, and one that had a fairly explicit relationship to visual art: the score or manuscript. As one manner of understanding Ritual is as a form of script or scoring which is performed, but encoded by others, this approach suggested itself as a useful starting point for the research of Sacerludus.

The Fluxus action scores and Conceptualist proposals of the 60s were influential
developments in the field of visual art and performance which adopted a similar approach. Of course, the relatively overlooked form of the ‘artist’s proposal’ is itself a not-dissimilar, widespread and continuing tactical form of this type… a preceding concept expressed in particular inscribed directions, diagrams or specific instructions, which in its subsequent execution and performance in other physical form, will be the ‘same’ but ‘different’.

John Cage was concerned with the kind of ‘indeterminancy’ contained in such proposals:

‘In New York, when I was setting out to write the orchestral parts of my Concert for Piano and Orchestra which was performed September 19, 1958, in Cologne, I visited each player, found out what he could do with his instrument, discovered with him other possibilities, and then subjected all these findings to chance operations, ending up with a part that was quite indeterminate of its performance. After a general rehearsal, during which the musicians heard the result of their several actions, some of them — not all — introduced in the actual performance sounds of a nature not found in my notations, characterized for the most part by their intentions which had become foolish and unprofessional. In Cologne, hoping to avoid this unfortunate state of affairs, I worked with each musician individually and in general rehearsal was silent. I should let you know that the conductor has no score but has only his own part, so that, though he affects the other performers, he does not control them. Well, anyway, the result was in some cases just as unprofessional in Cologne as in New York. I must find a way to let people be free without their becoming foolish. So that their freedom will make them noble. How will I do this? That is the question.’ (Cage, 2010)

However, while Cage was worried about the appearance of ‘foolishness’ in the results of the process, I was not. Indeed, as the musicians I ended up asking were not all professional, nor particularly was I, this seemed an unnecessary expectation, if not
in fact highly desirable in this case. I became interested in whether indeterminancy of the process might in fact produce results that appeared to be more intentional.

Another particular point of reference for this work was the work of Cornelius Cardew’s Scratch Orchestra, who employed randomly selected pages from Orchestra members’ Scratch Notebooks (Cardew, 1972) for performance, these scripts being of a musically non-conventional nature.

My aim became as follows…

to use a visual image to provide a basis/ series of clues/ indicators to interpret, and in turn, to create another piece of work or performance;

the notations would be deliberately non-specific in a conventional musical sense, being pushed closer to diagrammatic visual compositions;

the same six notations would be given to several different people to interpret, the resulting recordings of each notation to be multi-tracked together, to create a composite work;

the outcome of the process would be a ritual contestation and confusion of the role of the author, performer and audience.

Physical & practical description

a) The scores

There were six scores:

1. ‘a faithful re-telling of the world’s greatest’
2. ‘space BLOOD NOT SO SIMPLE’
3. ‘From Abba to Zappa. Out tomorrow.’
4. ‘HoRATIo TEN FUTURE’
5. ‘Why didn’t you? Stop the LAB’
6. ‘DON’T MISS HE WORLD’
96. ‘Notation 1: a faithful re-telling of the world’s greatest’, 2003, Graham Maule

97. ‘Notation 2: space BLOOD NOT SO SIMPLE’, 2003, Graham Maule

98. ‘Notation 3: From Abba to Zappa. Out tomorrow’, 2003, Graham Maule

99. ‘Notation 4: HoRATIo TEN FUTURE’, 2003, Graham Maule
These were assembled in a simplistic, perfunctory, semi-intentional style of collage. The composition of each was based on a broadly formulaic basis, so that each should contain the following elements:

A three-section photograph.

Two cut-out letters (between the range A-G) as start and end notes. This was the most overt concession to the possibility that this might be a musical score. This was simply to ensure that there be a degree of commonality between the recorded performances. However, the decision to respond to these as start-and-end or end-and-start notes was left open to the interpreters.

A hand-drawn image.

A number (3-4) of random collage images.

A collaged text phrase (which became the title of each piece).
b) The brief

This is the text of instructions I supplied with the six visual scores I gave to the interpreter-performers to outline the process:

1. Examine the score for a short time before interpreting it.

2. The only set cues are the start and finish notes (eg. ‘E’). You will find these on the sheet (in different positions on each). In some cases there may be more than one beginning or end note.

3. You may proceed through the score in any direction you wish, selecting and ignoring what you choose.

4. Perform (and record) your interpretation for 60 seconds. You may play when and how you choose, ie. for the entire duration, or only part; leaving silences, repeat a phrase etc., or not.

5. At the beginning of the recording, please say the notation number and count in, eg. ‘Notation 5… 1, 2, 3, (count a silent 4)’ and begin.

6. Use any media (musical, improvised, environmental, text, speech, singing, silence etc).

7. Anything that happens during the interpretation becomes part of the work. There are no mistakes.

8. Repeat the process above for each of the six notations.

The interpreter-performers were:

Steve Butler, a singer/ song-writer and multi-instrumentalist, who chose to play a keyboard.

Brian Cope, a composer and percussionist, who chose to play a piano.

Keeli Engel, a pianist.

Carol Marples, a flautist.
Myself, a relatively incompetent instrumentalist. I created two tracks or set of interpretations, by first playing a bass guitar and then playing a variety of improvised sound sources (door, letterbox, sellotape dispenser, vacuum cleaner, coins, CD cases, metal tape measure, radiator, bottle, wooden box).

None of us listened to any of the others’ recordings before performing our own takes.

**Discussion of the work & conclusion**

Reflecting on the outcome of the process, there were several different interpretative methods adopted by the performers in order to produce their contribution.

Brian tended to play formal shapes, eg. responding musically to the formal image of the electric plug in one score. He reacted to strong visual forms, in a ‘literal’ sense. In 4, he ‘ran up and down’ the vacuum cleaner’s pipe; in 5, the radiator form became a glissando; in 6, the symmetry of the fireplace was interpreted by starting in the middle and then working to either side, before selecting another form and working from shape to interval. The text, however, he read as notes.

Of all of us, he was the most used to this kind of improvisation, exercising a high degree of selection in what to play. As a result, he employed a lot of silent passages, in what he described as an ‘understated Messian-like style’.

Carol, who works in tapestry and painting, responded in a visually-conscious way, her reading responding to colours and moods more than form. Her contribution was fairly continuous, with little or no spaces.

Steve responded to the images as a continuous cue, creating more chord-based cadences.

Keeli initially found the improvisational approach quite difficult. She made fairly extensive preparation, though as she progressed through the series, became more attuned to the demands of the process. She found some images humorous, but confessed she did not then attempt to translate that in her performances.

Unlike all the others, I am not particularly musically ‘literate’ in the conventional
sense, unable to read printed music and being more accustomed to the aural learning of the folk tradition. My performances responded more to the 60 second duration itself, by identifying events during it, in a looser, less focused way with respect to form, mood or re-presentation of elements. The bass part, thus, merely happens. The sound-source track was more focused being narrative and literal, as I merely used the actual objects that appeared in the photographic elements as instruments to play.

In many respects, *Notations* was a relatively ephemeral work, being more concerned with enacting a ritual of exploration, within an already established genre of work. Its importance for Sacerlus’ progress was that it established a template which recognised the importance of process and, while privileging indeterminancy and chance, it also revealed that even in such work, there remains a high degree of structuring. The observation was articulated that to a major extent it is only out of order that dis-order appears and that a further dis-ordered order can be created.

The work was subsequently exhibited on two occasions, in the form of a modified music stand, into which a CD player was incorporated. The six tracks could be selected in any order and heard through a set of headphones. The visual scores were placed on the stand for perusal, as a record of the source of the performances as well as being an intimation of the open-ended possibility of further interpretation.

**Doxologic**

All art constantly aspires to the condition of music;  
so too,  
at its best,  
does theology.’

*(Armstrong, 2009, p.6)*
Maris Piper
Sender & audience

FROM:
A Digger of the earth, potato farmer or miner, in status that of a refugee or immigrant. He carried a wound to his body, that of a limp, and memories of the place from whence he’d come and the sensations and images of the place in which he finds himself.

TO:
The people who walked in the darkness of the interior of the Deutzer Brücke, a quarter-mile long concrete-box construction in the centre of Cologne, during an exhibition called ‘Spân’ (‘span’).

Issue to be addressed & concept

The famous perfume, Eau de Cologne, is derived from a mixture of citrus oils (lemon, lime, tangerine, orange, grapefruit, bergamot and neroli). It was created and launched in his new home town, Cologne, in 1709 by Giovanni Maria Farina (1685-1766), who hailed from Santa Maria Maggiore Valle Vigezzo, in Italy.

102. Giovanni Maria Farina, artist unknown
He wrote to his brother that it reminded him of his home country, and a spring morning, mountains and blossoms after a rain shower. It was promoted and sent to nearly all the royal courts of Europe. The historical significance of Eau de Cologne at this time was that it produced a constant, continuously replicable perfume using a large number of mono-essence oils. This was an unparalleled achievement at the time.

