



UNDERSTANDING SYMBOLIC PROCESS – METAPHOR, VIBRATION, FORM¹

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Metaphor, Vibration and Form identifies a process that underlies all ritual enactment. Whether it is Joseph Campbell's analysis of the Hero's journey, Victor Turner's theoretical and experiential interest in symbols, or Charles Laughlin's cycle of meaning, there is at work a particular kind of behavioral transformation system. It begins with the mind and the meanings provided metaphorically for symbols, then proceeds to an intense focus on symbolic sequences in meditation or in ritual dramas, so that the metaphor is taken into the body as physical experience. From this physical "ownership" of the metaphor, the properties associated with it are encouraged, socially and ritually, to come to the surface and be enacted in the form of everyday behavior. Questions of symbolic appropriation, the redundancy of symbol and professional responsibility are addressed in the concluding remarks.

1 Introduction

My perspective on symbolic process is tutored by Jung, Turner, Campbell and Lévi-Strauss, and involves considerations of context, structure, process and phenomenological experience. As a meditation teacher trained in Buddhist, *Vedic* and Shamanic traditions, I have learned to appreciate the importance of personal phenomenology in bridging the gap of understanding the cosmologies and symbolic meanings of other cultures and religious systems. For there is often a disjunction in communication and coding in fieldwork, as the experience of the anthropologist does not match with the state of consciousness from which the cultural informant communicates.

For instance, many of the events associated with shamanism that are labeled as anomalous have to do with the shaman's ability to move into and through a series of related altered states of consciousness (A.S.C.). Without a corresponding ability to enter into an A.S.C. it becomes exceedingly difficult for the observer to understand and code what may be communicated. A shaman may communicate to the observer about experiences and events several times removed from the reality in which the observer is located. Thus the shaman communicates S and the observer understands and codes it as O, thereby misrepresenting the features, structure and process of whatever the shaman participates in and communicates about. So there is often a major gap in cosmological maps, which constitutes a major epistemological problem in studies on consciousness. To close the gap, to reduce the disjunction in communication and the associated distortion in coding of information, requires of the observer the willingness and ability to suspend disbelief, and travel through the shamanic experience (or something similar) in order to code information from a different level of personal phenomenology. Without this ability and willingness, the observer remains caught in the mire of epistemological disjunctions that may well produce subsequent field reports that are inaccurate.

I think of symbols as multi-leveled and polyvalent. They connect to other symbols and complexes in ways that are often unrecognized. I believe that it takes human experience, and understanding of symbol, to open doorways to yet deeper understandings of that same symbol. Thus a symbol -- the Cross or the OM mantra -- can have meaning at different levels for different people, but can also change meanings as individuals engage more deeply with that symbol in an ongoing phenomenological relationship. Furthermore, symbols that are loaded with archetypal meanings have a similar impact on different people. Symbols are thus not merely abstract, intellectual constructs -- they have to be experienced and engaged with in an almost visceral manner for their meanings to surface. In this sense the symbolic process is a continual feedback system in which the symbol has to be integrated with everyday experience if a deeper understanding of it is to be the end result.

What I add to current conceptions about symbols is that they are communication vehicles that operate as pointers to the unknown, and as mediators between different levels of consciousness and reality. Symbols begin deep in the human mind and are then projected into mythology, which provides the basis for symbols to be enacted in ritual contexts as well as in everyday life. (The term "ritual" is used in the liturgical sense, in that it denotes religious connotations, as distinct from the everyday sense where it does not.) The mythological process is to my mind a vital organizing template for symbolic life cross-culturally. I have argued elsewhere that these sacred narratives draw on archetypal imagery from the human unconscious, and furthermore that the symbolic sequences of mythology activate deep unconscious structures. (Prattis et al. 1995:46). The world's mythologies are complex proto-histories of religion that are coded and multi-leveled, providing a guidance system for the integration of awareness with the unconscious. Ritual provides an effective arena for the operation of this system, which works with precision. The ritual enactment of mythology in ceremony, festivals, sacred dance, shamanism, rites of passage, etc., provides individuals with a phenomenological encounter in which they engage with universal structures contained in the unconscious by bringing them to the level of personal experience.

There is a cycle of understanding here which proceeds from symbols in the human unconscious to mythology then to ritual enactment. The next part of the cycle goes from ritual enactment back to human awareness. The argument is that the deep mind in the unconscious projects symbols into mythology which then become the basis of liturgical reinforcement. The liturgical acting out of the myths thus enables the devotee to experience, with awareness, the power of the symbols being liturgically enacted. This cycle can be tracked as follows: deep mind > symbol, myth > liturgy > reconnection with deep mind. So if we can begin to understand and decode mythology we will have a grasp on one part of the cycle of understanding which then takes us to the deep workings of the human mind.² This was, in different ways, the preoccupation of both Joseph Campbell (1949, 1960, 1974) and Claude Lévi-Strauss. (1972, 1973, 1978). Furthermore, it caught the attention of Carl Jung (1959), Victor Turner (1969), Mircea Eliade (1964), Charles Laughlin's biogenetic structuralist group (1990, 1995) and many others, in particular Paul Ricoeur (1969) and Roy Wagner (1986). This same preoccupation surfaces in the teachings and writings of seers, saints and shamans from time immemorial. There is a very rich legacy to draw upon, and not just from twentieth-century scholars, which converges on questions about the symbolic basis of our humanity.

