

What gesture can save the planet?

Imagining ritual - a preliminary step in ritual design



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1. Introduction

‘Ritual studies scholars are in the position of someone who teaches musical theory in a culture where music is seldom heard.’ Ronald L Grimes (1995, p. 23)

‘What gesture can save the planet?’ This question was put to several audiences and later published in the book *Rite out of Place* by the American-Canadian professor Ronald L Grimes (Grimes 2006, p. 147ff.). Grimes delivered his question tongue-in-cheek but not without serious intent. For according to scientists, planet earth is in a serious condition, mr. Grimes told. There is no shortage of ethical reprimands to do something about it, but a general awareness to really do so, has not yet sunk in. Why not look to ritual? Grimes brokered. In the past, ritual has served to bind people, sanctify kings, relate with the gods – the scholar Rappaport even thinks ritual *created* the gods – evidently, ritual has powerful potential.

‘What gesture can save the planet?’ Grimes is an eminent academic and one of the founders of Ritual Studies. Contrary to a popular and mainstream scholarly notion that ritual is traditional and conservative, he maintains ritual is creative and possibly innovative. Grimes likes to poke around, play the joker, but there is also a deep humanism that pervades his writing. Look at the Olympics, he points out. A ritual created in the 19th century with a massive global impact today.

‘What gesture can save the planet?’ In the end Grimes framed his question as a koan. A koan is a buddhist riddle you can’t solve rationally. You must sit with it. You cannot walk away from it. It’s truth must be *realized*, embodied.

This bachelorthesis is an exploration of the koan of Grimes. That brings me into the academic field of Ritual Design, a research project that has only recently been conceived within the young discipline of Ritual Studies. A recurring theme within *Ritual Studies* is the problem that a rapidly globalizing and modernizing world undermines or changes the meaning of traditional rites and symbols of identification. *Ritual Design* investigates, among others, how people (re)invent old or new rites and symbols in response to these developments.

‘What gesture can save the planet?’ The koan itself is too *‘preposterous’* to answer and will for that reason be confined to the more

achievable: *what contribution can ritual make to inspire people to a more sustainable livelihood?* This question will be applied to a case study of the Dutch environmental organization *De Kleine Aarde* that promotes sustainability.

The thesis by no means endeavors to design a ritual itself. According to Grimes, you cannot design a ritual from behind a desk. The act of Ritual Design is rather a process in which creative imagination of the potential of ritual and informed reflection based on literature are the first steps, to be followed by experimentation and critical evaluation (Grimes 2000, p. 83). The aim of this thesis is therefore to imagine the possibilities of ritual for *De Kleine Aarde* and prepare for an actual experiment.

In chapter two I will give justification of the method of my bachelorthesis. I will then turn to some practical information on *De Kleine Aarde* (chapter three). Following that I will explore three theoretical backgrounds in the work of Grimes, who is the lead scholar in my exploration of the literature. Here I will also evaluate Grimes's "critical engagement" with his object of study, a taboo for many of his fellow scholars (chapter four).

The theoretical exploration forms the thrust of this thesis and prepares the ground to ask *what is ritual?* (chapter five). I will investigate some types and characteristics of ritual and apply the literature to the case accordingly. To better understand the potential of ritual for *De Kleine Aarde* I will then ask *how does ritual work, what does it achieve?* (chapter six).

Finally, I will turn to the process of Ritual Design. *Can you invent ritual and how do you it?* (chapter seven) I will apply the literature to the case directly. With that I close my thesis with the conclusion where I will reflect on the theory and method of Ritual Design and answer my research question on the potential of ritual to inspire to a sustainable livelihood.

Intermezzo's

The thesis will be interlaced with intermezzo's that build on the literature explored. These intermezzo's are creative complements to the literature that do not fit its main development but do warrant placement with an eye on the research question. They are marked by this same grey background.

2. Method: consultative case study

To ground Grimes's question I will put it on a practical footing. My brother Martijn Messing is strategic adviser of *De Kleine Aarde* ("the small planet"), one of the oldest environmental NGO's in the Netherlands. It is the mission of the *Kleine Aarde* to inspire people to a more sustainable livelihood. Martijn was immediately hooked by Grimes's koan: "this gesture possibly is something for us", he told me.



Entrance of
De Kleine Aarde
Boxtel, 2008

"*What gesture can save the planet?*" will thus be transposed into the more practical question *what can ritual do to support De Kleine Aarde in its mission to inspire people to a more sustainable livelihood?* This question will be the theme in the exploration of the literature on Ritual Studies and Ritual Design. It is the challenge of this thesis to find an answer that is sufficiently practical for possible experimentation by *De Kleine Aarde* but also potentially universal for possible copying outside Holland.

Methodologically, this case study is a Ritual Studies consultation in the line of what Grimes developed in *Rite out of Place* (2006). Such a consultation is akin to applied anthropology and undertaken when there is "little time for sustained participant observation or protracted interviews [] This group or that institution is exploring an issue of ritual significance. I am invited to contribute a ritual studies perspective, sometimes to make recommendations or serve as a team member." (Grimes 2006, p. x.) Since I am expected to cough up advice informed by

knowledge and have little time for extensive fieldwork this method perfectly suits my bachelorthesis.

The consultation for this thesis will thus consist of an exploration of the literature on Ritual Studies and Design and an assessment of the potential what ritual can do for *De Kleine Aarde* based on both the literature and on short interviews with its strategic advisor Martijn Messing. I have also visited the ecopark of *De Kleine Aarde* in Boxtel, took a guide tour and investigated the website and brochures of the organization.

It is the hope of this thesis that the consultation will lead to an actual experiment with ritual design by *De Kleine Aarde*, thus furthering the embodiment of Grimes' koan and "who knows" perhaps establishing the first motions of his "preposterous" gesture. We will be sure to trace them back to those of the grand joker himself.

3. Background *De Kleine Aarde* ('the small planet')

De Kleine Aarde started with a magazine in 1972, following a cue from *the club of Rome*. This club published a report warning about the rapid depletion of natural resources due to growing human consumption. Hence the name of the organisation *De Kleine Aarde* ('the small planet'), signalling that planet earth - given the appetite of the human race - would soon become too small.



In 1973 *De Kleine Aarde* opened an eco-park of almost 3 ha in Boxtel, the Netherlands (near Eindhoven). In this park the organisation experiments with and educates about sustainable consumption. Anno 2008, the organization is supported by volunteers, donations and an annual subsidy of the Postcodeloterij (a national lottery). It also acquires project-based financing for initiatives both in- and outside the park.

A main tool in the education of *De Kleine Aarde* is the *global footprint*. According to this model each inhabitant of the world needs 1,8 ha available for energy, food, housing, etc. The average Dutch citizen uses 4,4

ha. *De Kleine Aarde* tries to persuade the Dutch to measure their footprint and then advises them how to reduce it by concrete steps.



Official logo of the main tool of education of *De Kleine Aarde*: *de mondiale voetafdruk* (the global footprint). The point where humanity overconsumed the earth's capacity was reached in 1987. Estimates are that we soon need three earths to feed, cloth and house all the world's inhabitants.

The model of the footprint was recently adopted by the European Commission. This implies considerable goodwill for the model with government agencies and *De Kleine Aarde* is now negotiating with the province of Brabant and several cities within this province to adopt the model for both the organisation itself as for employees and citizens.

A marketing plan of the province has divided Dutch citizens in several groups, such as 'the engaged' and 'the conservatives'. The engaged will probably already do something with sustainability or are easily persuaded. The challenge is to commit the conservatives, who will in all possibility only join in when their neighbours do. *De Kleine Aarde* asked to devise a ritual particularly aimed at this group.

Other important projects of *De Kleine Aarde* revolve around children: natural playgrounds for schools, education and 'experimenting nature' tours. The organization also stresses cooperation: *are you joining?*

4. Theoretical Background

Ritual Studies is a young field of study within the science of Religion. Its origin is often traced to Grimes himself. In 1977 he introduced the concept of Ritual Studies within the American Academy of Religion. The aim was to study ritual as ritual, that is to focus on ritual itself rather than study ritual as a means to understand culture or religion. A 'Journal of Ritual Studies' was started, which Grimes edited for several years (Quartier 2006, p. 23 and Grimes 1995, p. xi).

Ritual Design is a specialization within Ritual Studies. It provides academics with a focus lens while studying ritual: ritual creativity. Topics range from ritual



change within traditions to the design of new rituals such as secular funeral rites or the fictional employment of ritual on the internet (Second Life) or in literature (the Harry Potter series).ⁱ

My own focus in this bachelorthesis will be the writing of Grimes. A bachelorthesis is only a modest assignment and Grimes provides me with an efficient and respected outline of the discipline. Since I follow his method of *Ritual Studies consultation* (see chapter 2), it is only logical to focus on and investigate his academic style. Furthermore, the discipline of Ritual Studies is young and the research project of Ritual Desing only fledgling. I therefore believe it is more beneficial to critically test one approach rather than play out a rhapsody of alternatives.

To reduce the risk of one-dimensionality I will use textbooks of other writers in the background, most notably those of the recently died American professor Catherine Bell. To put the theory in perspective, I will often try to think through the consequences of what is stated for the researchquestion of this thesis: *what could ritual do to support De Kleine Aarde in inspiring people to a more sustainable livelihood?*

Professor Catherine Bell
died May 23, 2008, aged 55



Important books:
Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice (1992)
Ritual: perspectives and dimensions (1997) (2006)

Professor Ron Grimes
currently 65



Ritual Criticism (1990), *Deeply into the bone* (2000), *Rite out of place* (2006)

Style, academically speaking

The object of study in Ritual Studies varies from ritualization in animals (courting, territorial bickering) to daily interaction rituals (*‘how do you do?’*) and religious liturgy. The studied rituals are diverse: weddings, temple offerings, civil ceremonies, etc. The endeavor typically is *cross-disciplinary*, with the employment of ideas and methods from a wide range of disciplines, most often anthropology, sociology and theology (liturgy). (Grimes 1995, p. viii-xxi)

While this diversity is academically rich, it implies Ritual Studies has not yet a mature theory unique to itself. Rather, the discipline is *‘growing up in the midst of a number of alternatives’* who do not elicit wide consensus (Grimes 1995, p. 41). Often these alternatives are distinguishable to the specific disciplinary background of the author (Grimes 1995, p.x.).

Grimes proposes to safeguard this breadth of approaches while still developing a clear academic profile as Ritual Studies. Although he believes it may take several decades, he hopes the alternatives will turn out to be steps towards a single method that does not choose one of the theories exclusively but employs these theories in a way that integrates the *‘textualist interests of religious studies [and] the functionalist preoccupations of anthropology’*. (Grimes 1995, p x. and xvii). According to Bell, Grimes tries to bridge the well known distinction often made in academia between the interpretation of the meaning of ritual (*what does it symbolize?*) and the explanation of its mechanism and function (*how does ritual work and what does it effect?*) (Bell 1992, p. 53)ⁱⁱ.

Grimes himself prefers to speak of academic *style* rather than theory or method. Style here comprises of the personal stance of the scholar and the cultural form, i.e. the disciplines, he or she adopts (Grimes 1995, p. 24ff). In the following I will develop the aspects of Grimes’ own style.

In that style I recognize three important theoretical influences: postmodern anthropology, performance theory and biogenetic structuralism. Postmodern anthropology is a broad influence on his writing. Performance theory and biogenetic structuralism are marked by Grimes himself as



the two most promising theoretical currents in Ritual Studies (Grimes 1995, p. xv). These three are the 'cultural forms' of his style. They are complemented by a 'personal stance' of critical engagement. I will look into these aspects separately, beginning with personal stance.

Personal stance: *Critical engagement*

'Ritual Studies cannot dispense with either the confessional voice, which it inherited from liturgiology, or the analytic eye, bequeathed it by anthropology.' (Grimes 1995, p.4)

Grimes originally set out to become a Methodist minister, but earned his academic credentials as an anthropologist studying public ritual in North America (Santa Fe, New Mexico). He believes humanity can benefit from good ritual and refuses to separate 'the inspired body from the inquiring mind' (Grimes 1990, p. 1 en 2). He is committed to understand and help improve ritual and resists the academic tendency to see the object of study (ritual) as secondary to the study itself (ritual studies). *'Ritual can survive without ritual studies, though ritual studies cannot survive without ritual'* (Grimes 1995, p. xvi).

The result is a critical engagement with ritual. Grimes wants Ritual Studies to include an element of 'gift-giving' (Grimes 1995, p.19), to be of service to ritual performers. He also has no qualms to criticize his own culture, which he sees as ritually impoverished to the detriment of its citizens. Though this engagement raises eyebrows with fellow scholars who aspire to be more value-neutral, it has firm scholarly foundations, as we will see.

I will now look to the three main theoretical influences in the work ('style') of Grimes. Each of these influences has consequences for Ritual Design, which I will discuss as well.

