

THE AXIS MUNDI: THE ROLE OF COMMUNITY GATHERINGS IN CULTURAL DEVELOPMENT

(Roger) Neil Cameron (MPhil)

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Abstract

Gatherings have always been vital to community development because they bring about important social alignments within any group: festivals, rites of passage, celebrations, rituals and ceremonies are essential parts of our development as human beings. *Homo sapiens sapiens* survived by working together as cohesive groups and the human animal has evolved various susceptibilities that lean towards these kinds of community experiences. Billions of dollars are spent on these events around the world; hundreds of thousands of people work to bring them about; and they can be found in almost every community on Earth. Yet there is surprisingly little research on their evolutionary relationships and common structures.

This thesis examines these community gatherings or ‘tuning’ processes with the aim of producing a system of understandings that illuminates their inner workings. It is hoped that such a system of analysis will aid cultural development processes in communities and be of benefit to the designers of these vital events.

Community gatherings are examined through field studies in India, Australia, the United Kingdom and Ireland, as well as the author’s own extensive practice of organising such events for over forty years. This critical reflection on community gatherings reveals certain commonalities of dynamics, forms and processes, and these insights inform the development of a system of understanding, the Axis Mundi Analytical System – AMAS. Contemporary, historical and pre-historical events are investigated in the light of this analytical system and various international examples are used to illustrate its application.

This study is significant because it provides a theoretically enriched, practice-informed framework intended to be of real interest to designers of community gatherings as a tool to understanding the social and cultural dynamics that they work with and provide a mechanism to help them organise gatherings that enhance community development to its fullest potential.

Declaration

This dissertation contains no material that has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any tertiary institution, and to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text.

Signature

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Neil Cameron". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Date

9/11/2010

Statement of access

This thesis may be made available for loan. Copying any part of this thesis is prohibited for two years from the date that this statement was signed; after that time limited copying is permitted in accordance with the *Copyright Act 1968*.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Neil Cameron". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'N' and a long, sweeping underline.

Neil Cameron

18 March, 2010

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Part I: Introduction and Methodology

In these next two chapters I introduce the study and comment about the methodology used.

Chapter 1: Introduction

‘...the human mind is more a universe than the universe itself’ (Fowles 1966, p.118).

How gatherings work

Throughout my professional practice in cultural development I have used community gatherings as an important tool for developing social unity and identification. I have worked as an arts director of these events and I have seen what powerful effects gatherings can have in communities. I have experienced their capacity to bring people together in very positive ways, and know what strong and beautiful results can be produced when community expression is channelled through gatherings.

As a convergent event a gathering can ‘concentrate’ feeling, issues and situations into intense amalgams in ways that other forms of social contact cannot. These concentrated situations produce an intensity of focus that can establish loci of great energy capable of facilitating many different functions, including community expression, individual alignment, group identity, pollinated situations (by which I mean rich cultural cross-fertilisation) and opportunities for interchange. Gatherings are able to produce visions of social change for the future and summon up the past to understand histories. They can create an ideal, symbolic space where sacred or carnival aspects can be realised. They are alignment structures, each capable of creating a vision of the ideal. As Jorge Luis Borges described it, they are ‘Mortal, temporal copies of an unimaginable archetype’ (cited in Coleman 1999, p.425): social problems can be isolated at these events and worked out in places of experiment and creativity. Ideas can be played with, random thoughts pollinated into the mix, de-patterning can occur without harm, and results can be transferred back into local life. Gatherings thus act to transform, affirm, transcend and cathart social mechanisms that are all needed to produce healthy communities.

Gatherings have the capacity to formalise, to create spaces where social agreements are played out, and they have informal capacities where people relax and

enjoy themselves. Gatherings are a complex set of social mechanisms with a very varied social brief. These events are a social apparatus, taking a group from normal life to a special situation and back again in order to fulfil essential functions within a community. Gatherings territorialise¹ a wide set of social dynamics, bringing them together in various configurations and de-territorialise again to bring groups back to normal life.

Gatherings have a vital role to play in contemporary society. They have multitudinous expressions of human activity that include people of all races and beliefs, all economic backgrounds and all political and social positions, as well as a broad range of organisers, arts professionals and technicians who bring these events together. Internationally, these events involve hundreds of millions of people. They cost many billions of dollars² annually and have a profound effect on our consciousness as individuals and societies. These convergences have spanned all times and all geographical locations, producing some of the most moving and beautiful expressions that reveal the human condition and, conversely, they have sometimes been used to create situations of horror and distress. In spite of the importance of these activities in cultural development, no single system of analysis has spanned the depth and breadth of this particular domain—one that might form a praxis that would bring theory and practice into some sort of workable synergic taxonomy. It was the overall aim of this thesis to achieve such systemisation.

These community events vary greatly, the very heterogeneity of gatherings could make a unifying theory very difficult and yet, as an arts practitioner in the field, I could detect, under the patina of each cultural expression, a commonality of structure that emerged time and time again. I believed that a strong analytical system could be developed and used by professional event designers. As archaeologists Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2005, p.9) suggest:

What we need is a method that will help us to access knowledge about the universal foundations of diversity. We need to ask: What anchors facets of

¹ See Deleuze and Guattari (1987).

² It is estimated that the Beijing 2008 Olympic Games Opening Ceremony cost US\$100 million according to the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (<http://www.cbc.ca/world/story/2008/08/08/f-beijing-by-numbers.html>).

human behaviour that turn up in culture after culture? What leads to these commonalities?

It was a very broad remit. Often research projects tend to look, in depth, at a particular feature of gatherings but to discover common structures in all gathering events required a research program that embraced a very wide area of study. This had its disadvantages. Many of the areas studied warranted deeper examination and the danger was that the study could become too diverse, but I believed that in the field of cultural development a studied and comprehensive overview of what constituted gatherings was vitally needed and, in spite of the difficulties of analysis, we needed to understand more of their overall mechanics; and I was sure that this could be achieved.

To produce an overall understanding this research had to have directed aims. The first aim was to see if there really were common structures that underpin gatherings and, if so, to unpack and understand their elements. By bypassing cultural difference and working with examples found throughout the world, could such commonalities be found? If this could be achieved then this knowledge would become an invaluable tool in designing community gatherings. By studying how people have designed liminal zones, rituals, ceremonies and festivals, parades, processions and celebrations in different cultures at different times I unpacked various elements and compared them, looking for commonalities and variations. I looked at how gatherings were internally distinguished according to these elements and examined what makes up their various parts. I asked specific questions. Why do seasons matter, what semiology do people use, how does design create certain emotional effects, why do people react to myth and archetype and what do they feel in various diverse spaces? How are they affected by different states of inducement such as drink and drugs, how does meditation or movement affect the atmosphere? I felt that if commonalities of structure were to be found, then this comparative method was a way to find them.

Covering a wide sample of gathering events involved a threefold approach to research: practice-based reflections on a career, now forty years in duration, as a designer of such events; scholarly investigations of a significant interdisciplinary literature apposite to the breadth of the questions posed; and field studies in

Australia, India, Britain and Ireland examining sites where gatherings were held. The gatherings with which I was concerned included festivals, ceremonies, celebrations, initiations, funerals, weddings, fairs and carnivals.

To be able to 'hold' this information and gather it in a tight taxonomy, an overall system was needed and this became the second aim of the project - the development of a comprehensive analytical schema. Central to this overall system there needed to be an all embracing image, a central symbol that could represent the energies of gatherings. I called this conceptual centre the Axis Mundi³ - the central pivotal axis around which the vital function of social cohesion turns, a metaphor that could be carried through the thesis and unify, under one banner, all the gathering events I would examine. Applied to any gathering, in any community, the Axis Mundi could be seen as the energy that creates a community 'point' that attracts a social energy around it: people would create its spin and, in its vigorous movement, a community could truly say that a significant gathering had been achieved.

Because every universe is enclosed in curves, every universe is concentrated in a nucleus, a spore, a dynamized center (Bachelard 1958, p.157).

The vertical line of the Axis Mundi calls up the image of a central axis, a line on which everything turns, on which the whole world rotates, and we would, in modern times, probably see it as a line that runs through the planet from the North Pole to the South Pole, reflecting our understanding of the Earth's rotation.

However the symbology of the Axis Mundi allows it to begin anywhere on the surface of the world and remain true and in harmony with the idea. In Medieval times, this idea was captured in a cosmological map; this is exemplified in Dante's⁴ Axis Mundi found in *The Divine Comedy*⁵ with the sacred above and hell below. We cannot place an axis through the Earth and get it wrong; all points work, each links the sky (a symbolic search for meaning) with the underworld (an exploration of

³ Mentioned in Renfrew and Bahn (1991, p.406).

⁴ See Dante (1971, 1962 and 1955). See Pope-Hennessy (1993).

⁵ He explored this line from the 'dark wood' to Mount Purgatory with the ghost of Virgil; starting at the gates of the Inferno and down through the circles to the frozen wastes of the Inferno, placed exactly in the centre of the Earth, and then emerges again to re-behold the stars on the opposite side of the earth. They then climb the mount that 'straitens what has gone array' and then to the stars.

our hidden depths). The Nobel Prize-winning poet Octavio Paz put it this way:

Child with spinning top,

Every time he throws it,

It lands at the very centre of the world

(cited in Follmi, 2006, dated 6th May [diary form])

In this study Axis Mundi events are those where the energy of the community is brought to life by a ‘hub of meaning’ that provides a tuning between individuals and the group. It is where a time is set aside and designated to gathering. Moreover, it is a place where a focus of collective expression can rise and spin, propelled by its own momentum, and bring the community into a certain collective alignment.

Axis Mundi suggests the idea that there is a ‘centre to things’, a place where meaning is symbolised and enacted, a ‘doorroong willam’ as Australian indigenous peoples might say.⁶ It seems to state ‘this is the point, the centre, the place where we can gather, a point we can rely on; it can hold the heart of community, and we can all be a part of it’.

Through hundreds of thousands of years, Axis Mundi gatherings could be found around the camp fire, where people would form a community circle of common culture. These centres of focus can be found in some of the first houses ever built; in Catal Hoyuk in Turkey for example, where internal domestic spaces were ritual-balanced environments with each design factor dedicated to a central cosmological idea. We find similar dynamics in the magnificent cathedrals of Europe, with their spires reaching towards the sky. Axis Mundi can be discovered in natural spaces where sacred rites were performed in Ancient Greece, or in village greens where people danced around the maypole in Medieval England. We can find these centres in Asian temples on top of mountains or in the streets of Rio de Janeiro during carnival. The spaces or centres designated for social gathering can be permanent or temporary. All can be appropriated and given the status of an Axis Mundi.

⁶ ‘Heart of the place’—Wurundjeri Language, Victoria.

The Axis Mundi provides the designer of gatherings with a metaphor that involves collective power and a solid and reliable pivot, which, through its momentum and its turnings, harmonises energies, places order and stability, creates balance and brings about unity. These balanced turnings are not the energy of confusion and chaos; there is no Charybdis here. The energy that turns celebratory worlds in the Axis Mundi creates stability, a cosmology of order: it is a balance communities can trust. The energy created around its turning produces a vigour, a power and a certain fertility that sums up community life itself and is in concord with it: a measured synchronisation and a suggested order of the universe. Even the carnival, as profane and chaotic as it seems, has, at its heart, a certain order.

The nature of the universe which stills

The centre and resolves all else, from here,

As from its starting point. All movement wills. (Dante 1962, p. 294).

To use the simplest example to illuminate this energy, we might see the child in Paz's poem struggling to master the axis of a small spinning top, trying time and time again to put the toy into motion. It lies inert, waiting to be realised, until in one magical moment the child manages to produce the right energy in the right place and the top spins, lifting from gravity, its colours blurring. Its potential is unleashed, it turns, the child is overjoyed.⁷ In Kafka's (1995) story *The Top*, the philosopher is determined to understand the world in the spinning of a top and is frustrated when, every time he grabs it to discover the secret, it stops, and so reveals nothing. It is the energy surrounding the axis that drives the rotational movement that brings the Axis Mundi to life; energy gives it its attraction, its mystery. If the energy ceases, the top falls; without the energetic impulse it is immovable, inferring a leaden stoppage, a death, a grinding to a halt. The gathering disperses and ceases to turn and all energy is lost.

However, the overall metaphor did not provide everything that a schema

⁷ Tops were the earliest toys found as grave goods and also were used by the people of the Pacific for predictions. Clay tops found in ancient Sumer were made about 5500 BP and ceramic ones made in Troy about 5000 BP.

would need in order to provide a total understanding of how gatherings work. I had to work out a much more complex system to hold concepts of dynamics, form, the use of space, how the arts are utilised and what self-induced states are used. This system I named the Axis Mundi Analytical System (AMAS) and this provided me with a schema able to gather all the information into a tight taxonomy. I explain the working of this in Chapter Two.

Why gatherings happen

If it is true that gatherings are made up of common structural elements it follows that human beings build these structures because they answer some basic social functions within human existence. To fully comprehend gatherings in this light I had to look into *why* gathering happened in the first place and this became the third aim. To reach these ‘universal foundations of diversity’ that Lewis-Williams and Pearce mentioned, I needed to establish what social needs underlie gathering events and this meant studying the past as well as the present. Using the dialogic ideas of polymath Mikhail Bakhtin (1984) who claims that the past can still have a conversation with the present and can inform and affect thinking about modern practice, I traced community gathering events back into history and prehistory⁸ to see why gatherings had started and what social needs they met. Even deep prehistory is still able to inform contemporary situations; our inchoate emergence lies like a palimpsest, faded but still vibrant, under the surface of gatherings today.

It is likely that *Homo sapiens sapiens* evolved from a single mother in Africa about two hundred thousand years ago. Our ancestors, who had their beginnings with this single ‘Eve’, slowly spread throughout North Africa and into Asia. Some moved east and some west in a major bifurcation that would only come together again in the explorations of the Vikings around 1000 BP. The peoples of the west settled in northern Africa, the Middle East and Europe and slowly evolved into the civilisations that eventually developed the technology to cross the Atlantic.

The east-bound groups spread over the Asian landmass, slowly moving

⁸ I separate history and pre-history in this study at 3000 BP.

towards the rising sun, generation by generation, millennium after millennium, step by step, in an equally extraordinary journey of human exploration. Some crossed the ice bridge over the Bering Sea to present day Alaska about fifteen thousand years ago, and then began the slow percolation into North (12,000 BP) and South America (10,000 BP). This slow exodus reached a point where indigenous peoples arrived in what is now known as eastern Canada and Greenland. There they met up with their ancient cousins who had travelled from the west, who happened to be the Vikings. It was not a very successful link-up.⁹ These were the first meetings of eastern and western peoples, who had unknowingly provided the last link that completed a unique circle of human habitation around the planet.¹⁰

Although this link-up might have been the first contact between the two migrations, it was to come to nothing in cultural terms as Greenland was evacuated in the 'small ice age' of the 14th century and no real consequence was to come from the encounters. It was during Columbus's exploration that the two groups were finally pulled into each other's orbit, and the energy that flowed between them eventually established the modern world (Bellec 2002; Berthon and Robinson 1991; Flaum 1990; Newby 1985).

This historic meeting of the two groups reveals something of deep significance to this study of human gatherings. Columbus was emerging from a culture that was very different from the one he found on his landfall in the Caribbean. The whole development of western thought had produced people capable of controlling their environments through technological understandings—sophisticated farming methods, instruments, machinery, boats and guns. Columbus brought with him the accumulated knowledge of the medieval world that was, at that point, being

⁹ '[Thorvald] then said: 'Here it is beautiful, and here would I like to raise my dwelling.' Then went they to the ship, and saw upon the sands within the promontory three elevations, and went thither, and saw there three skin boats (canoes), and three men under each. Then divided they their people, and caught them all, except one, who got away with his boat. They killed the other eight, and then went back to the cape, and looked round them, and saw some heights inside of the firth, and supposed that these were dwellings' 'Grœnlendinga Saga' (Greenland Saga) viewed 26 January 2009. <http://gr_nlendinga_saga.totallyexplained.com/>.

¹⁰ Thor Heyerdahl set out to prove that the Ancient Egyptians could have made the first crossing of the Atlantic in papyrus rafts by making two boats from original drawings found in Ancient Egypt. He failed in his first attempt but succeeded in Ra II in 1970; however, there is little evidence that these journeys were ever made in ancient times.

added to by Renaissance thought, itself heavily influenced by the Byzantine. On the other hand, the local Taino people, who had made the journey from the east, were people who had developed little technology or science. Yet, in spite of such different cultural bases developed over two hundred thousand years, and despite the clash of these vastly different systems, the Taino peoples and the Spanish explorers did have a commonality that is important to this study—the inner *structures* of their gathering events were identical and they used them for the same social proposes.¹¹

Using imaginative licence, I can visualise Columbus and his men going through a formal celebration to thank their God for deliverance to San Salvador. There would be processions, singing, ritual movement, symbology, prayer and a sacred space delineated. Each individual crew member would be part of the group's identity and taken into this formal religious situation and brought into synchronisation with each other, forming group affirmation and association. I imagine that after the religious service was over informal activities would take place, probably augmented with alcohol, where people would dance and sing and release themselves to the joy of their survival. If anyone had died, they would be buried with formal honours. In spite of the cultural differences, it is almost certain that the local people practised similar ways of using gatherings to express their own common identity. They are also likely to have had ritual environments, processions, symbolic landscapes, rituals and formal interactions with their deities and probably, like the Spanish, would celebrate informally with dance and song. They would have festivals, bury their dead with solemnity, tell stories and celebrate weddings.