2 Process

Scholars throughout this century have searched for pattern and process in the symbolic diversity presented by the world's cultures. Joseph Campbell underscored the astonishing similarities in the world's mythologies with his analysis of the Hero's Journey (1949), the stages of which take adventurers on a search for Truth through successive experiences of personal liberation. In terms of process his ideas were closely allied to Jung's (1959) concept of individuation, Eliade's quest for archetypes in the history of religions (1969) and the classical Hindu concepts of the stages of spiritual life. Jung, Campbell, Eliade and Eastern religions shared a common theme about consciousness transformation and how mythic enactment in ritual facilitates this. (Underwood 1990:16). Campbell, Eliade and Jung, the mythological troika of this century

(Doniger 1990:182), were drawn to a study of Eastern religions, particularly Hinduism and Buddhism, because these belief systems allowed:

‘for a direct identification of the individual searcher with the divine consciousness. The gods of the various religions are understood to be simply masks by which universal consciousness manifests itself in different times and places.’ (Coward 1990:56).

According to Campbell myth provides a metaphor, in these terms, for an internal spiritual journey. By referring us to a transcendent, non-dualistic reality that exists in radical contradiction with the dualities and separations we create everyday in life, Campbell argues that myth guides us through the crises of our existence. (Campbell 1986).

Victor Turner's groundbreaking work on rites of passage (1969, 1992) focused on the liminal phase as the crucible of change and transformation. He identified liminality as the locale of rich ritual dramas, provided concepts to describe it (*communitas*, *gnosis* and anti-structure), implied a necessary synchronicity between symbol, experience and structure, and showed how dominant symbols can unify the normative and emotional poles of meaning. (Bynum 1984). In addition he demonstrated the multivocal nature of symbols by identifying three levels of meaning: exegetic, operational, positional; and permanently changed how anthropologists think about symbols. Grimes has pointed out that:

‘Before Turner ritual was static, structural, conservative. After Turner it is imagined as flowing, processual, subversive.’ (Grimes 1993:6).

No longer could symbols be regarded in the strictly functional sense of order and social solidarity, as Turner very skillfully and dramatically exposed order as the subversive target of liminal processes. His ideas on the dialectical tension between structure and anti-structure (1969) provided specific insights into the nature of ritual, which were about change, transformation and redefinition. As Laughlin and McManus have remarked:

‘Turner taught that certain types of ritual produce states of consciousness that effectively unstructure the "natural attitude" of participants and then restructure a new attitude, one that is considered more appropriate, functional, adaptive or mature by the society. The classic case of such a ritual is a rite of passage which transforms an initiate to a more mature level of social status. The key to the operation of any such ritual is the involvement of *embodied* consciousness in activities that produce transformations of consciousness (literally, the reorganization of the structures mediating consciousness). These activities destabilize the habitual patterns of neurobiological processing, and guide the growth of new patterns.’ (Laughlin & McManus 1995:38).

Laughlin's biogenetic structuralist group developed a model of the Cycle of Meaning (adapted from Ricoeur's hermeneutic circle). This described the process of symbolic penetration into unconscious realms, and the tutoring of that experience through shamanic intervention in order to construct new cognitive and perceptual realities. (Laughlin et al. 1990; Laughlin 1995). They were interested in levels of belief, understanding and realization in the interaction between religious worldview, brain cognition, neural structures and direct experience, whereby the mythic enactment and interpretation of the worldview was mediated through ritual processes and rewired into the brain.

Claude Lévi-Strauss (1972) chose a semiotic, linguistic approach to plot the archaeology of the structuring process from which he thought all symbolic systems were derived. This entailed the eventual relegation of cultural categories to the cutting-room floor, as Lévi-Strauss felt that an understanding of the deep, hidden mental processes required an identification of the relations between categories first of all, then an investigation of the structure of relations between relations. Cultural categories were merely a starting point in his exploration of the innate structuring capacity of the human mind. He argued that this capacity was expressed in culturally discrete ways yet the structure driving the symbolic constructions was beyond cultural constraints and configurations. Hence his famous comment about mythology, where he claims not to be interested so much in the myths themselves but rather with how myths think themselves out in the minds of men, without men knowing. (Lévi-Strauss 1972). I do not think the workings of the deep mind can be fully encompassed semiotically, and do agree with Turner's exposé of the limitations of semiotic

structuralism. (Turner 1992). I have, however, extrapolated on Lévi-Strauss' contentions by arguing that mythology and other systems of symbolic action are an implicit acting out of humankind's deep mentality. (Prattis 1973). The obverse also holds true -- that *not* to act out the symbolism, to be without mythic enactment and the physical experience of embodied consciousness, has dire consequences for civilization. I will return to this theme in my conclusion.

Perhaps the most sophisticated model of culture, symbol and transformation lies in the science of *Kundalini* Yoga as represented variously in Buddhism and Hinduism. The *chakras*, arranged in ascending order from the sacrum to the crown, provide a lexicon of the stages of transformation of an individual's consciousness. The *chakras* are thought of as an ultimately connected energy system that can be integrated through the vehicle of conscious breath, meditation, and ritual focus. Each center corresponds to a particular level of psychological awareness and spiritual growth and is associated with specific mantras, symbols, colors, and meditative practices. The aim of this transformation system is to advance through ritual practice and mental entrainment from the first *chakra* at the base of the spine (*Muladhara*), to the seventh *chakra* located at the top of the crown (*Sahasrara*), which represents the fully opened thousand-petal lotus of awakening, beyond all duality. The *kundalini* energy in this system passes through each *chakra*, activating and integrating it with other *chakras*, creating a centered consciousness which evolves to a transcendent state that is beyond the level of body, mind, and experience dualities.

I do not intend to review every tradition of thought which has endeavored to identify the underlying patterns of symbolic process, although I should point out Geertz' (1980) important critique on the transformative use of symbols in his book on the Balinese Theatre. Thus I selected the transformational grammar of semiotic structuralism, the cyclic processes of the Hero's Journey and the Cycle of Meaning, the dialectics between ideology and structure in rites of passage and the enduring progression of change inherent in individuation and *Kundalini* Yoga.