Theoretical background (I): *Postmodern anthropology*

Grimes' education in anthropology stood under major influence of Victor Turner. Turner was in the forefront of the so-called 'postmodern turn' that was - and still is - going on in anthropology and widely beyond. A lot of



Grimes' thinking can be understood when we look at the tenets of this postmodern turn, of which Turner and Grimes are just one of the troopers.

In a more general notion the postmodern turn is best understood as a reaction against the project of *modernity*.ⁱⁱⁱ This project started in the 15th-16th century and is equated with the striving for rationality and autonomy, i.e. freedom from tradition and natural want. There was a widespread belief that scientists could uncover absolute truth by formulating universally applicable laws in both the natural and social sciences. Realization of these laws in society was deemed Progress.

After WOII intellectuals increasingly made the so called *postmodern* turn. They blamed the modern believe in universal truth for the madness of war and oppression unleashed by political ideologies. They pointed out the idea of Progress was ruthlessly exploited as a sham for western colonization and imperialism. Furthermore, modernity was held accountable for mass-scale disruption of societies and destruction of the natural environment. In the eyes of postmodern intellectuals, it were the inventions of modern science that had provided the tools for these crimes.

Thus ensued a deep scepticism toward the scientific aspiration for universal truth. Instead, a stress on diversity was made as well as on the impossibility of value-free research. Scientists who made the postmodern turn (mostly social scientists) acknowledged how deep their work was influenced by their own underlying assumptions and anticipated the possible impact their work could have.

In anthropology the postmodern turn resulted in a different approach to culture and also religion. In the modern notion, cultures had been treated as unified wholes with consistent beliefs and values (Tanner 1997, p. 25-37). Religion and ritual were studied with an eye on their social function in the society or culture at large (Bell 1992).

Theorists who made the postmodern turn, could no longer see cultures as such wholes. On the contrary, they emphasized the continuous struggle within cultures about which beliefs and values could prevail. A modern textbook version of a culture was only the 'official' version, the



version of the dominant actors within a culture. Postmodernists tried to look underneath that surface and became interested in cultural change and counter-cultures (e.g. Victor Turner).

Not only did postmodern anthropologists begin to speak about *cultures* instead of culture, the same logic was applied to religion. In their view there was not such a thing as `Christianity` or `Islam`. Islam in Indonesia was different from islam in Marocco and the islam of a muslim cleric differed considerably from that of a muslim merchant. Each believer had a personal interpretation and `feel` of a religion dependent on his or her personal circumstances. As times and cultures changed, so did the meaning of ideas and symbols attributed to a religion by people. Hence, postmodernly inclined anthropologists now speak of `great tradition` - the `textbook-version` of a religion as comprised by scholars - and `little tradition` - the local versions of a religion as practiced by the various believers (Bowen 2005). Each local version has a meaning in itself and not just a social function in a society of people.

We can now see how Grimes's interest in ritual creativity fits into a larger epistemological project. In his view there is only `local` ritual, which he calls rites. Each performed rite is a unique creation determined by the circumstances of the concrete place, time and attending persons. Liturgists or ritual designers may concoct their own, ideal versions of a rite, but they then confuse `what the act is supposed to mean [ü] with what it actually does mean` to the people involved (Grimes 1995, p.6). People will always give their own (or no) meaning to the rites they participate in. For Grimes ritual creativity thus becomes not the exception, but the rule both in and outside religious traditions.^{iv}

The acknowledgement of this creativity forms the basis for his critical engagement. In Grimes's view, a ritual scholar does not try to impose his or her meaning of a rite, but negotiates between the conflicting versions of those involved (liturgists/ritual designers, practitioners and attending public alike). He or she does this by investigating what a rite does, which is the basis for a critical reflection on what the rite was intended to do. The basis for criticism is the effect of the rite and the

engagement stems from the epistemological conviction that there is no universal but only local meaning (Grimes 1990, p. 1-2 and 53).

The postmodern turn offers a second justification for Grimes's engagement. As stated above, postmodern scientists are keenly aware of the effect their work might have on the world they study. Grimes experienced this effect directly during his fieldwork when he encountered practitioners who took religious inspiration from the work of scholars such as Jung or Eliade (Grimes 1995, p 10). He also repeatedly points to the cascading effect of ethnographic research, where scholarly reports about - for example - the Snake dance of Hopi indians triggers popular interest and consequently tourism that then threatens to wash out the original meaning of the performed rite (Grimes 2006b, p. 7-15). If we scholars have this transforming impact on the object of study we try to understand, states Grimes, we better engage ourselves with this impact from the start. His program for doing so is an open, but critical engagement of scholars with ritual where they and ritual practitioners work together on the revision and creation of more effective ritual (Grimes 1990, p 1-2).

In sum, where Grimes's plea for scholarly engagement with ritual creativity is met with considerable reservation of fellow scientists, this is often due to an epistemological divide. The latter have, so to speak, not made the postmodern turn on either the idea that (1) the meaning of cultures, religions and thus rituals is continuously recreated and fundamentally fragmented, (2) scientists alter the reality they study.

Nonetheless, even in a modern light there is no need to raise suspicion against engagement of ritual scholars with their object of study. Although their research is not value-neutral - it is committed to more effective ritual - in principle it has no further personal (religious) agenda. The critical engagement is directed on the revision and construction of more effective rites, regardless of their content (religious or secular).

So, `what gesture can save the planet?`

Postmodern thinking suggests a ritual designer must not aspire to dictate his or her own meaning. The gesture or ritual must be designed with an eye on the principle that it will have different meanings to all those involved, dependent on their own cultural, social, religious or personal backgrounds.

Preaching evolution – a gesture to save the world?

Intermezzo

One of my first exploration of Grimes' koan brought my attention to the American couple Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd. The first is a paleontologist and science writer, the second a former christian pastor. In 2002 they sold all their belongings and they have since been traveling North America to preach the 'universe story'.



This story is about the unfolding of the universe from 14,5 billion years ago to now. Barlow and Dowd view the scientific version of this unfolding as a 'sacred story'. They believe humanity has a role to play in this story, a role we have to discover by engaging ourselves fully.

Both are called 'evolutionary evangelists' and one of their main aims is to inspire people to a more environmentally sustainable livelihood, to be connected to the universe and life (scientifically, we are all family). Potential for a gesture to save the world?



Their itinerary in itself is a ritual, preaching wherever they are invited. They also use ritual in their preachings, for example a star dust ceremony to communicate that the most important building blocks of our bodies have been made in the life and subsequent death of a star.

However, if one follows the postmodern line, this approach is too modern. Barlow and Dowd tell 'the truth'. You have to buy the story to be inspired. If you don't understand, accept or feel a connection with science you will not be 'transformed'. Furthermore, a lot of theorists firmly within the evolutionary paradigm think a possible causal direction in the universe is not the same as a spiritual purpose (Buskes 2006, 403-430). In sum, this approach probably leaves too little space for diverse interpretations, feelings and inclinations. It is too filled in.

Theoretical Background (2): performance theory

Part and parcel of the postmodern turn is, as we have noted, a deep skepticism towards theory. Theory is not seen as an accurate reflection of reality, but as a new creation of it. This rings all the more true with ritual, which according to Grimes, but also Bell, is something not just of the mind, but of the entire body. Intellectual activity - in the shape of a theory - will fail to understand it. We need 'a sense of ritual' (Grimes 1995).

To acquire this sense of ritual, Grimes proposes we look to drama, dance, music, in short: the arts. For whatever is happening in ritual it is more than just words and text. It is also about movement and silence, about tone of voice, timing and sequence. It is about colour and objects, about rhythm and space. All these dimensions of ritual elude a theorist behind the desk and that's why Grimes likes to take his students to a ritual lab, where they experiment with how it feels to paint their face and embody a ritual role. Grimes: 'Studying ritual will be fruitful if we recognize that we can only articulate its meaning after we have been grasped by its sense.' (Grimes 1995, p.23).



Lakewood Church Houston (16.000 seats)

Performance theory suggests ritual is not only about content, but also about who and how the ritual is performed. Each ritual is different just as a play of Shakespeare can be different dependent on the director, the actors, the decor or even the public.

This physical, action-minded approach has been dubbed *performance theory*, although according to Grimes it is more 'a set of metaphors_ that encourage comparison of ritual with other types of human activity. A main name in this theory is the theater director Richard Schechner, who wrote the elementary book *Performance Theory* (1988). Schechner compared ritual with theater and called both a 'showing of a doing_' (Grimes 1995, p. xv). The word *performance* refers to the emphasis on the doing, on the process rather than the content. Words like 'I now pronounce you husband and wife_' or 'I declare the session closed_' do not merely refer to the meaning of the words, they actually *perform* something, they bring about a change in reality (Bell 1997, p. 68).

Performance fits in nicely with the above mentioned postmodern idea that every rite is an unique creation. The same rite is different each time it is performed dependent not only on the main actors, but also on the decor, the public and factors beyond reach of those involved such as the atmosphere in the city or political events in the wider world. Not even the most sophisticated ritual theorist can control these factors. Consequently, the theorist who analysis a rite is confined by Grimes to a role similar to that of a literary critic (Grimes 1990). He or she can reflect on the effect, but the performance itself is an art that cannot be fully grasped by the mind alone.^v

So, 'what gesture can save the planet?_'

Performance theory advises to think of all the senses whilst construing ritual and not just the rational mind, that is reached by text. Moreover, it urges the ritual designer to get from behind his or her desk and to explore the possibilities of ritual in the *doing*, in the performance. Hence, the idea of a ritual lab to experiment with space, objects, gestures, symbols, etc.

A consequence for the consultation to *De Kleine Aarde* would be to first try out ritual possibilities on a small scale and evaluate the outcome. A good idea of what ritual can do, can only be formed when it is experienced, sensed, in the performance and not just by reading about it in a thesis.

Theoretical Background (3): *biogenetic structuralism*

The third influence in Grimes thinking and a more recent development in his 'style' is his attention to so-called *biogenetic structuralism* (Grimes 1995, p. xv). This theory combines an interest in human biology with evolutionary concepts and structural linguistics, hence the name biogenetic-structuralism (Grimes 2006, p. 138-140).

The project is to understand what happens in the brain and nervous system with ritual activity. The neuropsychologist d'Aquili, for example, researches the 'god-spot' - a place in the brain that is activated when in deep meditation (d'Aquili and Newberg 1999). Other theorists trace ritual's roots back to human evolution. In this view, ritual must have had survival value as an effective communication tool that promoted group-bonding or mediated social hierarchies (Grimes 2006, p. 138-140).

Biogenetic structuralism is part of what Dutch Socrates' prize winner Chris Buskes called the most important conceptual revolution in modern science: the evolutionary paradigm. It offers us an explanation of life without turning to the supernatural. It claims that our being is deeply imbued by the logic of our evolutionary history that continues to have a huge impact on our daily lives. Evolutionary thinking suffered a serious setback after World War II when the nazi's abused the concept, but the so-called 'modern synthesis' of genetics and Darwinian evolution has reestablished the paradigm. In every academic discipline it's influence is being felt with new research programs sprouting up inspired by it's concept (Buskes 2006). Biogenetic structuralism is one such example within the area of Religious Studies.

Though the research project of biogenetic structuralisms is still young, for Grimes it opens an opportunity to put Ritual Studies on a more 'hard_' scientific footing. Its explanations would provide a welcome and clear supplement to the more elusive interpretation of meaning in anthropology and performance theory.

It would give us an understanding why humans are so sensitive to symbols or why ritual can have such profound effects on the human psyche. If ritual behaviour is hardwired into the



human being, ritual itself is only a 'surface transform of [] deep, or preconious, structures_ (Grimes 2006). Whatever knowledge we gain from these structures, will benefit the way we organize our ritual.



Animal ritualization

Most animal combat within species ends without mortal wound because one of the combatants signals defeat by exposing the belly or throat.

According to biogenetic structuralists human ritual is an elaborate version of this symbolic behavior among animals.

Grimes provides two big arguments to label biogenetic structuralism as a promise. The first is the working of our biochemistry. Pills without any known medical substance can have real effect on patients just because they *believe* in them, because the pill has meaning to them (the placebo effect). In the same line, it is known that fear or stress can stop or damage bodily functions while comforting, soothing or cheering can release chemicals in the brain like endorphin that reduce pain (Grimes 2000, p. 33-36). Effective rites possibly induce similar effects, at least proper research should be able to show or disprove them. A second argument is the similarity between ethnographic testimony and propositions of biogenetic structuralism about the survival value of ritual - such as the way ritual can manage a group's relation with its environment (Grimes 2006, p. 139).

However, Grimes mentions also reservations. Most importantly, the biogenetic structuralists look to universal explanations of ritual, explanations that are valid for all rites and all people. Befitting to his postmodern background, Grimes points out that their claims may be valid for some rituals, such as trance dance or meditation, but not for all. Rituals are neither necessary adaptive in a good sense, *'one can ritually destroy an ecosystem as surely as one can ritually redeem it'* (Grimes 2006, p. 140). Finally, anthropological research shows clearly that some cultures have more ritual than others. So, while Grimes evaluates the idea that ritual is hardwired and evolutionary functional as stimulating, he nuances them as well. The claims must be made more tolerant for local differences.