**Formulation of thesis of the work**

At the time when Farina moved to Cologne, the ability of immigrants to settle in the city was very strictly regulated by law. However, in this apparently less than hopeful context, Farina was nevertheless granted citizenship of the city, thus one of few exceptions to these laws. It was for this reason that, in gratitude, he named his creation in honour of his newly granted identity as a welcomed resident of the city. The apparently foreign nature of the name, in French, was due to the fact that French was spoken in high society throughout Europe at the time. An otherwise foreign entity was seen as the mark of a certain class of society.

The context again was again the Deutzer Brücke in Cologne, the liminal architectural entity, the nature of which I discussed earlier in the apocryphal work, ‘Flatable’. Constructed in the 70s at the height of the Cold War, it embodies a readiness to prevent alien incursion.

At the time of making this work, the European Community’s attitude to foreigners and debate about appropriate ways to deal with the influx of refugees was prominent in the media, in both the UK and Germany. Just prior to the making of ‘Maris Piper’, there had been the tragic incident in which 58 illegal Chinese immigrants had been suffocated in the back of a truck, the air vent having been...
closed during the crossing from Zeebrugge to Dover (Highbeam Research, 2005).

Migrations and transportations litter history. When chosen, they are expressions of the positive human desire for a new beginning, improvement or opportunity. On the other side of the ticket of historical record, when imposed, they trace the dark roads of removal, expulsion and exile of the ‘undesirable’ or those deemed ‘surplus to requirements’. Their passports are subsequently stamped ‘incompetent’, ‘refuse’, ‘scapegoat’, ‘alien’, ‘terrorist’, ‘scum of the earth’…

The Promised Land is nevertheless often attained, via the parting waters (or airstreams) and the long, unforgiving wilderness. The milk and honey land is, of course, another people’s settled territory. At first, it offers up suspicion or hostility, but later, grudged acceptance, occasionally even welcome. This land becomes other than it was. For its first inhabitants, it becomes different, slowly changed, even unrecognisably more exotic. For its most recent arrivals, carrying with them their imported commodities, habits, spiritualities, customs and language, it too alters: slowly, ponderously, irrevocably becoming mundane, unremarkable and strangely familiar and strangely unsettling. The flight, the journey, the pilgrimage, in the end are contained and owned in a local history.

These movements of alien incursion and their knee-jerking shadow become ritual occasions, in both positive and negative aspect, as they recur, calendared, seeding the seasons and furrows of each and every culture.

Tragically, those indigenous folk who (at least for a while) feel the repulsive or ‘patriotic’ duty of resistance, born of fear of alien-spirit-possession, form their sects and produce their symbolic rituals of disdain. Their prejudice perceives an ineffectual immune system, wide open and wickedly welcoming of virus and bacterium. Casting themselves into trances, they tabloid sermons and mantra malevolence. The not-so-man-in-the-street litanises laziness, lechery, ignorance and odour, fit for damnation. Random ritual acts of aggression and violence supposedly cleanse the collective soul, reminding the hapless disciples of their devotion.

Their alienated incursion, at first a liminal passage of time and space, dis-orientates the new arrival. But gradually, as Victor Turner suggests, this space-time becomes the forge in which new shapes and cultural creativity appear, solidifying as the years pass. The liminal space-time is a laboratory where the new symbols and patterns are born, which when proposed and exposed to quotidian reality, change and renew cultural expectations, forms and practices of the new home.
The past is re-created, but essentially left behind. Through a process of imagining, experiment and invention, the present is re-presented, the future cultural, social, economic and religious forms draw strongly on the past traditions of a far away place. An altering of the everyday occurs, through time and space, from that which is normality into a limbo, which itself is ultimately and invariably transformed into a new ordinariness.

‘Maris Piper’ recognised these temporal contexts of current events and the physical and historical characteristics of the specific location.

In its physical installational and performative form, it was conceived as a response to the ritually recurrent scapegoating of those who are poorest and foreign by the privileged, powerful rich world. As such, it took the form of a ritual of processional lament, to draw attention to the contradictory attitudes of Western society with its prejudices against immigrants, yet also its ultimately passionate appropriation of immigrant contribution to maintain service provisions by filling the most demeaning jobs which indigenous citizens are hesitant to undertake. It also aimed to deconstruct supposedly distinctive Western culture and identity, which contrary to the impression often given, is an made up of a huge variety of appropriated, non-Western, immigrant, cultural form and identities.

The script-scoring of ‘Maris Piper’ was posed in three-dimensional terms through the three sculptural objects as a simple network of points or stations between which performer and viewer-participants would navigate. The nature of the bridge’s interior imposed an essentially uni-directional line. Being collaboratively made, they possessed an ambivalent encoding for me… partially mine, yet partially another’s.

**Physical & practical description**

The elements of ‘Maris Piper’ were two-fold: a sculptural installation (in collaboration with Sandra Collins) and a performance Ritual by myself.

The sculptural installation consisted of a processional series of structures:

- a potato bed,
- a narrow wooded corridor,
- a large blue plastic-covered container-like construction.
a) The potato bed

The potato, is a now a well-established staple Western food, often in the form of ubiquitous chips or frites. Equally, it has associations particularly in the British Isles, Ireland, the Netherlands and Germany as being the staple of the poorest. The ‘Maris Piper’ is the most popular and widely grown type of potato in the UK (lovepotatoes.co.uk, 2005; europotato.org, 2005).

It is often described as a ‘white’ potato. As opposed to the constituent plants of Eau de Cologne, which grow above ground, in the air, the potato is a perennial plant of the earth, the underground.

However, in terms of Europe, the potato is itself an ‘immigrant’. Hailing from Latin America, it has been cultivated by the Andeas Indians from at least 2000 years before the Spanish conquest of that continent. A relatively recent arrival, it was introduced to England, reputedly by Walter Raleigh, in the mid 16th century.

The potato bed consisted of a rectangular wooden-dowel frame, divided into three square grid sections, with potatoes threaded along its sides. The bed form was chosen as an evocation of perhaps the most basic symbol of home. However, it was raised off the ground on casters, thus making it also potential mobile.
b) The wooden corridor

This was constructed from wood and again a square grid was used. A narrow corridor, waist-high and covered on the inner sides by jute (potato sacking) material, it took a form and alignment intended to allow entry of only one person at a time at one end, but implying a filtering by a wider opening at the other. This sculptural form evoked a crude version of movement corridors often seen in airports, and dimensionally, though not materially, the queueing passages at ticket, baggage or passport checkpoints.

c) The blue container

The third sculptural element imitated the scale of the ubiquitous goods containers used to transport materials and commodities around the world.

Nuance of ‘transportation’ in historical usage (as in the Scottish Clearances etc.) was intended. From its surface, covered in blue plastic sheeting, variously-sized red plastic
funnels (typically used for pouring liquids like oil) protruded, irregularly spaced, like so many loudspeaker-like forms, but from which no sound emerged.

In sculptural terms, the relationships set up between these three elements was intended to create a staged series of progressions: from small to large-scale, from basic-natural to manufactured-unnatural, from historically-prior to contemporarily-occurring form, from open to closed design, from light to darkness.

d) The performance

The direction of progression of the sculptural elements was echoed and underlined by the direction of the performative movement.

The name ‘Maris Piper’ (‘Piper of the Sea’) evokes notions of journeying as well as conjuring a Scottish musical association.

The Potato Miner initially lay beside the potato bed in silence. The in-key was the switching-on of the headlamp and a South African song, ‘Hamba Nathi’ (‘Come with me, for the journey is long’). The otherwise unannounced beginning of performance by the song element enacted a ‘calling’ function, as in a conventional Ritual. Here, people not in the immediate vicinity, in either of the adjoining chambers of the bridge, heard the echoing, became aware that something was happening, and so made their way towards the song-source of the sound.

After about 30 seconds of singing, the Miner raised himself up onto his feet, stacatto-like, as if reluctant.
As the Miner moved towards the wooden corridor, he began to walk with a limp, which became increasingly more pronounced from this point. His movement was halting as he travelled between the corridor’s walls, sometimes using his arms to haul himself forward. During this section, another South African song, ‘Ewe Thina’ (‘We walk his way’) was sung.

On the third and last part of his journey, the Miner passed around the blue container, while singing a traditional Scots ballad of exile, ‘Caledonia’ (in this case, referring to Nova Scotia), which recounts the difficult experience of an immigrant to the west coast of Canada, whose first job is ‘loading at no.3’, a reference to either dock or mining activity.
Having traversed the length of the container, on completion of his song, he sank to the ground in the darkness. The performance concluded as he switched off his headlamp.

Throughout the characteristic sounds of the bridge – the continual, loud sound of traffic overhead – contributed an irregular swelling, but constant, form of ‘ground note’ to the vocal line of the singing.

**Discussion of the work & conclusion**

As opposed to the precursor work, ‘Notations’, the issues of rehearsal and restored behaviour through embodiment in the presence of others was raised. However to avoid over-theatricality, I was keen to use a simple structuring (tripartite), in devising
the script-scoring, to allow a degree of freedom.