3 Metaphor, Vibration and Form

I now intend to identify a particular process. The movement is from metaphor to vibration and finally to form. I will discuss the properties of each component of this process, which draws on my personal experience of meditative and shamanic practice, before providing two examples of the processual movement from metaphor to vibration then to form -- one of which "works", the other of which does not. The examples are necessary to fully amplify the conceptual distinctions I employ to describe and understand transformation through phenomenological engagement with symbols.

The term metaphor, in this essay, is used to describe the qualities, meanings and properties assigned to symbols. Webster defines metaphor as:

‘A figure of speech in which a name or quality is attributed to something to which it is not literally applicable.’ (Webster 1988).

In ritual systems the reference is usually to something transcendent that is not literally anything in physical reality. Joseph Campbell repeatedly warned that it is a mistake to read the metaphor that any symbol alludes to, in terms of denotation instead of connotation. (Campbell 1988). The importance of metaphor, the process of connotation and analogy, is that it enables a symbolic concept to register with the mind and senses. As metaphorical meaning is imparted to symbol by our minds in the first place, there is then an engagement of the mind's products with the mind's sensibilities. As I intend to demonstrate, when this engagement occurs within well defined, and orchestrated, ritual sequences which are socially supported, an inordinate impetus for behavioral transformation is engineered. Vibration is nothing other than the physical experience of the metaphysical and "numinous" meanings attached to symbols. Rites of passage, cycles of meaning, meditative practices and ceremonial dramas provide the context or arena for the symbolic metaphor to be experienced in ever deepening ways, as energy circulation and vibrations that are felt physically in the body.

The progression from metaphor in the mind to vibration in the body is essential because without it the individual is left with mental constructs and intellectual curiosity, but no physical experience. Without such experience it is impossible to take the next step into the ineffable (Jacobi 1967:54-59), which by definition cannot be adequately described. It does, however, have connotations with the idea of the "numinous" -- a spiritual connection with both other human beings and the metaphorical manifestation of divine presence, the *unio mystico* of Christianity and the experience of the union of opposites, *conjunctio oppositorum*. (d'Aquili 1983:263). The midpoint of the progression from metaphor to vibration then to form usually involves entry into an altered state of consciousness (A.S.C.), so that the individual experiences an oceanic sense of interconnectedness, harmony and integration with the universe. Without the experience of this state, I would argue that behavioral restructuring and personal transformation is highly unlikely. This is what form refers to; the cognitive/perceptual changes in the individual that are reflected behaviorally, and then reinforced socially through the participation and consent of the surrounding community. This ongoing *communitas* after the ritual experience of the initiate is a crucial ingredient of the transformational process. When the physical experience in the body deepens and is interpreted and understood through continued ritual focus, the initiate becomes aware of differences in attitudes and behaviors, as the "numinous" qualities associated with the symbolic metaphor are eventually expressed behaviorally in terms of new and different modes of acting. The new behavior forms are supported socially, and through repeated ritual enactment, which entrench the qualities of the symbolic metaphor in the mind, behaviors, and attitudes of the initiate. It is at this instance that one can say the metaphor has come into form, through a model of behavior transformation based on symbolic focus, "numinous" experience, and mental entrainment. The reinforcement of the ritual experience through social encouragement to enact the metaphorical qualities experienced during the mid point of this process, is essential for the ritual process to work on transforming the behavior of ritual participants. This is to point out that there is often an ongoing sense of *communitas* long after the ritual performance is over. This social consolidation makes the ritual cycle fully effective. This is what rites of passage, the hero's journey, cycles of meaning and so on, accomplish.

Much of the consolidation of the movement from metaphor through vibration to form takes place in what has been referred to as the void. (Muktananda 1974; Mookerjee 1982; Wilbur 1980). This corresponds, in part, to previous discussions of A.S.C. which I see as the pivotal point of liminal experience. (Prattis 1997, Chapter 9). The void is a liminal, transcendent state beyond time and space constraints. It does in fact precede metaphor as it lies beyond all imagery, yet it also contains imagery and metaphor as latency. This latency, however, makes it possible for metaphor to provide a means of accessing the void. The two examples that I discuss later in this essay may make this concept clearer. Being in void energy allows the initiate to experience a heightened awareness of the stimulus provided by symbol. The void also occupies the midpoint in the process of movement from metaphor to vibration and finally to form. It is an experience outside of time and space, where there is nothing in terms of preconceptions or prior experience to hold on to. In this liminal state there is in actual fact a great deal taking place, mostly to do with consolidating within the body the "numinous" qualities of the metaphor focused upon. Metaphor is thus a means for human awareness to connect to symbol, so that the spiritual guidance inherent in all that symbolizes the transcendental, for instance, can initially be grasped. The metaphor -- be it a concept of the Almighty or a symbol for Truth or Eternity -- is an external mental form which corresponds to a latent internal symbolic structure that is not yet known through personal experience.

It is being in energy, through a ritual focus that engenders an A.S.C., which in turn translates the "numinous" qualities of metaphor into personal experience, that the initiate then integrates with physically. So knowledge does not remain a mere intellectual artifice or a series of mental sets; knowledge becomes deeply embedded in the body as physical experience. This is what I understand embodied consciousness is all about. In meditation and other rituals of transformation the focus on a particular symbolic metaphor or complex of symbols, brings to the surface specific qualities that are then felt as a physical circulation throughout the body. Ideally the initiate must be in this energy experience in a detached manner so that the qualities of the metaphor become physically encompassed as experience without any accompanying projections, hence the supreme importance of an A.S.C. and the suspension of time and space. In this process the qualities inherent in particular metaphors can eventually be given form. These changes create

shifts in cognitive/perceptual mind states and permit the initiate to see a larger picture of interconnectedness that was formerly not possible.