Oranjeekte (Dutch soccerfans)

'Even if people avoid formal rites and stage plays, they cannot escape ritualizing and dramatizing'_ (Grimes 2006, p. 137-138).

It is easy to see how biogenetic structuralism offers an extra foundation for Grimes critical engagement with ritual. If ritualized behaviour indeed permeates our being, we cannot escape it even if we loose the familiar and traditional ways of doing so. Grimes: *'If, for instance, people do not initiate their youth into adulthood, young peers will (perversely in al likelihood) initiate themselves'_ (Grimes 2006, p. 137). One has only to look to the plethora of youth subcultures to see this point. Ritual scholars then, in the eyes of Grimes, can help a society to reinvent ritual when the traditional forms are corroded. There is a biological *need* for it. People will always search for ways to extinguish this need or suffer - knowingly or unknowingly - from the lack of them.*

Furthermore, Grimes thinks ritual designers could perhaps be capable of imagining ways to supplement medical science, adding a meaning to medicines that amplifies their function. This would offer us *'a middlepath between magic and science'*, *'the best of both worlds'* (Grimes 2000, p. 33 and 36). One that is more inspiring than the clinical gaze of doctors and more comprehensible than magic.

So, *'what gesture can save the planet?'*
 Biogenetic structuralism encourages us to look to symbol for such a grand task as saving the planet from destruction. We have a talent ('competence') for ritual that is only waiting to be activated and could turn out to be far more effective than just education. In addition, biogenetic structuralism suggests the gesture is in potential already 'out there', in our own physique or ways we instinctly communicate meaning. A ritual to be devised best builds on these - universal - instincts, the more so if its aspirations are global.

Subconclusion and evaluation

In exploring Grimes' academic style we have noticed three important theoretical influences. *Postmodern anthropology* informs there are no fixed norms and values in a society or culture. There is a continuous struggle going on which norms and values prevail and ritual activity is a conscious or subconscious effort to promote one version of them. Scientists influence this struggle with their interpretations. Furthermore, the meaning of ritual is personal, dependent on the personal circumstances of those involved. Thus, those interested in ritual design best abstain from dictating their own meaning and imagine a ritual that is open to multiple interpretation.

Performance theory stipulates that ritual is not something just of the rational mind, but of the entire body. It puts primacy on practice, on action. A keen ritual designer is therefore mindful of all the senses and shall preferably not devise a ritual with a mere focus on text. He or she also refrains from the idea that ritual can be imagined solely behind a desk and will instead seek active cooperation with performers as well as a critical reflection of their performance.

Biogenetic structuralism encourages any would-be ritual designer with the notion that ritual behaviour is deeply rooted in the human being. It urges the designer not to imagine a ritual that is too rational and high brow, but rather seek connection with this natural inclination towards ritual. This inclination is recognizable in all kinds of behaviour that is not culturally framed as ritual, but does form a potential basis for the construction of it.

This all adds up to Grimes' plea for a critical engagement of ritual scholars with ritual. If it is true that ritual - even traditional religious ritual - is a continuous recreation of meaning in a changing time and culture, and if scholars indeed influence the process, they best engage themselves openly. They should investigate and communicate their own preferences so there can be no hidden agenda.

Next, it is the job of the ritual scholar to mediate between the diverse interpretations of meaning that those involved in ritual attribute to a ritual performance. Main questions thus are what effect the ritual *intended* to have and what effect it eventuated in *practice*. To acquire a real sense of what ritual can do, Ritual Studies probably also best complements

ethnographic research, which is descriptive of practice, with experimental research, which is constitutive of practice in a playful environment such as a lab - although it is too early to say whether these experiments pay off (Grimes 1995, p. 20-22).

In assessing Grimes' academic style we have to distinguish between the broad research program he envisions for the discipline of Ritual Studies and the personal preferences with which he conducts his own research.

The broad research program he envisions is academically rich with an emphasis on cooperation between multiple disciplinary backgrounds and thinking 'out of the box'. This suits a young discipline that is still only scouting the terrain of its study. In addition, it combines two of the most important contemporary intellectual projects: the postmodern turn and the evolutionary paradigm^{vi}. The first cherishes the creativity and openness of all human activity while the second emphasizes its causality and understandability. Grimes' solution to view the biological mechanics of ritual as a backstage of ritual and the creative performance as the frontstage seems to give ample credit to both ways of intellectual thinking without diminishing their import (Grimes 2006, p. 139).

The personal preference of Grimes' research is tilted to ritual creativity outside the religious traditions. It is only natural that this raises suspicion and skepticism among a majority of scholars on ritual who seem still preoccupied with the study of the major religious traditions. For myself, I wholeheartedly support his call to '[u] integrate search (in the spiritual sense) with research (in the scientific sense)' (Grimes 1995, p. 290). I find the claim of biogenetic structuralists that ritual is deeply rooted in our psyche convincing. Since traditional ritual is in my experience fading, it is only valuable to society that ritual scholars assist individuals and groups in devising new ways of 'being ritual', whether secular or religious.



Pigs for the ancestors - a gesture to save the world?

Intermezzo

Another prominent scholar who wrote about a ritual to save the world was Roy A. Rappaport. In his study *Pigs for the Ancestors* (1968) this former President of the American Anthropological Association expounds on the function of ritual in maintaining the ecosystem. According to him ritual has an unique capacity to instill a cosmology (worldview) in people that affects their behavior also outside ritual (Bowie 2000, p 118-127).

In his last book he maintains that present society's worldview is 'monetized', based on narrow Cost-Benefit analysis, thus not in sync with the ecology and very capable of destroying it. He advocates a 'postmodern science' that transforms this cosmology into one concordant with the natural sciences that show man as integral part of the planet's ecosystem (Rappaport 1999, p. 451-461).

He even goes further. With an eye on our evolutionary history, he regards mankind as 'that part of the world through which the world as a whole can think about itself' (Rappaport 1999, p. 461). Scientists have an almost religious duty to tell this deep truth that 'claims' you when you grasp it. (Rappaport 1999, p. 459)

In Rappaport's mind ritual is uniquely fitted to help generate the transformation. Just as ritual was capable to 'forge' the image of God 'out of the power of language and emotion', so can ritual forge a new cosmology where man feels part of the world's ecosystem and acts accordingly (Grimes 2006, p. 140-144).

Although Rappaport claims to be in line with postmodernism, this is only concerning one aspect: scientists influencing the world they study. For the rest he employs a thoroughly modern view: there is a universal truth and societies are integrated wholes. Along this line it is possible to devise a ritual to change these norms and values 'top-down'.

However, following the postmodern line people will probably never accept one 'truth'. Rappaport's approach is then too content minded and leaves too little space for multiple interpretations.



5.a. What is ritual?

Now we have explored some important theoretical foundations of ritual studies we can ask: *what is ritual?* As we noted in chapter four, a theorist who has taken the postmodern turn will put forward a definition only with hesitation and reluctance. A definition supposes a scholar can mirror the reality he or she studies in text, which is presumed to be impossible; a definition will always be a recreation of reality. Furthermore, the ambition to define 'in casu' ritual, suggests there is one kind of phenomenon out there in the world that is continuously occurring with the same characteristics. That ambition clouds our view on reality, the postmodern idea runs, because reality is not a clockwork mechanically repeating itself but always changing and in flux.

Regardless of this fundamental theoretical problem, if we want to speak sensibly about Ritual Studies or Design, we need some sort of definition to demarcate what we are talking about. For this reason postmodern thinkers on ritual, such as Bell and Grimes, have come up with ingenious solutions.

Bell proposes we choose a verb ('ritualization') rather than a noun ('ritual') so as to make clear we are talking about action, something that is always ongoing and changing instead of fixed. In her opinion, this ritual action is 'designed and orchestrated to distinguish and privilege what is being done in comparison to other, usually quotidian activities'. An act of 'setting some activities off from others' (Bell 1992, p. 74). Grimes notes this way of typifying ritual in general as an act 'of marking off' is a fair consensus among scholars (Grimes 2006, p12).

Grimes himself devised a sophisticated definition by distinguishing four concepts when thinking about ritual. The first is *rite* (Latin: ritus). This refers to 'a specific enactment located in concrete times and places'. The second is *ritual* (Latin: ritualis), which points to 'the general idea of which a rite is a specific instance'. The third is *ritualizing*, that is 'the act of cultivating or inventing rites' and the fourth *ritualization*, 'activity that is not culturally framed as ritual but which someone, often an observer, interprets as if it were potential ritual.' (Grimes 1990, p. 9-10).

In this qualification of ritual we can comfortably recognize the postmodern notion that no event and thus no ritual is the same, while there still is the possibility to talk about a general category of ritual. *Rite* denotes the unique, local event of – say – a holy mass and *ritual* the idealized version of this mass that in itself does not exist. No holy mass is in reality ever the same.

Moreover, Grimes’s qualification safeguards the idea we saw in biogenetic structuralism¹, that ritual is a kind of activity so deeply rooted in human biology that people cannot help doing it. *Ritualization* is the word with which we can recognize ‘ritual-like’ behaviour (such as the natural inclination to stick to a certain way to answer the phone) where *ritualizing* stands for the process to deliberately make a rite out of such behaviour. Ritualizing also covers the cultivation of a rite itself, this follows the line of Bells advice to look for a verb to denote ritual action, what Grimes would call the *performative* aspect of ritual. Ritual is always about doing something, about action.²

Finally, the advantage of Grimes’s distinction between ritualizing and ritualization above the mere ritualization of Bell, is that we are able to distinguish between deliberate acts of ritual and subcategories between ritual and ordinary activity. To Grimes general definition I would add the notion of J.Z. Smith, a historian of religion, according to whom ritual is a focus lens on what is important (Quartier 2006). This reduces the vagueness of seeing ritual as ‘an act of marking off’.

For the purpose of this thesis my general work definition of ritual will then be: *ritual is doing something with the objective that the act is ‘larger’ than the act itself.* With ‘larger’ I mean more important than just the functionality of the act.

I call it a work definition because we need an easy to understand notion of what ritual is to cooperate with ritual practitioners or organizations such as *De Kleine Aarde* who are interested in Ritual Design. During research, among academics, we can then use the distinctions of Grimes which are probably too complicated to use outside academia. This work definition probably is also no surprise for a popular notion of what

ritual is. When asked, my brother (advisor of *De Kleine Aarde*) defined ritual as ‘an act to which people attribute meaning’.

All in all, we are left with the impression that ritual is much about symbolism. Thus, if we are looking for ritual to support *De Kleine Aarde*’s in inspiring people to a more sustainable livelihood, we must look for an act that connects people with something larger than the act itself, something that is important to them. This probably implies we must look for something that is ‘larger’ than sustainable consumption itself for in the main people have not yet acted as if this mattered greatly to them.



¹ See chapter four on biogenetic structuralism.

² See chapter four on performance theory.

A TV-show – a ritual to save the planet?

Intermezzo

With the word *ritualization* Grimes denotes activity that looks like ritual although it is not meant like ritual. This activity can be interesting material to actually cultivate or invent ritual, which he calls *ritualizing*.

One probable example of Netherlands are the tv-good cause. The first dikes burst, but it really show *Open het Dorp* Dutch presenter Mies national sentiment to gather a significant amount of money that served to open a special village for disabled people.



ritualization in the shows to raise money for a started in 1953 after the got started in 1962 with the (‘open the village’). The Bouwman whipped up

Ever since, tv-shows popped up after natural disasters such as the food crisis in Africa 1984 and the tsunami disaster in Asia in 2004. The last disaster was the inspiration for a tv-show that raised the record breaking amount – for Dutch history – of 72 million Euros on a total sum of 112.144.000 Euro.



Subsequently, the Dutch prime minister Balkenende felt moved to praise the feeling of national unity that transpired in and around the show.

These tv-shows are in a way, like theater and ritual, about the ‘showing of a doing’ (see performance theory in chapter four).^{vii}

De Kleine Aarde is looking for ritual with a particular eye on convincing ‘conservatives’ who unlike the ‘engaged’ are difficult to induce to change. Unless their neighbours are changing too.

A national TV-show could generate a stir where ‘the engaged’ form the vanguard, added by a number of willing celebrities, until there is momentum where even ‘the conservatives’ want to join in to be part of the national sentiment. In stead of donations, the show would revolve around individual commitments to reduce one’s footprint. In lieu of a counter that shows the amount of money raised, the counter would start at the footprint Holland actually has to count down according to the amount that is made in each commitment. A televised gesture to the rest of the world.

5.b Ritual types, dimensions and characteristics

When thinking about ritual, both Bell and Grimes emphasize not to confuse a general idea or definition of ritual with specific types, characteristics and dimensions of ritual. Grimes proposed a system of sixteen *types* of ritual, varying from rites of passage, worship to interaction rites (Bell 1997). He also advises to distinguish different *dimensions* of ritual activity, ranging from place, objects, sounds etc. (Grimes 1995). In addition, Bell notes *characteristics* of ritual-like behaviour and invariance (Bell 1997).