There was no preceding real-time rehearsal, merely a fairly perfunctory walking-through. There were three performances (the third is submitted in Sacerludus). While these were script-scored in the sense that the progression through the three stages, the songs, and a general conception of how to move were pre-planned, a decision regarding the degree of articulation of the latter was spontaneously improvised.

An unplanned innovation that resulted was the addition of a phasing or manifesting of relatively, small bursts of energy/movement and the slight appearance of a kind of ‘stop-frame’. Short silence in harness with momentarily stilled holding-of-position, and thus image, appeared. These began to inject particulars of sculptural form (rhythm and solidity) into the otherwise generally continuous, fluid action, though it would only be in later works that this would become more consciously intended.

There was no attempt by the Miner to address people visually. He was sealed within his own experience and memory, an alone-ness even within a gathering. This may have undermined the nature of the distancing effect of the performance, permitting them to follow the Miner’s linear, if short, progress. A more direct addressing would probably have defined their role and expectation of how to engage more explicity. Many of them moved, by a slight shuffling, along the extent of his progress, taking on a gait not dissimilar to the Miner himself.

However, a significant degree of physical distance was held, defining in effect a zone of performance, the edge of which they held. In the context of these, there nevertheless remained a significant degree of spatially-flattened, conventional frontality: parallel layers of performance and audience, with a tendency for the sculptural works to act as backdrop.

So there was nevertheless a slight nuancing towards their involvement as viewer-participants, though much less than in the lament pilgrimage of ‘Flatable’. The tactic, the keying of the ‘calling’ of the first song may also have modified this positioning.

In distinction to the previous work, an inversion occurred: I performed others’ works (songs) as one element of the script-scoring, using these as a form of encoding, whereas previously I had created the script-score which (in the main) was performed by others. In this sense, there was less emphasis on artistic control and more on interpretation and performance.
In terms of the installation itself, and beyond the duration of the performance, the viewers interacted with the ‘scripting’ of the objects: some moved the potato bed, others lay down in amusement, walked through the passage way (including one instance of moonwalking) and put their ears to the red plastic funnels, as if expecting to hear a sound, imagining these as loudspeakers.

‘Maris Piper’’s execution heightened my awareness of the possibility of considering sculptural elements as forms of encoding, in as much as the positioning of sculptural objects set up matrices – here an essentially linear one – which offer potentiality for scoring movement and in return that movement could heighten the perceived meaning of the object.

One of effects of the linear tracking of the Miner, for those viewers who remained in one place, was that the action (and to slight degree) the sound appeared as a kind of stereo strip which flowed past them, giving them a kind of by-stander, witness-like modification of status.

‘Maris Piper’, also prompted recognition of the role of persona(s) and atmosphere – in the earlier ‘Flatable’, similar, though much more muted, role-characterisation and atmosphere of lament was used.

Part of this may have been the use of songs and the specific narrative of these (perhaps more their folkly, Scottish character rather than the language… being Scots-English there would have been less detailed comprehension for Germans, even if many can speak the language). A curiosity-inducing strangeness may have been evoked though. For the structuring of the work though, it formed a commentary or triggering of imaging and emotional narrative to complement objects and performance.

**Doxologic**

The Cheviot, the stag and the black, black oil…

the eastern invention of the bagpipes
badges contemporary Scottish identity…
the Celtic Scotti put their claim and their name on previously Pictish and Welsh domains…
the Peruvian potato became an Irish staple,
then tragically, plague...
far eastern jute assumed the mantle
of a Dundonian trilologic third...
middle eastern fossil fuels transfuse and transform
the industrial life-blood of the West...

exotic others
become our mundane selves...
Four Friends
Yellow
Four Friends Yellow

Sender & audience

FROM:
A Househusband, singing as he moved as well as moving furniture.

TO:
The people who were in Kilmarnock, at the Dick Institute on the occasion of a mixed group exhibition, ‘See Scotland’. The show included drawings, paintings, sculpture and installation. The space was basically square in shape, with a proportionally high ceiling and bright illumination.

Issue to be addressed/ concept

The exhibition had a stated intention of examining Scottish culture. The ‘Four Friends Yellow’ installation and performance aimed to explore notions about the background nature or relative invisibility of cultural identity, particularly its overlooked domesticity.

Culture is as ubiquitous as furniture, but in many of its genres, relatively far more invisible. Arguably it is most ‘visible’ in movement, gesture and image. As a form of ‘invisible furniture’, culture in-forms, supports and moulds living. Specific forms often exists in an over-looked state, even when exerting their influence, and are thus un-remarked, under-valued or neglected.

Formulation of thesis of the work

‘Four Friends Yellow’ was conceived with reference to the early 20th century ‘Musique d’ameublement’/ ‘Furniture Music’ works of Eric Satie.
The first of these pieces was performed in an art gallery, during the interlude of a Max Jacob play. Satie spoke of ‘furniture music which would not disturb the clatter of knives and forks.’

An introduction to the 1920’s work was read before hand:

‘We present for the first time, under the supervision of MM. Satie and Darius Milhaud and directed by M.Delgrange, “furnishing music” to be played during the entr’actes. We beg you to take no notice of it and to behave during the entre’actes as if the music did not exist. This music… claims to make its contribution to life in the same way as a private conversation, a picture, or the chair on which you may or may not be seated.’ (Satie, quoted in Kahn, 1999, p.179-180)

To emphasise his backgrounding intent, Satie positioned the performers around the walls. But despite this positioning and the above plea for his work to be ignored, the audience turned and directed their attention on the musicians as they took their places in preparation. Satie was so disturbed about this that he ran around regaling people to look at the walls, the floor, their seats, anything other than the source of the music. This tension between awareness and non-awareness, consciousness and unconsciousness was never fully overcome by Satie. But this work was a significant influence on John Cage’s 1947 ‘Silent Prayer’ (a precursor to his revolutionary ‘4.33’ of four years later), a proposed piece intended to consist of uninterrupted silence, which he planned to sell to Muzak Co. These of course all belong to the geneology that has led to the more contemporary ambient music of Brian Eno and others.

The intention in ‘Four Friends Yellow’ was to re-coin a form of furniture music.
and dance, a hybrid, in-between entity, which being neither totally background or foreground aimed to occupy a mimimal 'betwixt-and-between'. As such a sense of uneasiness or indecisiveness was desirable.

Allan Kaprow’s ‘Push And Pull: A Furniture Comedy For Hans Hoffman’ (1964) work involving furniture re-alignment offered another reference.

As did Alison Knowles’ ‘Wounded Furniture’ event-score of 1965 which suggested taking an old piece of furniture and destroying it.

Instead of Knowles’ bandaging (an act of salvation), here the objects were covered in plastic waste bag material (a sign of rejection). Instead of Knowles’ suggestion to spray red paint (a warm colour) on the joints, here blue (a cold colour) was used. Two elements of her instructions – ‘(e)ffective lighting helps’ and ‘(p)erformed by one or more and simultaneously with other events’ (Friedman, Smith & Sawchyn, 2002, p.71) – set up a similarly contradictory situation to Satie’s introduction and his outburst against attention. ‘Four Friends’ in its positioning, appropriation of the gallery’s bright illumination and scheduling aimed to possess this uneasiness which would nevertheless be unremarkable.

Physical & practical description

Four pieces of domestic furniture were used as actors, proposed alongside the artist’s presence – an ironing board, a chair, a table and a standard lamp – and were covered in heavy blue plastic sheeting of the type used for heavy waste, such as bricks, plaster or soil. Similar to ‘Maris Piper’, they offered an ambivalent encoding as script-scoring cues as well as layering of frames: here not made by me, but at the same time altered in that they were plastic-wrapped by me. An additional wrapping was imposed with a large transparent plastic dust sheet placed over them, framingly-
evocative of forgotten, out-of-use objects bearing witness to a past life while awaiting a possible, but unassured future life.

The four friends of the work’s title were four male, Scottish authors, poets and musicians: Robert Burns, Robert Louis Stevenson, Robert Crawford and Michael Marra.

The two deceased (Burns and Stevenson) are of course household names whereas the two contemporary ones (Crawford and Marra), are less so. As there were four personalities, all male, so there were four pieces of furniture, though conventionally nuanced, and manifested physically here, as domestic and thus (at least, stereotypically) ‘female’. Thus, the nurturing, foundational nature of the cultural artefacts were underscored.

The furniture was placed slightly off-centre and close to and slightly-into one of the circulation paths generated by the entrance doors. There were two other durationally ‘active’ works in the gallery, one of which was a cabin-like structure with old home movies, and another a projection. Hence the performance had some ‘bleeding’ competition. These continued to play for the duration of the performance.
Optional ‘ignorance’ of the work on the part of the audience was further emphasised by performing it twice, using the same series of songs and texts. Thus those who had watched the first performance did not pay as much – if any – attention to the second.