As a result of my immersion in meditative techniques I tend to think of symbols in a musical sense, as tones. I have found that continued meditative focus on symbol produces a particular kind of alignment whereby the symbolic focus strikes a tonal chord with like structures in my unconscious and my cells. At these points of synchronicity, much of what is undiscovered (unconscious structures, cellular memory) is then made available to my conscious awareness. My exposure to meditation and transformation rituals has been through the medium of Buddhist *Mahayana* practice, *Siddhi Samadhi* Yoga, and the *pranayama* practices of *Raja* Yoga, in addition to shamanic experience over the past three decades.³ I will briefly allude to the understandings I have derived from my personal experience with these traditions.

I have found metaphor and analogy to be very important aspects of meditation as they enable a symbolic concept to register with one's mind and senses. For instance, the qualities associated with the Star of David, the Cross, or the OM mantra take shape in the structure of symbol and sequence of visualization and experience. In meditation these qualities are transformed by being traced out in white light, (as symbol), and experienced in the body, (as vibration). This aspect of physical experience is very important and explains why so much attention was given by my teachers to personal registration with bodily sensations and the discernment of their significance. They signify a connection, through conscious breath, between one's mental awareness and the corresponding symbolic complexes structured at the cellular and archetypal level. The point of meditation is to bring all these levels into synchronistic harmony with the highest plane of consciousness that is achievable at the time.

From this perspective, the discipline of meditation can be thought of as the focus, through breath, whereby the frequencies of metaphor and symbol are experienced as energy vibrations and circulations in the body in ever-deepening ways. This is the step from metaphor and symbol as mental constructs to vibration -- the physical experience in the body of the tonal frequencies associated with the "numinous" qualities of the metaphor. As this deepens through continual meditation and ritual practice, one suddenly becomes aware of differences in attitude and behaviors. New qualities are expressed from within. The qualities of the symbolic metaphor are thus surfaced, pulled up from the unconscious and activated by a symbolic mental construction that is felt in the body. Without the physical feedback from the body one remains with mental constructs only -- the books and reports of experiences told by others. One does not own the experience for oneself. The physical aspect of meditation and ritual experience -- sensations, vibrations, circulations in the body, energy pulses -- enables one to own the experience for oneself. If this is not the case, then one is a talking head, full of theological niceties, and other people's jargon. One is not informed by the significance of *one's own internal experience*. (Jackson 1989).

In all meditation traditions it is constantly emphasized that the vehicle for transformation is oneself. It may come as a shock to realize that one has all that one needs within oneself, within one's body. This is a metonymic process in which the microcosm (body) contains all the information about the macrocosm (cosmos). (Laughlin et al. 1990). Fully knowing the body means knowing the wonders of the universe. Guidance from teachers and symbolic signposts are essential, hence the necessity for cosmology, ritual and some form of spiritual intervention and guidance. Yet the realization that one is ultimately responsible and alone in one's spiritual evolution fosters a climate where one embraces such aloneness and moves on with trust in one's own bodily Truth. The Gnostics clearly understood this, but paid the price of expulsion from orthodox Christianity once spirituality had become a matter of relating to a God beyond oneself, mediated through the institution of the church and its appointed officials.

To recap the major points made about meditation: the most important focus is the conscious use of breath and the realization that one breathes with one's entire body. The mind focuses on how breath is brought into the body both with respect to location (energy center) and to metaphorical construction (symbol and visualization). In this way mental constructs for direction and amplification of the energy associated with symbolic metaphor enter the body with breath during meditation and are felt as bodily sensations. These vibrational frequencies, or tones, represent particular metaphorical qualities that are held mentally and once experienced physically, translate into form in terms of changes in how we think, speak and act. Continued focus on meditations, visualizations and ritual that characterize the properties of a given symbolic complex

cause changes throughout one's being -- from the cellular level to the expressive level. What one discovers is that one speaks, thinks and interacts with a new appreciation for the qualities inherent in the symbolic complex focused on. Furthermore, the changed manner of expression draws forth corresponding qualities from those interacted with. It is at this instance that one can say the metaphor has come into form at another level, the metaphysical into the physical - although the process is unending as that which seeks to become physical (viz. the metaphysical) is rarely exhaustively appropriated by the individual.

4 Eagle Dance

The Sky Woman or *Winona* Myth of the *Ojibway* and *Iroquois* Nations is about the first spirit being and ancestor of the human race, *Winona*, who descended to the Earth from a hole in the sky and landed upon a great turtle, whose back formed the dry Earth. She is supported and nourished by the animal kingdom, attacked by evil spirits from the underworld, guided by spirit guardians sent by the Creator, and after the Creator's intervention she in turn becomes a guiding light particularly for male spirit quests. The most spectacular transformation that *Winona* guides humans through, is the Eagle Dance, a sacred ritual enactment grounded in this creation myth. In the present era this sacred dance is taught to males who seek to transcend the historic and present tribulations and dispossessions that beset aboriginal society, and thereby provide an example of courage and strength for others. (White Eagle Woman 1990). Before this sacred dance is enacted the initiate is prepared for the movement into a different state of mind and of being - through ritual fasting, sweats, sexual abstinence, observation of food taboos, isolation and solitude. During this time frame, which can take up to eighteen months, the steps to the dance are learned, but beyond this, the qualities that are associated with Eagle are taught. The initiates learn the mythologies and rituals that feature Eagle, and draw on the experience of other initiates who have gone through the ritual preparation for this dance. So the initiate gets a feeling for the majesty, power, and grace of Eagle and a sense of the great dignity and wisdom that underlies the power of all that symbolizes the Eagle. The all-seeing eye of Eagle provides an unflinching vision of truth and clarity. This vigilant scrutiny is both of energy brought towards the initiate, and of all that arises internally, and is designed to enable the initiate to take steps towards ultimately seeing every reality clearly, just as it is. Also taught is the sense of how solitary Eagle is in his majesty and knowledge, without reaction or judgment.