We might look at the meeting between Columbus and the Taino people from

¹¹ Although there is little ethnographical evidence to prove that the Taino peoples had these systems we might presume them to be true. More detailed records of cultures all over the Americas recorded over the next hundred years demonstrated that all groups had these basic structures in place. Las Casas, the first North American born ordained priest argued that these new people were indeed fully rational beings, whose social structures and a large number of its practices, were equal to anything the Old World had produced (*Bartolome de Las Casas and his defense of the Indians*, viewed 10 July 2009. <<http://www.hartford-hwp.com/archives/40/186.html>>). In later explorations of the South American continent the Spanish were to discover complex and sophisticated civilisations (Aztec and Inca amongst others) that amply demonstrated that South American peoples had built rational social structures closely resembling the West in day-to-day practice. 'In pre-contact California, these late Palaeolithic villages boasted a spectrum of trades as well as complex political hierarchies. This is vital. It proves that complex political organization did not arise solely from agriculture, still less from the invention of writing' (Smail 2008, p.67).

historical, social or ethnographical perspectives, but the encounter reveals an ancient commonality of gathering behaviour that lies hidden in the deep social structure of the two peoples. In such a light Pinker (1997, p.32) argues that contrary 'to the widespread belief that cultures can vary arbitrarily and are without limit, surveys of ethnographical literature show that the peoples of the world share an astonishingly detailed universal psychology'. By extrapolating from this historic meeting, both back into prehistory and forward into our own time, by scanning the Eolithic¹² age and our Postlithic times, and by linking the atavistic with the modern, the antediluvian with the contemporary, I found that wherever human beings are found they will build the selfsame gathering structures to fulfil specific and essential social needs. Gatherings helped form associative groups by binding people together; they formed ameliorative situations where different peoples could share experience; they 'acted out' various important factors that needed to be imbued within the group; they added understandings of the environment and gave expression to cosmological ideas.

Although I had discovered that gatherings *had* emerged from common social imperatives and did have common structures I had still not answered why the *same* structures appeared in all human society in spite of the differences in local cultural expression through time and place. Answering this question became the fourth aim. I had to move beneath local *modus vivendi* to discover what lay at the very heart of gatherings that made them universal.

I researched this question deeply and found that the answer is that these structures are deeply similar because we are all of the same species: *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Our brains have *evolved* to gather because gathering was essential to human survival, and that is why we will always produce the same structures at all times and places - our brains are designed in such a way that they will always produce the same structures in the same way. According to Geertz (1973, p.69) 'the evolution of what

¹² Scientists studying craniums have found that the brain in modern humans has remained virtually unchanged for one hundred thousand years. 'Our ancestors of a hundred thousand years ago were already anatomically modern humans with bodies and brains' (Miller 2000, p.17). 'It is, therefore, unnecessary to postulate either a discontinuous, "difference-in-kind" pattern of human evolution or a nonselective role for culture during all phases of hominid development in order to preserve the empirically established generalization that as far as their [inborn] capacity to learn, maintain, transmit, and transform culture is concerned, different groups of *Homo sapiens* must be regarded as equally competent' (Geertz 1973, p.69).

eventually developed into the human nervous system was positively shaped by social ones'. We have the same brain architecture and therefore we will build these structures compulsively in any society; they are part of being human, and we have evolved a brain that has these 'leanings' inbuilt.¹³ Indeed,

the doctrine of the psychic unity of mankind, which so far as I am aware, is today not seriously questioned by any reputable anthropologist... asserts that there are no essential differences in the fundamental nature of the thought process among the various living races of man (Geertz 1973, p.62).

The gathering structures that bring community together are not arbitrary actions that spring up by accident in groups. They are deep-seated activities compulsively exercised: human beings have this susceptibility¹⁴ built into their cognitive design, and they continue to build these common structures through time and place because the brain architecture is not predisposed to form them in any other way.¹⁵ In one view:

One of the things that marks humanity out from other species, and accounts for our ecological success, is our collection of hyper-social instincts. Yet to most people instincts are animal things, not human. The conventional wisdom in the social sciences is that human nature is simply an imprint of an individual's background and experience. But our cultures are not random collections of arbitrary habits. They are canalized expressions of our instincts. That is why the same themes crop up in all cultures—themes such

¹³ 'Although each society's cosmology is unique, nevertheless there are broad structures that derive from the brain' (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005, p.11).

¹⁴ It is important to note the word 'susceptibilities'; they are 'leanings towards' not certainties. 'But the point is that when we attribute mind to an organism, we are talking about neither the organism's actions nor its products per se, but about its capacity and its proneness, its disposition, to perform certain kinds of actions and produce certain kinds of products, a capacity and a proneness we of course infer from the fact that he does sometimes perform such actions and produce such products' (Geertz 1993, p.51).

¹⁵ 'Its generality is founded on the working of the human brain that, in all its electro-chemical complexity, creates what we call our minds. The neurological functioning of the brain, like the structure and functioning of other parts of the body, is a human universal. The specific contents of individual minds, their thoughts, images and memories, are another matter altogether; content is largely, but not entirely, provided by cultures as they are, or were, at specific times in human history' (Lewis-Williams and Pearce 2005, p.6).

as family, ritual, bargain, love, hierarchy, friendship, jealousy, group loyalty and superstition. That is why, for all their superficial differences of language and custom, foreign cultures are still immediately comprehensible at the deeper level of motives, emotions and social habits (Ridley, 1996, p.6).

Community gatherings have been essential to the evolutionary process and are built into our cognitive designs. Of such matters Smail (2008, pp112-3) writes:

Current theories suggest that our large brain did not evolve to solve the relatively simple problem associated with tool use, much less the problems posed by the hunt. Instead, the large human brain evolved over the past 7 million years to allow individuals to negotiate the escalating complexities posed by human social living. This is still what we use the brain for today—most of the time, at least. And then there are all the noncognitive features of the brain. Many of the things we do are shaped by behavioral predispositions, moods, emotions, and feelings that have a deep evolutionary history. These body states are not ghostly things flitting mysteriously through consciousness. Recent work in neuropsychology and neurophysiology has shown that they are physiological entities, characteristically located in specific parts of the brain and put there by natural selection. Some of them, including emotions, are relatively automated, no different from the other areas of life governance—basic metabolism, reflexes, pain, pleasure, drives, motivations—that are routinely handled by the brain in all hominoids.

Although many theories speculate how human beings took their particular evolutionary path—inter-tribal competition, the opposing thumb, sexual attraction—there is little doubt that much of our success, in evolutionary terms, was facilitated by the fact that we belonged to well-organised working groups that bonded and associated effectively. To do this more efficiently the human brain evolved the ability to ‘think’ and ‘communicate’.¹⁶ We evolved by being able to process the outside

¹⁶ ‘The evolutionary anthropologists such as John Tooby and Leda Cosmides see the modern mind as the product of biological evolution, and argue that the only way that so complex an entity can have arisen is by natural selection. In particular they argue that the human mind evolved under the selective pressures faced by hunter-gatherers during the Pleistocene period, and that our minds remain adapted to that way of life. Several writers have followed this lead, seeking to place the evolution of mind in

world in intelligent ways and, by cooperating with one another, to form identifiable groups with efficient teamwork, good communication and information exchanges. The human brain has evolved to interact with a group, and, consequently, groups were able to survive as strong units rather than collections of random individuals. According to Capra (2002, p.3):

social reality evolved out of the biological world between two and four million years ago, when a species of 'Southern apes' (*Australopithecus afarensis*) stood up and began to walk on two legs. At that time, the early hominids developed complex brains, tool-making skills and language, while the helplessness of their prematurely born infants led to the formation of the supportive families and communities that became the foundation of human social life. Hence, it makes sense to ground the understanding of social phenomena in a unified conception of the evolution of life and consciousness.

We are animals with few physical defence mechanisms. We have neither large teeth nor sharp claws, and we cannot run at any great speed, and have little protective hair when the cold descends; thus we are vulnerable to other animals, including the smallest of insects and inclement weather. Our ancestors were especially vulnerable at night and could be attacked by predators whose smell and hearing are much more acute than our own. Human beings had a long childhood and were constantly vulnerable to attack, illness and accident. We were also, ironically, in danger from each other, as one group might attack another.

It was only by thinking, coping with situations, and inventing strategies and plans through group communication that we survived. Of such characteristics Pinker (1997, p.6) writes:

an explicitly evolution framework. Dan Sperber has written of the "modularity of mind," seeing the pre-sapiens mind as functioning with a series of modules for different activities (hunting, planning, social intelligence, natural history intelligence, speech etc.), and Steven Mithen has argued that the "human revolution" which marked the emergence of our species was the result of a new cognitive fluidity which emerged as these specialized cognitive domains came to work together' (Renfrew and Bahn 1991, p.481).

Our mental programs work as well as they do because they were shaped by selection to allow our ancestors to master rocks, tools, plants, animals, and each other, ultimately in the service of survival and reproduction.

By cooperating with fellow human beings, our ancient ancestors could maintain food supplies and protect themselves, mate and reproduce; in evolutionary terms it was the group that survived, not the individual. (When I write of our 'ancient ancestors' I am referring to the Palaeolithic period.) Generation after generation of human beings survived climates that produced freezing wastelands hostile to most forms of life and during that time sea levels dropped one hundred and twenty metres below present levels: survival depended on finding enough food and water to feed the group. All of us have evolved from those struggles. Our physiological and cognitive architecture has been developed by these travails—in other words, we are 'designed' through evolution to live as a group. Thus, by

submitting himself to governance by symbolically mediated programs for producing artefacts, organizing social life, or expressing emotions, man [sic] determined, if unwittingly, the culminating stages of his own biological destiny. Quite literally, though quite inadvertently, he created himself (Geertz 1973, p.48).

In that creation of self to which Geertz refers, the human animal developed various cognitive evolutionary susceptibilities that were hard to resist. In other words, they have 'evolved in synchrony with human biological evolution' (Smail, 2008, p.93).

Without this 'tuning' apparatus we would not have survived as a species. If parts of the human brain evolved to 'organise its social life' then it is of critical importance that social structures that 'tuned' the individual to the collective also developed. Community gatherings were essential in facilitating this interaction between the individual mind and the group's urge to survive. Therefore the structure of human gatherings has developed in concert with the human mind to perform this vital evolutionary 'tuning' function.

While the humans adapt their cultural style to meet different conditions, the

underlying structures that support gatherings and bring the individual into a central harmony will remain the same. All human beings have this susceptibility, a built-in cognitive leaning to gather together to sing, tell stories, elect a leader, express collective joy, mourn a friend, welcome a stranger and a myriad of other social functions; all this because they have evolved to do these things—gatherings allowed the human being to survive and are part of us. In this light, community gatherings are of enormous importance. They form a vital communicational axis and are the crucible of common exchange—that is, they form the central energy of the group.

Although these susceptibilities, born of human evolution, come from our deep past, they are manifest in today's design of celebrations as well—parades, masked balls, Catholic masses, agricultural shows and all other gatherings. It is intriguing to think that the designs of convergences today cannot escape the commonality of our own inner evolutionary design and that we share with our ancestors these same impulses: it is a sort of communication, an extraordinary link with deep prehistory, which on the surface seems so far away from our own modernity, but is closer than is generally thought.¹⁷ An act of long ago can have poetic meaning today because we share these links with our own past.

An examination of gatherings throughout history will establish the underlying commonalities and make a holistic analysis possible. Every gathering, however varied, convened for whatever social need, can be approached as a *tuning centre*, with structures developed to align the individual human brain, with its built-in cognitive susceptibilities, to the group.

In taking this viewpoint, the various common structures used by human beings throughout history and prehistory, can be unpacked, examined and understood. The fifth aim was to examine contemporary gatherings in the light of this research and see if modern structures are still influenced by these

¹⁷ The archaeologist Steven Mithen, author of *The Prehistory of the Mind*, remarks: 'If you wish to know about the mind, do not ask only psychologists and philosophers; make sure you also ask an archaeologist' (cited in Claxton 2005, p.33).

ancient needs. The tangled and interactive knots of gathering activity can be unravelled thread by thread on the understanding that all were used to bring the single mind into the group consciousness essential for human survival. Once examined, each thread can be woven again into a more careful pattern that allows a deeper understanding of the overall workings of gatherings and allows an analytical system to be developed and used in modern events.

Given the preceding outline, in Chapter Two I lay out my methodology and the Axis Mundi Analysis System and make various observations about the conduct of the research. In Part II I explore the mechanics of *how* Axis Mundi events work (Chapters Three to Six): Chapter Three investigates the alignment dynamics found in Axis Mundi structures, exploring how gatherings can create imaginative spaces, replay myth and archetype, form atmospheres of intensity, and create symbolic environments and processes of emotional expression. The chapter also investigates what forms the structures take and includes liminal processes, formal procedures, festival and celebratory events, parades and processions. In Chapter Four I explore the use of 'space' by looking at both natural and constructed environments and why certain places are selected over others, as well as the 'theatrical potential' of these Axis Mundi areas. Then in Chapter Five the uses of the major art forms are considered. I also list and investigate the ways in which human beings achieve these 'special' tuned states and how they use external and internal methods to produce feelings of cohesion. Chapter Six looks back to prehistory to trace the social needs that made this human tuning so necessary. I separate community needs into vital social imperatives that all groups would have experienced if they were to survive.

In Part III I explain why gatherings developed in the way they have. In Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine I trace each of the identified social imperatives through prehistory and history and trace them in our contemporary world. I then observe how these social imperatives have amplified or diminished, and how Axis Mundi events have changed and adapted to meet modern needs. In Chapter Ten the thesis finishes with a summing up of the thesis and some remarks about further study.

Before continuing I would like to define three important words that are used in the study.

Definition of three key words

Part of the problem in defining the way gathering events are viewed is that specific words commonly used to describe these activities are allowed a wide definitional base and a great deal of interpretive licence. I intend to place my own interpretive meaning onto three key words – community, sacred and carnival - in as precise a way as possible and thereby place them within a tight semiological framework. These definitions will be used throughout the thesis as carefully as possible, although porosity of meaning at certain times produces overlays and integrations. It must be stressed here that the positions taken in regard to these words are particular to this study and its referential structure and in no way claim a wider definitional position.

The first word ‘community’ defines a commonality of culture that operates in certain networks of communication to produce feelings of affinity, identity and belonging.¹⁸ If a group does not experience certain roseate warmth, or at least a feeling of commonality and reactive recognition, brought about by a common culture, I would not regard this as a ‘community’ in this study. In modern society we can see that community is plural in nature and is operating in complex conglomerations capable of re-identifying themselves quickly and seamlessly into new formations, territorialising and deterritorialising themselves into certain identifiable realms. In identifying community this study activates borders of cultural amalgams in identifiable cultural spaces.

It is important to analyse certain identifiable conditions that produce common cultural alliances and allow them space in this research. The commonalities might be determined by geography, where rivers, mountains, the sea, valleys and a host of topological areas produce usable spaces, where cultures have built up into communities. Communities can be defined in terms of social class where certain cultural amalgams build upon income or class identities. Tight cultural groupings can also be identified in social differentiations such as:

age (youth, middle age, the elderly);

¹⁸ See Mulligan et al, (2006).

gender (male, female, gay);
judged intelligences (clever and stupid);
interests (hobbies, sport, activities, social habits); and
physical manifestations (the deemed good looking and the deemed
plain, the small and the tall, the ill and the healthy).

They are even able to embrace cyberspaces, such as the internet, as efficiently as traditional areas of interchange. People who form chat rooms, listen to the same music, watch the same entertainment and read the same media can also be identified.

I want to bring into the word 'community' the implication of certain ties and bonds that suggest a positive aspect to community dynamics; I want to capture the warmth, the bonding, the shared feeling of association that is so important to collective communication. I want to suggest the implication of strong alignment that produces what Turner (1982) called 'communitas'.¹⁹ When I use the word 'communitas' I imply a positive sense of affirmation where gathering dynamics encourage association and a common bond that is manifest in a shared vision and common social wealth.

It is also important to make another distinction. This study examines the community and the way it gathers together; however, there is an important difference between an event organised by a top-down structure, which suggests *civic* organisation, and a bottom-up structure, which relies on grass roots energies: these might both be described as *community* events but they are being fed by different energies and consequently produce different results. The research needed to distinguish between these two distinct types of celebratory behaviour. I therefore have given the sobriquet 'civic' to any event that is organised by a governmental or top-down authority and have kept the word 'community' to describe community celebratory events organised by the people themselves.

¹⁹ Burke (1992, p.57) notes that 'the anthropologist Victor Turner, developing an idea of Durkheim's about the importance of moments of 'creative effervescence' for social renewal, coined the term 'communitas' to refer to spontaneous, unstructured social solidarities'. Although I fully concur with Turner's ideas of the qualities that make a community create communitas, I suggest that the 'spontaneous' and 'unstructured' elements are open to reinterpretation and stable structures can be found inside these seemingly random expressions.

Thus the word community is used in this thesis to describe the operation of a common culture that interlinks in various ways to produce feelings of unity, fealty and identity. The word has its derivation in the Latin 'munus', meaning an obligation to give a gift when receiving a gift; in other words, an exchange of gifts. This definition works in this thesis in the context of gathering. The gift that the individual gives to the group could be seen as an abandonment of the ego-based self to the larger commonweal in exchange for the group's protection. Gatherings are the community's way of concentrating and emotionalising the exchange of these gifts: it shows obedience to the exchange.