Although all these distinctions are interesting and important for ritual design, there is not enough time to delve in all of them in this bachelor thesis. I will therefore select the ones who seem to me the most promising to map the possibilities of ritual for *De Kleine Aarde*.

Ritual types

Bell lists six different types of ritual activity in her book *Ritual: Perspectives and dimensions* (1997). Her classification is compact and offers me an efficient possibility to look briefly into these types with the intent to see whether they might be of interest in what ritual can do to support the mission of *De Kleine Aarde*. What type of ritual would be suitable to inspire people into a more sustainable livelihood?

I will look into five of the six types of Bell, leaving out the type rites of affliction, directed at the spirits, because this type is too religious and not suitable to employ for a general public. I will also add one type of rite – interaction rite – classified by Grimes because my assessment is this rite is of value to *De Kleine Aarde*, which I will explain when developing the type.

▪ Rites of passage

Rites of passage commemorate life-changing events such as births, funerals, weddings and initiations into adulthood or social groups such as the US Marines Corps boot camp or a student fraternity. Often rites of passage demarcate biological events (sexuality, maturation, death, etc.) but according to some scholars they are really attempts of humans to regain control over what they do not control (Bell 1997).

A rite of passage that is of particular interest is the *pelgrimage*. Scholars believe rites of passage effect transitions both in the social sphere and in the psychological sphere. In a pelgrimage, scholars recognize these transitions according to a model of Van Gennep in three stages. The first stage is a separation of the pilgrim from his or her familiar surroundings. For a certain period the pilgrim will leave home and social identity behind to enter the second phase, that of the journey, in which he or she charts unknown territory and suffers separation and the difficulties of travel.

The third phase is the culmination of the pelgrimage, where the pilgrim arrives at a place of special, even sacred importance. He or she will then return home a-changed, with a new identity, unwilling to slide back into old, familiar patterns (Bell 1997).

De Kleine Aarde wants people to change their unsustainable livelihood into a sustainable one. The main tool in her education is the *global footprint*, a model to calculate what an individual or organization consumes set against what would be sustainable (see chapter three). On a first glance the pelgrimage offers a potential template as a rite of passage to a more sustainable livelihood. At the end of the rite people would commit themselves in a fundamental way to sustainability, refusing to slide back into old patterns and probably advocating social change as well.

At the moment pelgrimage enjoys popular attention. Former religious pelgrimages such as the route to *Santiago de Compostella* are reinvented in a secular way by people who mark the pelgrimage as a new stage in their lives (Turner 1998 and Post, Pieper and Van Uden 1998). For example, the German actor and tv-presenter Hape Kerkeling made a pelgrimage after an illness and documented it in a book. This book has found wide appeal and his pelgrimage emulation.³

³ Kerkeling, H. (2006) *Ich bin dann mal weg: Meine Reise auf dem Jakobsweg*. Published by Malik, München.



This suggests pelgrimage as such is adaptive and its symbolism easy recognizable for people who are not necessarily religious. With regard to *De Kleine Aarde*, there are symbolic similarities (walking - footprint). However, rites of passage require a willingness to participate and thus a high amount of assent to the importance of the rite. This would make this type probably unfit for *De Kleine Aarde* which aims to reach for the 'conservatives' and not just for those who already feel connected.

Nevertheless, if we think of ritual as 'the showing of a doing'⁴ there might still be potential in this rite, at minimum as a media message.

If *De Kleine Aarde* finds high profile media figures to undertake a pelgrimage to a destination as a *rite of passage* towards sustainability, this could potentially generate considerable interest. Especially if the pelgrimage is not a one time event, but for example undertaken at the beginning of each new month by a new celebrity.

Such a pelgrimage offers a number of possibilities. First, it would offer people who are wrestling with doubts whether and how to change their lives, a stimulus to make the change and follow in the 'footsteps' of the celebrities' (whether in mind or real). Second, people who are less willing to change, would get a clear sign of the importance people attribute to the issue, communicating the message of *De Kleine Aarde* in a way that sheer warnings about immanent doom cannot.

A potential risk of such undertaking would be superficiality. If the pelgrimage is seen as just another media stint, it would probably look ridiculous and undermine the very idea of pelgrimage as well.

▪ Calendrical Rites

Another basis genre Bell describes are rites that celebrate not a once-in-a-lifetime event, but recurring moments according to the calendar. Like rites of passage these rites give a sense of order and control over the passage of time by giving meaningful definitions to it. Calendrical rites are divided in seasonal celebrations that celebrate the changing of the natural seasons

⁴ Performance theory, see chapter four.

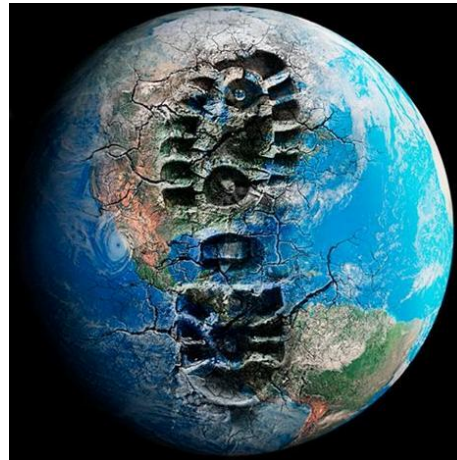
(e.g. harvest day) and commemorative celebrations that recall important events (Christmas, the Fourth of July in America) (Bell 1997).

In contemporary society calendrical rites form a frequent venue for what Grimes calls 'ritualizing', the deliberate act of inventing ritual. There is an ever growing 'day of the' _ where not so much as a historical event is celebrated but a certain issue. Examples range from 'the day of the teacher', 'the day of dialogue', 'the day of poetry', etc. It is not uncommon that the installation of such a day has a commercial motive, for example the motive of lingery shops to sell more décolleté's on 'the day of the décolleté'.

Concerning *De Kleine Aarde* the so called *Earth Day* on the 22 of April comes in mind. This day was started in the United States to raise awareness for the Environment and has grown into a global event to promote sustainable development. In the wake of the Nobel Prize winning movie 'The Convenient Truth' Earth Day 2007 witnessed a considerable boost in attention with multiple pop concerts around the world.⁵ For Earth Day 2010 the global *Earth Day Networks*'s campaign wants a huge celebration of the 40th anniversary of Earth Day under the mission name *The Green Generation* to mark 2010 as the beginning of 'an age of sustainability and a break with the past.'^{viii}

This calendrical rite is interesting for *De Kleine Aarde*. The event already has some media attention in the Netherlands. However, because of the plethora of 'day of' _ the type of calendrical rite itself has been worn down a little. People are probably tired of yet another day with yet another festival or event. Still, the fact that this day is _ in opposition to secretary's day - a global event with truly global significance restores some of it's potential. The day is possibly a worthwhile starting point for a campaign or a focus point of a broader ritual that encompasses a longer trajectory (to prevent the somewhat superficial event like feel). For

⁵ Note that there are actually *two* Earth Day's, one in the Northern Hemisphere and one in the Southern.



example, *De Kleine Aarde* could start a ritual in 2009 that culminates in 2010, the 40th birth day. Since that day is intended as 'a break with the past', it might be beneficial to connect it with a pilgrimage (see rites of passage).

▪ Rites of Exchange and Communion

Rites of exchange or communion are mostly practiced within a religious tradition. They are on the most basic level intended to open a communication between the sacred (e.g. god) and the profane (humans). Often something is offered to the sacred in the hope to receive something back (good luck, forgiveness, etc.). (Bell 1997).

While this type of ritual action is recognizable to almost everyone, it is probably not suited for *De Kleine Aarde*. To offer a sacrifice to e.g. *Earth* can be a highly symbolic act, but if people do not have a matching cosmology or belief system, the rite would probably not mean anything to them.

The only potential I can think of is to imagine a ritual with a 'sacred' earth as 'broken' (Paul Tillich's term), that is people do not really believe in the myth or symbol, but it continues to have a certain value to them (Grimes 1990, p. 127). An example of such a rite in the Netherlands probably is *Sinterklaas*, a feast analogous to Santa Claus, in which most adults do not believe but they still find the myth of value.

In the same line (but different) one could imagine a rite that symbolically sets up a communication with the Earth, for example to ask forgiveness. But on the whole, I assess such a rite too far-fetched, probably triggering a lot of mock instead of goodwill or a feeling of *I don't want to be part of this*, especially among 'the conservatives' _ that *De Kleine Aarde* wants to reach with a ritual.

- **Fasting and feasting**

Fasting is about abstention from food or sensual pleasures for a certain period to underline spiritual values above those of more worldly concern. Bell emphasizes the public display of cultural or religious values that fasting communicates within a group. In religious traditions like Christianity and Judaism fasting is followed by a communal festival like carnival or the sharing of a meal. Together, both fasting and the following feast heighten a sense of community and (religious) identity. It also serves to delineate who belongs to a certain group and who doesn't (Bell 1997).

The rite of fasting seems to have caught on outside religious traditions as well. Famous examples are Gandhi who publicly fasted for long terms to communicate his cause, or the hunger strikes political prisoners perform in order to draw attention to their plight. In the Netherlands, the DJ's of Radio 3FM yearly go into hunger strike on public display in a house of glass put on a public square, a week before Christmas. In 2007 they collected over 5 million Euros for the Red Cross in doing so.^{ix}



Wedding in the glass house

DJ Giel Beelen started a fasting ritual in 2003 that is now an annual feature of radio 3FM. DJ's lock themselves in a glass house and fast for 134 hours on continuous broadcast. They receive visits from politicians, business leaders and even marrying couples, as well as phonecalls from listeners with donations for a good cause.

Fasting might have value for *De Kleine Aarde*. There is an obvious connection between not eating and the stated unsustainable rate of consumption of the earth's resources. Fasting would then be used as a media tool to communicate the message of sustainability. If properly organized it can also have personal value for people who are worried by global warming and want to do something. A communal period of fasting 'to save the world' would give a sense of community, which could be

enforced with a closing environmentally sustainable meal on public display on a square in a big city. However, this ritual will probably not engage the 'conservatives' to change their ways of consumption although it might add up to the message that they should. The annual fasting of 3FM might serve as a bandwagon.

- **Political rites**

A political rite is a symbolic display of a group or individual in a society to establish that what is symbolized as important or natural to the social order. Political rites can be just as powerful as threats or physical force and are not merely expressions of certain values or norms, they (re)create these values and norms by sheer repetition. For example, each 'Heil Hitler' salute in Nazi Germany was a symbolic affirmation of Hitler's rule and in doing so a recreation of his power. Any one living in that society could hardly have escaped it, the same way a dancer can not escape the rhythm that is played by the orchestra (Bell 1997). In a less dramatic way, political rites are about publicly showing what a politician values, for example when a politician or royalty opens a building of an organization that is deemed important.

Political rites do not only suit the powerful, they also form means of expression and attempts to change society for countercultural movements. The Netherlands witnessed a strong tradition of public demonstrations for all kinds of causes, although the tradition seems now somewhat faded. Political rites are frequently used by organizations in civil society and if *De Kleine Aarde* wants to use this type of ritual action, it has to compete for attention in a very substantial way.

On the other hand, the (anti)globalization demonstrations at the end of the nineties (20th century) gathered significant momentum. Though these demonstrations were often derided and scoffed at because of violence, they did force politicians and business leaders to make a stance on issues such as free trade and poverty. Sustainability is a global issue, there is potential here, e.g. within a larger network of NGOs.

Marching – a gesture to save the planet?

Intermezzo

Silent march

A political rite that has developed in the Netherlands in the last decade is the silent march. These are often held after events of deadly (street) violence and communicate the value of peace and solidarity against the background of aimless aggression.



Loud march

In the eyes of some these marches symbolized passivity, a display of helplessness, and after the murder of the Dutch filmer Theo van Gogh in 2004, protesters gathered for a `loud march` led by the mayor of Amsterdam Job Cohen. An estimated number of 20.000 people had brought pots and pans and collectively made as much noise as possible to vent their anger and `outshout` the violence of the crime.



Loud marches have since been part of the political ritual repertoire in the Netherlands. In a sense they can be seen one of a kind, because the one follows the cue of the other.

To make a lasting impact these marches probably require a large crowd which can be difficult to organize for *De Kleine Aarde*. You would also need a sense of spontaneity. To organize a loud march in advance would amount to an `ordinary` political demonstration, a symbolic display of which there are so many in the Netherlands. On the other hand, marches connect to the education tool of *De Kleine Aarde*: the footprint.

Interaction rites

The last rite I want to investigate here is *the interaction rite*. Interaction rites are not classified as basic ritual genres by Bell but they are by Grimes (Bell 1997, p. 93-94). The type has been extensively theorized by sociologist Erving Goffman and demarcates ritual(-like) activity in the interchange between human beings, for example greeting or saying good bye. These rites revolve around expectations people feel a need to live up to. They are about what Goffman calls the social constructing of a self, a `face_`. (Bell 1997, p. 141).