With all of these qualities of the Eagle in mind, the point of meditative and ritual focus for the initiate is to enable him to experience these same qualities arising from inside himself. So after a protracted preparation period, when the initiate dances the Eagle dance for the first time, his altered state of consciousness enables him to soar with the energy and spirit of Eagle and he feels he *is* Eagle. This is felt physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually, all at the same time, and the initiate is taken past internal mental blockages that would formerly prevent the experience to the expression of the "numinous" qualities that symbolize the Eagle. What begins in the mind as symbolic and metaphorical imagery about the qualities of Eagle is taken physically into the body through careful ritual preparation in order that the energy of the Eagle symbol can be experienced as vibration in both the preparation and the dance. The final step is that after the ritual performance, the initiate incorporates aspects of the metaphorical qualities of Eagle that he has experienced into his daily living. And indeed this is expected of him -- to display some, if not all, of the metaphorical qualities associated with the symbolic meaning of Eagle. This is supported through social expectation and repeated ritual enactment, so that the entire ritual experience from Metaphor, through Vibration, finally to Form is reinforced and established through what I have referred to earlier as an on-going *communitas* after the ritual performance.

5 The Eucharist

In the celebration of the Eucharist in Holy Communion, the bread and wine are symbolic of the body and the blood of Jesus of Nazareth. This symbolic complex originated at the last supper when Christ broke bread for his disciples and bade them eat, that in this way they could partake of his essence (his body). The same applied to the wine that was passed around his disciples -- drink and partake of his essence (his blood). In this instant Jesus created a mythic enactment and a means through which this sacrament could be re-experienced in the ceremony of bread and wine that Christians celebrate as Holy Communion. From the Gnostic Acts of John there is an account of Jesus when anticipating arrest in the garden of Gethsemene. He gathered his followers into a circle to dance, while he stood in the center intoning a mystical chant (Pagels 1979:7), asking his disciples to "Answer Amen to me". Although Pope Leo the Great condemned the Acts of John as heresy in the fifth-century, I agree with Joseph Campbell (1988) that this is one of the most magnificent passages in the entire Christian tradition. Consider this excerpt of Jesus speaking to his disciples:

'I am a mirror to you
Who know me. Amen
I am a door to you
Who knock on me. Amen
I am a way to you
The traveller. Amen
Now if you follow
My dance,
See yourself
In Me who am speaking
And when you have seen what I do,
Keep silence about my mysteries...
You who dance, consider
What I do, for yours is
This passion of humanity
Which I am to suffer...
Now if you follow
What I am, you shall see
When you come yourself.' (Acts of John 95:25 – 96:40).

This mythic enactment is a powerful metaphor for all the qualities embodied and symbolized in the being of Jesus Christ. Bynum (1984) describes the Eucharist as the central symbol in a processual ritual drama that moves from the last supper, to the crucifixion and resurrection. The Eucharist symbolizes this entire process in an astonishingly simple and powerful ceremony that nowadays escapes our attention, simply because we remain solely with the intellectual, metaphorical component of what I consider to be the supreme mythic enactment of the entire Christian religion. The mystery that Jesus referred to is to "see yourself in Me who am speaking". This was the experience made available to his disciples at the last supper, a liturgical design so they could feel Christ within them and from that consciousness they could then touch the entire cosmos. Participants in this mythic enactment have the opportunity to glimpse eternity, for revelation to touch their insights, as a deep part of their psyche is illuminated by this elegant and powerful liturgy. This, to my mind, has always been about celebrating the consciousness of Christ- like qualities, of life not of death. So the taking of the Eucharist on a regular basis is meant to produce a fine tuning of an individual's awareness to the energies of Christ consciousness, symbolized in the liturgy of Holy Communion.

Yet for the vast majority of Christians in contemporary society, partaking in Holy Communion is a process of ingesting a wafer and some grape juice in a solemn ceremony usually held on a Sunday. It is rarely more than a surface performance that has become stuck at the metaphorical level. It has intellectual appeal at best, at worst it is a dutiful performance for most participants. Yet look at what has been lost given

the perspective I have offered about metaphor, vibration and form. The purpose of the Eucharist, a mythic enactment about Christ's qualities, is absolutely immense. This purpose is to feel physically that the bread and the wine *is* the body and blood of Christ; that the energy of Christ the savior is at work inside because it is felt physically, and "owned" by the body as experience. It no longer remains a mental or metaphorical concept in the intellect. When people feel the elements of the Eucharist inside themselves, as the body and blood of Jesus, the "numinous" Christlike qualities associated with the symbolism of the Eucharist are brought to the surface of experience and may then become enacted in daily living. In our postmodern culture, however, there is rarely the context for community support to reinforce the ritual experience. Remember that the goal of the Eucharist is to be Christ, just as the goal of the previous liturgy is to be Eagle.

6 Some Loose Threads

There are a number of loose threads left hanging in the present essay that I would like to return to before I draw it to a close. These threads of argument have to do with symbolic appropriation, levels of reality and the outrageous idea of going beyond symbols.

There is a problematic consequence of the deep hunger for ritual in our contemporary society -- a civilization that has apparently lost touch with the unconscious, the symbolic significance of myth and with how ritual enactment lead to personal transformation. This hunger has lead to a large-scale and indiscriminate borrowing and appropriation of other cultures' symbols, and to the prolific creation of syncretic ritual -- all driven by a deep sadness about the modern world's disconnection from a deeper sense of humanity. Barbara Myerhoff (1984), Ronald Grimes (1990, 1993) and others (Myerhoff & Moore 1977; Driver 1991) have cogently argued a case for new rituals in a society that has become increasingly fragmented, and which also lacks the mechanisms to handle the crises and transitions of daily life. New Age movements and prophets of various hues and integrity have appropriated the rituals of other cultures, taken them apart and quite consciously proceeded to create new rituals of their own. Guided more by the spirit of Emerson, the grand do-it-yourselfer, than by an understanding of process, preparation and underlying mythology, men and women are creating goddess circles, wild man retreats, ritual therapy groups and are appropriating, in particular, the sacred ceremonies of Native Americans. This takes me into the delicate area of symbolic appropriation.