The second word I wish to define tightly is the word 'sacred'. The use of the word sacred in this study has no metaphysical connection; it describes that area of human function concerned with thoughts about important and vital questions of meaning and existence incorporating concepts and feelings about life's energy. The word also attracts religious connections, but these will be resisted in some places and a more general and secular approach will be imposed. Within most human beings is a cognitive function concerned with feelings of connection with the spirit of the world, however this manifests; this can range from a supposed understanding of God to a reverential appreciation, housed within the secular, which tries to identify 'higher' understandings of how the world works and of our place within it.

Finally the word 'carnival' needs to be understood carefully. It might be thought that the carnival's role is to debunk both sacred and community norms and values and abandon order and meaning and that iconoclasm's strongest role is overturning the status quo and would seem to reject any sort of orderly symbolic concentration. However, carnival cannot escape structure and symbolic operation and it is active here in a sort of reverse; it creates its own order within disorder, its own meaning within its seeming anarchy. In mocking the symbols of social order it forms a language of its own that is as powerful and unifying as the normality it counter-poses. An examination of any carnival will see symbols of upset, disarray and anarchy, but these ironically produce a clear semiology and are a cohesive and symbolic whole. The street where carnival happens is no longer ordinary but loaded with symbolic action: the conscious is overturning the usual run of things, but the unconscious demands a form of language for this overturning.

Carnival is a word that describes numerous activities and can be utilised to encompass the very spirit of certain kinds of gathering event. This ubiquitous heading attracts many meanings and can generally be used to describe any sort of party-like gathering. Strictly speaking, the word carnival refers to the festival before Lent.²⁰ Catholic communities had a feast day before Lent, Mardi Gras or 'Fat Tuesday' - fat being used to describe the amount of food consumed before the fast was imposed). The word carnival is also used to describe temporary events of reversal and social overturning of the established order; for example, Dionysian rites in Greece, Saturnalia in Rome, the Festival of Fools in Europe in the Middle Ages and the Gay Parades of today²¹. Mardi Gras carnivals are still held in Europe and the Americas, the most outstanding of which might be the Mardi Gras in Rio de Janeiro.

However, these categories do not necessarily apply to modern usage of the word carnival. There are now carnival types that have no relationship to Lent or to reversal dynamics. Carnival is a very mobile celebratory type and is transcribed into modern popular culture in complex ways although some still hold to the traditional times of Mardi Gras - the Venice and Nice festivals are held in carnival season in January or February. Some communities call their festivals 'carnivals' but do not adhere to the date or in any way refer to religious links. These communities have carnival structures but transfer the main carnival aspects into party gatherings. For example, popular culture produces various cultural experiences in carnival mode, especially for young people, which, in reality, are what might be called 'party' festivals – the Munich beer festival *Oktoberfest* is an example.

While I recognise that the word 'carnival' will describe the festival before Lent, and I will be specific when using the word in that context, I use the word 'carnival' to describe any of the wider celebratory behaviours described above. It acts, in my research, as an antonym to the 'sacred'.

20 The derivation of the word is likely to come from *carne levare* ('to remove meat') or *carne vale* ('farewell to meat') as meat is often not eaten through Lent.

21 Gay Mardi Gras in Sydney and San Francisco for example.

Chapter 2: Methodology

In general, case studies are the preferred strategy when ‘how’ or ‘why’ questions are being posed, when the investigator has little control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within some real-life context (Yin 2003, p.1).

To be able to fully understand the workings of Axis Mundi events I had to achieve two objectives. The first was to discover *how* gatherings work: what inner structural elements made up these social phenomena. Secondly, and just as importantly, I needed to explore *why* they have developed in the way they have and discover how they are used in contemporary society.

I undertook a widespread examination of gathering events throughout time and place, comparing one case study with another, until basic structural elements and their sub-elements were revealed, their usage understood and the motivations to hold them uncovered. When these two research strands of ‘how’ and ‘why’ were completed, they could be brought together in an overall schema that could be applied to any gathering event in order to illuminate its workings and account for its usage.

In designing Axis Mundi events in my professional work as a director, I noticed that the same common structural elements kept appearing in every event. These structural elements had traceable sub-elements that, although capable of variation, seemed universal. I was sure that if I traced what these commonalities were, an overall schema could be developed. I will use an analogy to describe my approach to finding the schema. A house has a set of inescapable common structural features - such as walls, roof, doors, windows and floors - and within each of these basic elements lies a set of predictable sub-elements where variation can happen. In spite of the individuality imparted by sub-elements, the house can never escape the structural constraints that are its fundamental descriptors. I had found that every gathering event, in spite of its unique character, had common structures comprising a set of predictable elements and sub-elements that, although capable of variation, were constant. The seemingly random set of factors could be defined by these commonalities to produce an understanding of how gatherings work.

Community gatherings²² are broadly defined, by their traditional social usage—such as seasonal celebrations, community festivals, sacred expressions, carnivals, civic displays and rites of passage—but this categorisation does not expose how they actually operate. To properly define how Axis Mundi events actually work it was necessary to leave aside their cultural differences, important as they are, and concentrate on *the structural elements* that are common to all gathering events over time. To that end I had to unpack these multifaceted events into their various elements and sub-elements of design, develop a schematic that described these elements and test the schema against a set of ‘live’ events, until I had distilled a useful and universally applicable model of how Axis Mundi events ‘worked’.

The stages of research

The research plan I developed had three stages, which looped back in a continual reflective process, and I detail these below. The first stage investigated the commonalities found in the structural elements in my own work, using a methodology of practice-based research, to develop a nascent overall schema of how Axis Mundi events functioned. I examined over eighty events I had produced, searching for constant structural elements and various sub-elements, until I had a basic system on which to build. I called this the Axis Mundi Analysis System (AMAS). In the second stage I developed the system, using library research into Axis Mundi events found in contemporary, historical and pre-historical situations around the world. The system was continually changed and adapted to the new information as it accumulated. In the third stage AMAS was tested in the field. It was a field trip that encompassed Australia, India, Britain and Ireland and ‘road tested’ AMAS in a number of diverse events and situations. Insights from the field trip were integrated into the study and information was actively and thoughtfully negotiated, inconsistencies discarded, and structural commonalities upgraded and sophisticated. The system eventually stabilised when identified structures and their sub-elements remained durable whatever the example fed into it.

²² This study is about community events motivated by cultural development and does not cover commercial events.

Stage 1: Practice-based research and the development of AMAS

Resolving the problems found in practice-based research

Very little direct research material explores the inner mechanics of gathering events from a designer perspective and no discipline frames the work: it is what might be called ‘virgin territory’. Community gatherings are a recognised aspect of community development, but surprisingly little in-depth research explores a general theory about *how* gathering events function in this context and about why certain designs do or do not work in given situations. With so little research material at hand, a first step was to study the projects that I have had direct contact with. As a director of gathering events for nearly forty years I have worked in many different kinds of community events in diverse local and international communities²³, and so drawing on my experience²⁴ using auto-ethnographic methods of research has been important. This approach is often helpful for artists.

Haseman and Mafe (2008, p.1) who have investigated practice-led and practice-based research make useful comments about all research methodologies based in one’s own work:

[I]n Australia this move into research has seldom been easy, for traditional research approaches are made up of protocols and conventions which are hardly congenial to the working practices and methods favoured by artists and practitioners. These newcomers to the world of research feel deep and unresolved tensions, for traditional research approaches seem too linear, too predictable and too ordered to capture the messiness and dynamism of the process of enquiry which lies at the heart of their creative production.

In *practice-based research* the practitioner uses past work to inform theory-based study with a view to influencing operations and practices in the field. For instance, musicians might study their past compositions as a basis for new understandings, or dancers might use experiences in their career to advance

²³ Australia, Britain, Ireland, Germany, Holland, Belgium, Bulgaria, Romania, USA, Canada, New Zealand, Hong Kong, Nepal, India and Japan.

²⁴ A list of projects can be found in Appendix 1.

knowledge about a particular way of dancing. In my own case I wanted to use my past experience as an arts designer of Axis Mundi events to reveal the inner workings of gatherings with a view to providing myself and others with a highly sophisticated tool by which to guide the work. My methodology is firmly based in *practice-based* research and I use my past work as a rich source of research information.

Creative practitioners often find it difficult to find research methodologies that include their own work, as they see their work personally. Artists are, by their very nature, investigating and expressing the subjective, whereas academic study searches for the objective. According to Haseman and Mafe (2008, p.2):

most established research strategies are carefully structured to exclude the researcher, based on the belief that researcher subjectivity stands to infect the objective 'truth' and universal applicability of research findings ... Into this unsettled and shifting research environment arrived the artists and creative practitioners who wish to undertake research into their practice by placing it at the heart of the research process, and in ways which go beyond the conventional research strategies favoured by traditional quantitative and qualitative research.

However, many creative people are well versed in research within their practice. Throughout my professional life I have extensively researched projects, constructing theoretical propositions tested by 'real' life situations in society; community projects that are not well researched can quickly turn into social disasters that can do damage to both the community members and the team that facilitates them. As a practitioner the theoretical concepts I developed in this thesis had to be weighed against a life-long practice; they had to withstand the critical eye of an experienced professional. This can be a stern test of theory where many ideas, however well argued in an academic environment, do not actually work in the field.

In the case of how gatherings are designed, practice-led research also allows access both to broad and tacit knowledge sources. The Axis Mundi events created by practitioners in my field have to take cognisance of many knowledge forms, ranging from social work to teaching techniques, and from musical scores

to engineering questions. The work is placed in many different geographical spaces, each testing design to the full: rivers, beaches, rural environments and many others. It has to deal with various social situations and cultural groups. All these variables 'flow through' the work, constantly testing any theory from a number of points of view. In this view, Haseman and Mafe (2008,p.3) suggest that:

practice can be understood primarily as the knowledge, tacit or otherwise, of how something is done within the context of a professional and cultural framework; a contingent activity that makes or establishes meaning or significance although not through the application of thought alone. Practice needs to be understood in its wider sense as *all* the activity an artist/creative practitioner undertakes.

Needed too, is a background in myth, archetype, story and symbol, as well as a firm grip on the disciplines of their own creative poetic. Axis Mundi designers are at home in this world and can use these variable knowledge forms to inform theory that would not be possible if their study was based only in library research.

So, practice-based research was a valid first step to establish a basic system. But to circumvent any subjective bias that system had to be tested against library research and field study so I could adapt and improve upon my practice-based model using more objective methods.

In approaching my own practice with the view of developing a system by which to understand the Axis Mundi of gatherings, there was a bewildering set of cases: each one with different cultural milieux. They had been produced in many different places, with many kinds of people, and each case was a complex set of interlocking, multifaceted combinations and design decisions, and yet I suspected that evidence for their commonalities could be developed if their complexities, found in all design processes, could be disassembled into constituent parts and systematised.

The Axis Mundi Analysis System (AMAS)

After many months of analysing the characteristics, design and effects of my own projects, commonalities gradually started to reveal themselves. In order to be included in the system each element and sub-element needed to be evident in all projects. In other words, they had to be a constant structural part of every event. A picture of five invariable common elements emerged, with a set of constant sub-elements that were capable of internal variation; these are described in detail in chapters following. An overview is nevertheless useful at this juncture.

The first element common to all Axis Mundi events I have called ‘alignment dynamics’. This powerful constant describes the forces that designers use to bring about a certain atmosphere that can, for example, provoke emotional states; create flows, ebbs, climaxes and calms; tie in strong narratives and symbolic concentrates; and use the function of gathering to produce a desired outcome. Fifteen sub-elements, all capable of variation, make up this element. These sub-elements were not all used in every event and sometimes stood alone or were used in concert with others, but combinations were found in all gathering events. They include the use of day/light and night/dark; of the feelings created by the ‘crowd mind’; and of emotional responses such as transformation and catharsis; and they involve the act of looking into history and into the future; and sensitivity to the ways in which community can merge with myth and archetype.

The second element was easier to identify: I have called it ‘form’. All designers of Axis Mundi events use basic forms, whether consciously or unconsciously, to contain and realise gatherings, and these can be broken down into six basic sub-elements. Not all events use all these sub-elements—most use combinations—but all gatherings use one form at least. The first sub-element of form is made up of liminal zones to prepare participants to enter and leave the Axis Mundi, and many designers take these zones very seriously. They then choose one or more of five other sub-elements to ‘hold’ the gathering: ritual, ceremony, festival, translocational events, and celebration. The third element is space utilisation; each has its own particular design aspects with its own built-in theatricality.

I have divided space into two sub-elements—the natural and the constructed.

The fourth element traced in every gathering is a range of six inducements designed to appeal to the susceptibilities found within human behaviour: eating, drinking and drug-taking, for example, or more internal factors such as group rhythm, movement and sexual energies. The fifth common element is the use of the arts, comprising of five sub-elements: music, theatre, dance, visual arts and the written or spoken word.

These elements and sub-elements are not a rigid set of rules but rather susceptibilities built into design which produce a set of atmospheres which encourage certain feelings. Geertz (1973) calls these susceptibilities 'dispositions'. Although he is talking about these dispositions in a religious context in the following quotation, they apply to all Axis Mundi events:

They shape it by inducing ... a certain distinctive set of dispositions (tendencies, capacities, propensities, skills, habits, liabilities, pronenesses) which lend a chronic character to the flow of his activity and the quality of his experience. A disposition describes not an activity or an occurrence but a probability of an activity being performed or an occurrence occurring in certain circumstances (Geertz 1973, p.vvi).

So this system is not a set of certainties. These susceptibilities or dispositions can move through the various levels of involvement, with some becoming active and dominant while others are not used at all. They can mix together forming conglomerates or act individually exerting their particular pulling power. Some can be dominant at some moments in the proceedings but fade away at others. I have to view these human susceptibilities as 'calls', as atmospheres, as moving dynamics that have a capability, a potential, to involve people in certain ways, rather than produce a set of prescriptive concrete predictabilities. A gathering might be there to tune the individual into the community but they can always walk away.²⁵ The

²⁵ The collection of electrochemical cells inside our brains were capable of adapting to various situations through parallel networking mechanisms and working with other brains to form survival groups. 'The human brain is made of many parts. Each has a specific function: to turn sounds into speech; to process colour; to register fear; to recognize a face or distinguish a fish from a fruit. But this is no static collection of components—each brain is unique, ever-changing and exquisitely sensitive to its environment' (Carter 2003, p.8).

dynamics are there as a ‘potential’ in the design of an Axis Mundi event, an inbuilt motivation.

By identifying these major elements and their attending sub-elements I had built up a sound basic foundation on which to establish constants in the design process, but the system still lacked a way of representing the ‘energy’ of an event—the factor that made a gathering come alive. AMAS needed a way of determining the animation, the life, the morphology of an event; to do this I turned to the Axis Mundi’s realisation in mechanical form—the gyroscope.

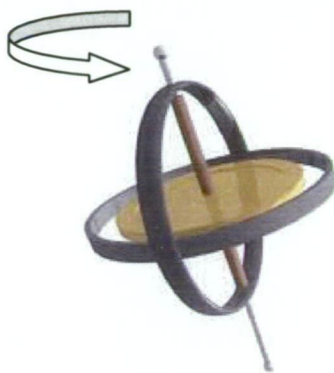


Figure 1: Gyroscope

Source: Wikipedia (arrow added) http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Gyroscope_precession.gif

This mechanical Axis Mundi became a powerful working model to describe community gatherings. The gyroscope is inert until the central axis is given movement, and then it will stand up and spin, the weight of its horizontal disc keeping it up. The vertical axis stretches upward towards the sky, the downward vertical impresses itself on the earth and the horizontal rotor’s speed and weight creates its energy to stand up and continue a prolonged rotation, alive with energy.

Axis Mundi community events can be given an energy to spin and will gain momentum and energise, lifting such gatherings into motion, their impetus driven by the people’s energy. The upward thrust of the axis can indicate an event’s search for

meaning (the sacred). The downward thrust describes its relationship with the sensual (carnival), and the horizontal spin can be a measure of its community involvement. The event's *raison d'être* can be seen as the external initial spinning force that is applied to the axis, mobilising the community and bringing it into gathering balance.

I also used other aspects of the gyroscope to understand gathering events in terms of their energies. The motivating energy that starts a gyroscope moving must come from an outside force, and the same is true of gatherings. 'A motivation is a persisting tendency, a chronic inclination to perform certain sorts of acts and experience certain sorts of feeling in certain sorts of situations (Geertz 1973, p.95)'. They all need something that will produce the initial energy to start the axis moving, and these energies can be traced and identified. This metaphor was also useful in determining the speed and rhythm of the event's uplift as it rises into balance and its overall momentum and acceleration. The event's emotional tones, the quality of participation, and levels of involvement can also be evaluated.