Think about a manager who feels he or she has to speech on a goodbye party of a subordinate. Although there are no formal requirements, the speech will feel as more or less scripted, both in tone and content. The boss will probably put on a `face_` that does not directly mirror his or her personal feelings but rather reflects what is expected by the occasion and needed for the sake of the organization.

An interaction rite that can be of interest to *De Kleine Aarde* is the signature. In a signature people symbolically manifest their commitment. The act of signing is not only an expression of the commitment but also a creation of it (a `performance` - see performance theory in chapter four). The person who signs creates a `face_`, a self-image he or she has to live up to. Often a signature creates judicial obligations as well.

In my earlier exploration of ritual I noticed the power of tv-shows (benefit performances) and radio-shows (the fasting in the glass house). These shows can stir up a sentiment people want to be part of. Their effect is probably caused by the adding up of contributions from `the engaged_` who build up a momentum during the broadcast when also `the conservatives_` feel a desire to join.

In these shows it is about donations and I wondered if you can use the formula for commitments to sustainable consumption. Just to say yes to change probably is to superficial and it might be useful to think of the creative power of interaction rites such as the signature. A first idea could be to replace the signature for a footprint that symbolically endorses a change. This interaction rite can also be used in dealings with mayors and business leaders who want to steer their organization to sustainability.

The 'footnature' - a gesture to save the planet?

Intermezzo

De Kleine Aarde wants people to reduce their global footprint and change their livelihood into a sustainable one. This requires a willingness to change. But what if the willingness is there and evaporates just like a new year's commitment?

May be a interaction rite could help to solidify the commitment. A mere signature under a promise would be ridiculous, but what about a *footnature*? Would that help? Doing it would probably be fun, but then, would it be forgotten, remembered as something silly or in stead put against the wall as a reminder? There is potential here, although the danger is superficiality.



Ritual characteristics

In trying to understand ritual, scholars have identified several characteristics of ritual and ritual-like activity. These range, among others, from formalism (the 'air' with which an action is performed), invariance (the orderliness of an action or its repetition/routine), to traditionalism (the sense of 'we have always done it like this thus it is good') and sacral symbolism (the capacity, as we noticed in defining ritual, to make an act 'larger' than itself). (Bell 1997).

Identifying such characteristics provides the scholar with considerable flexibility in studying ritual for what is important in one type of ritual - e.g. rites of passage - might not be relevant in another - e.g. political rites. This is in line with the postmodern idea that there is no universal truth about ritual (see chapter four). Having a set of characteristics allows the scholar to compare rites among each other, across cultures or with activity that is not culturally framed as ritual but is 'ritual-like' ('ritualizations' in Grimes's speak). The brushing of teeth, for example is ritual-like in respect to some characteristics - invariance- but not to others - sacral symbolism (Bell 1997).

Because of time restrictions I will focus on the most important characteristic of ritual: symbolism. Symbols are key to understanding ritual (Chauvet 1995). Grimes: 'Ritual is a symbol embodied and enacted' (Quartier 2006, p. 20). Only if we have understood symbolism for the mission of *De Kleine Aarde* we can imagine other characteristics. Before we can imagine ritual, we have to imagine symbol first.

▪ Sacral Symbolism

Symbols are more than mere signs: they evoke feelings and connect to cultural values and ideas. A national flag, for example, is not just a flag that refers to a country, it *embodies* that country to a degree that tearing it apart or burning it can be experienced as an almost physical insult by inhabitants who witness it. Symbols can consist of images, objects, buildings or even complete sites and cities.

The most fundamental thing symbols do is differentiate between what is ordinary ('profane') and what is of ultimate importance ('sacred'). This differentiation is not only expressed in the symbol, but according to postmodern thinkers such as Bell, also *created* with the symbol. The planting of a flag on a stroke of land or even the moon, is an on-the-spot establishment of an entire country. (Bell 1997).

Postmodern thinkers also emphasize that symbols are multivocalic - 'many voiced', they will have different meanings with different people according to their respective backgrounds (Bowen 2005). While one person can shrug his or her shoulders when the national flag is burned, the other becomes enraged.

So, if symbolism is important to ritual and we are to imagine a ritual for *De Kleine Aarde*, we need a symbol that is sufficiently connected to something 'sacred'. Sustainability in itself may be important but is not (yet) perceived as sacred by most people and the footprint rather has an odour than apparent sacrality.

What do we need to achieve sacrality in a symbol? How does a symbol work?

Scholars have come up with interesting speculations when thinking about symbols. The anthropologist Victor Turner, who we have seen before in chapter four (postmodern anthropology), distinguishes between a `sensory pole` and an `ideological pole` in a symbol. The sensory pole denotes the varying feelings people have with a symbol according to their human make-up. The ideological pole refers to culturally specific ideas. (Bowen 2005).

This distinction takes in the postmodern notion of both multiple personal and social meanings people attribute to images or objects. When thinking about a gesture to save the world, one would imagine a symbol that is strong on the sensory pole, evoking basic human feelings, while it leaves open the possibilities on the ideological pole, not shutting this pole down by offending cultural sensibilities around religion or nationality. A candidate symbol that comes to mind is planet earth itself, since astronauts regularly report how their sense of nationality evaporated looking down to the planet from the



`We did not inherit the Earth from our parents, we borrowed it from our children`

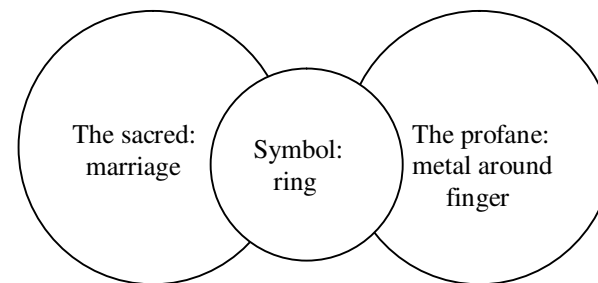
Indian saying in brochure of *De Kleine Aarde* sky.^x

Another interesting approach to symbol is derived from the semiotic work of Charles S. Peirce. This logician distinguishes three ways in which an object can be meaningful: (1) based on direct contact or pointing to this contact, (2) based on resemblance (icon), (3) based on culturally specific ideas. For example, body parts of holy persons can be cherished by believers who attribute power to these relics because of they represent a physical contact with someone holy. In the same line anthropologists analyze the workings of Catholic images of the Virgin Mary, where it is the *resemblance* that conveys the meaning. Bowen (2005).

When imagining a symbol for *De Kleine Aarde* this would suggest looking for something that is ideally both physically connected with something sacred as well resembling of it. If we take planet earth as symbol this would imply making an object like the earth. Although everything we make is necessarily from the earth, we would have to think about possibilities to enhance the `feel` of the earth, a direct connection to what people across cultures perceive as coming from earth, e.g. clay?

The last scholar I turn to for an understanding of the symbol is Louis Marie Chauvet. In his analysis of rupture between the sacred and the profane, the catholic scholar Chauvet, a dominican, states that a symbol bridges the rupture. The symbol mediates between the sacred and the profane. It does not only point to the sacred, but is present in the sacred just as in the profane. It is in this dual presence that the symbol functions as a bridge or mediation between both worlds. (Chauvet 1995).

For example, a wedding ring belongs to the profane as well as to the sacred. The profane is the metal itself, it's shape, texture, feel, etc. You have it around your finger the whole day. The sacred is the marriage the ring symbolizes. The marriage is in the ring and if one of the partners would loose it the other will probably feel hurt.



Within his analysis Chauvet uses four interesting concepts that can help imagining a symbol for *De Kleine Aarde*. The first is *hiëratism*. This is a development in which the symbol becomes too holy and loses it's touch with the profane. An example that is named by Quartier is the *host* of

holy Mass. It symbolizes the body of christ (the sacred), but for a lot of present day believers it has lost it's connection with the profane, with their ordinary lives. (Chauvet 1995).

The advice is thus not to imagine a symbol that is too holy. This is perhaps also why a rite of communion with the planet earth is not fit for *De Kleine Aarde*: the symbolism is too `holy`,` too far removed from the daily affairs of most people's lives.

Next, if we are to imagine planet earth as symbol for a rite it too risks being too holy, too ethereal, `nice`, too far removed from ordinary reality. However, since *De Kleine Aarde* has projects with children, the children can be asked to make a small earth. This would connect the symbol with something from ordinary life that in the same time is holy as well in a way that probably even `conservatives` would recognize and connect to. For example, I wonder what someone would feel if a child offered him such an object with an adjourned letter e.g. with photograph of the child, asking him or her to make a change.

Note that it is possibly that the more visible the problems of the planet become (global warming, rising prices of commodities, geopolitical trouble about commodities), the more profane and recognizable it becomes because acutely present in the daily lives of people (security, wallet).

Children's drawings - a gesture to save the world?

Intermezzo

At the beginning of 2008, while walking around the corner, I was struck by a series of children's drawings that were adjusted to fences, streetlamps, etc. The drawings urged people to put their lights off, don't leave the television on stand-by and to shower less - TO SAVE THE EARTH some of them stated (or something like it).

This makes me wonder. I know from experience that it can be a little bit difficult to throw away the drawing of your nephew or niece (if it's your child your stock is more replenishable, but still). I have children's drawings in rooms of otherwise quite serious professors and managers. Such drawings are



about more than just the drawing, they probably also represent innocence. In Chauvet's words: the drawings are both very profane (even simple) as `holy` for they are made by kids.

Apparently if you let children make something, it adds a touch of sacrality to the object. A small planet earth, made of clay, fragile, by a child given to a mayor, business leader, parent or aunt to change course to sustainability might be a good idea. Fragile, so it can be broken and play into the `sensory pole` of the object (Victor Turner). Made of clay, so it not only resembles the earth, but feels like it. It is worth the experiment!

A second important concept within Chauvet's analysis is the opposite of *hiëratism*, namely *trivialization*. In stead of too holy, a symbol then becomes too trite, to trivial. (Chauvet 1995).

This would probably apply for the *foot* as symbol in a rite. Since the footprint is the main tool of education of *De Kleine Aarde* it is obvious to look for it as a symbol. I mentioned the idea of a `footnature` in lieu of a signature to solidify a commitment to change. But though the foot evidently has a physical connection and so would possibly play into the `sensory pole`, it is seldomly connected to something holy, except in the rite of footwashing (a rite way out of practice in contemporary society and thus `too holy`). If we are to employ the foot as symbol we need to think of something to make it more holy.

An idea to make the foot more holy could be to ask celebrities their footprint and use one food of them for a template where the one who is committing himself to sustainability puts his own step into the other. To add to the idea of *reducing* your footprint, the template could consist of two giant steps, representing the current footprint of 4.4 ha. And the two much smaller footprints of both the celebrity and the one who commits himself. The holier the celebrity (Nelson Mandela?), the more it adds to the weight of the symbol, although in line with postmodern thinking, you should probably best a range of celebrities from which people pick the ones that matter for them.

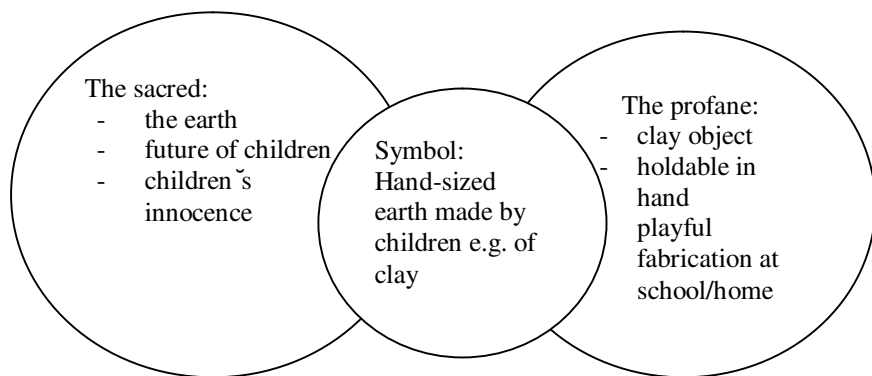


Designer and philanthropist Donald J Pliner asked celebrity friends their footprint to raise money and awareness for curing autism. Each celebrity has placed a footprint on a signed shirt for auction that benefits autism research.^{xi} According to the theory expounded in this chapter, the direct contact of the celebrity with the t-shirt (footprinted) achieves a degree of holiness.



The other concepts in Chauvet's analysis are *fixisme* and *deprogramming*. In *fixisme* the symbol is too fixed, it cannot be adapted to changing times and circumstances. This rings true with the postmodernist idea of multi-vocality - do not fill in the symbol too much. In *deprogramming* the symbol loses its ability to bridge what is meant to be sacred because there is too much freedom to interpret the symbol. So the advice probably is to make the symbol open for multiple interpretation but that you have some direction. (Chauvet 1995).