**Discussion of the work & conclusion**

In terms of script-scoring, like *Maris Piper*, the song material (augmented by text) was used, but with a looser concept of sequencing – there was no pre-determined order and no rehearsal. This randomness appeared to be successful in terms of conveying inconsequentiality.

The dust sheet enabled a degree of obscurity, distancing and a certain ghostly ephemerality, as well as defining an enclosed, if shifting, staging-space for the performance. As opposed to the parallel strip vector of *Maris Piper*, here the performative space was heavily defined by the sheet and within this the matrix of the furniture. However the mobility of the furniture still held potentiality of movement, though in retrospect this was not significantly realised and was perhaps an opportunity lost.

In- and out-keying was defined by the the Househusband entering and leaving the dust-sheeted zone and by the minimal gesture of switching on and off of the standard lamp, its relative theatricality made insignificant (in Kabakovian light terms), being a mere additional 60 watts of illumination in an otherwise floodlit space. Thus it appeared not to overly shift or work against the intended mundanity of the performance.

![Image: 'Four Friends Yellow', 2005, Graham Maule](image-url)
Originally, only one performance had been intended. Having become aware of the register of the first, I took the decision to do a second and this was more intimate and thus more closely satisfied the desired degree of non-performativity. The register was sometimes projected with the aim of being heard, sometimes only murmuring, sometimes engaging by looking, sometimes looking away self-absorbedly. While the second performance was an improvement in terms of a less projective and visual addressing of the audience, an even more intimate tone would have been more relevant – indeed I recall several instances of embarrassment, a sign of having not considered these aspects.

Having ‘taken the stage’, that is, going under the sheet, the initial period of silence, with movement alone was also extended to reinforce the sense of relatively non-eventful and unremarkable activity, with both more- and less-deliberate positions and actions adopted.

On this occasion, the first small-scale intimation of creating a ‘tradition-within-a-tradition’ within my praxis itself – the subsequently developed notion of using elements of previous artworks in the construction of an adapted liturgical script – appeared in terms of materials (the carrying-forward of the blue plastic which featured in ‘Maris Piper’).

The aim of establishing a degree of indeterminancy appropriate to the liminal ‘bewixt-and-between’ seemed to have been partly achieved, helped by the silent periods between textual and musical pieces, uncertain pauses, without articulation as specific elements in themselves. However, I also felt a degree of frustration that this wasn’t as fully developed as it could have been.

Even though shifting from the frontality of the previous work into a theatrics-in-the-
round, the containment and focus of the performance zone tended to lend a more conventional role to the viewers, though again nuanced by stages of engagement or disinterest.

The role of the sculptural objects became that of players as I moved between them, pushing, tipping, turning.

Viewers’ reactions varied, some finding the performance engaging others not. The first performance seemed to be read more in terms of one generating a conventional audience response; the second less so, and hence while less satisfactory in a performative sense (and particularly when seen as documentation), indicates that the inattention of the audience could arguably be said to have been scripted in accordance with the original intent.

**Doxologic**

In a certain city
there lived a physician who sold yellow paint.
This was of so singular a virtue
that whoso was bedaubed with it
from head to heel
was set free from the dangers of life,
and the bondage of sin,
and the fear of death for ever.
So the physician said in his prospectus;
and so said all the citizens in the city;
and there was nothing more urgent in men’s hearts
than to be properly painted themselves,
and nothing they took more delight in
than to see others painted.

(Stevenson, Robert Louis, from ‘The Yellow Paint’ in ‘Fables’, n.d.)
DeLuSilencio
DeLuSilencio

Sender & audience

FROM:
A Blind Man, black-clad, white stick-wielding; and his foil, a white-overalled Engineer.

TO:
The people who gathered for the opening of a student group exhibition next door to the Torness nuclear reactor in Richard Demarco’s Skateraw archive, on the 20th anniversary (to the day) of the Chernobyl nuclear accident in 1986.

A second repeat performance took place a month later in the ECA Sculpture School’s Project Room to a group of MFA students and others. The video documentation submitted is that of this second occasion.

Issue to be addressed & concept

Richard Demarco is often hailed as the first Scottish curator to introduce contemporary art to mainstream Scottish culture, championing, in particular, Joseph Beuys. Known for his concept of ‘social sculpture’, it was an unremarkable move when Beuys became a founder of the German Green Party and engaged in several anti-nuclear protests/ actions. Though not a Christian himself (at least in the conventional sense), he regarded Christ as a model for the artist. If the Creator was incarnated in ordinary flesh and blood, making it holy, one could conclude again unremarkably, as Beuys of course does, that ‘Everyone is an artist.’
Perversely, much of the funding for Demarco’s archive and the maintenance of the building comes from British Nuclear Fuels (with the Torness nuclear power plant a stone’s throw from Demarco’s building)... so the coincidence of this opening with the 20th anniversary of Chernobyl was ironically apposite.

This was the anniversary of the ‘day of silence’, the day after the accident had happened. During this second 24 hours, only the Soviet authorities knew that anything had happened. It was not until the following day that news of the tragedy was released to the world.

**Formulation of thesis of the work**

In researching for the project, I also drew on historical and contextual facts about the surrounding location.

The major way that the Chernobyl accident affected those beyond the Ukraine was by dint of the extensive radioactive fallout, incurring major ecological and economic consequences. Here in Britain, milk and meat from animals that grazed on irradiated pastureland was deemed unfit for human consumption for a considerable time afterwards. One of the striking images from Chernobyl was of a devastated earth, criss crossed by the wooden walkways raised above the soil, this land too poisoned for human beings to be allowed to come into contact with it.

The correlation of that distant nuclear power station and one in Edinburgh’s hinterland was thus, naturally striking, with Skateraw/Torness being in proximity to sites of historical, ecological and geological significance. It is directly on the ‘John Muir Trail’, Muir being the eminent, Dunbar-born naturalist, author, and early advocate of wilderness preservation, who established the US National Parks.
Muir roamed around Dunbar in his youth and in response to which he first identified the seeds of his future theories. He recounted:

‘around my native town of Dunbar by the stormy North Sea, there was no lack of wildness, though most of the land lay in smooth cultivation.’ (Muir, 1913)

Skateraw/ Torness is also in close proximity to Siccar Point (aka. ‘The Holy Grail of Geology’). In 1788, another Scot, James Hutton, the ‘father’ of geology, deduced that the earth was a dynamic system in which rocks could be deformed over long periods of time.

His discoveries were made while exploring the rock formations at Siccar Point. He thus blew apart his time’s accepted conception of the earth’s age (which was based on an extrapolated biblical chronology).
By compositing various fragmentary material references to these discoveries of research I proposed a litany of potential, of creation and destruction in response to the breach/ crisis initiated by the Chernobyl accident. Distinct from the previous works, the conscious ‘game’ posed here was a more explicitly monumental occasion and ritual of commemoration and contradiction, much more highly structured in terms of its aural material, spacial matrix and the sequencing of its phases.

**Physical & practical description**

The installational context of the performance appropriated the four items of furniture covered in blue plastic (waste bag material for heavy waste or rubble) from the previous ‘Four Friends Yellow’ work – table, chair, standard lamp and ironing board. As opposed to ‘Four Friends’, where these were conceived of as moveable actors in the situation, here they were set up as ‘stations’ or ‘altars’, akin to the static focii of Thomas Hirschhorn.

Through use of nuclear-generated power, home life is implicated in the ethics and politics of its use. Domesticity is no sanctuary from accident, even if thousands of miles away. Private life too, is like invisible, background radiation, its half-life extending far beyond the ebb and flow of public culture. Its sheer normality is a hidden energy discretely practiced.

A grid of long, thin candles and four stands of incense pellets was placed on the table. Underneath the table there was a bowl of water and a towel. The ironing board held a collection of electronic audio equipment, alongside a music stand.

The performance consisted of three stages or phases, with movement within and between the grid defined by the static stations of the furniture.
a) First sounding

This was a sequence of establishing actions, keyed initially by a decaying sound wave – an appropriated audio simulation of the Big Bang, a scientist’s proposal for what it might have sounded like, were there ears to hear (Virginia University, 2006) – and an audio recording of local birdsong. As myself, I lit the grid of candles, singing an invocation, ‘Deus De Deo’ (‘God from God, light from light’). I then took on the persona of the Blind Man, who switched on the standard lamp.
b) Second sounding

The Blind Man moved to the right-hand music stand and sang ‘Westlin Winds’, a song by Robert Burns, of love set in a vivid description of the natural landscape.

Moving back to the light, the Blind Man changed back into the Engineer. The Engineer then walked to the table and lit the incense at the four corners of the candle grid.

A pause. He then walked to the ironing board. Using vocals, microphone, various percussion instruments, mouth organ, loop machine and effects pad, he built up a
progressively, overloaded sound, by way of successively looped layering.

A pause. The Engineer walked back to the table and proceeded to extinguish the candles, before washing his hands. He returned to the ironing board, manipulating the sound via effects. He pulled the plug. The sound ceased.