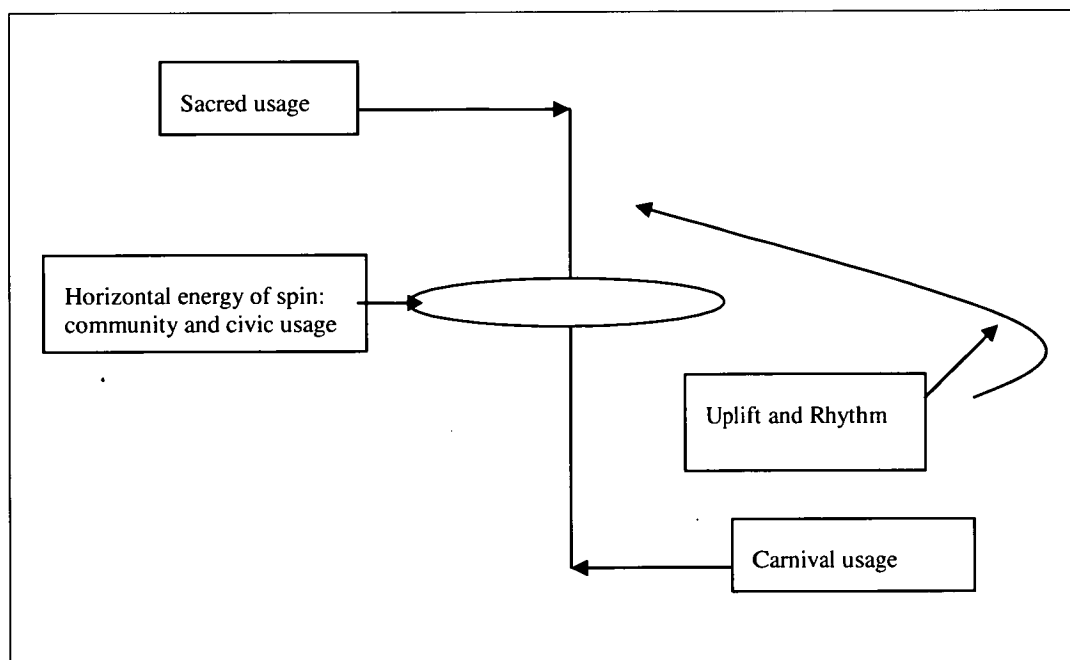


Figure 2: AMAS schematic

Source: Neil Cameron

This mechanic realisation of the central metaphor lies at the centre of AMAS and was very useful in describing these various energies. However it cannot be

presumed that all people will place themselves into the system at the same level.

It is important to note that in all Axis Mundi events the roles that various people play in community gatherings vary a great deal, and it is therefore important to define the different kinds of involvement people have. I have separated involvement into five levels:

1. The officiator, priest, celebrant, artistic director, organiser—the person/persons controlling the running of the event
2. The primary participants—the principle people going through the gathering—the central group who are actively ‘doing’ the event
3. The secondary participants—the friends, guests, family, direct community of the participants—people with personal involvement but not actually ‘doing’ the event
4. The public—uninvolved people who might come across the event or go to an event in a casual way
5. The facilitating crew—technical personnel, caterers, administrative back-up teams, etc.

These roles are to some extent artificial and often merge into each other; yet it is helpful to consider different levels of involvement in every event. All these levels must be thought about and defined when designing a gathering. There is no overall rule or predictable plan to people’s involvement: level differentiation is only a guide to help distinguish the levels of experience. For instance, at a local wedding the priest goes routinely through a wedding that the bride and groom and their friends and family see as one of the most important days of their lives family. The officiators are often heavily involved in a local festival and find the experience intense; whereas the general public might not be so fully engaged. To fully describe the various levels throughout this thesis would become cumbersome and unwieldy, and so when I talk about participants it must be taken for granted that I realise that they do have a range of experiences and that in a professional design situation these differences would be allowed for.

By adding together the various structural elements, sub-elements, and energies this identified, I could lay out the basic AMAS as an overall schema (See Figure 3 below).

In the top left hand box I have placed what I have called the alignment dynamics that describe the various sub-elements that sum up what dynamics affect gathering designs. Below is a box that can be expanded to produce an understanding of how space is used and the next box down lists the self inducements that can be found in gatherings. On the right I have listed the forms gatherings take and below that a list of the arts that are used to form Axis Mundi events.

At the bottom is the gyroscope metaphor with its vertical energy that lifts upward to the sacred and the downward towards carnival and it also includes the horizontal energy that represents community involvement.

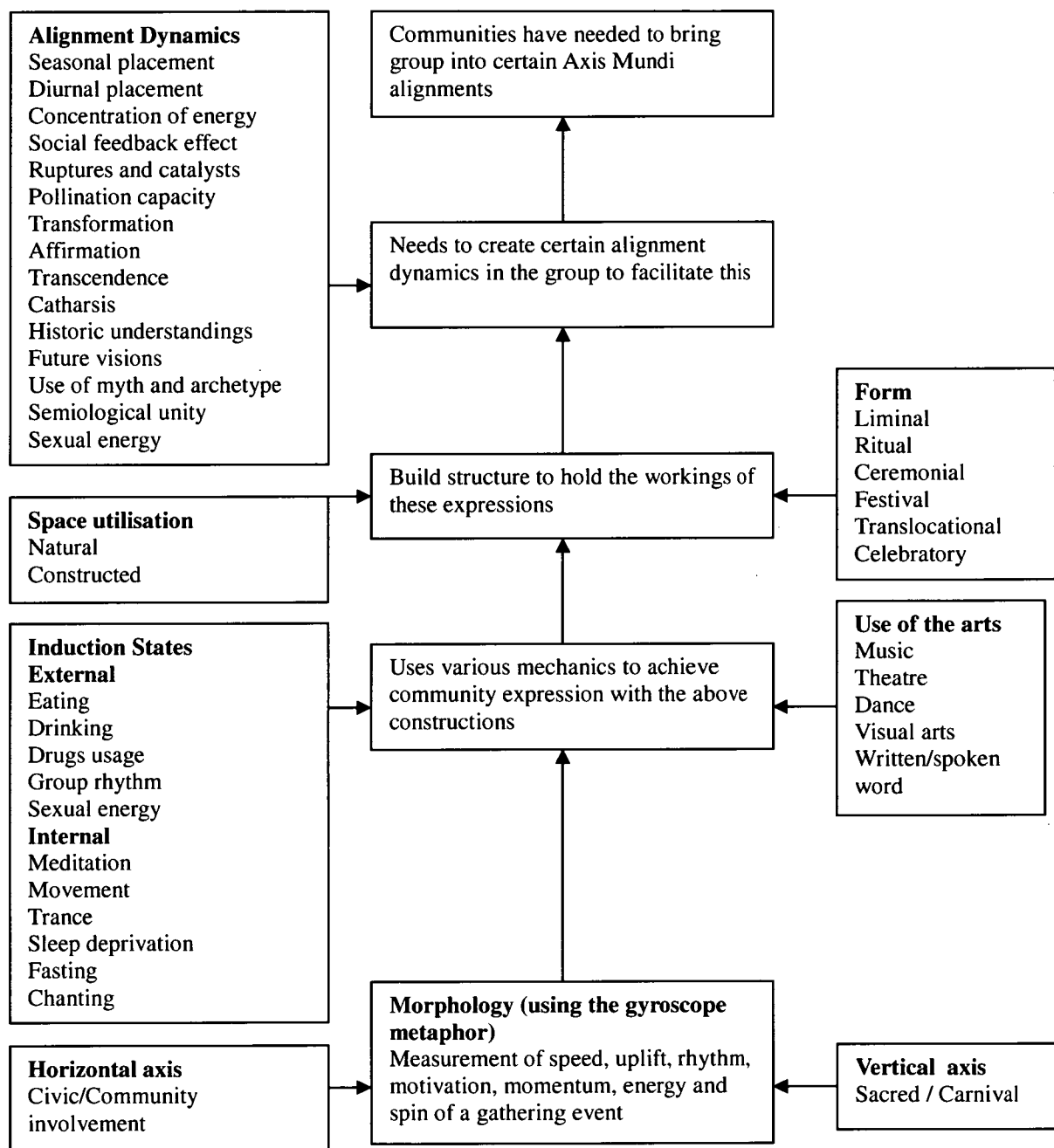


Figure 3: Basic Axis Mundi Analysis System

Source: Neil Cameron

Stage 2: Scholarly literature

Since Axis Mundi events are a synthesis between practical problems, poetic integrations, community interaction and administrative necessities, a polymath approach to research was warranted. As mentioned earlier, a paucity of material is available that directly relates to Axis Mundi design; thus the search to secure an appropriate literature had to be wide-ranging and take a multidisciplinary approach. I read various 'overview' books by anthropologists and ethnologists (Leach 1970; MacAloon 1984), cultural philosophers (Chatwin 1987; Fox 2002; Frazer 1993; Jung 1958, 1964 and 1995; Orloff 1985), social commentators (Adorno 1991; Debord 1995; Kittelason 1998; Manning 1983; MacCannell 1976; Martin 1981; Smart 1995), for example.

To investigate whether the structural elements of gatherings had a deep evolutionary past I studied a wide range of examples in history and prehistory looking for commonalities, repeated details and general structures. According to Burke (1992, p.22) 'two approaches, particularizing and generalizing (or historical and theoretical), complement each other, and ... both of them depend on comparison, whether explicit or implicit'.

I found three research areas particularly useful. The first was promulgated by palaeontologists and archaeologists and reveals probable scenarios in community gathering events in prehistory going back about 100,000 years (Armit 2005; Burland 1965; Carroll 2001; Cope 1998; Goudsblom 1992; Martin 2003; Mathews 1989; Muller and Muller 1999; Partridge 1958; Renfrew 2008; Schultz and Lavenda 1995; Solso 2003; White 2003). The second was to investigate historical accounts of Axis Mundi events into recent times from 5000 BP onward and in a wide range of cultures (Baylet 1996; Booker 2004; Brockett 1987; Bronowski 1973; Harwood 1984; Davey and Seal 1993; Golding 1995; Hirsch 2002; Hooker 1998; Huxley 1974; Keegan 1993; Latour 1993; Spivey 2005; Tarnas 1993; Toulson 1993; Wright 2004). The third was the study of contemporary Axis Mundi activities of indigenous peoples whose gathering activities have remained relatively unchanged through the millennia (Brooks 1996; Christoph, Muller and Ritz-Muller 1999; Cowan 1991; Doring 2000; Johnson 2001; Maybury-Lewis 1992; Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999; Neidjie with Fox 1986; Presland 1985; Pyne 1991; Quilici 1980; Quine and Ullian 1970;

Reynolds 2006; Stubbs 1974).

When this research was finished there was no doubt that Axis Mundi events had been practised from very early on. Furthermore, the common elements found in ancient practices were also identifiable in events today and corresponded to the model developed empirically from my own practice.

Stage 3: Field Studies

Field studies²⁶ of Australian, Indian, British and Irish sites and gatherings had two aims. The first was to ‘road test’ AMAS in real situations and to further refine the system until it reached a ‘stable’ state. The second was to examine sites and situations that gave insights into why Axis Mundi events originated, a matter I will address in the next section. Examining both the ‘how’ and the ‘why’ was greatly helped by these various field studies.

My study had to cover a wide set of events to allow a substantial comparison, and this meant that a collective case study was essential. According to Stake (2000, p.439),

With even less intrinsic interest in one particular case, a researcher may jointly study a number of cases in order to investigate a phenomenon, population, or general condition. I call this *collective case study* ... It is instrumental study extended to several cases. Individual cases in the collection may or may not be known in advance to manifest some common characteristic. They may be similar or dissimilar, redundancy and variety each important. They are chosen because it is believed that understanding them will lead to better understanding, perhaps better theorizing, about a still larger collection of cases.

By investigating the inner structures of Axis Mundi events (the how), I was able to examine ‘live’ examples over a wide area to further strengthen my theories about structural and sub-structural elements, which was invaluable. AMAS had developed via a study of my own practice into a workable system ready to test

²⁶ For detailed schedule see Appendix 2.

against 'real' situations. Although there were further small refinements, the system was robust when tested in the field. At each event I examined the dynamics, forms, spaces, inducements, and arts usage from the point of view of design. I observed how the sub-elements I had identified were used and how they created the transformational energy needed to align communities. I enquired who had provided the initial impetus to the event and what designs were used to effect what ends. When the field study was complete I was able to finalise the system with some confidence.

In terms of Australian case studies over the period from 2006 to 2009, I attended eighteen events in Tasmania and three on the Australian mainland, evaluating different kinds of community and civic festivals, parades, celebrations, rites of passage and arts events. I compared each for their common structural elements and sub-elements and tested all of them against the evolving system. Although the domestic examples were useful to road test AMAS, it was only by going overseas and testing the schema in an international context that I could posit the commonality of the elements with confidence. Therefore a field study was organised that used a broader international base for comparison.

The international field trip needed to provide a wide selection of Axis Mundi events that could be used to 'road test' the AMAS system; supply historical and pre-historical situations that would reveal information about past gatherings; and have a wide and varying geographical and social base. Many of the Axis Mundi events visited are examined later in the thesis. When these factors were weighed up I organised a five-month trip comprising two months in India and three in Britain and Ireland, with twenty-two major sites and many minor sites visited. At each site I applied the AMAS, examining its overall strength and robustness.

India has very rich traditions of community gatherings that span thousands of years and may be interpreted as Axis Mundi events. This provided me with first-class examples of gatherings set into long-term historical situations. I felt that if the system could remain robust in a country far different from the West, evidence would accumulate that the structural elements I had developed were widely applicable. The

sites and events in India were selected from advice provided by cultural experts in Indian travel,²⁷ who were asked to select festivals and sites that would be pertinent to the study of gatherings. Five major gathering sites, representing a wide range of events, over a large geographical area, and reflecting the 'deep' history of Axis Mundi events, were suggested. I was also able to visit many secondary sites in close proximity to the chosen areas. I was accompanied by interpreters at most sites.²⁸ I photographed each site, read local guidebooks and studied information found on site and wrote a journal. For site details see Appendix 2.

The first site chosen was the ancient city of Varanasi, in the middle of India, on the river Ganges, and considered sacred by Hindus. I had the opportunity to study numerous events during my visit, including daily religious rituals in temples and open-air sites, the cremation of bodies in the designated areas, marriage processions, translocation processions for the river goddess and a fireworks festival.

The second site was a short journey up river to Allahabad, where the largest festival in the world is held—the Kumbh Mela. This major Hindu festival occurs every three years and is attended by eight million devotees, who gather on an auspicious date to bathe in the holy waters.

The third site was in Pachmarhi in Central India. It hosted the Shivratri Festival and, although this celebration is held all over India, this particular instantiation of the event is reputed to be one of the oldest gatherings in India. Thus I was afforded an opportunity to visit an event of great antiquity and to examine its elements and sub-elements, developed over millennia.

I travelled then to central India to visit the fourth site, the Ellora and Ajuata caves, which supplied a great deal of information about cave use in gatherings.

Finally I flew to Assam to the Guwahiti/Muguli areas on the Brahmaputra River. In this area of Assam there is a Tantric temple in which animal sacrifice is practised, providing an opportunity to see an event using sacrifice now hard to find

²⁷ Sea and Sky Travel

²⁸ As I was comparing structure and not cultural input, the guides were not interviewed but only provided logistical backup and local background information. They had no part in the construction of the thesis.

in the West but central to many gatherings over human history. I also visited the island of Majuli, which houses twenty-four Vishnu monasteries where the arts are practised as a form of worship, and attended the national Holi Festival there.

The second and third destinations were Britain and Ireland. Both are English speaking and I have also worked there professionally. Furthermore, they have a rich variety of prehistoric and medieval sites for a study of community gatherings. I selected five specific geographical areas that were chosen to reveal information about pre-historical and historical gatherings. To learn about semiological concentrations, ritual, ceremony and the use of space I visited nine gothic cathedrals and one abbey. I also examined prominent pre-historical sites that included a village site in Peterborough; this is the reconstruction of a stone-age village built by Francis Pryor, the prominent British archaeologist. In Edinburgh I investigated the Beltane Festival, the reconstituted Celtic Spring Festival that gave many insights into contemporary versions of old events. I recorded the process by photographing sites, writing a journal and gathering information from local libraries.

I divided the sites into active or inactive sites. On active sites there was much to learn as an observer: buildings and ritual spaces could be studied and variants noted. As Yin (2003, p.92) suggests in this regard,

By making a field visit to the case study 'site', you are creating the opportunity for direct observations. Assuming that the phenomena of interest have not been purely historical, some relevant behaviours or environmental conditions will be available for observation. Such observations serve as yet another source of evidence in a case study.

Historical and pre-historical sites that were no longer active allowed me to glean a great deal for the purposes of structural comparison; for example, space usage could still be evaluated, as ritual landscapes were still, in some cases, transparent. These sites had long been studied by scholars from various disciplines and gave various indications as to usage and operation that could be evaluated with reasonable accuracy. Library research helped deepen my understanding of how the sites might have been used and local information, such as written guides and interpretative signage, was also helpful.

In sum the various sites and events visited presented the opportunity to see if the elements and sub-elements I had developed remained stable when applied to ‘real’ situations, spread across a wide selection of examples in different countries. Although AMAS was refined during this process, it maintained its integrity and was not changed overly. By studying my own practice, enriched with intense library research and organising an extensive field study, I had managed to find a constancy of elements and sub-elements within events that could be used to illuminate a design process that I term an Axis Mundi gathering or event. These commonalities revealed that gatherings had consistent structures, by which one can understand more about the workings of the event. The detailed findings of this part of the research are reported in Chapters Three to Five. However, I still lacked the method/framework to discern *why* Axis Mundi events are motivated in the way they are.