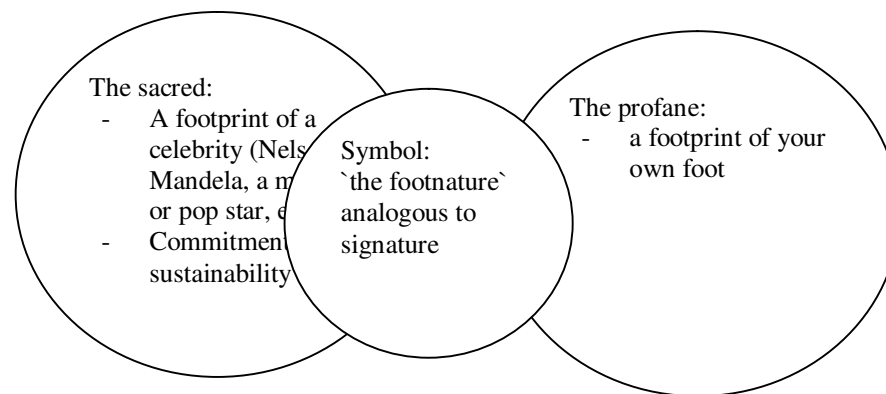
For our symbol of the planet earth, you could script the symbol so that it is small (hand-sized), and break-able (if you drop it, it should break) and leave the rest open. For the footprint, script the formula one foot of a person you cherish (from celebrity, to your grandma or what about the footprint of your child when she is two?). and the other of your self and leave the rest open.



Planet earth is an obvious symbol to work with in a ritual. It is sympathetic to almost all cultures. There is a clear biological connection and it looks like what we are trying to save. To enhance its meaningfulness we can connect it with the 'holiness' of children. If they make a small earth, it will be invested with their innocence the way a child's drawing is touching regardless of its beauty.

If the object feels like earth, you also play into the 'sensory pole'. And if the object is fragile, you enhance the message that the earth needs caring for. I wonder what would happen if such an object is deliberately dropped, so that it breaks. What if a whole crowd would do it? And if they all were children?

To acquire a sense of the earth's possibilities as a symbol it could be fruitful to investigate what is being done with the symbol in religion, for example in what K. Waaijman described as 'milieu-spiritualiteit' (environmental spirituality) (Waaijman 2000, p. 205-211). The earth as such can possibly have deep transcendental meaning, although in line with the postmodern turn we developed in chapter four, a possible rite should probably be careful filling that in lest the meaning of the symbol becomes closed for multiple interpretation.



A signature commits somebody to his or her promise. A 'footnature' would be a commitment to reduce your global footprint. Doing this would be fun, but to avoid making it trite, we have to think of something to make it more 'holy'. The connection with a celebrity could perhaps do the trick.

In future research we could examine the literature of religion and anthropology what is already been done around the foot, to learn from the creativity.



Carrying the world – a gesture to save the planet?

Intermezzo

If you think about the world as symbol, it might be worthwhile to investigate the myth of Atlas who carries the world.

What if the website of *De Kleine Aarde* depicts a whole bunch of people standing on top of the world, weighing down heavily on poor Atlas. For each visitor who commits himself to sustainability, one person's step off the world to help Atlas shoulder his burden. You could even customize such a symbol to a town or street where the goal is to have everyone commit themselves to sustainability, visibly shown on the website with a shifting balance of people with their big feet standing on top of the world while other people are trying to shoulder it.

6. How does ritual work?

One of the major intellectual developments in thinking about ritual was to look at its function: what does a rite do? What effect does it have in society? (Bell 1997, p. 23). This brought a new perspective on ritual, one with which we have yet not looked at thus far in this thesis.

We have seen that according to scholars a rite is about setting off what is important against e.g. that what is ordinary. We have also noted that rites often employ symbols that bridge between the ordinary (‘the profane’) and the important (‘the sacred’). But how does a rite work? How does it achieve something? *What* does it achieve?

Only if we know what a rite does, can we evaluate what potential ritual has for *De Kleine Aarde*.

What does a rite achieve?

Concerning the rite’s function (*what* it achieves), Grimes describes an intellectual development in the thinking about ritual (Grimes 2006, p. 11-13). Until the sixties of the 20th century scholars attributed two important functions to rite. The first was a capacity to provide for social cohesion. This was in line with the theories of sociologist Emile Durkheim, who stated that religion sacralized the norms and values of a society. Rites worked by evoking strong emotions within individuals that binded them to the community. While these individuals thought they worshipped God, they in effect payed tribute to society in which God and religion functioned as points of identification (Bell 1997, p. 24).

According to Grimes, the second function attributed to rites was an ability to offer personal consolation. This followed ideas from Freud (Grimes 2006, p. 12). Freud thought rites were an outlet for deep, but repressed impulses. He drew parallels between the obsessive behavior of neurotics and the pious observances in religion (Bell 1997, p. 12-15). Other psychotherapists also took a more positive approach to ritual as a means to express and subsequently heal psychological problems (Quartier 2006, p.25).

After the sixties a third possible function was signaled, inspired by the work of Victor Turner (who we have seen before). Turner thought ritual offered people a possibility to step out of the regular social order and

it's dominant values in order to counter them or experience the possibility of alternatives. This was done, according to Turner, by an alternative sense of identity forged in the rite by the experience of distance from the dominant values and fellowship (‘communitas’) with people of equal desire for alternative values. (Grimes 2006, p. 12).

These three functions still figure in present day scholarly writing about ritual, although they also have evolved. It is perhaps safe to say that three functions add up to what in present day thinking on ritual amounts to a *social* function of ritual and a *psychological, personal* one. The psychological, personal one is about feeling and identity. The social function is about communicating what is important to the rest of society.

Grimes sums these two up in what he calls the ‘paradigmatic’ function of ritual, the function that most scholars acknowledge as paramount: ‘it’s capacity to form values and guide activities outside the context of the rite itself.’ (Grimes 1990, p. 44) In a rite a version of reality is presented with such authority that it is intended to dictate the actual reality (Bell 1997, p. 138 ff).

How does a rite work?

There is debate among scholars how this feat can be accomplished (*how* a rite achieves something). Following performance theory (see chapter four), some scholars suggest that in the performance of the rite an ideal ‘model of’ the world is framed, similar to an alternative reality on a stage or movie screen. The multi-sensory experience of the rite then transforms this ideal model of the world in a ‘model *for*’ the world, that is those involved will acquire a mindset or attitude with which they will try to shape reality according to the ideal model.^{xii} (Bell 1992, 1997)

The debate revolves, among others, around the question whether this can only be done by ritual. In line with her postmodern bent, Bell believes models of the world do not exist outside the embodiment of human agents. Only if someone acts according to a model you can say such a model exists. While it may be true we act in ordinary life according to subconscious, dominant models of what we think is ‘normal’, it would be an impoverishment of our freedom to believe we can only change through the performance of a ritual. It would also take our eyes away from the fact that

even ordinary activity, like watching television, standing in a cue or having a conversation embodies a model *of* the world that – often unquestionably – is accepted into a model *for* the world for we stand neatly into the line of the cue, follow the etiquette of the conversation or accept the reality that is presented in the news. Postmodernists try to deconstruct these unquestioned models. (Bell 1992, Tanner 1997).^{xiii}

This is not the place to delve into this debate much longer. In thinking about how ritual works, I will follow Grimes in seeing ritual as an embodied medium of communication. ‘Embodied’ to mean that ritual is not just about text, it is a ‘multimedial’ that can also involve drama, music, dance or art (Grimes 2006). I particularly like the qualification of the scholar Tambiah, who sees ritual communication as ‘[] *not just an alternative way of expressing something but the expression of things that cannot be expressed in any other way*’ (Bell 1992, p.111).

The latter’s understanding of the mechanism of ritual as an unique way of communicating sits well with biogenetic structuralism that sees ritual or symbolic action as deeply rooted into our body⁶. For example, research shows that people can forget a complete sermon after they come out of church, while they still remember the ‘feel’ of it: ‘*Perhaps bones remember what [the] brain has forgotten.*’ (Grimes 1990, p. 41). In this perspective we have a ‘sense’ for ritual that can and perhaps needs to be addressed.

Do we now know *how* ritual works? No. The above is far too abstract. To answer the question we will have to dig into the characteristics of ritual activity (Bell 1997). We also have to study the dimensions of ritual that Grimes points to such as space, sound, objects, ritual identity etc. (Grimes 1995). There is not enough time to do so in this bachelorthesis. We need to establish the *potential* for ritual for *De Kleine Aarde* first. If we conclude there is potential, we can then explore the characteristics and dimensions of ritual in a later consultation.

We can however conclude two important things from the above discussion in assessing the potential for ritual to *De Kleine Aarde*. Ritual is

⁶ See chapter four on biogenetic structuralism.

held capable to both raise awareness for sustainability in a society (the social dimension, that is the communication of values) as transform such an awareness into a real commitment (the psychological dimension, that is the formation of values that guide activity).

This would lead to the following advice. We have seen that *De Kleine Aarde* distinguishes two important groups in thinking about it's mission: the `engaged`, who already have an awareness or feel connection with the mission, and the `conservatives`, who only vaguely have an awareness and feel little connection. My advice would be to imagine a ritual that at a minimum allows the engaged to solidify their connection into a real commitment (the psychological, personal dimension), while their `showing of the doing` functions as a communication tool to the conservatives in order to raise their awareness (the social dimension). If the rite builds enough momentum, who knows this awareness is transformed in a commitment as well, but to aim at that *directly* would probably be a (symbolic) bridge too far.

Put in an other way, ideally the rite should provide people with a sense of identity, a belonging to a community with shared values: those who want to reduce their footprint or support sustainability. The above discussion suggests that a successful rite could `sacralize` the underlying values, which would add to a feeling that every choice to consume in a sustainable way is a `bridge` to be part of these values and thus the community that support them.

Finally, the above briefly mentioned *dimensions* of ritual activity informs us to look at the different levels or sites *De Kleine Aarde* is operating. There is the *ecopark* with visitors and customers (shop, restaurant). There is the website. There are the projects on schools and the contacts with mayors and business leaders to persuade them to make the change. All these sites offer different possibilities for ritual which we could connect but should also distinguish in further research.

The Quilt – a gesture to save the world?

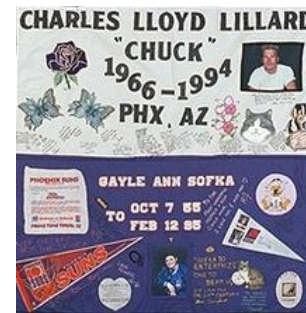
Intermezzo

A quilt is a type of bed covering that has a traditional folklore background. Starting from 1987 it was employed by AIDS activists who began `the largest art community project` in the world, where friends and relatives of AIDS victims stitched panels of 3 by 6 foot with the name of their beloved. Together the panels formed a growing and soon huge quilt that was exhibited in 1988 in Washington before the White House and experienced extensive touring in the USA. The so called *NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* found worldwide emulation and is still operative on <http://www.aidsquilt.org>.



With the literature we explored thus far we can probably say the quilt forms a very successful sacral symbol (see chapter five, 5.b.). The quilt bridges between what is ordinary (the quilt you can touch, the name of the beloved you stitch) and what is profane (the remembrance of the beloved, the AIDS community, the cause).

According to the website of the project, more than 14 million people visited the project around the world – so apart from an act of remembrance and a sense of community, it is also a larger socio-cultural communication of the cause (battle against HIV/AIDS).



For *De Kleine Aarde* a lesson could be to create something on it's own grounds, the eco-park in Boxtel, where people physically/materially contribute and thus connect to a symbol of sustainability. Perhaps something can be done with the symbols we imagined thus far (earth, footnature).^{xiv}

7. How do you invent ritual?

Now we have explored some important theoretical foundations of Ritual Studies (chapter four) and looked in what ritual *is* (chapter five) and what ritual *does* (chapter six), we can focus on the question: how do you invent ritual? We already have mapped some potential of ritual for *De Kleine Aarde* but how are we to build on that potential? Can we invent ritual and how do you do it?

Can you invent ritual?

Grimes states repeatedly that the idea of ritual invention is anathema to a common notion with both the general public and among scholars that ritual is something conservative, something of the vested (religious) institutions instead of something innovative and creative (Grimes 1995, 2000 and 2006). To postmodern thinkers such as Grimes however, ritual creativity is the rule rather than the exception. We have developed this idea in chapter four. Even if a rite is performed with the intent to *exactly* copy the past or an ideal script, it is a new creation. No place or person is alike and as times and cultures change so does the meaning that is attributed to symbols and rites.

Apart from the change of meaning and the difference of circumstances in which a rite is performed, Grimes points to considerable ritual invention both in- and outside traditions. For example, in early christianity baptism was a rite for adults, conducted at sunrise in the nude, but it gradually evolved into a rite for young baby's (Grimes 2000). Well known examples outside traditions are the Olympic Games and Grimes himself started out his career studying the *Fiestas de Santa Fe* in New Mexico. This festival originated in 1712 and witnessed decline and comeback as well as ritual innovations such as the burning of Zozobra, a huge puppet, a practice only started in 1924. In addition, Bell mentions ritual invention in the nation states of Europe in the 19th century or the former Soviet Republics in the 20th century. These states all needed ritual and 'invented tradition' to



legitimize their existence. (Bell 1997) An example in the Netherlands is 'Princess day' that began in 1885 to emphasize national unity above the fragmentation of the provinces.