The Engineer removed his boiler suit. Now myself, I turned off the light.

c) Third sounding
I then became the Blind Man again, who sat down, taking the standard lamp in his lap. He sang ‘Ho’dyt Sonko’, a Belarussian lullabye, paused, and the performance ended.

**Discussion of the work & conclusion**

As in both *Maris Piper* and *Four Friends Yellow* there was minimal physical rehearsal of the performance phasing, except by way of structuring the script. This structuring was much more pronounced than in previous performances, hence taking on more formal, deliberate characteristics.

The exception to this was the improvisatory passage when the Engineer created the audio overload. Experimental versions were made and thus, in a sense, rehearsed, though the final manifestation bore little relationship to these originals. I also rehearsed aspects of movement in the persona of the Blind Man, though trying to avoid too convincing a re-presencing in order to allow for some natural breakage of this role.

The identity of the audience remained in more conventional, observational mode. This distancing was, in part, an inverted articulation of the Blind Man’s persona and agency, in contrast to the Engineer’s action and its — even if unintended — consequences.

More fundamental perhaps was the proscenium setting of the performance zone (in the case of the Skateraw performance, in front of a large wall hanging as backdrop). The relatively fixed, frontal position of the on-lookers was in effect nuanced in an imitation of essentially powerless populations at the mercy of accidental discharges, kept in the dark through the secrecy and lack of transparency surrounding the nuclear power industry. So this was perhaps the most appropriate viewing alignment given the situation.

In its more formal, scripted sequencing and articulated structure, *DeLuSilencio* marked a significant innovation in this research. The content of each phase, sequencing and chronology came to the fore.

As opposed to *Maris Piper*, which tended to a three-part linear extrusion of sound and movement, or *Four Friends Yellow*, with its more randomised circularity, the stationed phasing loaded each point of development with a sense of moving
between scenes. The shift between persona (and costume for the first time), change
of position, carefully defined acts and the recorded/ live vocal/ live electronic modes
created a more conventional theatrics.

Previous works had been relative ‘monocultures’ (ie. representing a single, consistent
calendar character or point of view). Here three personae featured.

The appearance of the Blind Man also marked the first occurrence of this persona
in Sacerludus, albeit modified in subsequent works. This brought the tactic of
performing in character more fully to the foreground. Here his non-visual capability
was contrasted by that of the other two personae.

In performing, the lack of confrontation – ie. the persona did not interact –
contributed to a relative understatement of characteristics, which produced a sense,
at least in my mind, of each being facets of the other. Thus, theatricality appeared
more on technical and formal levels of costume, action and sound-generation, than
in emphatic, traited role-playing.

The content of the work carried a more pointed condensation of symbolic forms
and meanings, here by simplified formal juxtaposition. The use of electronic sound
technology as an active element of tone and shade was made for the first time,
prompting an increased awareness of the relative allurement and potential of
different types of sound (vocal and mechanical) and the periods of (in)attention they
induce. The sonic elements selected were more pointedly illustrational and so a
narrative loading became more emphatic.

**Doxologic**

‘A wandering particle kidnapped one of them,
and the two that were left made day and night,
and left and right, and right and wrong,
and black and white, and off and on,
but things were never quite the same,
and two will always yearn for three,
you’re after you, or me.’

(Morgan, 1985, p.89)
Fern 04
Fern 04

Sender & audience

FROM:
An invisible Teaser, as cameraman, standing behind the viewfinder of his video
camera, while tempting a dog with a stick; and the dog, Fern, a small black collie
mongrel, who belonged to the wardens of the Callendar youth hostel at which the
Teaser, in the role of tutor, was staying with a group of 2nd year Sculpture students
on a drawing field trip.

TO:
The people who, standing before the screen, witnessed the dance within-and-
without the frame of the video projection.

Issue to be addressed & concept

Each day this dog, Fern, would disappear during the early part of the day – we did
not know to where – and re-appear in the late afternoon. Having returned from our
work in the field, we would often spend time throwing sticks for her to retrieve.

When a stick was thrown, she would follow it and on reaching it, would circle it
several times round it, then stand looking at the thrower. After encouragement to
bring the stick (to no avail), the thrower would then invariably move towards her.
At this, she’d pick up the stick and carry it further away, proceeding to repeat the
circular dance. Coincidentally, ‘fern’ in German means ‘distant’ or ‘far’. It occurred to
the me that rather than the thrower succeeding in getting Fern to fetch sticks, she
was successfully training the thrower himself to fetch.

It turned out that Fern was a ‘failed’ sheepdog, deemed unsuited to further training
half-way through her education. Perhaps it was her teasing Ritual that the instructors
perceived as inability or lack of aptitude for canine education that brought on that
decision. However, one skill she may have been exhibiting was the instinct, another
equally important sheepdog ability: that of bringing the shepherd’s attention to a wounded animal that had fallen.

**Formulation of thesis of the work**

The context of the drawing trip and these incidents with Fern prompted thoughts on several fields – education, play (and film) – with their pedagogical characteristics. I was interested in relate these to ritual encoding.

**a) Education**

The educational process is one of the most extensive Rituals in Western society. In one inflection, it reinforces the values and structural roles required by Late Capitalism, through its crucial work of creating and sustaining professions. In contrast, it can also inculcate a questioning attitude to this ideology.

Increasingly, participation in succeeding stages of education is an elaborate rite-of-passage: ‘Education, education, education’. It removes the student from normal productive requirements, placing them during the period of study in a liminal phase of un-defined identity, at the mercy of systematic codes and demands, before re-aggregating and returning him/ her to structural society, having conferred a new, superior status.

The desirability of becoming a student (acolyte) is unquestionably desirable and greatly sought after. The status and power granted by approved masters to the successful acolyte accords access to services and resources, which are denied those who have not been similarly processed. Belief in the institution itself is so pervasive and seemingly unquestionable that Ivan Illich can, with some justification, legitimately claim that education possesses the characteristics and status of a secular, ideological religion (Illich, 1978, p.40-56), if one that is more sectarian, selectively exclusive in nature than many more conventional ones.

This internationalised Ritual also contains a significant liminal characteristic within it, that of contradiction. While the educational superstructure acts to reinforce the ideology and power relations of consumer professionalism, it nevertheless throws up counter-cultural thinking and practice about what education should do and how
it should be practiced.

Alternative critiques challenge the dominant practice. These see education in a more dialogical, interactive and inclusive light. It is the existence of such approaches to which this artwork addressed itself, in playing with the dynamic of dialogic pedagogy and the reversal of the teacher-taught power relationships.

b) Play & the other

The interaction between a human being and an animal other also brought to mind several artistic precursors in this mode.

Beuys’ ‘Explaining Pictures To A Dead Hare’ (1965) and particularly ‘I Like America And America Likes Me’ (1974), not least because of the ultimately playful engagement established between the artist and the coyote.
Both of these works employ the frame as a central device. The separation of the space inhabited by the artist and animal, and the viewer being physically separate: a viewing frame in the former, a caged liminality in the latter (also emphasized in the pre-liminal and re-aggregated phases by Beuys’ transportation to and from the gallery, sealed and hooded in an ambulance). In this sense, they are more accurately personal Ritual, inflecting a shamanic action by the artist on the part of others.

I was aware of these, though wanted to induce a more participative viewing engagement and heightened degree of immediacy, as opposed to Beuy’s tactic of isolation and distanced-engagement.

The concept of art Ritual as ‘play’, even serious ‘play’, in an educational mode, speaks to Huizinga’s notion that play is primary to, and a necessary condition of, the generation of culture and here more specifically, education:

‘Let my playing be my learning, and my learning be my playing.’ (Huizinga, 1971)

By addressing the ‘other’ and expecting to receive something from the resulting discourse, the outcome questions the location of creativity. A plural form of pedagogic agency is understood.

c) The filmic medium

I had taken some video footage of Fern and because of this began to reflect on the use and properties of this medium. The ritualizing effect of film, spoken of by Ronald Grimes (Grimes, 2006, p.27-38), was consciously addressed due through the role of the third actor in the performance, the video camera.

The simple visible presence of a camera induces in those present a sense that something special is going to happen. This performs a keying function common with Ritual, that the everyday is being left behind and a liminal, heightened state is being entered. Likewise when the camera operator switches off her equipment, a second keying returns the situation to normal, structural reality.

As well as affecting those outside the camera’s perspective in this way, the camera’s presence affects the self-consciousness of those in front of the lens. The filmed adjust their actions, either exaggerating or subduing them, often modulating this behaviour along the lines of those codes of behaviour perceived as appropriate for
this occasion of exposure. The automatic tendency to ‘say cheese’ or pull a face, or assume an air of suddenly studied seriousness are only the most obvious example of this implicit ‘obedience’ that is triggered.

The liminal, limiting nature of the frame makes a selection of one part of reality, excluding whatever is outside it. By recording this now special image, it reforms it as a both script-score (which can be endlessly repeated) and performance. Arguably the scripting-scoring is even more rigid and invariant than any similar liturgical one in that there is no possibility of subsequent improvisation than that re-enacted by a human actor in a conventional Ritual.