It is true to say that cultures have always borrowed symbolic complexes and incorporated ceremonial practices since time immemorial. At the archetypal level of understanding this borrowing is to be expected and perhaps openly permitted -- all other things being equal. But all other things are not equal. Factors such as conquest, dependency, exploitation and colonialism provide a volatile political context as the arena within which symbols are borrowed, reconstructed and used. Consistent with this argument is the notion that humans share common symbolic complexes, located deep in the unconscious, that are expressed in discrete and different regional and cultural manifestations. While recognizing that this is so, it would be naive and irresponsible to ignore the volatile political context within which symbolic appropriation takes place.

Having said this, it is also important to introduce a note of candor into the discussion of symbolic appropriation and syncretic ritual. The communities and populations studied by anthropologists have been subject to varying degrees of capitalist penetration and are part of the global commodification of products, values and symbols. They also participate in the current explosive information era with the combined result that their post-colonial world is largely one of fragmentation, dependency and conflict, involving the breakdown of traditional symbolic systems that once provided meaning for the construction of coherence. Their traditional ceremonies and symbolic maps of coherence are frequently forgotten or have value only to certain elderly segments of aboriginal society. Nonetheless there is in process a worldwide phenomena of populations creatively re-inventing themselves through remembered and borrowed ritual as one means of defining identities for political, moral and symbolic reasons. Thus the issues of syncretic ritual and

symbolic appropriation are not unique to western culture, and never have been. There is a growing pan-cultural phenomena of reviving and re-inventing symbolic systems appropriate for the present era of fragmentation and uncertainty on the one hand, and global commodification on the other. The problems and issues of syncretic ritual can be generalized to a much wider context than western civilization. Furthermore, as our civilization has gone further in the demythologizing process than most other cultures, then our attempts at re-inventing identity through ritual practices -- borrowed, remembered, synthesized -- provides a critical empirical arena for research on symbolic process. This directs the observer's focus to examine both the lack of attention to due process and to the overall context that drives the hunger for ritual in our society.

These considerations take us back to Emerson. The effort to build a better mousetrap assumes that short cuts will be taken in order to produce a more efficient and readily available end product. The heirs to Emerson (viz.-us!) have traveled from the richness of mythic narrative to the terse paucity of seven-second-sound-bytes. When this latter logic and communication preference is transferred to ritual activities, the potential for highly dangerous consequences is created. In non-industrial societies the underlying mythology, ritual preparation and attention to due process enables initiates to engage safely with archetypal material. This occurs under the guidance of shamans or medicine people who have the requisite knowledge of entire cycles of meaning and of the symbolic transformations involved. Without this kind of knowledge, preparation and guidance, modern day wild man retreats, healing circles, or masking workshops, for instance, may well do more harm than good in terms of releasing unconscious material in circumstances where nobody has the requisite knowledge or procedures to facilitate archetypal integration. Given the shortcuts, lack of attention to preparation and due process in symbolic appropriation, is it then possible in the modern world to create meaningful symbolic systems that serve the interests of transformation and societal change? Or are we left with a form of mindless psychobabble that characterizes many New Age endeavors? I think the answer is a little bit of both!

When one engages with archetypes, rituals and mythology, one enters an exceedingly powerful set of symbolic complexes. I think there is a supreme responsibility on anthropologists to clearly understand the consequences and processes of this combination and to communicate to, and educate, a wider public audience about the awesome power of rituals that activate archetypal material. By and large I would argue that our society is stricken with a chronic, but not yet terminal, case of symbolic illiteracy. When this spiritual barrenness is allied with a hunger for meaningful ritual, it is inevitable that individuals and groups will indiscriminately tinker with ritual, other people's and remnants of their own -- we are, after all, the heirs of Emerson, the avid consumers of seven-second-sound-bytes. Yet anthropologists know enough about ritual to advise against tinkering without knowledge, understanding and respect, and as responsible professionals we can counter the gross misunderstandings about ritual, symbols and archetypes. Rituals that are borrowed and vaguely remembered can be recreated in a manner that is authentic, once one understands the importance of respect, preparation and due process.

My experience and exposure to symbolic complexes from other cultures - shamanic and meditative - is that they do strike a personal chord within me. Thirty years of experience and respect for symbolic complexes has been for me a necessary prerequisite before it was possible to reconstruct meaningful symbolic sequences that were valuable for healing and transformative practices in my own society. As a mediator between symbolic systems, my underlying concern with deriving a healing ceremony based on shamanic and meditative experience rested on considerations of safety, responsibility and sacredness, and were a result of my observations of symbolic reconstructions that did not have these considerations (see Chapter 9, Pratts 1997). From the preceding remarks it is obvious that I do not have a solution to the issue of symbolic appropriation and perhaps there is no need for one. However, I do feel it is necessary to map the context, history and further use of another culture's symbols to understand the contingent factors in this sensitive area of symbolic appropriation. Perhaps it would be more correct to refer to archetypal borrowing as symbolic appropriation and to reserve the term cultural appropriation to refer to situations of syncretic borrowing by members of dominant cultures.⁴ At base the question of symbolic appropriation is an

epistemological one. My approach to it is via experience, with an appeal to the unconscious and the universe. Many readers may not go along with me on this, yet it is necessary to reiterate the direction of my preferences.