In contemporary society, Grimes (1990) sees a steady growth of experimentation with ritual after the 1960s, not only from religious sects or cults but also from loosely alligned groups and individuals. A particular manifest phenomenon of ritual design he describes is the 'workshop circuit'. A phenomenon also present in contemporary Holland (Aupers 2005). The practitioners of these workshops typically ask admittance fees and emphasize they are not a 'religion' whilst nurturing an open atmosphere and aspiration for personal growth.

Grimes assesses the effect of these workshops, an analysis that forms a basis for his approach towards ritual design⁷. I will look into his analysis and then work out his approach.

Grimes distinguishes three liabilities of inventing rites: (1) *spiritual consumerism*, (2) *cultural imperialism* and (3) *spiritual experimentalism*. Note that he does not critique the experiments as such, but he criticizes the way the experiment is executed. He wants to improve the ability within society to experiment with ritual by such critique. (Grimes 1990).

The risk of *spiritual consumerism* is on the side of the one who visits the workshop: superficiality. The experience itself may be deep, but the feelings evoked only last for a short while. After that the spiritual hunger or thirsts arises anew and the 'spiritual consumer' looks for a new workshop, thus hopping from one to the other. '*Rituals are eaten but never digested.*' (Grimes 1990, p. 123).

The second risk is on the side of the performer: *cultural imperialism*. The performer may copy a ritual from a tradition (Grimes has particularly native Indian spirituality in mind) without regard of what the people within this tradition might feel. It is possible, Grimes notes, that the ritual or symbols used are sacred to them, not to be touched by outsiders. Just borrowing the rite without regard would amount to a scoff, an insult.

The third risk Grimes sees with ritual invention is on the side of both performer and public, all though the onus lies on the performer:

⁷ I use ritual invention and ritual design as synonyms

experimentalism. This risk comes from an entrenched cultural value in Western societies, the value of innovation. While innovation as such can be laudable, it risks to degrade to an obsessive appetite for something `new` without adequately testing or valuing the old (invention). Grimes explicitly uses `ism` here to distinguish this obsessive desire from experimentation as such, which he deems essential for ritual design.

Thus, although Grimes argues that contemporary experiments with ritual are a substantial development, he warns that they can easily fall prey to a general attitude of consumerism and obsession with fads, thereby *undermining* what most ritual experiments set out to accomplish, that is meaningfulness or commitment. People too easily slip into just copying a rite from a tradition without attuning it to the actual circumstances of their own culture, personal backgrounds or sensibilities. (Grimes 1990).

In stead, it would be wiser to learn from the *creativity* of other cultures and times, to try to gauge how ritual was employed to what effect, and then employ this creativity rather than ready-made rite in our own culture and time. (Grimes 2000).

We can easily see how Grimes' criticism and suggestions follow the lines of the theoretical background of his thinking. Grimes wants us to understand we can criticize ritual not from a theological or `truth` base but `out of the actual norms of [our] own culture and body` (Grimes 1995, p. 6). This echos the postmodern stress on diversity and versality of meaning, the plea for creativity from performance theory and the attention to the senses and the body from both performance theory and biogenetic structuralism (see chapter four).

Re-inventing invention

To address both the risk of ritual invention as the opportunities Grimes Grimes proposes to re-invent ritual invention. He develops tools to do so in his books *Ritual Criticism* (1990), *Deeply into the Bone: re-invented rites of passage* (2000) and *Rite out of Place: Ritual, Media and the Arts* (2006).

To destill a strict method from these works would be contrary to Grimes' postmodern style. You cannot employ the same method of ritual design on all kinds of different ritual types. A rite of passage such as a

birth revolves around something that is already happening (a birth) while a rite such as one we imagine for *De Kleine Aarde* is a creation of a happening itself. Furthermore, before one begins the process of ritual design one would already need a certain `sense` of ritual, a `style` with which one employs the method just the same as a craftsman wields his instruments. (Grimes 1995).



The Olympic Games - a gesture to save the world?

Bell has analyzed some examples of ritual change and invention, such as the Olympic Games (Bell 1997, p. 210-252). According to some scholars, these games are a success because they leave a lot open to local creativity. The host cities can bask in the glory of the Games and still put an own, distinctive face on it. The same accounts for the players, who participate in the olympic ideal of the games, but also in the honor to compete for their country and the personal pride of possible victory.



Chinese woman in rolechair defending olympic torch against protester for Tibet in Paris. This shows how the Olympic is a `multivocal` platform that allows for different meanings in the same rite: national pride (China) and human rights (Tibet)

Here we see the importance of multivocality of symbols and rites we developed in chapter four (postmodern turn). It seems that precisely because the Games are not too fixed, too filled in they manage to be a considerable success. Perhaps not a success according to the grandiose hopes of it's initial designers, but still a success because the games succeed in creating a sense of global community that both countries and individuals can connect to. This success is probably also due to the combination between the ideal of harmony and the basic physical side of competition among humans.

Particularly interesting for *De Kleine Aarde* is the idea of the torch relay. It as a global, event, around marching (footprints). Is there potential here for emulation? May be we can connect this with the political rite or the pelgrimage.

Another interesting idea for *De Kleine Aarde* could be to introduce the element of competition in a rite, because that seems to play into basic human instincts (ritualizations see chapter four on biogenetic structuralism). If we combine that with the symbol of a handsized clay earth we explored in chapter five (sacral symbolism) could we then write out a national (global?) competition among children for the most beautiful earth? We could offer this to the prime minister or start an 'earth relay' analogous to the torch relay where the fragile champion earth is passed around the world.

Another idea is to start a competition among cities or streets where you keep a score on how many peoples pledge to change to sustainability.

Nevertheless, following the above mentioned books we can recognize some basic characteristics of ritual design in Grimes' thinking we outline here.

The suggested steps in Ritual Design, following Grimes, would be:

1. Attention
2. Imagination
3. Studying
4. Invention
5. Experimentation
6. Evaluation
7. Reinvention
8. Performance of rite
9. Ritual criticism.

In step 1. *Attention* the ritual designer attends closely to around what the ritual revolves. This is to say, the designer refrains from grabbing his textbooks and begins by fieldwork first. What are the ritual sensibilities?

In our casus of *De Kleine Aarde* this involved visiting the eco-park, walking around the gardens, listening to what the volunteer guide tells about sustainability. Gauging what the strategic advisor feels when talking about the need for sustainability. We have also established some ritual sensibilities thanks to the *marketing plan* of the Province of Brabant that noted two important groups the 'engaged' and the 'conservatives'. A further exploration would warrant deeper inquiry into this marketing plan.

In step 2. *Imagination* the ritual designer looks for ritualizations, that is gestures, motions, sounds, symbols that are already out there but are not deliberately ritualized. This imagination is like walking around with a divining-rod or metal-detector looking for potential where a ritual can be build around. We can see here how important it is that the ritual designer acquires a sense of ritual first before setting out to invent.

My own ritual sense is underdeveloped, though I was fortunate to follow a ritual lab with Grimes which gave me a first a feeling of ritual. For the case of my thesis, I took a cue from the education tool of *De Kleine Aarde* - the footprint - and from the name of *De Kleine Aarde* - planet earth. With the footprint and planet in mind I investigated the internet and started wondering what you can do with it, to what sense of ritual it plays.

In step 3. *Studying* a designer crawls behind his books to see what ethnographic research and Ritual Studies literature can learn. The important thing here is not to look for an exact match, but get inspiration for a creative adaptation.

In this casus we have done so by investigating various ritual types and the most important characteristic: symbolism (see chapter five). If we are to go further with ritual design for *De Kleine Aarde* more study is required into ritual characteristics and dimensions. (see chapter five).

In step 4. *Invention* one loosely invent a rite to have a starting point for experimentation. This step can also be postponed until after step 5 *Experimentation*. The advantage of this postponement would be to allow maximum free space for creativity in the experiment.

In this casus we have invented two symbols (the `footnature` and the clay earth made by children) with which we like to experiment. In addition, we can build on the ideas we had on ritual potentials while investigating the ritual types (chapter five).

In step 5. *Experimentation* one experiments with the ideas one had during *invention* and allows for space to improvise. This step is the biggest lesson from performance theory (see chapter four) that states that ritual is not just about rational ideas, but about all the senses. You have to experience these, experiment with them.

For this case, it would imply we improvise in a ritual lab-like space with the symbols we invented (`uncovered`) in step 4. We can also start a `small`, local one-time event rite which can form the basis for designing a more extensive rite later. For example, we could start with one school class where the children make a clay earth and offer that to someone accompanied with a letter asking to change to sustainability.

In step 6. *Evaluation* the designer evaluates the experiment. By this, he or she can improve the ideas of invention of step 4.

This step has not yet been taken in this casus and awaits further assignment.

In step 7 *Reinvention* one reinvents the ritual based on all the work so far. It is here one comes to a first concrete outline of the rite. In line with postmodern thinking and performance theory, but also according to Chauvet's notion of *fixisme* we have seen in chapter five (sacral symbolism) one should leave considerable space in such a design for adaptation to local circumstances.

This openness for local circumstances is particularly important in our casus. In chapter two we stated that the ideal rite for supporting *De Kleine Aarde*'s mission would leave the possibility open to serve as potential for the `preposterous` gesture to save the planet. As Grimes puts in his own imagination of *a gesture to save the world*: we need a `locally global show` (Grimes 2006, p. 159.). The to-be-designed rite for *De Kleine Aarde* thus ideally is a rite that is `loosely` designed, open for adaptation.

Black Ball - a gesture to save the planet?

Intermezzo

Yvonne Dröge Wendel (1961)

Black Ball was the reply when I told my friend Paul Vossen about my thesis and the idea of a clay hand-sized earth and something analogous to the olympic torch relay.

Black Ball is an art project of Prix de Rome winner Yvonne Dröge Wendel. The center of the project is a four meter big Ball made of felt. This light, rollable object pops up on a certain location in a city and it will then find it's way pushed by spontaneous gestures of people who happen to come by, usually accompanied by quite some happy consternation.

The project started in 2000 in Leeuwarden and has been `all around the world`, from Bolzana, Newcastle, Istanbul back to Rotterdam.



Could this be something for *De Kleine Aarde*? You could ask the artist to make it into an earth, then stipulate a parcours around the Netherlands (world?) and divide it up the way an Olympic torch relay is. It should be an honor to push the ball for a stretch (provision: commitment to reduce your footprint.) In addition, it seems an attention grabber. To bystanders etc the possibility would be to mark their footprint on the earth if they make a commitment to sustainability. You could keep the ball for a while at the eco-park in Boxtel for `footnatures`.^{xv}



In step 8 *Ritual performance* the rite is performed.

In step 9 *Ritual criticism* one evaluates this performance. This way one can learn from the practice to improve the rite and take in lessons for ritual design in general. Grimes repeatedly states to let this criticism not degrade to an elitist affair among designers or scholars, but engage the performers and public as well. No one has a patent on ritual sense. (Grimes 1990).

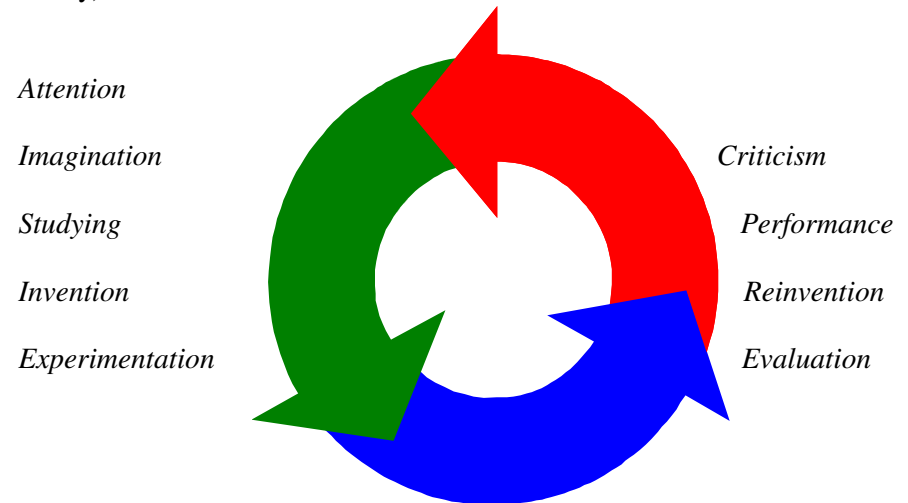
It is important to note that these steps are not meant as a linear or mechanical process from beginning to end. They are more like a circle, or if you want spiral of you take in the hoped for progression, where the study of ritual and the practice/design of ritual mutually influence each other. We study ritual to understand ritual, any understanding of ritual will influence ritual performance and this influences again our study, etc.