Research methods used to determine *why* Axis Mundi gatherings are held

The research into *why* Axis Mundi events developed worked in parallel with investigations into *how* gatherings worked; however, each had its own methodology. During my investigations of how Axis Mundi events worked in prehistory I realised that such gatherings played an essential role in group survival. As I outlined in preliminary fashion in Chapter One, human beings have evolved and survived because of their ability to work as a group, to ‘tune’ into each other, in common and mutually beneficial ways. As demonstrated in Part Two it can be seen that gatherings had a strong role to play in facilitating this tuning and this provides an explanation about why these events have been found in all societies at all times and places.

Approaching cognitive studies

Claxton (2005, p.309) notes the relationship of the design of the human mind and its link to survival:

Human bodies are programmed to grow four limbs, not eight, and to develop muscles that can, with training, jump two metres into the air, but not, with any amount of training, ten. And so, we must suppose, the developing mind, too, reflects an evolutionary bedrock of ‘survival themes’.

The human brain has evolved to work corporately; it can be argued that without this consistent cognitive ability *Homo sapiens sapiens* would have died out. Whatever the social usage—rites of passage, civic ceremonies, sacred rituals, seasonal markings and community festivals—community gatherings attune individual community members within a particular group. The cognitive architecture of the human brain has remained unchanged for the last hundred thousand years perhaps because it has ‘tuned’ so successfully to the methods of survival.

Cognitive research spans a great range of specialist subjects and various highly specialised disciplines. I claim no expertise in this area of science, and the research was greatly assisted by eminent ‘translators’ who have added accessible bridges to the literature, giving insights into human cognitive functions and their evolutionary history (Buzan 1993 and 2001; Damasio 1999; Dawkins 2004; Dennett 1991; Giroux 1994; Greenfield 2000; Gould and Purcell 2000; Koestler 1964, 1967 and 1978; Lewin 2001; Page 1999; Ramachandran 2003 and 2005; Reaney 1994; Shorter 1996; Wilson 2003). Geertz and Smail were especially helpful in the area of the evolution of the human brain. They suggested that to understand the social workings of today’s society we must understand the deep history of the brain; we must learn about evolutionary factors that formed human cognitive architecture.

As Smail (2008, p.7) notes, ‘the most obvious device for making the deep past intelligible ... is the brain’. The more I could understand the working of the human mind in Axis Mundi situations, the more would be revealed of the structure of gatherings.

Cognitive studies have made great advances in the understanding of the human mind over the past twenty years, due to the development of computerised axial tomography (CAT) scans and other innovations in neurology. These findings were very useful in revealing the parts of the brain concerned with ‘tuning’ into the group and in supporting the idea that this tendency is trans-historical and worldwide. On this point Smail (2008, p.201) comments:

The lessons of human population genetics have an intrinsic fascination. To these I have suggested ... that we add a neurohistorical perspective, with sets of tools and concepts that allow us to think about the historical implications of recent developments in neuroscience and human biology.

This history is necessarily a deep one, since the genes responsible for building the autonomic nervous system are themselves of considerable antiquity. This history is also a world history, since the equipment is shared by all humans, though it is built, manipulated, and tweaked in different ways by different cultures. Finally, it is a history to which many of us can connect. We will always want to know where our nations and economies and religions came from. We want to know the origins of both human rights and intolerance. We want to follow the histories of women and men and their patterns of sexuality. But we also want to understand why our brains and bodies work the way they do. That understanding is impossible without history.

Four aspects of brain function are particularly important for understanding gatherings. The first is the capacity of the brain to model the world and provide structure and stability, while simultaneously having the capacity to provide creative solutions and to invent and incorporate new data. Tensions between the two functions arise in Axis Mundi events repeatedly, as some gathering structures deal with stabilising the group while others deal with coping with change.

The second aspect is the capacity to negotiate the sense of self within the sense of community. In this respect Carter (2003, p.8) postulates that the

collection of electro chemical cells inside our brains were capable of adapting to various situations through parallel networking mechanisms and working with other brains to form survival groups.

The third aspect is the desire to form meta-languages of explanation to identify where 'self' lies in the whole and to ascribe an enveloping 'meaning' to events. The fourth aspect is the way in which the brain processes and interprets the experience of pleasure. By looking at these four aspects of the brain I could see how they were used in gatherings.

The question then arises: what social imperatives in human evolution have been essential to human development that has needed such tuning dynamics? This would lead to an understanding of *why* gatherings were held and illuminate why they were so important.

Research material in the disciplines of ethnography, cognitive studies, archaeology, anthropology, sociology, architecture, history and theology was cross-referenced to provide information useful in determining a range of social imperatives. Seven social imperatives were identified:

- To develop associational structures that help cement community bonding, fealties, links and develop a common culture;
- developed ways of facilitating interactions with outside groups;
- dealt with factors such as inbreeding and genetic health;
- evolved multi-level communications for meaning transfer and information exchange;
- to facilitate through formal processes changes, adaptations and transformations;
- to reinforce and retain knowledge of their environment in terms of orientation, food gathering, flora and fauna, weather and climate;
- To reinforce a shared cosmologically and understanding of the world.

Having established the presence of these imperatives in deep prehistory, I examined each in detail, and found that gathering events could be seen to be instrumental in assisting the community to cope with each of these factors.

The seven social imperatives became a constant on which all Axis Mundi events could be evaluated. I tracked the imperatives through history and into the contemporary world, noting their influence on gatherings, and investigating whether forms of either or both had adapted, changed or been rejected over time.

To trace the imperatives that would reveal common elements through history and to monitor how gatherings were designed to tune the individual into the group to meet these social needs, I had to develop a time line. I chose a point in prehistory, 5000 BP (around the time that Stonehenge was built), because there is a great deal of information from that point in time about the way communities lived.

In order to circumvent the problem of choosing just one community in divergent cultural settings, I postulated an imagined community, Kelby, that would become an example of the 'typical' that could be used as a model for theoretical generalisation. As long as the structures used in the imaginary village could be seen

to be reasonably common in all villages of the time, in terms of the inner structures of gatherings, a single case could illuminate the whole. As noted by Yin (2003, p.41):

the objective is to capture the circumstances and conditions of an everyday or commonplace situation ... The lessons learned from these cases are assumed to be informative about the experiences of the average person or institution.

In taking an imaginary village, whose inner structures of Axis Mundi events reflected the inner structures found in a typical village of the time, I created some freedom to examine how and why gatherings answered the seven basic social imperatives. A model of this sort could be used to speculate on common structural workings without engaging in an actual local cultural interpretation. Burke (1992, p.28 & p.59) elaborates:

A preliminary definition of a 'model' might be an intellectual construct which simplifies reality in order to understand it. Like a map, its usefulness depends on omitting some elements of reality altogether. It also makes its limited elements or 'variables' into an internally consistent system of interdependent parts ... However, it is probably more useful to use the term 'model' more strictly. Let us add one more element to this model of a model and say that it is an intellectual construct which simplifies reality in order to emphasize the recurrent, the general and the typical, which it presents in the form of clusters of traits or attributes. Models and 'types' then become synonyms—which is perhaps appropriate, since *typos* is Greek for mould or 'model'. 'It is the function of models to simplify in order to make the real world more intelligible' .

Gathering activities among the group in Kelby were based on clear and actual examples from a wide range of communities located within a prehistoric/historical continuum, through field work and research across a wide range of disciplines. The findings of the relevant research are contained in Chapters Six to Nine.

When I included these seven social imperatives into AMAS (see right hand corner) the final schema looked like this.

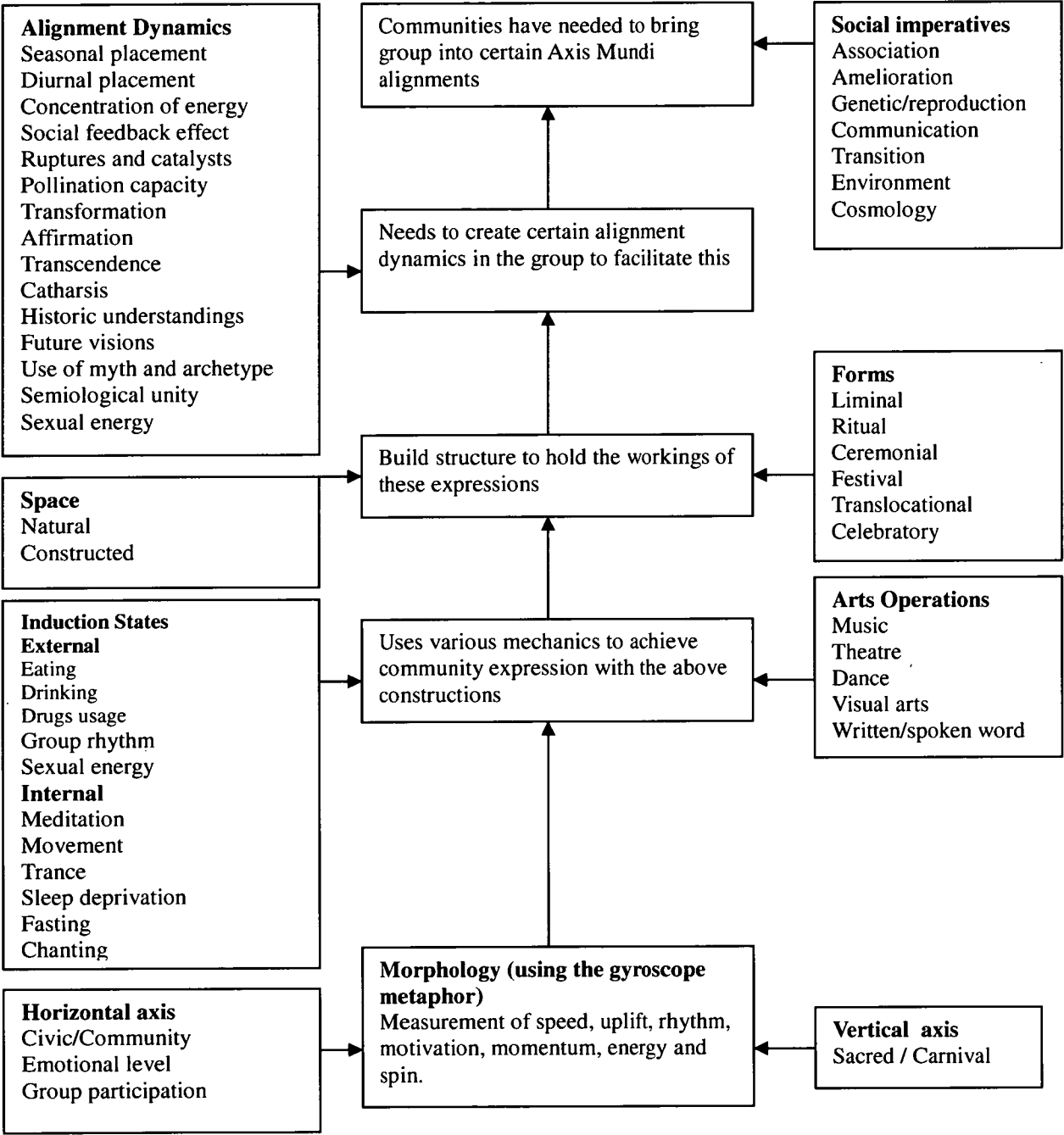


Figure 4: Final AMAS schema

Source: Neil Cameron

Part 2: How gatherings are structured

In the next three chapters (Three to Five) I lay out the inner workings of gatherings. I examine their dynamics and forms in Chapter Three, the use of space in Chapter Four and the use of arts and the influence of inducements in Chapter Five.

Chapter 3: Alignment Dynamics and Forms

Alignment Dynamics

The Axis Mundi Analytical System laid out in Chapter Two revealed a number of alignment dynamics which will now be examined in detail. All Axis Mundi events have design dynamics that can be activated to aid the tuning process. No Axis Mundi events can function without at least some of the sub-elements found in dynamics being brought to bear within a design. Although I will discuss the basic elements of these dynamics here, they will also emerge throughout the study in more detail when actual examples are explored in Part Three.

Fifteen sub-elements of the dynamics of Axis Mundi events are elaborated below.

Seasonal placement

The subtle change in the colour of the leaves, the atmosphere in the air when snow falls, the somnambulant languor of summer heat, and the sight of one blossom after the winter's cold might touch us with expectations, sadness or feelings of hope which may all be described as seasonal placement. Human beings have evolved over millions of years to be sensitive to the change in seasons. Survival of the group depended on an understanding of the rhythms in the seasons. Certain animal behaviours could be predicted, certain fruit would be ripe at certain times and food could be found: miscalculations produced famine and eventual death. When Axis Mundi events are designed in communities, the time of year or the season can be vital. The momentum of the Axis Mundi is powered by many sorts of energies, and susceptibility to the season's atmosphere is one of them. Campbell (1949, p.384) comments:

No tribal rite has yet been recorded which attempts to keep winter from descending; on the contrary: the rites all prepare the community to endure, together with the rest of nature, the season of the terrible cold. And in the spring, the rites do not seek to compel nature to pour forth immediately

corn, beans, and squash for the lean community; on the contrary: the rites dedicate the whole people to the work of nature's season. The wonderful cycle of the year, with its hardships and periods of joy, is celebrated, and delineated, and represented as continued in the life-round of the human group.

When an event is planned in a traumatised community, for example, spring might be seen as a good time to hold it—a time of new hope and new beginnings. Marriages might be held in summer, a time of ripening and fruitfulness. The seasons are reflected in our own inner rhythms and, to energise a gathering, the design can utilise these inner sensitivities. It is as if human beings have internal reflections that glide in unison with these seasonal changes in the natural world. As animals who have a life or death relationship with the Earth's food supply for so long, it is not surprising that we react to the seasons with a certain intensity of feeling. Each season has its own power to activate deep stirrings contained in the self—such as memories of childhood, feelings of decline, new beginnings, the joy of plenty and the fear of loss.

There is no typical seasonal rhythm and the design of a gathering that aims to utilise the season's atmospheres must take into account the qualities of the local seasonal change. Tropical climates bring the 'dry', a 'build up' towards the monsoon and the 'wet' with its release of life-giving water. I can remember the children coming out of their houses and dancing and singing in the rain when the first storm came to Darwin after months of the dry weather.

Not all peoples classify seasonal change in the same way. Indigenous peoples in north east Australia have five seasons, each one a subtle reading of the environment and its changes (Davis 1989). In Europe the traditional four seasons have a host of gathering events inherited from ancient cultures mixed into amalgams of complexity—the winter solstice with its ancient themes of renewal in the depth of winter are entangled in a Jewish story of a Messiah born; traditions of the Celts and the Norse are also added to the rich mixture with reindeer and Christmas trees.

Axis Mundi events of all kinds can cluster at the changing moment between the seasons—the solstice and equinoctial cusps. These yearly marking points have been critically important to prehistoric peoples because the sun's movement marked

key moments in the yearly cycle. But even in contemporary times Christmas and New Year, spring, the summer's apogee and the final days of autumn are all times when, consciously or unconsciously, dates are chosen for Axis Mundi events. These key moments are markers of change, times to adapt the rhythms of one period to match with another. On a more poetic level these moments in a year focus attention upon the more intimate cycles to be found in human lives, where the season's passing also signals the personal passage of time with the continuous death of the past and continuous rebirth of the future. These markers can contain liminal moments of focus where all life can be made into metaphor and myth, each factor looping in recursive reflections upon another, the season's cycle and our own, the season's lives and deaths and the ones we play out within ourselves; this is a universal phenomenon. The seasonal cycle is an extraordinary dynamic that can contain rhythms of profound feelings at many levels, and can be brought into animation within the structure of the Axis Mundi. In the examples given later in the thesis the seasonal influences will be revealed more fully.

Diurnal/nocturnal placement

A dramatic difference in response in Axis Mundi participants can be seen by the utilisation of day and night-time dynamics. As with the seasonal response, human beings have evolved to interact with these two conditions in radically different ways, and they are also affected by the liminal zones of dawn and dusk. Gatherings in the daylight can contain some sense of optimism even when the Axis Mundi event is somewhat sad: at night old fears are awakened with the darkness, and the unknown becomes intensified, sometimes bringing apprehension and fear.

These susceptibilities to this particular dynamic can be used by Axis Mundi designers in many ways. The tension can be heightened by the dark but can be made safe again with the reassuring use of light: on Millennium Night in 2000 in Woodford, Queensland, I was involved in organising a thousand people procession with two thousand large candles. Out of the darkness came a river of light symbolically signalling a hopeful future. Great monsters can emerge out of the dark only to be beaten back by heroic acts. Bonfires can also gather a community into a circle of warmth; and circle dancing in an area lit by brightly coloured lights can activate feelings of unity. But darkness also awakens other energies that are often

used to power the Axis Mundi spin. The Mardi Gras celebrations around the world thrive on the uncertainty of the dark, bringing to the surface the ambiguous, the sexual, the wilder side to human behaviour—darkness becomes an ally, a friend to the sensual. In later chapters I will explore these different dynamics within examples of carnivals.

The liminal zones, dawn and dusk, can bring about strong states of feelings. We have strong susceptibilities to the rising and setting of the sun, and Axis Mundi events can be placed at these times. Returning to the Woodford Folk Festival mentioned above in Queensland, on the morning of the new millennium I stood with thousands of others watching the sun come up over the Glass House Mountains. The Buddhist monks from the Dalai Lama's North Indian centre in Dharamsala were chanting, and permeating the crowd was a profound feeling of a new beginning. Many were emotionally moved. There was no difference between this sunrise and any other except that it had the complex cultural amalgam of the Millennium surrounding it. To focus attention, chanting produced transcendent feelings in the people present.