I offer only those guidelines I am drawn to through my own experience of the symbolic complexes of other cultures. They are; understanding, experience and respect; attention to the principles of safety, responsibility and sacredness; and knowledge and experience of due process. In this regard we can learn a great deal from Buddhist distinctions between historical and ultimate reality that are directly applicable to our understandings about creating significant ritual processes for our times. Thich Nhat Hanh uses the analogy of how waves and water are connected to understand how different dimensions of reality are interwoven (1992:111-128), and why we must learn to touch both. Waves rise, fall and die when they wash up on a shore -- this is the analogy for the historical dimension. The ultimate dimension is the water that remains constant no matter what happens to the waves. Hanh points out that we generally only touch the wave, rarely do we discover how to touch the water. He goes on to say:

'... the world of waves is characterized by birth and death, ups and downs, being and non-being. A wave has a beginning and an end but we cannot ascribe these characteristics to water. In the world of water, there is no birth or death, no being or non-being, no beginning or end. When we touch the water we touch reality in this ultimate dimension and are liberated from all of these concepts.' (Hanh 1992:117).

Ultimate reality thus refers to a transcendent reality, a dimension outside of time and space. Historical reality, on the other hand, is the existential dimension of our day to day existence. The two realities are brought together or at least overlap, through mythology, ritual enactment and meditative practice. I have referred to myths as sacred narratives beyond time and space; to rituals as mythic enactments that bring the mythic dimension into existential reality, with unique symbolic performances that are discrete to particular cultures, religions and times. So that which lies outside of time and space is brought *into* the dimension of time and space through mythic enactments. I would argue further that transformation is not possible without this particular interconnection of dimensions. For if we try to symbolically transform time and space elements (existential reality), by applying other time/space elements to them, then very little will take place beyond surface posturing. "A" cannot change or transform "A". But if the symbolic basis of transformation draws on no time/no space elements, and applies them to temporal/spatial phenomena then movement towards the transcendent is possible. Here we have "B" working on "A" and transformation is now a possibility, particularly if it takes place within well orchestrated symbolic processes that are socially supported and mythologically grounded. Thus we can begin to appreciate, from another level, the supreme importance of mythology.

I believe that archetypes operate in the same manner as mythology in that they too are symbolic complexes beyond time and space. Jung (1953) implied, and Laughlin insists, that archetypes are neural structures of cognition that developed during the evolution of our species. For our present existential reality the archetypes can be considered as symbolic complexes structured in our collective unconscious, the experience of which lies beyond time and space. Laughlin maintains that the archetypes are the direct window into what he calls the 'non-local totality of the Quantum Sea.' (1996). An important part of the human spiritual journey is to recognize and actualize the archetype of Divine Consciousness, often referred to as the God Archetype. (Coward 1990; Zimmer 1969). It manifests itself in different religious connotations of the transcendent in different populations, religions and time/space frames. For instance, concepts of God, the Creator, Yahweh, Allah, *Bodhisattvas*, etc. draw on a similar archetype - that of Divine Consciousness - which lies outside of time and space and manifests in the temporal/spatial dimension as specific, culture bound religious preferences. There is not a time or space boundary on archetypes, thus they are a facet of ultimate reality. Their projection through myths, dreams and enactment in the symbolic sequences of ritual and ceremony brings them into historical, existential reality so that time/space referents are symbolically connected to no time/no space referents. We can then touch both the wave and the water.

Without this kind of equation I do not think ritual can work in a transformative manner. This assertion provides a caveat to assess the quality of emergent ritualizing in our society (Grimes 1993:10); because a

secular mentality, applying itself to ritual processes, rarely recognizes the significance of the no time/no space dimension which in turn provides the foundation and symbolic energy for transformation. Yet this is what contemporary ritualizing is so desperately trying to touch. Indeed we are driven to it, for in our collective unconscious lies a no time/no space "programming" in that ultimate reality (the water) lies unrecognized within our minds as archetypes. This is why there is a psycho-biological drive, innate to our species, to experience altered states and mythic consciousness. (see Prattis 1997).

James Joyce once remarked that our existential reality with its trials, tribulations, triumphs and sorrows is an opera, only it hurts! To endure the opera and to transform our beings requires a glimpse or experience of a reality not bound by historical, existential constraints of time and space. Hence the value of Buddhist and other cultural conceptions about ultimate reality. For when the timeless, the spaceless enters the historical reality of daily existential activities, it provides a conduit or path for our consciousness and lives to transform. We yearn for these glimpses, fleeting experiences, and the lack of them drives the hunger in our civilization for meaningful symbol systems. However, in the cobbling together of ritual from different sources, the syncretic end result often ignores or only pays lip service to the no time/no space dimension of ultimate reality that actually spurs our transformation. In other words, drastic or marked changes in consciousness are not attained. This is despite the fact that our myths are good -- for instance the Parsifal myth, the emerging Gaia myth and the mythology behind the enactment of the Eucharist (Bynum 1984) -- all contain the components of ultimate reality. We can take the time and discipline to learn, understand, and appreciate the myths of other cultures -- otherwise their rituals, once borrowed, do not make sense, and more importantly they do not carry the energy of transformation as they are taken out of the context of no time/no space.

Symbolic transformation begins in the dimension of ultimate reality beyond time and space that many cultures clearly recognize and articulate in their myths and dreams. The myths of the world, as Jung has pointed out, carry the imprints of archetypal material. Therefore the dimension of ultimate reality is clearly inherent in human beings, in the archetypal level of the collective unconscious. So when we make myths and create rituals we bring into existential reality the deep knowledge of ultimate reality that lies undiscovered within us. In this cycle we take steps to return to what we hold deep in our minds and create a fuller, more integrated expression of ourselves. These recognitions provide important caveats and guidelines in our rush to tinker with ritual. It requires that we become aware of different dimensions of ourselves and realize that a meaningful symbol system is one that brings the historical and ultimate dimensions together in the interests of integration and transformation. The obverse is that if our ritualizing processes are not mythologically and archetypally based then they are a surface practice, a superficial acting out of the deeper connections that are available. With these caveats in mind, our headlong rush into symbolic appropriation *can* be tempered with knowledge about process, connections and dimensions. There is a clear logic to it all, yet it is a logic that requires that we first of all experience it.