So the film set out to interrogate this most ritual element, the edges of its educative effect and the image-space created through the lenses of video and projector themselves.

**Physical & practical description**

There are, in effect two works here: one, the initial, spontaneous ‘performance’; the other, its manipulated trace – the construction of an (initially) one-minute film. This was made for ‘Digital VD’, a 2007 project consisting of 60 artists’ films the separate elements of which (moving image and sound) were randomly mixed up by a software programme. In this way, one film would infect another with its sound and vice versa in an almost limitless combination. ‘Digital VD’ was shown at ECA, DCA and in other locations worldwide.

‘Fern 04’ is a later version. The one minute video is looped twice: forward-reversed-motion. This enables a further, potentially endless sequencing, should the looped work itself be looped, giving an impression of continual, uninterrupted movement.
This sculptural rhythm is further reinforced in the video framing by my rocking from foot to foot, imposing a repeated subdivision within each one-minute section. This action arose as the teasing action of being about-to-throw to which the dog would respond with its own anticipatory movement.
The incorporation of my breathing as I shifted weight added another rhythmic element, the sound of which is accentuated by the post-production addition of a submersively liminal, reverb effect.

The distancing effect of the frame and the medium is echoed in the relatively constant distance from the lens maintained by the dog, inscribing a radial space around the lens’ central location, in effect defining a staging area.

Discussion of the work & conclusion

‘Fern 04’, as a video work, allowed the exploration of a more pronounced circularity in contrast to the linear, narrative sequencing of the earlier works and any physically embodied instance. The compounded repetition within the work induces a trance-like, meditative effect, heightened by the mechanical manipulation of the image-colouring and the effect-loading of the sound.

The retreat-and-return of the dog emphasises a ritual dynamic of cycling and re-occurrence, a one-minute opening of successive capture and evasion, that is neither and both.

The accidental appearance of the particular stick the dog carried in her mouth evokes by its staff-like form, shepherd and animalistic shamen. The presence of this stick was invisibly mirrored by another, in my hand, which is off-screen – these operating as two ritual artifacts, which induced a sense of playful expectation.

Questions of who is doing the leading, who is following, who is teaching, who is learning, who is being ritualized and in what manner, are thrown back and forth in a fluid, ritual call-and-response of mechanical motion.

Whereas previous works had used pre-determined script-scores, sculptural objects, lighting, textual and musical elements, all with significant consideration as to how they might operate within a ritualized scenario, ‘Fern 04’’s status is (to considerable extent) a form of found object in ritual terms. The subsequent action of editing functions as an inverted restoration of behaviour, the trying out, experimentation and dry-running occurring after the event.

The question of the exact nature of the viewer’s status as distanced or involved agent hangs in the balance, dependent as it is on how the work might be presented,
whether that be on a wall, a monitor or on the web, the sound through speakers or headphones, keyed-in by the viewer’s finger on a keyboard (or totally overlooked with others chosen for viewing) or a computer programme’s randomizing algorithm (both as in DigitalVD) or projected on a small, medium or large scale in whatever kind of space on wall, floor, ceiling or other surface…

**Doxologic**

All knowledge is grace.
It waltzes into peripheral vision
and behind your head.

Out of frame,
Shakespeare murders people there.
Non-existence of non-existence.

Keep your eyes on the prize.
Hold on.
Fern 07
Fern 07

Sender & audience

FROM:
Two Gangster-Shepherds, black-suited and shade-wearing, who displayed somewhat ambiguous attitudes and demeanours, moving from aggression and control to a more intimate friendliness, perhaps more akin to sheepdogs, friends or even, servants. Outside the window, two other colleagues appeared and moved about in the course of the performance as enlarged black triangular ‘Ears’.

TO:
Students and tutors at ECA, in the Sculpture School’s Project Room on 7th May 2007.

Issue to be addressed & concept

The concept was to produce a ritual performance that enacted a transition from an audience of observers to one of gathered community, even friends.

The starting point for the performance was to appropriate and incorporate the previous work, ‘Fern 04’, looped continuously, as an element of allurement and key for activation, while augmenting it by additional images, sounds and movement.

Whereas ‘Fern 04’ investigated the video camera’s framing, here a layering of framing was introduced: the walled dimension of the room, the previous video projected within it, the window framing an external locus of staging, the entry doorway, the manhole cavity with their differing properties of containment or excess.

Formulation of thesis of the work

In terms of textual parallel to the forward-backward looping of the dog – dog-god
– was invoked. Cultural notions of followed-follower, attraction-repulsion, assent-dissent thus came into play in implied form.

This correspondence was also reinforced by my association of the dog in ‘Fern 04’ with a recurring image of a black dog in the films of Tarkovsky, through similarity of sheepdog appearance.

For example in ‘Stalker’ (1979), the appearance of the dog, coincides with a passage of numinous transendence, catalysing a panning, dreamlike, visionary image-sequence of discarded objects in a tiled pool (syringes, weapons, icons, bowls, cups etc). This happens as the Stalker character of the title sleeps, and is accompanied by words from Revelation (the Apocalypse).

Of course, the word, ‘dog’, can be used ambiguously. It may convey the sense of a pet, warmth, simplicity, honesty and fondness. Or it may be a term of abuse, a description of rejection, inferiority and incompetence.

The tendency for dogs to want to be present and in the immediate vicinity of their master or mistress, sharpens the positive human perception. Dogs (or domesticated wolves) have shared human life, some would argue, from the time that our species moved from being hunter-gatherers to that of agriculturalists. They have played an integral part in our development and seem ‘always’ to have been there.

Our society’s habitual response to both ‘dog’ concepts are played out in practices that exhibit a strongly ritualistic character… whether that be in pet-training, feeding routines and patterns, the way we talk and confide in our pets or even the way we regard other people of possessing more or less admirable character and attachment (‘she’s a cat-lover’ - as opposed to ‘a dog-lover’…). Such multiplicity and ambiguity of imagery and response is replicated in attitudes to the idea of ‘god’. Similarly, this tension seems to have ‘always’ been present in the minds and imagination of humanity.
Physical & practical description

The room in which the ‘Fern 07’ performance took place contained a table with a laptop and projector, under which was an amplifier and CD player. A manhole in the floor was partially open, and from the gap there protruded a black plastic tail-form, with a white tip. On the floor were a television and two transistor radios. These were ‘untuned’ and emitted visual and aural white noise as background layers onto which other aural elements of the Gangster-Shepherds’ and viewer-participants’ movement, vocalisations and recorded sound were introduced.

In order to explore the tactics of context, imagery (stilled and moving) and evocation of adopted personae, I chose not to utilise performative vocality to the extent I had before, except in a more limited way. Hence, the performance was, in essence, silent except for some elements of spoken (shouted) sound.

The other sounds were those of the physical movements and an appropriated recording by Michael Marra – a song entitled ‘Julius’, which imagines the thoughts and attitudes of a dog of the same name, the pet of the ‘legendary’ Dundee singer, Dougie Martin. Julius laments that he was never allowed to be present, on stage, with his owner to experience his performances first-hand.

The structure of the performance was as follows:

a) The looped video, Fern 04, was projected on one wall.

b) Keeping a distance from the viewer-participants, the Gangsters entered and physically ‘mapped’ or commanded the space.
c) The Ears appeared outside the window and danced/ moved; this cued the central, liminal phase of the performance ritual.

d) The Gangsters now played/ danced in response to the projected film and so signalled a change in character from their previously aggressive state into a more open, companiable one.
e) The ex-Gangsters, now moved into intimate proximity with those around. In some cases, this involved physical contact.

f) The ex-Gangsters reversed their previous action of commanding the space, un-mapping and then exiting.

g) On the ex-Gangsters’ exit, there was a hiatus, with the film still looping.
h) The performance came to a close, as one of the ex-Gangsters, now partially divested of the defining elements of his previous character (black glasses and jacket) now entered, pushing a trolley with wine and snacks.

**Discussion of the work & conclusion**

Previous works had dealt in varying degrees with the status of viewers on the spectrum of viewer-to-participant. Here a more concerted conception was worked out… the people’s decision to move in response to the position of the projected image and the appearance of the ears at the window, the intimacy and physical touch-address, the incorporation of the wine and food, as an echo of the Gangster-Shepherd’s previous intimacy.

The earlier moving of furniture, as actors-in-the-performance in *Four Friends, Yellow* was developed here, in that such a tactic was applied to the viewers, in order to orchestrate them more integrally as participants-in-the-performance in that several tactics succeeded in enlisting and moving the participants (by implicit direction).

The layering of spaces, sound types (vocal, recorded, thrown-object, ripples of amusement) lent a greater degree of sensory orchestration to the piece. There was a parallel multivalence in the different facets of the dog-persona, carried in the several character elements. This seemed to successfully impart a further satisfying complexity and nuance that previous works did not possess.