Similarly, if not so intensely, hundreds of people make their way to the top of Dhoopgarh Hill each night in Pachmari, in the central province of India, to watch the sunset over the mountain ranges. In 2000 I stood with the crowds as the sun set and felt the emotional intensity produced by the splendour of the setting sun, a symbol of life fading away, intensifying feelings of appreciation and wonder—cognitive matrix interactions bringing about multi-associative intensities.

Concentration of energy and semiology

While a concentration of energy might seem to be a tautology when applied to a gathering, it has many subtle aspects, especially in Axis Mundi events.

All Axis Mundi events can be designed to increase and decrease the concentration of participants, thereby increasing and decreasing the effect of crowd dynamics on the individual. I am thinking here about events that are designed to bring crowds into community harmonies and about how this dynamic is incorporated

into Axis Mundi events (see Morris and Marsh 1988).

Gustave Le Bon was a French sociologist who developed a theory of crowd behaviour in the early 20th century that is still relevant today:

The whole of the common characteristics with which heredity endows the individuals of a race constitute the genius of the race. When, however, a certain number of these individuals are gathered together in a crowd for purposes of action, observation proves that, from the mere fact of their being assembled, there result certain new psychological characteristics (Le Bon Project Gutenberg web site, viewed 11 July, 2009 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/tcrwd10.txt>>).

Le Bon developed ideas about the loss of individual identity in crowds, a gaining of a group dynamic that ‘tuned’ people from single units into a mass consciousness.²⁹ He discussed what he called ‘contagion’ where feelings would sweep over a group and, in doing so, would produce the ‘group mind’.³⁰ He commented on the suggestibility of a crowd and noted how they can be swept along in a kind of hysteria.³¹

It is vital that designers take into consideration that crowds can achieve the heights of positive feelings when realising a group mind, but, conversely, they can turn into a chanting mob. Axis Mundi designs can achieve both, and so a great deal of care has to be taken in managing this dynamic. As Le Bon points out:

feelings and of the acts these feelings provoke, the crowd may, according to circumstances, be better or worse than the individual. All depends on the nature of the suggestion to which the crowd is exposed. (Le Bon Project

²⁹ Le Bon further pointed out that ‘the individual forming part of a crowd acquires, solely from numerical considerations, a sentiment of invincible power which allows him to yield to instincts which, had he been alone, he would perforce have kept under restraint’ (Le Bon, Project Gutenberg web site, viewed 11 July 2009. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/tcrwd10.txt>>).

³⁰ ‘In a crowd every sentiment and act is contagious, and contagious to such a degree that an individual readily sacrifices his personal interest to the collective interest’ (Le Bon, Project Gutenberg web site, viewed 11 July 2009. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/tcrwd10.txt>>).

³¹ ‘Under the influence of a suggestion, he will undertake the accomplishment of certain acts with irresistible impetuosity. This impetuosity is the more irresistible in the case of crowds than in that of the hypnotised subject ... the suggestion being the same for all the individuals of the crowd, it gains in strength by reciprocity’ (Le Bon, Project Gutenberg web site, viewed 11 July 2009. <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/tcrwd10.txt>>).

Gutenberg web site, viewed 11 July, 2009 <<http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext96/tcrwd10.txt>>).

Methods to transform a collection of individuals into a 'crowd mind' are well known; for instance, close packing, drums, repetitive mass movement, loud music, chanting, collective singing and special music can produce a 'single mind'. The emotional range achieved by this dynamic can be very wide indeed. It can range from rock concerts to fascist parades (Hitler knew about Le Bon's studies), and from football crowds to choral singing.

Smail (2008, p.171) describes these affective interactions as being teletropic:

[T]he category is largely composed of actions or behaviours that directly influence brain-body chemistry in others by altering the production or reuptake of neurotransmitters in their brains in ways that lie largely outside their voluntary control. These actions can be loosely subdivided into two types of teletropy: symbiotic and exploitive.

To a certain extent these two teletropies depend on the motives of the organisers of gathering events. I am concerned with the dynamics found in *community* events rather than the motives behind them, but it is worth noting that commercial forces can use these same socio-techniques to profit from cognitive susceptibilities, sometimes in ways that are detrimental to participants. The symbiotic can easily change into the exploitive. 'One person's symbiosis, clearly, is another person's exploitation. The psychotropic approach itself is neutral with respect to these sorts of interpretation' (Smail 2008, p.173).

Designers cannot discount that once the crowd mentality has taken control of a group there is a moment built by momentum and rhythm, when a critical state can be reached, see Ball (2004), and the crowd can get out of control. One of the earliest records of this dynamic might be found in Acts (19:28) in the Bible when St Paul faced the Ephesians, who chanted 'Great is the Diana of the Ephesians' for two hours and drove themselves into frenzy that nearly destroyed him. Modern people know the results of the mass hypnotic power that overtakes soccer fans, political marchers and the like. It is very difficult to bring the group out of this state once its members have been taken by its rhythm.

Group dynamics are vital in many Axis Mundi events, and designers often increase community intensities in positive ways at certain points. This might mean that a community festival starts with a spectacular opening ceremony that brings everyone together to establish a temporary common identity, a cultural community. The festival might have some smaller gathering points to concentrate energy at certain moments, a large-scale gathering at the end to bring about an intensive focus and then a gentle disengagement as the community disbands to normal configurations. At other Axis Mundi events the profile of concentration could be very different—a funeral is an example. The entry into concentration is gentle, the gathering is kept very low-key, there is deep intensity at the actual moment of burial or incineration and then a slow dispersal.

Each and every Axis Mundi event has a particular profile that can maximise (but also diminish) the energy distribution of a sequence of experiences. Experienced designers will use these intensities and dispersals to good effect and achieve a sense of rhythm, resonance and crescendo, and eventual closure.

Group dynamics can be profoundly affected by consecrated meaning in intense conglomerates. Multiple clusters of meaning, usually dispersed in normal life, can be brought together in the semiological ‘specialness’ of a gathering, and these can epitomise community thought, aspiration and feeling. The centre of an Axis Mundi can be a conglomerate of this kind, tuning a group into a concentrated point of focus with cultural significance as the energiser. It can also touch deeply embedded feelings that stretch back into deep history. A baby held up to a crowd as a symbol of hope can be seen as one of these concentrations: the baby triggers feelings of protection and future continuance.

I consider extremely fruitful this idea that social life should be explained, not by the notions of those who participate in it, but by more profound causes which are unperceived by consciousness, and I think also that these causes are to be sought mainly in the manner according to which the associated individuals are grouped (Durkheim cited in Ball 2004, p.443).

There are few Axis Mundi events that do not place within their structure a myriad of signs, signals, symbols, metaphors and codes. Placing these in particular

interactive spaces, in certain close proximity, forces meaning to multiply, to open up involvements with the individual human brain and form bridges that link the single self to the multiple other. This capacity was brought about by our interaction with the world, as Barrow (1995, p.113) states:

As those constraints of natural environment were accommodated by the evolution of adaptive organisms, selection led to curious sensitivities to the environment, whose legacies are manifest in our aesthetic feelings for nature scenes, and in many of our antipathies to the unnatural. These considerations reveal something of our intuitions for the natural and the unnatural; they lie at the heart of our latent desires to appreciate, nurture, and recreate the environment in sensitive ways. They teach us something about our response to symbols.

Axis Mundi events are powerful social machines that have great capacity for accretion. They can collect the various fragments or pieces that make up community and, in a miracle of implosion, bring the symbolic whole into a synthesis of cohesion, placing the community into an imaginative working model of itself - the 'normal' reducing itself into the concentrated 'special'. The cognitive ability contained within the mind that allows this dynamic to 'make sense' is an often neglected part of Axis Mundi design or, worse, is misused³² and yet, when properly placed, can produce elegant and powerful concentrations of human expression.

We are used to thinking of semiology as visual (as in signs), but, in the case of gathering, the semiological workings can be seen as multifarious, with smell, sound, touch and taste all carrying multi-level symbolic conglomerations, each medium compounded within the next to create intensity and Axis Mundi spin. This concentration can happen at the sacred and carnival ends of the Axis Mundi vertical. One might think about the Axis Mundi dynamic created by a Catholic Christmas Mass with its many levels of semiological input—such as choirs, organ music, processions, movement, spoken word, church symbolic environments, costumes, candles and incense—all being plugged into the massive conglomerate of the

³² Some gatherings connect powerful matrixes to one another for their shock value, plundering any powerful synthesis for its signature icon.

Christian story and its internal traditions. At the other end of the vertical the carnival can also demonstrate elegant conglomerates of semiological intensity. A float in the Rio Mardi Gras parade, for example, produces multi-level intensities, each part enforcing the next in complex integrations of expression. The glittering costumes, the music and dance, the visual delivery and the commitment to the amplification of a certain joy of life can be found in the semiological expression.

In gatherings, in the Axis Mundi spin, the symbolic world can be brought to life and ordinary worldly constants broken down by the intensities of experience into energies of animation – this is what makes the normal into the special. Individual brains, with their dispositions towards gathering, can be attracted, intrigued and brought together with others in a concentration of energy created by the semiological activity as they ‘plug in’ one circuit to another, creating layered meanings, and exciting certain juxtapositioning and emotional interaction. Designers of Axis Mundi events who do not rely on traditional ways of creating these dynamics (many formed from thousands if not tens of thousands of years of refinement) must deliberate carefully before bringing them together, as these semiological ‘joins’ can become entangled in confusion, creating energy perhaps, but never being able to create the perfect momentum.³³ According to Barthes (1982, p.216):

there is probably a genuine imagination of the sign; the sign is not only the object of a particular knowledge, but also the object of a vision ... the semiologist *sees* the sign moving in the field of signification, he enumerates its valences, traces their configuration: the sign is, for him, a sensuous idea.

Social feedback effects

It is the quality of an event to contain a continual loop of social interaction generating constant energy. The designers of many Axis Mundi events use this energy to adapt to new needs. Some gatherings remain fixed in themselves and resist the ability of the attendees to feed back comments or actions that might precipitate

³³ Loud rock music expressing the values of popular culture played at a country fair can cause energy but might cause a great deal of symbolic confusion as the values of one might clash with the values of the other.

change. Sometimes communities feel there is a good reason for this. In sacred events, for example, some traditional religious services would resist radical feedback activities that might threaten the set form. To illustrate, modern Christian churches often struggle with a need to change the ritual to meet modern needs but are reluctant to change long-held traditions of the church, this often results in a confused situation.

However, some groups actually thrive on such social feedback processes and are continually changing the shape of the Axis Mundi event to meet the needs and enthusiasms of the community. This feedback loop works in the following way. The gathering event is staged and feedback processes are set up to comment on what happened. The design is then changed to accommodate the feedback. This process is ongoing, and the constant positive reaction to the community's feelings and needs by the central body produces constant change in design that can be refreshing and exciting. The Woodford Folk Festival in Queensland, Australia constantly changes its program as a result of feedback by both staff and attendees.

This 'open' stance can, however, have implicit dangers in an Axis Mundi event. Certain factions or individuals can put enormous pressure on a design, using the social feedback apparatus that can be difficult to deal with, especially when their suggested changes might be either ill-informed or self-seeking. Treading a fine line between community involvement in their gatherings and good design can sometimes be difficult for event designers. But if this delicate balance is maintained, then an open social feedback process can create an interactive and beneficial effect on the development of the event. I live on an island, Tasmania, where social feedback loops are intense, with small, cohesive, communities able to become involved in the design processes of Axis Mundi events. On the other hand, in large city conglomerates, local community feedback can be swept aside by the flowthrough of wider social currents. A town council, for example, can have a 'festival' for a community with no local feedback loops put in place at all, and yet be subject to interrogation and change from external sources such as a state or national government.

There can be more active and immediate instances of social feedback processes that can create powerful stimulants to an event. They are what I might call uncontrolled feedback loops. In setting up an Axis Mundi event, the feedback is built into the very process and action of the event, with growing complexities building on

top of one another, looping back into the whole and increasing its activity and dynamic. As this loop or series of loops continues, the event reaches a critical mass that transforms the event into an emergent other, a new expression that goes beyond any amount of planning. Ball (2004, p.155) suggests that ‘something about the way that those individuals interact produces a kind of coherent group behaviour. Emergent properties show that the whole can be more than the parts’.

Some designers of Axis Mundi events place this unpredictable looping into gatherings because, if they work, they can bring about transformations that can be very exciting, fresh and new—for example, the ‘silence’ built into a funeral by a celebrant after inviting anyone in the congregation to speak, leaves a vacuum waiting to be filled with an unexpected energy; the choral director who abandons the formal musical route and takes up improvisation, risking all in that musical freedom; the theatre director who invites the audience onto the stage; or a festival director who gives freedom to a group to express anything its members feel is important. Releasing this kind of dynamic can be a worthless experiment ending in dismal failure, with the Axis Mundi failing to spin. But it can also result in a special and profound focus, born of a critical mass build-up that can be memorable and bring about great energy in the axis.

Ruptures and catalysts

These two sub-elements describe dynamics of ‘positive interference’. Ruptures are not leakages or aggressive attacks but ways of disturbance that tip balances, stimulate energy and create the new. Catalysts can be powerful energisers used to create disturbance and positive change by mixing in new ingredients. They both suggest radical intrusion planted inside an Axis Mundi event to create energy and change. I have described above how social feedback can create energy by a continued looping process, and ruptures and catalysts are used for the same reason—that is, to lift the force inside the movement of the gathering event to achieve intensity.

Ruptures can be described as destabilising factors built into an event design that fracture or upset the form, thereby creating vigour that increases the turn of the Axis Mundi. They might be compared to the damage to an ant colony when a part of

its hill is damaged by a careless foot, setting off an immediate frenzy of activity, pulling energy from across the insect community, whose members put every available resource into repairing the rupture.

In an event, an example of a rupture dynamic might be as follows. Preparation procedures in certain Axis Mundi open-air theatre events can be planned to exclude a dress rehearsal; this places the running of the event into completely new territory—the event will only happen once with no overall run through. By its very nature, this choice creates ruptures as the unexpected emerges (whereas a dress rehearsal smoothes out the unexpected). The Axis Mundi event is staged and ruptures occur—people miss their entrances, lights do not go on at the right time, certain props are misplaced, or sequences are disrupted. The performers (who are trained and ready for this situation) are prepared to work together to cope with any rupture, to invent new links, repair the holes and be creative about solving the problems. This preparedness creates great unity in the group and generates creative atmospheres that produce a great deal of positive energy that injects itself into an event.

Catalysts are outside agents that, when added to certain elements, will produce energy and radical change, without being affected by the change. A catalyst can sometimes be a person. For instance, a great teacher brought in from the outside can work with a group of singers, taking them further than they thought possible, creating what might almost be said to be a chemical change in their presentation. An empowered celebrant can bring about a feeling of new union in a married couple that transcends the short service. It can also be an experience, unrelated to an event that inspires new energy and commitment. In my own case, the tragedy created by the collapse of the World Trade Towers produced great energy within our group to create a work that reflected the wish for recovery; it was a catalyst that created a new approach to what we were doing.³⁴

There is an inherent danger in the introduction of rupture and catalyst dynamics, as both can backfire easily. They can flatten the energy profile and, at

³⁴ The work created from this particular catalyst was *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* performed at the Woodford Folk Festival in 2002. It was a community event that expressed a need for clear sightedness in dealing with this world catastrophe.

worst, completely destroy the whole event. I have been involved in events where the outside disruption did not give the expected lift and instead destabilised the project: civic interference for political reasons, or a sponsor who wants a bigger commercial profile, are examples.

Pollination capacity

The dynamic of social pollination is both simple and complex within Axis Mundi events. On the one hand, pollination can be seen as an exchange of ideas, energies or experiences between people that creates a 'fertile' situation of potential growth. Varela (1991, p.88) comments on these properties when they are found in physical systems:

... starting with simple components that would dramatically connect to each other in dense ways ... Today people prefer to speak of emergent or global properties, network dynamics, non linear networks, complex systems or even synergies

People meeting in the informal moments of a community event can exchange opinions and suggestions for improvement, establish new links and friendship and create ideas for the future. Sometimes the pollination process can be more formalised by placing disparate groups or individuals together and, through their interchange can produce new directions for both communities. As long as the atmosphere is one of open exchange, two different groups can create completely new dynamics and a great deal of energy. By running an Axis Mundi event that places young people with the elderly, one ethnic group beside another, or the healthy with the sick, a pollination effect can be triggered. Merging groups become more multifaceted as new alignments form, creating new complexities to be dealt with as a result of this interchange.

But a difficulty arises in the employment of this dynamic because the results are unpredictable; they can lead to breakdown and alienation. The groups can become threatened and combative when asked to combine with others and so the Axis Mundi wobbles and spins out of control. The skill in the design is to produce a balance, a control of the energy, which will enhance the two communities, creating energy and understanding and new directions that will not unbalance the whole.

Transformation, affirmation, transcendent and cathartic qualities

I will present later in this thesis many examples of these processes in action and do not want to take up a great deal of space here. However, I will put forward a brief description of these important dynamics that are found, either in single emphasis or compound interactions, in every Axis Mundi event.

Transformational gatherings take participants from the normal to the special and back again but a permanent transformation occurs to some participants in the process. Through careful design a shift occurs that produces a new state—rites of passage are particularly good examples, and marriages or initiations demonstrate this phenomenon well.