We already have encountered this process in chapter four. There we established that if it is true that a scholar influences his object of study (a tenet of postmodern anthropology) and that ritual is in large part about action and not just about text (a fundamental idea of performance theory), ritual cannot be understood just behind the desk and ritual studies should engage itself with the ritual performances it influences. As Grimes put this in his inauguration at the Radboud Universiteit: *‘Reimagined as performance, ritualizing is the act of stepping in to be, whereas theorizing is the act of stepping back to know.’* (Grimes 2006b, p. 5 ff)

Ritualizing here means the act of deliberately inventing or cultivating rites (see chapter five, 5.a). *Theorizing* is the act of critical reflection thereon. Although Grimes himself does not do this himself, we can apply this distinction between *ritualizing* and *theorizing* to the above model. Ritualizing is done in the steps of attention, imagination, invention, experimentation, reinvention and performance (steps 1, 2, 4, 5, 7 and 8 in the model) while *theorizing* in the steps of studying, evaluation and criticism (steps 3, 6 and 9 in the model).

The reality of a scholarly engaged ritual designer will probably be not so clear-cut. Whilst stepping in the act of invention, a designer will in all likelihood have some theorizing going on in the background as well and

vice versa. Note also that the steps in this model need not be performed by the same person, e.g. ritual designer. A ritual designer can cooperate with artists, ritual performers etc. In addition, ritual criticism should according to Grimes *‘not be an elite domain’* (Grimes 1990, p. 18). Everybody is entitled to criticism of ritual (wether it works), especially since ritual is not just about the rational mind but about all the senses/body to which the scholar cannot claim privileged access. (see chapter four, performance theory).



A model of ritual design, based on the writing of Grimes. The essential element of this model is that ritual creativity (*ritualizing*) and ritual criticism (*theorizing*) are *‘twins’*, they influence and hopefully improve each other (Grimes 1990, p. 53). The design of one rite ideally goes through one such cycle (or more if there is time). An academic ritual designer goes through many, with each design ideally further refining his or her *‘sense’* of ritual.

For *De Kleine Aarde* we have only taken the first steps of attention, imagination, studying and *‘some’* invention. More study can be undertaken following the potential we recognized. Experimentation would now be fruitful to develop the ideas.

8. Conclusion

In this bachelorthesis I investigated the possible contribution of ritual in inspiring people to a more sustainable livelihood. This was done by a case-study involving one of the oldest Dutch environmental organizations *De Kleine Aarde* who has this mission. My research question was: *what can ritual do to support De Kleine Aarde in it's mission to inspire people to a more sustainable livelihood?*

The case study gave me the opportunity to explore the method and theory of the still very young academic research project of Ritual Design. What is it's potential in helping contemporary societies to re-imagine symbols and rites of identification in a rapidly changing world?

I will begin with a theoretical reflection on ritual and the method of ritual design and then apply this to my case study in the shape of a consultation to *De Kleine Aarde*.

My primary focus in the literature was the work of Ronald L Grimes. Grimes is one of the most prominent scholars in Ritual Studies and his work gave me an articulate vision on Ritual Studies. Grimes has also written extensively on ritual creativity and was thus well suited to help answer my research question.

In my exploration I established three important influences in his thinking that subsequently turned out to shape his ideas on Ritual Design. The first theoretical background I noticed was *postmodern anthropology*.

Postmodern anthropologists take at the core of their thinking that the meaning of culture and thus rituals is fundamentally diverse. No symbol or rite will be interpreted the same by anyone. For Ritual Design the lesson is to devise symbols and rites that allow for 'multivocality', that is give space to multiple interpretations.

Furthermore, postmodern anthropologists state that scientists influence the reality they study. For ritual scholars the consequence is they best acknowledge their work influences the way ritual is performed, which in turn will influence their work.

The second theoretical background I established was *performance theory*. This intellectual stream suggests ritual is about all the senses and

not just the rational mind. This implies a ritual designer cannot design ritual from behind a desk, but rather should engage with experiment and design a rite that engages the whole body.

The third theoretical background was *biogenetic structuralism*. This theory suggests humans have a symbolic instinct. Ritual is 'in our bones.' The implication for Ritual Design is that designers best attune to these instincts. It also suggests that we can find ritual-like activities everywhere in daily life, on which the ritual designer can build.

These three backgrounds add up to a vision of a mutual beneficial circle of ritual creativity and ritual criticism, where the criticism stems not from 'the truth' but from the effect of the rite. Norms to judge this effect are our own culture and bodies. If a rite is not attuned to it's cultural environment or does not connect to the bodily senses, it will probably fail.

The process of Ritual Design thus best builds in steps of both creativity and evaluation, experiment and criticism. A rite must develop, 'grow' in the course of the process.

My bachelorthesis consisted of first steps in the process of Ritual Design. These steps involved attending to what was already happening at and around *De Kleine Aarde* that had ritual potential. In addition I looked into several ritual types and characteristics to imagine their use for *De Kleine Aarde*. I also investigated what ritual is supposed to do, how it 'works' to match these insights with the aspirations of the organization.

Following these steps my preliminary conclusion is that ritual seems to promise a lot of potential for *De Kleine Aarde*. Ritual is ideally held capable of forming values and guiding activity outside the rite itself. Next, ritual is seen as a unique mode of communication that can broadcast values to society in a way that no other mode can accomplish. If this is true, ritual can (1) persuade people with a sympathy for sustainability to commit themselves to really make the change (2) raise considerable awareness that such a change is necessary to the rest of society in a way that education cannot achieve.

Although *De Kleine Aarde* asked to devise a ritual for 'conservatives' who feel little connection with sustainability, my advice is



to design a ritual for the `engaged_ who already have sympathy but not always live up to it. This is partly because the first are hard to engage in a ritual, but also because ritual seems about `the showing of a doing_. If you direct a ritual at `the engaged_ you will then strike twice with one blow: you give `the engaged_ a stimulus to make the change (`do_) and by making that change they communicate (`show_) the importance of this change to `conservatives_.

I have established several ritual types and activities *De Kleine Aarde* can build on. My general consultation is to think of a rite that culminates at the 40th Anniversary of *Earth Day* (22th April 2010) intended by the global network that coordinates the day as `the turning point for all people world wide [that] mark the beginning of the Green Generation: an age of sustainability and a break with the past_^{xvi} The rite could possibly start at the 22th April 2009 (the 39th Earth Day). In the course of the year a number of rites could be performed. Before these are developed, it would be wise to experiment with potential symbols that can form their center, since according to literature, symbols are key to understanding ritual.

I have imagined two potential symbols that build on the main education tool of *De Kleine Aarde* (the footprint) and it's name (the earth).

The first symbol is a fragile clay, handsized earth that is made by children. This symbol can be offered to mayors, business leaders or neighbours/parents with an accompanying plea to make the change. It could be subject to local or national competition or central to a loud march where a crowd of e.g. children drops and breaks the earths.

The second symbol is the `footnature`. This is a signature in the shape of a footprint to underline a commitment for change to sustainability. The footprint possibly best be connected with the footprint of a celebrity like Nelson Mandela etc. to augment it's impact. These footprints can be part of a radio or television show analogous to benefit shows, where people now do not donate money but pledge a change.

Other rites that offer potential is the pilgrimage with it's connection to the footprint and symbolism of transformation, or the torch relay of the Olympics. In the latter the torch can be transplated by a small

clay earth or by a felt earth version of the *Black Ball* from artist Yvon Wendel Dröge.⁸

It is also valuable to look at the different levels *De Kleine Aarde* is operating (website, ecopark, schools/projects). They best be combined for optimum effect and sense of community. For example, earth versions of the *Black Ball* can be exhibited in the ecopark in Boxtel. People can `sign` the earth with their footprint pledging a change. Next, on the website people could contest for a small part of the relay parcours, where the selection criteria is how many people they convinced to make the change.

The website can also be used for a competition among streets and cities in reducing their footprint, e.g. by making use of the myth of Atlas with people weighing on the earth (those who did not yet make a change) and shouldering it (those who made it)⁹.

For the road ahead I would advice *De Kleine Aarde* to engage artists in an experiment with the above symbols. The artist Wendel Dröge was mentioned, other artists can be invited to design a template of a small fragile earth that children can colour or adorn. A producer can then be found to make these on a large scale for school projects.

I would also recommend exposure of these ideas to the volunteers and network of *De Kleine Aarde* to benefit from their `sense`. Further literature research on ritual types (e.g. pilgrimage), symbols (earth) and dimensions (place, sound, movement etc.) might be rewarding.

For further discussion I wonder whether it is ethical to employ children in (such) a cause and what the difference is between ritual activity like the ones suggested and marketing/branding of NGO's.

So, *what gesture can save the planet?* Unfortunately, we were not able to device one in this bachelorthesis. We did come up with possible ideas to employ ritual in inspiring people to a more sustainable livelihood. It is still too early to judge their worth and that of Ritual Design in helping society to re-invent rites and symbols. That there is a need to, might be concluded from the interest of *De Kleine Aarde* to use ritual. Ritual may

⁸ See page 29

⁹ See page 23

not serve to save the planet, it could yet turn out to help communicate its cause and thereby stimulate a real contribution.

Damiaan Messing, August/ September 2008

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ⁱ See for example the website of the international conference in Heidelberg on 'Ritual Dynamics and the science of Ritual' from 29 September - 2 October on <http://www.rituals-2008.com/index.php>, retrieved 31 August 2008

ⁱⁱ Bell thinks Grimes' attempt unsuccessful because according to her the emphasis on the meaning (the symbolic) is still dominant. Bell 1992, p. 53. See her criticism on performance theory in endnote five for more.

ⁱⁱⁱ The following account of (post)modernism is oversimplified. It is possible that the intricacies of the matter escape me but luckily - and most certainly - they do not count much in the context of this thesis. The account is based on varying sources, among others Gellner (1992), Harvey (1990), Toulmin (1990), Bell (1990), de Vries (1995) and Tanner (1997).

^{iv} Bell (1992) is more radically postmodern than Grimes. In her view, people not only recreate their tradition in ritual, a tradition is recreated in every act where elements of the tradition transpire.

^v Bell (1992) finds fault with performance theory, again apparently because it is not postmodern enough. The metaphor of performance would distract our understanding of ritual as ritual. It would also give undue prevalence to thought, since a performance is about *enactment* or *embodiment* of a meaning (thought). Bell wants to abolish this dichotomy between action and thought. It could be a new way of domination by theorists over their object of study, she thinks, because in the end it are theorists who uncover the meaning, in postmodern speak: create it and thereby introduce their own version of reality (Bell 1992).

Bell obviously wants to deconstruct the theories about ritual to uncover what intellectual project they are part of or what - for the theorists themselves - hidden meaning they impose. She herself tries to remain free from such subconscious streams of projects and meanings. That seems impossible to me. In the end her 1992 book reads as a theoretical analysis of theories with the intent of showing that theorizing makes no sense. That is trying to prove your point by means of the very thing you are trying to disprove. As if to catch your own shadow.

^{vi} The Dutch Socrates' prize winner Chris Buskes recently called the evolutionary paradigm the most important conceptual revolution in modern science. It offers us an explanation of life and life's phenomena without the need to turn to the supernatural and changed our view on the world and our selves in even a more fundamental way than the idea that the world is not the center of the universe. Evolutionary thinking suffered a serious setback after World War II, when the nazi's abused the concept, but the so-called 'modern synthesis' of genetics and

Darwinian evolution has reestablished the paradigm as a major influence in all academic disciplines (Buskes 2006).

^{vii} Sources used for this intermezzo: <http://www.nu.nl/news.jsp?n=464630&c=29>, retrieved on 24th of August 2008.

^{viii} Sources: <http://www.earthday.net/about>, www.dagvandeearde.nl http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earth_Day, retrieved 25th of August 2008.

^{ix} http://seriousrequest.3fm.nl/page/07_fotoboeken_overzicht, retrieved 25th of August 2008.

^x *Choosing a flag to unite a planet*, International Herald Tribune, d.d. 29-01-2004.

^{xi} http://www.autismspeaks.org/inthenews/clothesauction_ripkabracelet.php, retrieved 18th of August 2008

^{xii} The terminology of 'model of' and 'model for' derives from a definition of religion by Geertz 1973.

^{xiii} An other interesting issue in the debate is the supposed 'subconscious' nature of the ritual. Scholars typically point out that those involved in ritual are not expressly and deliberately trying to establish a sense of community, to find consolation or create an alternative reality (Bell 1992). The intent is on attraction of the symbol or rite itself. This makes me wonder, when thinking about ritual design, what would happen if you devise a ritual that *does* set out clearly, in the ritual itself, to establish such functions? Would it diminish the impact or, in such a secular as ours, enhance it?

^{xiv} <http://www.aidsquilt.org/history.htm>, retrieved 4th September 2008

^{xv} <http://www.showroommama.nl/projects/blackball.cfm>, retrieved 4th September 2008.

^{xvi} <http://www.earthday.net/>, retrieved 4th September 2008