To an extent before, but more so in the aftermath of *Fern 07*, I became aware of the elusiveness inherent in the performative work. I had set up two video cameras to record the work, but there were challenges and implicit limits to recording all of the action. The nature and scale of the space, set up as it was in-the-round (as opposed to proscenium-arched), in concert with the conceptual layers of performance (the video, the movement of the multiple Gangster-Sheepdogs, the Ears outside the window) made explicit that recording every aspect was impossible.

Particularly in the context of its predecessor, the video *Fern 04*, with its characteristic features of inclusion and evasion of the frame, I had decided not to brief the documenters about what was to happen in the script. As a result, and due to the additional fact that both of us who were the Gangster-Shepherds moved at various times to opposite sides of the room, there were significant parts of the
performance which were not recorded. This elusiveness is further reinforced in the final video, as footage from only one of the cameras is used.

This evasion of documentation’s grasp underlines the nature of this stage of the artistic work, emphasising the fact that performance is a transitory occasion, undermining the pretension that the captured record can achieve any more than only a very partial representation, and not a re-presencing of the original event. This also privileges the participative trust in the viewer-participants to interpret for themselves what they are experiencing.

On this occasion, viewer-participants’ subsequent responses were intriguing. There were occasions of laughter (e.g. at the appearance of the Ears outside the window and when the Gangsters started to engage physically, standing close beside or touching people). The laughter exhibited both amusement, surprise as well as slight degrees of nervousness at physical proximity or risk of being chosen. One person thought that on changing their characters, the Gangster-Sheepdogs should have kissed or embraced (undoubtedly, an attractive idea to be explored in future work). Another took the characters to be masons. Another was continually aware of a ‘larger beast’ (the protruding tail and the dancing ears outside communicating this). Others perceived these elements along with the mapping actions as a kind of expansion or ‘exploding’ of the space.

This also was accompanied by a repeatedly shared perception that, while only a relatively short fifteen minutes, the performance lasted much longer. And the final act of bringing in the trolley with wine and snacks evoked the carriage of the ordinary (even sacramental) into the art space, highlighting the ritual aspect of wine at an Opening and the incorporation, in this context, of time to reflect on and discuss what had gone before into the work itself.

**Doxologic**

‘You think those dogs will not be in heaven?
I tell you,
they will be there
long before any of us.’

(Stevenson, Robert Louis, quoted in Orme Masson, 1922; p168)
Himmel
Himmel

Sender & audience

FROM:
A Blind Man, with his black garb, white stick, dark glasses and wearing a blonde wig. Again he took the role of singer and mapper of the limits of the space in which he found himself, calling out from his darkness.

TO:
The people gathered in Tastatut, a small 2-room gallery situated in an old shop frontage in Taunusstrasse, Cologne on Friday 11th January 2008. Tastatut had been set up by local artist Monica Pantel, with an emphasis on showing performance and film work.

Issue to be addressed & concept

At this time, Cologne’s annual design festival was taking place. The theme for that year was ‘Himmel’ (‘heaven’ in English). The previous year’s theme had been ‘Hölle’ (‘hell’). The festival was city-wide with hundreds of events taking place in different kinds of locations.

‘Design is the conscious effort to impose a meaningful order…’ (Papanek, Victor, quoted in Margolin, 1986)

…planning, assembling and orchestrating appropriate elements to achieve a goal or purpose. At its broadest, it is an artful attitude that underlies every object and system that humanity creates, an intentional language that seeks to communicate specific messages about who we are, what we think, value and believe. On this level, it parallels Ritual as a mode of communication that shows (taste, sophistication, class etc.) in its performative use.

At this time there was considerable discussion in the media between the proponents of ‘Intelligent Design’ and the Neo-Evolutionists, as they rehearsed their
fundamental disagreements about intention and accident.

Two further quotes crystallised the emerging concept…

‘Good design goes to heaven; bad design goes everywhere.’ (Gerritzen & Lovink, 2001)

‘Designers are meant to be loved, not to be understood.’ (Barrell, 2007)

People of faith (who it may be noted in passing don’t all believe in the specific concept of Intelligent Design), nevertheless usually have some understanding of God as the creator of the heavens and the earth, and particularly they hold that, as the Creator, God is to be loved, if not fully understood.

The Judeo-Christian Bible speaks of this being expressed in an eternal song of the angels, singing the (triadic), ‘Holy, Holy, Holy’ in praise to God (Isaiah 6: 1-13). On a more local, that is terrestrial level, Isaiah tells of how the whole of creation, the sky, elements, mountains, rivers, birds, animals and humankind clap their hands and dance in ecological health (Isaiah 55: 12).

The composite picture of the heavens and the earthly creation is as an endless song and dance. The created order calls out, in song, articulating gratitude and wonder to their Creator. Also by addressing their Other, isolation is transformed into relationship, through faith.

Even secularly inclined humanity calls out in a not-dissimilar faithful desire, in both intentional and unintentional ways. If not in conventional faith and praise, still there exists a near-endless expression of desire for personal, communal and ecological relationship of well-being and returned, reconciled communicaton. Scientists launch time-capsules containing examples of knowledge and culture into deep space. Astronomers attentively listen to cosmic white noise picked up by their radio telescopes, hoping to discern the pattern and intent of intelligent life in the random mass of static. Any such discovery would obviously have significant ramifications for our philosophical and religious understanding of our place in the universe.

And even without similar conscious intent, TV and radio stations broadcast waves of light and sound that emanate from our globe in an unceasing mass performance that flows around the earth, into eyes and ears, as well as out and on and into the universe.
Consciously or otherwise, whether from a scientific or religious point of view, humanity expresses itself incessantly to others and to the heavens, waiting to hear a sign, a message or an affirmation. Daily on earth, we watch other people from our windows, from our vehicles, on our TV sets, musing on their living. We listen, even in our loneliest moments to CDs and late night radio, the sounds in the street or on the phone, to remind ourselves we are not alone, to touch and be touched. We want to know that, at least, this possibility remains.

**Formulation of thesis of the work**

Thus in ‘Himmel’, I wanted to explore the issues of communication as an affirmative Ritual of desire, an uncertainly faithful attempt to reach out beyond limitations, a self-revealing that shows more than it consciously knows or necessarily intends.

I found some precedent in works by Paul Carter, where he concentrates the repeated cry, if secularised and staged, of the Psalmist(s) – ‘How long?’, ‘Where are you?’ – or even Jesus’ own: ‘Why have you forsaken me…?’.

![Image](image_url)

\[145. ‘Trying To Start An Argument With God’, 1996, Paul Carter\]

In ‘Trying To Start An Argument With God’ (1996) and ‘Heaven Search Station’ (2000-01) he initiates a dialogue, the nature of whose response is uncertain. Faithful, fumbling, founnering and trying.
Certainly, if or when it comes, response defies the possibility of stable, visible representation outside its occurrence.

This hiddenness makes authentication by third parties problematic. The only reliable, and still imperfect, measure of its veracity being seen in subsequent action and praxis. Demonstrable, transformational consequences have to be relied on to guage the nature of the original experience, praxis proving the the idea, the ephemeral experience, the ultimately inadequate theory,

So, in 'Himmel', I set out to create a ritual expression of desiring, transmitted, heavenly, cosmic or earthly physical communication.

**Physical & practical description**

**a) The installation**

At one end of the main room of the gallery was a large table, approximately 1.5 metres square. This was covered by a large white tablecloth. Operating as the framing mechanism, first as an enclosed, visually-solid quasi-sounding box, secondly as a plinth-surface upon which objects and then my body were placed, and then opening up the formerly enclosed form, different conditions of this were played-out.

On either side, this table was flanked by two large incandescent lamps, of the type normally used in factories or workshops to give broad swathes of standard
illumination. Instead of being used in their normal configuration – suspended and shining downwards – they were here inverted and placed on the floor, shining upwards. Used this way they resembled illuminated plinths.

On top of each of these, there were two transistor radio forms, formed out of transparent tape.

Underneath the table, and initially invisible to the audience, were several pieces of electronic audio-generating equipment.

Down the sides of the room were seating benches. At the opposite end of the room, there were more benches, here arranged as a stepped configuration, rising to a height of around half the height of the room.

b) The performance

For the first part of the performance, the Blind Man was concealed under the table, improvising muted vocals, randomly tuning-in to radio stations, white noise or generating sounds by means of an electronic effects unit. Visual interest was subdued in favour of auditory imaging. The viewer-participants gathered, generally regarding this initial period as one where nothing was happening, lulled into taking the sounds as if they were so much background musak.
Raising his stick from below the table and tapping it suddenly on the wall behind (to the surprise of some viewer-participants), the Blind Man emerged and stood a few moments in silence. Returning under table, he turned on the two uplighters, then re-emerged to begin mapping the space, uncertainly, traversing it and touching the walls.

Again he returned beneath the table. More electronic and vocal sounds, including a sung fragment of a ‘Kyrie’.
Once again returning to visibility, the Man proceeded to lift the radio forms from where they were placed on top of the lights and carried these outwards, holding them ultimately beside the heads of arbitrarily selected viewer-participants. Each of these radios was then taken and set upon the table.