Affirmation events go through the normal/special/normal cycle but the participants are not changed permanently. Rather, they are affirmed in their previous existence. These events are designed to intensify feelings of support, of shared values and confirmations of unity. A good example would be a community fair in which people come together to verify the strengths they find within their community; they celebrate what is important to them and in so doing experience feelings of affirmation.

Transcendent events follow the same normal/special/normal pattern and are designed to bring people into a state of unity. These Axis Mundi events do not affirm community by intensifying associative cultural commonalities but, rather, they put people into states of heightened awareness that produce emotions of ‘human unity’ and a release of personal ego. Singing in a massed choir or dancing can both achieve this feeling.

Lastly, I use the word catharsis to describe Axis Mundi events that take people or communities who are ‘in trouble’ from the normal to the special and allow new and more positive directions to emerge and so effect permanent change. The ‘recovery’ events that are produced in times of emergency are good examples and will be discussed later.

Historic understandings and future visions

Axis Mundi events can track back into a community’s history and produce

reflections, interpretations, investigations and understandings that illuminate the present. In activating this dynamic within an Axis Mundi event the community of the past can be envisioned, its dark aspects purged, its positive factors celebrated, its positions understood and feelings of continuance furthered. These envisionings can be explored in theatre presentations, songs, dancing, music, re-enactments and other forms. They can also be found, sometimes deeply buried, within folk traditions that stretch back into the past and were formed by real events—the burning of the Viking ship at Up-Helly-Aa every January in Shetland is an example³⁵. But there are dangers within the Axis Mundi design in the interpretive understandings of the past—one person's view of history can be informed by prejudice or misreadings that can deeply offend others. The history of non-Aboriginal Australia can be deeply offensive to Indigenous peoples when certain communities hold re-enactments from the perspective of a 'brave' explorer.

Visions of 'what might be' can also be played out within the energies of the Axis Mundi. These scenarios can be bleak warnings about a dangerous future (many environmental projects in contemporary society play out these themes), or they can be calls to community to rally together to form new beginnings. One event in which I was involved, the Craigmillar Festival, was situated in a socially deprived area in Edinburgh. There, a group of local people staged theatre performances about imagined and better futures to great effect – this example is examined in more detail later. The susceptibility to envision futures can be harnessed within Axis Mundi designs to create 'visions of change' that can act as real models for some future intent.

Use of myth and archetype

Myth and archetype³⁶ are powerful design tools that are activated in many Axis Mundi events, and their usefulness will be demonstrated in many of the

³⁵ The Vikings used to commonly invade these islands and this festival ceremoniously burns images of these boats.

³⁶ For myth and archetype reference I consulted the following writers: Armstrong 2005; Bellingham 1989; Boyer 2000; Campbell 1962, 1988, 1984 and 1990; Cavendish 1980; Cotterell 1997; Cotterell and Storm 1999; Erdoes and Ortiz 1984; Grimal 1963; Hamlyn 1968; Hughes 1968; Lash 1995; Lefkowitz 2003; Lowenstien and Vitebsky 1997; MacLagan 1977; Malnic 1998; Mitchell (1973 and 2003); Osbon 1991; Pollack 1997; Sansonese 1994; Segal 2004; Sharkey 1975; Whittaker 1989 and Willis 2000.

examples in this thesis. Our cognitive susceptibility to identify and ‘live within’ mythological and archetypal frameworks, at least for the duration of an Axis Mundi event, demonstrates their important function in helping to construct complex paradigms. In gatherings they are important, producing forms that designers can utilise to carry information and feelings. As Campbell (1949) has shown, these basic frameworks underpin all cultures and therefore produce compound associations that not only create Axis Mundi momentum, but also provide ready-made shortcuts to strong feelings of association universally. However, Campbell (1949, p.248) warns that their power is often obscure:

The apprehension of the source of this undifferentiated yet everywhere particularized substratum of being is rendered frustrate by the very organs through which the apprehension must be accomplished. The forms of sensibility and the categories of human thought, which are themselves manifestations of this power, so confine the mind that it is normally impossible not only to see, but even to conceive, beyond the colorful, fluid, infinitely various and bewildering phenomenal spectacle. The function of ritual and myth is to make possible, and then to facilitate, the jump-by-analogy. Forms and conceptions that the mind and its senses can comprehend are presented and arranged in such a way as to suggest a truth or openness beyond.

Using myth and archetype to frame Axis Mundi events and invite human engagement is a complex activity and one that forms a continuous and persistent theme throughout this study. A myth, however, is not history: it transcends fact, moving the actions of real humans into a framework of the universal.³⁷ If ‘hard fact’ is applied to myth and archetype, the power of the internal message can collapse in an atmosphere of cynicism: the poetic, such a powerful tool to lift the Axis Mundi, is rejected and dispensed with, leaving the event without its lyrical base. ‘Wherever the

³⁷ ‘We have only to read it, study its constant patterns, analyse its variations, and therewith come to an understanding of the deep forces that have shaped man's destiny and must continue to determine both our private and our public lives ... their understood function is to serve as a powerful picture language for the communication of traditional wisdom ... The metaphors by which they live, and through which they operate, have been brooded upon, searched, and discussed for centuries—even millennia; they have served whole societies, furthermore, as the mainstays of thought and life’ (Campbell 1949, p.256).

poetry of myth is interpreted as biography, history, or science, it is killed ... it is never difficult to demonstrate that as science and history mythology is absurd' (Campbell 1993, p.249).

Sometimes, when I have been involved with 'religious' events, this dichotomy reveals itself, with the Church morphing a supposedly historical narrative with a mythological framework. This often creates a clash within the Axis Mundi framework that weakens both fact and fiction. In civic events, too, the clumsy and careless use of myth to power an event can ring a false note that is often detected within the community. The hundredth anniversary of a town, for example, can be mythologised within the marketing profile but does not actually touch the mythological shared by its people. A misplaced mythology leaves events moribund.

Sometimes the designer must be strategic in the use of myth and archetypes, allowing them to become resonant and alive within a gathering, empowering the event, without declaring their presence. They become sub-texts within the event, providing a skeleton to be fleshed out in local contexts. For example, I have expressed the myth and archetype within the Christian story, allowing the full power of the metaphors to emerge, reconstituted and reinterpreted within a contemporary secular context, with no reference to the Bible at all, with powerful results. The ability of the mind to embrace metaphors as systems of understanding and association allows the designer of Axis Mundi events to use mythological and archetypal dynamics that, in turn, activate gathering susceptibilities within people even when they are all but invisible. Campbell (1949, p.383) elaborates:

The tribal ceremonies of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, installation, and so forth, serve to translate the individual's life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms. They disclose him to himself, not as this personality or that, but as the warrior, the bride, the widow, the priest, the chieftain; at the same time rehearsing for the rest of the community the old lesson of the archetypal stages. All participate in the ceremonial according to rank and function. The whole society becomes visible to itself as an imperishable living unit. Generations of individuals pass, like anonymous cells from a living body; but the sustaining, timeless form remains. By an enlargement of vision to embrace this super-individual, each discovers

himself enhanced, enriched, supported, and magnified. His role, however unimpressive, is seen to be intrinsic to the beautiful festival-image of man—the image, potential yet necessarily inhibited, within himself.

Sexual energy

One dynamic is very infectious when used by designers and that is the activation of sexual energy. Carnival is most especially powered by this strong instinct. People become highly energised through pounding music, revealing costumes, wild dancing and a sense of libertine exuberance. But community and sometimes even civic events have sexual energy threading its way through all sorts of seemly non-sexual situations; the typical village dance has threads of sexual energy for example.

Sexual feelings are a complex and multi-level involvement and a very powerful part of some Axis Mundi events. Although it is hard to choose just one example amongst so many—ranging from rock concerts to Mardi Gras, and from New Year's Eve celebrations to festivals—a gathering of the Nuba people of Kau, people in the Sudan, is one. In the afternoon of a particular day the young men gather together to fight each other with sharp bracelets, and in their wrestling, they do a great deal of damage to one another. Later that day they dance the *nyertun*—the dance of love. According to Riefenstahl (1976, p.223) who photographed them, it:

opens with a wild flurry of drums. Almost demurely, the first girls approach ... the floor soon fills and comes alive with movement. The drumming grows louder, the dancing wilder ... They sway their hips in time to the drums, holding supple twigs or long whips plaited from leather thongs as aids to the dance.

The fighters, who have also painted and adorned themselves, dance in. Their movements are very slow compared with those of the girls ... Bending backwards from the waist, they emit ... bird of prey screams ... the drummers and ... a choral accompaniment to the wild rhythm ... Then it happens. One girl dances up to a fighter ... Quick as a flash, she swings one leg over his and rests it on his shoulder, body swaying. Her chosen mate ... A man does not keep his tryst until nightfall ... The drums continue to throb, the girls dance far into the night ...

This fascinating mythical rite, which has survived the passage of centuries, must surely be unique of its kind.

I will explore these dynamics in various examples found in later chapters.

Forms

Various universal forms 'hold' Axis Mundi events in their structure. Parades, processions, rituals, symbols, liminal pathways and certain other activities have been used universally by human beings as a means of gathering. Where does their potency lie, and how do they work to bring the individual into the group?

I have separated gatherings into the various forms that I list below. Axis Mundi events always have at least one of these forms as a working structure. They can function as single or multiple events, and they can stand alone or incorporate each other in a wide set of circumstances: ritual can be found within festivals, ceremony within translocation, and liminal areas can be detected almost everywhere. Yet the following forms can be firmly circumscribed and analysed, and are presented in detail below.

Liminal zones

[B]oundary zones were viewed as being of particular importance to prehistoric communities. Ceremonies in these places 'at the edge' would have protected or reinforced the 'core' or stable area against forces that were thought to threaten it. They were also neutral places where people from outside could safely be met (Pryor 2003, p.90).

If the Axis Mundi is where the 'special' can be invoked, then individuals and groups have to have some preparation to move from the 'normal' into that 'special' space, and designers build in to events such liminal zones in order to facilitate these movements. For example, it is difficult for people to just gather and become part of an event in ad hoc fashion; they can sometimes feel nervous and apprehensive at these times, and they need to have mechanisms which allow realignment to happen, to gradually adjust to new circumstances. They also need time to adjust back into normality at the end of an event.

This is why liminal zones are ubiquitous in human gatherings everywhere. These are important transitory stages, times that allow a staged 'compression' and 'decompression' (see Broadhurst 1999). Designers have to determine the speed of entrance and exit, the symbols that will be used, and the part that the arts will play. The 'normal' must be softened or made more flexible, put into a state of openness to the 'special' world of the Axis Mundi and, conversely, must be made more stable again as people leave that world.

It could be said there are two kinds of liminal zones in gatherings, and both stem from ancient roots. People have always needed liminal zones that take the individual into predictable affirmation structures to enhance group solidarity. But they have also needed procedures which prepare the participants for gatherings that bring about upheaval and change. I shall call the first type 'stabilising' processes and the other 'destabilising' processes.

The first liminal type, the stabilising process, is intended to produce feelings of constancy and stability. Its main aim is to ease participants into a situation where they will feel safe, secure and harmonised: it is non-threatening and it signals affirmation and dependability. It is a gentle entrance into the known, the expected. It is a place which might be extraordinary but has a secure feeling, affirming and deepening group allegiances. The celebration is in an emotionally comfortable place. What will happen within it is predictable. The liminal signals are familiar. It has probably been entered before; pathways, models and associations are in place. Individuals know they will be strengthened and replenished. The entrance to a local community festival, for example, often shows these features with welcoming entrances decorated in flags and flowers, friendly faces giving out helpful programs and gates opening into familiar spaces.

The second liminal process, the destabilising process, is designed to take participants into the unknown. It is anything but cosy; it is unstable, hazardous and precarious and calls for immediate and rapid adjustment. The individual is in new territory, the pathways have been disturbed, the known sags under the strain and disorientation follows. The liminal zone warns of a storm ahead, and yet the community still understands that the Axis Mundi will hold them safely, however unstable the form will become; the entrance way to a masked ball, a zone between

identity and ambiguity, is an example.

Bachelard (1958, p.223) comments on the liminal entrance:

And there is no need to return to a distant past, a past that is no longer our own, to find sacred properties attributed to the threshold. In the third century, Porphyry wrote: 'A threshold is a sacred thing'.

Through two million years the cave entrance was a liminal zone; it was our refuge and our enemy, a place of stabilisation and place of destabilisation. We could live in cave entrances and gain shelter but what lay inside might harm us. When our ancestors stood at the edge of an unknown river, rewards might lie on the other side. But what dangers lay ahead? When we had to move from the open grasslands into the tree canopy, we passed the safety of all-round vision to the darkness of the wood. These are all liminal zones and human beings have had to deal with these borders between safety and danger for as long as they have lived on Earth.

To trigger the feeling of these ambiguous spaces and to understand their liminal quality, designers have to become aware of the inner reaction that people will have when they approach a gate, a doorway or an entrance. The brain prepares to move gears, to adjust its dominant pathways and modular configurations. New rules might apply as we move from one space to another, especially if that new space is unstable and unknown.

In fact, it is one of its primal images, the very origin of a daydream that accumulates desires and temptations: the temptation to open up the ultimate depths of being, and the desire to conquer all reticent beings. The door schematizes two strong possibilities, which sharply classify two types of daydream. At times, it is closed, bolted, padlocked. At others, it is open, that is to say, wide open (Bachelard 1958, p. 222).

Compare, for example, the two gates shown in Plates 1 and 2, and note the difference between safety and danger, order and disruption; these offer clues to the design of the liminal zones of the Axis Mundi. These opposites of the sacred and carnival space work through many cultures. They are reflected in story, myth and belief in the 'stabiliser' and the 'disrupter', the saint and the joker, Nietzsche's Apollo and Dionysus, the God and the Devil, all playing with the delicate balance

between structure and disorder. Entering the sacred needs compression and decompression zones that can move participants into a rarefied space where the ordinary can give way to the luminous. As noted by Huxley (1974, p.16), 'Here, we must deal with awe, fascination, and terror, with ignorance shot through with the lightning of certainty, and with feelings of exuberance, love, and bliss'. To enter the state of carnival unprepared might bring dislocation, with participants being unable to merge with the group, causing distress. According to Cronon (1995, p.156), 'The comfortable predictability of the linear slips away into the uncertainty of the indeterminate—into discordant harmonies and disorderly order'.



Plate 1: Santiago di Compostela

Source: <<http://members.Virtualtourist.com/m/3357e/3e180/>>, viewed 12 August 2009.

Photographer unknown



Plate 2: Luna Park, Melbourne

Source: *Wikipedia* web site, viewed 12 August 2009.

Photographer unknown

This is why liminal apparatus is placed around celebratory structures—where the participant is prepared for what will happen and will be in the ‘right’ mental and emotional space to enter the area where true *communitas* is activated. Whichever sort of liminal zone is put in place, the zone can also act as enticement. Gatherings are, by their very nature, areas which contain the ‘special’—for example, the illuminating, the mysterious, the potent, and the powerful—and designers should never underestimate the nature of human curiosity. The liminal gives notice, advertises its wares, and asks all who enter to abandon the normal. We are curious to investigate because it has been part of our survival tactics to learn about the world.

And because *Homo sapiens* has, to a unique extent, bet its evolutionary life on the survival strategy of learning and knowing—since *ignorance* is dangerous and adaptation is smart—the presence of non-lethal strangeness triggers ‘approach and investigate’, with accompanying feelings of *interest*, *excitement* and *fascination* (Claxton 2005, p.310).

All liminal zones are borders to be crossed, and, as such, create tension around potential change. Axis Mundi designers often use these tensions to create

dramatic experiences to bring about adjustment to the spin. For instance, in a performance on Snake Island near Toronto in 1981, the theatre company Welfare State International brought the audience across the lake in a boat at night, with music and characters on board. They were met with a parade that took them along island walkways to the performance area. This liminal experience took over an hour, and the audience were thoroughly reoriented. They had left the normal behind and were now able to tune into the 'special' of the performance.

Ritual

Ritual are actions, able to be repeated, that invoke in people a set of behaviours that produce particular mind-sets serving a variety of social functions (see Cohen 1991; Grimes 1993 and 2000; Messenger 2008; Roose-Evans 1994; Scheff 1997; Turner 1982). The word 'repeated' can be confusing because the people inside the rituals—participants, friends, family or general public—may only perform the ritual, say, every Sunday (church service) or only once (a marriage ceremony), but the form is repeated again and again by instigators and technicians.

To add a further complication, a ritual might happen only once and never be 'repeated' by any group, but it is invariably using replicable forms to achieve the aims of the ritual. The placement of flowers at various sites after the death of Princess Diana is one example of this tendency.

Ritual is a process found within some Axis Mundi events—such as rites of passage, formal moments, and sacred activities—when specific states of alignment are called for. Rituals are a way of *ordering symbolologies* to set up interactions with a conveyed meaning. They are channels of semiological agreement. Although thinking about rites, Durkheim (1975, p.111) sums up these qualities:

Rites are ways of behaving which only come into being at the heart of assembled groups and whose function is to create, maintain and to re-establish certain mental states within these groups.