A final thought is about going beyond symbol. In meditation and ritual dramas a great deal of attention is devoted to the constant surfacing and releasing of patterns that obstruct vision and clarity. Indeed, the different techniques of meditation can be viewed as mechanisms of symbolic entrainment designed to deal with such obstructions. The symbolic forms in meditation are frequently set within *mandalas* (circles) into which the separation and obstructions dissolve. It is no accident that this framework also operates as a physical stage or theatre for Native American rituals -- medicine wheels, sweat lodges and healing ceremonies. By relying on a symbolic focus for "assistance" up the ladder of consciousness, one must be aware that such focus in and of itself incorporates notions of separation. The symbol forms a boundary or veil, and often times a crutch to enable one to journey further along the continuum of consciousness. Yet the focus on symbols, the importance of mythology, and the attention to due process is so that all of these components can ultimately be abandoned. I am asserting that in ritual life the progressive exposure to symbolic encounters ultimately leads one to recognize the inherent redundancy of symbol. It too is an obstruction, and focus upon symbol, myth and structure has to dissolve into emptiness and silence. The symbol itself is drawn from historical reality yet its *referent* is that of ultimate reality! Symbols thus bridge the realities kept separate in our minds and experience. When the symbol becomes redundant then the boundaries of separation between ultimate and historical reality become meaningless. For example, the Tai

Chi symbol of Yin and Yang energies maps complementary gender and energy polarities framed within a circular *mandala* form. The real significance of this symbol becomes apparent when it dissolves into emptiness at the center of the *mandala*. This is the point of symbolic exposure and maturity: to dissolve polarities, to release obstructions until the final obstruction is also released -- the symbol itself.

All of this, of course, is very difficult to contemplate and even more difficult to experience. So we rely on progressive symbolic encounters as navigational guides both through the crises of life and for movement along the continuum of consciousness. The *Upanisads* of India, a most wonderful mythology of consciousness, address these concerns directly. The *Vedic* notion of the four stages of life (*asrama*) describes how as students and householders, individuals are influenced by biological drives and external worldly identifications. (Coward 1990:55). Myth, symbol and ritual are the vehicles that take attention away from the *egosphere* of the first two stages of life (student and householder), and refocus an individual's attention to the internal *ecosphere* of the final two stages. In other words, these vehicles set us up for the transformations in consciousness anticipated for the final two stages of life, which are referred to as the forest and wandering holy beggar stages. (Zimmer 1969:155-158). Jung would no doubt describe this as the final steps in the individuation of a person, the insistence by the God archetype that it be recognized and actualized. The forest stage involves the throwing away of external identifications and worldly concerns before discovering the essence of self underneath the masks and identities gathered throughout life. The mythology and symbols that guide an individual to this stage are themselves masks and they too must be abandoned. This is what I mean by going beyond symbol. The *Vedas* support a very profound cycle of meaning, as the *Rishis* and *Yogis*, having gone beyond mythology and symbol, return to society with their experience and wisdom. They then teach others the necessary symbolic steps to arrive at the state of "no symbol", an awesome yet comprehensible journey of the Hero in both classical and modern life.

7 Conclusion

Now that the threads of symbolic appropriation, levels of reality, and going beyond symbol are loosely tied I can return to summarize the body of this essay. My text has demonstrated that an understanding of symbolic events cross culturally requires an appreciation for the significance of the interplay between context, structure, process and phenomenological experience; furthermore, with how they connect to different dimensions of reality. This cycle of understanding leads to an emphasis on symbolic systems as models of behavior transformation, and research may usefully be applied in identifying the limits of process by examining instances in which this process runs its full course, and in which it does not. The two examples -- the Eucharist and Eagle dance -- amplified my model of process. The movement from metaphor to vibration, then to form, also augments an understanding of the processual analyses of Campbell, Turner, Jung and Laughlin, while at the same time providing a critique of the transformational grammar of Lévi-Strauss. Finally, the model enables one to understand the lack of transformation and change in some symbolic systems, by identifying the component of process where societal attention becomes fixated -- mostly at the metaphorical, intellectual level. The two examples provide graphic illustrations of this. The thoughts on symbolic appropriation and discussion of the ultimate redundancy of symbol, instigates a debate about the professional responsibility of anthropologists concerning the symbolic processes and emergent ritualizing of our times. This raises questions of what and how we communicate, who we communicate it to, and more precisely why we must serve a public much wider than that served in strict academic discourse. I leave the last words of this essay with Thich Nhat Hahn. In discussing the activities of *Bodhisattvas* he brings the two dimensions of reality together and illuminates the *Vedic* cycle I discuss in the previous paragraph. He states:

'Having touched the ultimate dimension, these *bodhisattvas* return to the historical dimension to help, however they can, to transform the suffering and offer relief. They live the life of a wave, but they also live the life of water, and in doing so, they offer us non-fear.' (Hahn 1992:128).

Endnotes

1. John Dourley and Derek Blair provided very thoughtful critiques of an earlier draft of this essay. Tim Olaveson directed my attention to grammatical mistakes and to my neglect of the concept of the "numinous". Charles Laughlin provided a timely and well received critique. My debt of gratitude is to them all.
2. John Dourley, Professor of Religion at Carleton University, suggested this tracking sequence in his very helpful critique of an earlier draft of this essay.
3. My own field experience of these teachings was through the wisdom of White Eagle Woman (1990-1995) and a medicine woman of the *Shuswap* nation who prefers not to be identified (1988-1990). I present a distillation of their guidance, which has been dutifully checked with them in an ongoing consultation for accuracy in representing their knowledge and teachings.
4. Conversations with Derek Blair brought out the importance of these distinctions.

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