Once this was done, a gospel song (about having shoes in heaven), accompanied by awkward dancing on the spot, turning and tapping the stick in time to the song.

The Man headed back to the table and lay down on it, gathering the radios onto his torso and drawing the tablecloth up and around. In the process the audio infrastructure, previously concealed beneath the table, became exposed.

Now shrouded, he hummed a lullabye, before lapsing into silence. Stillness.
Discussion of the work & conclusion

The use of technological and vocal sound, even in such a small space, heightened the differing degrees of allurement and attention given to them. The electronic sound was largely ignored, when heightened by non-visibility. Until the Blind Man’s presence was visually registered, there was ambiguity about whether this was recorded or performed in the moment.

The extended pre-liminal phase of gathering incorporated people’s conversation into the work, as their voices became aggregated with the electronic sound. In this sense, the rituality of the Vernissage (the Opening) was appropriated into the work, introducing a significant level of joint-agency in the creation of the occasion. This characteristic of the Vernissage, as a communal meetings with other people of similar interest, became more explicit: the definition of a ‘ritual community’ being as important as the artistic exhibitional element.

As in ‘Fern 07’, there was interaction and physical engagement with the viewer-participants, though to a significantly lesser degree than in the previous work. It was noticeable, in the relative intimacy, that folk shifted position when I came close, to allow me to achieve my intended action, or when I moved into their peripheral vision.

In addition, through watching the video footage, the space as defined by both its given alignment and my intervention, created two ‘staging’ sections, one – the table end – solely my area of action; the other – jointly shared by all – which people moved about in extensively in the first half. While I had intended that nothing happen visually in this phase, in fact we could consider these viewer-participants’
movements and actions, even if spontaneous, as being as much part of the ritualised choreography as what followed.

The two registers of lighting were significantly at work: dim (curiously, a recurring theme in the 3 works I have created in Cologne!) and semi-dim, echoing aspects of the obscurity of the Blind Man’s persona. Was a more dream-like (?) ambience given by the uplighters, I wonder, which was less reliant for its theatricality on my subsequent actions?

I became aware of the contrasts of visibility and hiddenness, to engage ignorance, overlooking, lack of attention and their opposites. And consequently, also what this might entail for involvement of others than the artist. Perhaps degrees of attention and boredom play a form of trickery regarding what people think is going on: heaven, hell, or the merely mundane.

**Doxologic**

‘…Songs taken to the cleaners have big souls
roomy enough for cigarette and gunshot. 
Plainchant, birds in spiniflex, ululations,

every song that is must have a cleaner,
to let it know how God is in the details

public as the sky right now above you,
private as your own ears, listening.’

APOCALYPSE
Apocalypso
Apocalypso

Sacerludus has been a testamental work. A research process into the opening-up of ritual liminality, excavating and generating further possibility, alternating between praxis, reflection and then again to praxis, a cycle of re-cycling traditions of situated occasion and pointed evasion. Not a definitive statement of ceremonial commemoration of (perhaps) once-lived experience, but stations on the way to a crossing-over, an analogous tactics of process to sketch the bounds of a specific, biased being in art.

The text itself has been ritual - structured analogically to a typically tripartite phasing. First, Apocryphal gathering of everyday ritual insight, an analytic separation of tactics into their own frames. Then, a liminal, Gospal transition, juxtaposing theoretical expansion with art practice illustration of others’ work, appropriately-in and then appropriatively-at the end of each Gospal, by an indeterminate evocation of performatively hermeneutic texts, circling around Sacerludus’ artworks. This has been followed in Actual, the forming of a linking, bridging passage which sought to elucidate the predominant ritual ‘games’ and tactics I employed in the physically embodied artworks of the Epistolic section. Each of these dealt in closer, more specific detail with the contexts, concepts and manifestation of individual works.

Reflecting on the processual series of ‘sacred games’ played throughout Sacerludus has confirmed the presence and legitimacy of significant ritual tactics in contemporary art practice in general, as well as obviously in my own praxis. While I believe I have shown this is a productive area of research, even as importantly, these games have also revealed the limitations of such analogous application.

Perhaps the most important factor here has been the question of the relation between performative work and the character of its audience or participants: the possible positioning on the spectrum from the detached, passive ‘observer’, at one extreme, to the actively- and collaboratively-involved ‘viewer-participant’ at the other. This is perhaps the most crucial negotiation involved in determining to what extent any occasion (in art or elsewhere) can be regarded as merely possessing ritual characteristics or being itself, Ritual. Sacerludus’ works have uncovered a range of such positions as being possible, each dependent on a complex of temporal and
physical nuances and cueings. Retrospectively, one observation I have mused upon (and drawn from the Biblical source) is that significant worship (or ritual) does not seem to occur where there is an absence of some kind of preceding community. How might this apply to the ritual artwork occasion? Might such questions of chronological sequencing and the preconditions of efficacy areas that offer considerable scope for future research in relation to my own praxis?

Sacerludus’ research works have been characterised by the repeated tactics of bricolage, particularly the deployment of durational elements, the presence of which by implicating time emphasise an understanding of artwork as constructed occasion as opposed to discrete object.

The most frequent and deliberate use has been that of sonic material: the embodied artist, the viewer-participants, the spacial context and sound-generating objects and equipment. Understanding these as significant elements in the ritual artwork occasions of Sacerludus, this may be seen as a contribution to the expanding contemporary notion of the sculptural field in that it re-emphasises non-visual, yet physical (and thus sculptural) elements. Likewise, as a claim for the importance of embodiment in praxis, this has operated as a creative source of tension in relation to the growing tendency towards virtuality in the contemporary moment. This may be seen to operate as both contextual corrective and creative counter-balance. Again, this dialectic offers itself as an area for further research.

Beyond this, inasmuch as Sacerludus has (of necessity) not dealt in similar depth with everything that has been discussed, certain intersections have appeared as deserving more focused enquiry, not least and for example... on one hand, an attempt at delineating a fuller history of contemporary history of art practice as it engages ritual practice; or on another, the relationship of Christian theology, in particular, to art and art history with an emphasis on the contemporary moment.

**Apocalypsoïd amen**

In conclusion, Sacerludus proposes that there are often-concealed strata of commonality that both both Ritual and art praxis share in their purposeful purposelessness. The core dynamic of liminality has grown stronger in art of recent times particularly through contemporary artists’ preferred modes of practice, even beyond the more obviously performative dynamics of the collage, the found object and the installation.
Ritual, as a bricolaged, multi-media process, contains and enacts many art forms. Many artworks today and in the recent contemporary situation enact significant approaches that are, in kind and degree, many ritual forms.

The generative power and implicit political bias in Turner’s reading of liminality, thrown into art-ritual praxis aligns such praxis with a modestly, activistically-inclined disposition that engages the contemporary globalised art situation, acknowledging degrees of complicity with capitalism’s devouring commodification, yet unfolding tactical, oppositional sites in which the art congregation can surreptitiously insert significant degrees of self-defined and reflexively-critical agency – what Jeremy Biles, citing de Certeau, might call ‘guileful ‘ruse(s)’ (Elkins & Morgan, 2009, p190).

My aim in Sacerludus has been to delineate my art praxis as a tactical ritual process. I have not sought to conclusively posit exact correspondence of all art practice with the same, but nevertheless I might justifiably close this apostolic pilgrimage by paraphrasing George Orwell, in a modest litany.

The Cantor might proclaim, and the ritual assembly might sing back their refrain:

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cantor:</th>
<th>All art is ritual;</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>ALL:</strong></td>
<td>But some art</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>is more (Ritual) than others.</td>
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<td>Amen?</td>
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**Apocalypso: the unveiling**

‘From Friday 1st April to Monday 4th April 2011 at The Old Ambulance Depot, an exhibition entitled ‘Apocalypso - art praxis as a tactical ritual process OR Sacerludus (Sacredgame)’, will take place.

The Private View will be on Friday 1st April at 6.00 - 8.30pm at 77 Brunswick Street, Leith, Edinburgh EH7 5HS.

All are cordially invited to attend.’

This comprised the works submitted by Graham Maule on the occasion of his completed submission and examination for the award of a practice-led PhD degree by Edinburgh College Of Art.
The student, Graham Maule was supervised during his research by Prof. Jake Harvey – First Supervisor, and Dr. Neil Mulholland – Second Supervisor.

The Oral Examination took place on Monday 4th April 2011 in the Boardroom of Edinburgh College of Art. The Examiners were Dr. Sophia Lycouris – Internal Examiner, and Prof. John Newling – External Examiner. Dr. Andrew Patrizio fulfilled the role of Independent Chair.

The Examiners’ Joint Recommendation was that the degree be awarded if minor changes were satisfactory; these were completed by 4th July 2011 and subsequently approved.

This thesis thus represents, though does not re-presence, the outcome of this ritual process.
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