Our ancient ancestors would have needed unalterable structures that were able to 'play out' a symbolised code of meaning again and again to establish knowledge, firmly and irrevocably, within the group and in each and every individual:

laws could be regularised, cosmologies enacted and alignment, community agreements solidified. Each group would have social spaces where they could engage with certain, clearly understood, proformas; and these could be repeated and therefore constantly transmit knowledge from one generation to the next. Their very survival depended on stabilising knowledge within agreed forms.

Each individual had to be aligned with the group's culture, and knowledge had to be stabilised. Rituals were able to take people through passages of prescribed behaviour that brought about alignments to a community purpose. These knowledge forms could only be adjusted with careful transformation rituals that would then enter the lexicon of the group's collective structure as new understandings. Ritual actions acted as a safe set of procedures that could protect the whole system from a fatal formlessness that might bring about anarchy. This advent of repeated vision in rituals could elicit faithful adherence to the group but how are they capable of achieving this mental state?

Ritual's power to align rests on two particular human cognitive features. The first is our capacity to model the external world within the self and constantly match the 'real' world to the internal models we have developed. Renfrew and Bahn (1991, p.394) explain:

It is useful to assume that there exists in each human mind a perspective of the world, an interpretive framework, a cognitive map—an idea akin to the mental map that geographers discuss, but one not restricted to the representation of spatial relationships only. For human beings do not act in relation to their sense impressions alone, but to their existing knowledge of the world, through which those impressions are interpreted and given meaning.

These flexible models of the world are very subtle, and the information that makes a particular model may reside in different parts of the brain. These 'parts' might be used in a number of other models. In evolutionary terms we have developed this analysing function to be able to read the world, interpret what is happening, run these factors through a critical and predictive system, and react accordingly. Carter (2003 p.195) explains:

The brain is in large part a probability computer; and our actions are based on predictions to future situations. But we cannot predict with certainty what our or other people's predictions will be—what they will see or how they will behave. This is a price we ... pay for basing behaviour on the probable, or desired, future; but intelligent behaviour is not possible without attempted prediction. Predicting from hypotheses ... from meagre data is the hallmark of perception.

One of the ways in which we hold models is in symbol. Human beings are exceptional in this regard. We have the capacity to use a symbol, or set of symbols, to 'hold' a model that can be used to gain information or to interpret a situation. The symbol is an open interpretational space to which the actual can be aligned. For example, by holding the circle as an image we can apply a large set of semiological alignments within its boundaries and even beyond. The simple circle can hold meaning as, say, the sun, community unity, a sense of completion, a ripple, an apple, a ball, senses of inclusion and exclusion, the moon, or the human face. Through this simple sign, a multitude of complex ideas can flow. Meaning can only be secured by the symbol if it is placed in a cultural space that territorialises it with reference. We cannot think without a complex set of modelling systems and the use of symbolic signs that act in an algebraic way to help us interpret the world. All new thought is a realignment, an adjustment, an updating, a synthesis, a merging, and a piecing together of the old. Carter (2003, p.227) describes it like this:

Without some symbol, like a name, for an object you have nothing with which to hook the memories of it from storage. They may be brought to mind by sensory reminders—a flash of yellow, perhaps—but voluntary access to them, on demand, would be much harder. Once you can label things, however, you can make your mind into a filing cabinet and pack it with representations *of* the outside world. You can then pluck out these representations at will and juggle and juxtapose them, creating new ideas in the process. This creates a template within which ideas can be ordered and structured, giving shape and stability to notions that would otherwise remain nebulous. Thus it provides the means to consider abstractions: honesty, fairness, authority and so on.

Ritual can build up interactive environments of imagined worlds that we can align with, design to our own specifications and use to affirm our allegiance to the community. It is only a model but it has an important function: in controlling participation in particular ways the designer can align the individual and the group within the Axis Mundi.

The second cognitive aspect that creates ritual is that people retain information in matrix gatherings, each able to join in clusters to form complex interrelated thoughts. These are connected by neural pathways that grow more efficient in realising their mapping by repetition. According to Buzan (1993, p.29):

Every time we have a thought, the biochemical/electromagnetic resistance along the pathway carrying the thought is reduced. It is like trying to clear a path through a forest. The first time you struggle because you have to fight your way through the undergrowth. The second time you travel that way will be easier because of the clearing you did on your first journey. The more times you travel on that path, the less resistance there will be, until, after many repetitions, you have a wide, smooth track that requires little to no clearing. A similar function occurs in the brain: the more you repeat patterns or maps of thought, the less resistance there is to them. Therefore, and of greater significance, *repetition in itself increases the probability of repetition*. In other words, the more times a mental event happens, the more likely it is to happen again (see also Buzan 2001).

In other words, the more one repeats a cognitive action the more embedded it becomes. If designers create a symbolic ritual environment that can be moved through³⁸ regularly, it continually deepens established neural pathways and becomes more and more ingrained. This capacity to deepen pathways, imbuing the brain with more and more familiar patterns, is especially useful in the design of many kinds of gatherings. Historic or prehistoric ritual sites used by different groups all over the world demonstrate the effectiveness of building environments that encourage repetitious usage within their design.

³⁸ A ritual is a moving physical experience, the body memory is also utilised to reinforce the emotional or mental interaction and the Axis Mundi landscapes reflect this physical involvement.

Rituals also provide structures that can include transformational processes that create change. These two ritual forms could be called affirmational and transformative.

Affirmational rituals

To understand community rituals in terms of affirmation is to see a set of modelled proforma activities that bring about a state of mind in the individual that synthesises with the group. The ritual environment is a special space that mirrors the group's feelings and identity and creates an interactive environment that allow participants to express these feelings and sense of identity. The individual can tune in to this interactive environment and become part of it and this is a very affirming activity—a synthesis between a person and the community promotes feelings of security and sharing.

Ritual structures are invaluable in forming concrete sets of actions, unchanging at a meta-level from one experience to the next. They create an interactive model, a symbolic external manifestation of what is important to a community. These sets of associations are reactivated every time a ritual occurs, bringing this central knowledge into the individual's mind again and again, each time bringing comfort, assurance, and affirmation that the individual is in perfect synthesis with the group. These semiological agreements can be witnessed by the wider group, setting allegiances in place, able to be renewed and refreshed. That process of renewal is important since episodes

that are destined for long-term memory are not lodged there straight away. The process of laying them down permanently takes up to two years. Until then they are still fragile and may quite easily be wiped out (Carter 2003, p.268).

Rituals, then are very efficient in bringing the individual into a special state where the inner self is reminded intellectually, emotionally and physically of what he/she should find important in the group. Affirmation rituals in Axis Mundi events are processes of inculcation that provide structures used by groups in leadership rites, religious activities, and civic and community gatherings. Designers can use community ritual to create strong affirmational behaviour in a group.

Transformative rituals

Transformative rituals have a different function; they realign individuals and groups, allowing them to cope with change. Ritual can ease this process, create an understanding of it and mark the moment it happens and in this sense is a learning system. It has been noted that a

learning system... must be one in which dynamic conservatism operates at such a level and in such a way as to permit change of state without intolerable threat to the essential functions the system fulfils for the self. Our systems need to maintain their identity, and their ability to support the self-identity of those who belong to them, but they must at the same time be capable of transforming themselves (Schon 1973: p.57 . Viewed on 30 April 2007. <<http://www.infed.org/thinkers/et-schon.htm>>).

Transformative rituals produce new models. One of the reasons transformational rituals were developed was to help individuals cope with change of status, age or position in the group. In initiations the participant had to be taken through a long period of preparation, slowly preparing the old neural pathways for change and, through ritual, establishing new pathways and matrix alignments in the brain for the future. The actual moment of change is when the old model is discarded and a new configuration accepted. Rites of passage demonstrate this well, where young people change because of an initiation, or a couple are realigned with the community when they get married.

It is not just individuals who need these transformative moments but also groups. So communities go through various rituals when they need to change form at times of radical upheaval marking particular moments or redesigning structure. These social procedures realign community in its new direction.³⁹ They allow individuals and groups to be able to change states, as in shedding an old skin. Leadership changes are typical of an elaborate transformation ritual—a coronation for example.

³⁹ A recent example of this was the apology to the Aboriginal people made by Kevin Rudd on 13 February 2008.

Ritual effects on senses

Whether ritual is affirmational or transformative, it uses many methods to engage the individual with the group. Rhythm and energies inside Axis Mundi rituals can vary greatly, each one designed to suit a particular situation. In some cases, ritual can provide spaces that need a certain calmness, a quiet set of actions, or a respect to a higher authority which can be very beautiful to watch: 'the observance of ritual is a form of the cultivation of beauty' (Fowles 1966, p.163). Other rituals are more active, with violent movement, but they, too, contain a certain security, for the set of actions is known; it is predictable and safe, but it also releases vigorous energy. Sometimes the designer wants to produce a calmness and at other times feverish activity. Rituals can cope with both as long as they are appropriate to the situation they are in. The body is involved and its own capacity to hold memory can be evoked. Walking slowly with prescribed movement can bring on a sense of alignment (a Sunday Mass parade for example), while swinging vigorously up and down together also works as an alignment (see the Jewish practice of *shucken*).

It is useful to note how ritual space affects the senses. As the main conveyor of information from the external to the internal, the senses are very important to ritual. Messages sent by the various senses to the brain have to be interpreted, and feeling and thoughts emerge from that analysis. Vision brings with it multiple messages from the outside world, and a large part of our brain is involved in understanding these messages. Our sense of smell brings about intense memory links and connects with our emotions. Ackerman (2000, p.22) describes this process in a more scientific way:

When the olfactory bulb detects something—during eating, sex, an emotional encounter, a stroll through the park—it signals the cerebral cortex and sends a message straight into the limbic system, a mysterious, ancient, and intensely emotional section of our brain in which we feel, lust, and invent. Unlike the other senses, smell needs no interpreter. The effect is immediate and undiluted by language, thought, or translation. A smell can be overwhelmingly nostalgic because it triggers powerful images and emotions before we have time to edit them.

It is no accident that smell is used in ritual both consciously (the smell is

produced with the intention of stimulating certain associated memories—incense for example) and unconsciously (the smell of flowers at a wedding). These smells are picked up and send pleasure signals to the participant, evoking inclusion and warmth, which acts as a powerful tool in creating alignments within ritual. Taste also has its role to play: acidic or sweet, each has its own emotional impact. The taste of wine and bread in the Mass, the sweets given as *pradash* in Indian temples, special foods eaten at certain ritual times, all bring memory experiences into alignment.

Touch, too, can convey a variety of ritual messages: the *sadhus* in India putting a *tilak* marking on every forehead, the shakings of hands in a church, or the application of holy water can all help deepen the ritual state.⁴⁰ According to Ackerman (2000, p.78),

Those animals who did more touching instinctively produced offspring which survived, and their genes were passed on and the tendency to touch became even stronger. We forget that touch is not only basic to our species, but the key to it.

The language of touch clearly demonstrates that, like the other senses, it is the context of the experience and the brain's interpretation that is important. A hand, say, is placed on a bare arm; it can be the touch of your small child or spouse, a work colleague, a person disliked, or a dying relative—each one provoking radically different feelings. But in a ritual environment, each touch is placed according to particular significance, bringing with it layers of meaning.

Of all the ritual tools used to bring about alignment sound can be the most powerful. As I explore in more detail later, singing, music, drums, repetitive chanting and certain rhythmic speech can bring about intense feelings of togetherness.

Vision, hearing and smell are passive absorbers of information (celebratory systems encoding and participants decoding), whereas touch and sound have

⁴⁰ 'Touch is a sensory system, the influence of which is hard to isolate or eliminate ... Touch is a sense with unique functions and qualities, but it also frequently combines with other senses. Touch affects the whole organism, as well as its culture and the individuals it comes into contact with. "It's ten times stronger than verbal or emotional contact," Schanberg explained ... No other sense can arouse you like touch ... we never realized it had a biological basis' (Ackerman 2000, p.77).

transmission qualities (encoding and decoding can be a two-way stream) that allow the participant to actively join the ritual by touching and making noise. An intensive use of sense environments in Axis Mundi rituals often intensifies unconscious triggers to more deeply involve participants.

The use of ritual can be very powerful because it deepens pathways and forms strong associations and can act as a powerful transformation apparatus, but by using that self-same methodology, it can also reduce meaning inside an event to one of habit and, in some cases of boredom. Many belief rituals have sunk into despondency—in other words, the Axis Mundi fails to spin with energy. The organisers are producing rituals in an atmosphere of empty repetition. Ackerman (2000, pp.304-305) describes it this way:

Our senses also crave novelty. Any change alerts them, and they send a signal to the brain. If there's no change, no novelty, they doze and register little or nothing. The sweetest pleasure loses its thrill if it continues too long. A constant state—even of excitement—in time becomes tedious, fades into the background, because our senses have evolved to report changes, what's new, something startling that has to be appraised: a morsel to eat, a sudden danger ... There is that unique moment when one confronts something new and astonishment begins. Whatever it is, it looms brightly, its edges sharp, its details ravishing, in a hard clear light; just beholding it is a form of revelation, a new sensory litany ... when it's become commonplace, the brain begins slurring the details, recognizing it too quickly, by just a few of its features; it doesn't have to bother scrutinizing it. Then it is lost to astonishment, no longer an extraordinary instance but a generalized piece of the landscape.

Ceremony

The word 'ceremony' is derived from a 'sacred act' and has a particular meaning in relation to Axis Mundi events. This form of activity could be defined as gatherings of interested people who use various structures to move into a formal situation to achieve a social aim, be it legal, civic, community or something of personal significance. They are pre-planned structures that use symbol, movement, the spoken word, different art forms and special rituals to achieve a concentration of

meaning that the group want to recognise as significant. There is an 'importance' in ceremonial actions, and such events contain a sense that a social function is being processed, witnessed, and recognised to have been achieved and 'cemented' in place.

A ceremony is often officiated and can have repeatable ritual content—for example, a politician appears each year to open a local fair, or a local priest blesses the fishing fleet during a community festival or the official part of a marriage (see Baldizzone 2001; Fox 2002, Gill and Fox 1996; How 1999). A ceremony can also be singular in nature—for instance, a politician opens a new park, or the priest says a prayer over a group of rescued miners. They are often associated with civic and sacred situations but can happen in a wide variety of contexts; however, they always contain a formal component.

Axis Mundi ceremonies give any group a social process that provides structure to the formal. This is important, as all groups need mechanisms that have clear starts, predictable lines of procedure and an end signal that can contain a 'fixed' group of meanings. No social group can work efficiently without a differentiation apparatus that distinguishes between the informal and the formal. There needs to be an 'understood space' where informal intercourse gives way to an agreed form of behaviour that signals the group's obedience to itself. This formal state, where deviation and improvisation are frowned upon, is part of the community's tool kit of alliance.

We may not know much yet about this cognitive mechanism that brings about the sense of the formal but we do recognise the feeling within ourselves when a formal situation is about to happen.⁴¹ People are taught from an early age the mechanisms for formality, and it is a more complex apparatus than usually presumed. It is an agreed structure that has certain 'rules' that are activated at particular times. There is no deviation from the pre-organised script, no interference to the process, respect is asked for and achieved, and special clothes and equipment, as well as symbolic accoutrements, can be used to back up the unalterable process. Signals are usually given which begin and end a formal ceremony.

⁴¹ When someone declares a festival open, when a speech is about to be made, or when a sacred event is being enacted.

Ceremony within Axis Mundi events leans towards a certain pace—the procedures tend to be deliberate, measured and sometimes even ponderous. Carefully prepared liminal zones can be important to establish that ceremonial conditions are going to apply. The group has to tacitly agree to enter that state together, to induce it and deactivate it and stay within the ‘rules’—if this is rushed, formality can break down.

It is difficult to trace where ceremony might have originated, but it might have been from the need to place certain social situations into agreement. Formality signalled a need for a process which suggested that certain aspects to society were the ‘formed’ part of the social contract. Without formal structure, it would always be difficult to say where a broad discussion, and even argument, stopped and an agreed shared reality was accepted.

Ceremony is a very important form in Axis Mundi design because it creates points of intense concentration of group approval even though it does need a particular process to activate it. The group needs to be able to ‘tune’ into a formal situation, agree by its rules, and accept its authority, and this can only happen in certain conditions that have to be cultivated and prepared. At the Opening Ceremony of the Olympic Games, for example, the fun and spectacle of cultural expression give way to the formal part of the Opening Ceremony: soldiers march with flags, national anthems are played, world leaders give speeches that make the purpose (and the rules) clear, the audience are respectful, and a flame is lit—the games can commence. The ceremony within the Axis Mundi event has formalised the group’s unity of purpose, authority has been evoked and the aims made clear, the social agreement is ratified, and the community can proceed with confidence to give energy to the event. Carter (2003, p.61) elaborates:

Our urge to rationalise behaviour probably has considerable survival value. The human species got where it is largely by forming complex social constructs—from the hunting party to the political party—and making them work. To work they require that we have confidence in them and to have confidence we need to believe that the actions of these organizations are based on sound, rational judgements.

Festival

'Festival' can easily be held within the idea of the Axis Mundi and is a positive expression of community gathering. I will give a brief overview here but examine these kinds of Axis Mundi events in a lot more detail in later chapters.

Festivals have identified aspects. They are gatherings where a number of people go through various activities that could be described as joyful concentrations of emotional expression that often have structures for meaning exchange. There are many different kinds of festivals and these manifest themselves in the type of social expression needed; for example, carnival, seasonal traditions, sacred expressions, community gatherings, fiestas, fairs, festivos or galas are all forms of festival. The definition depends on a minimum number of people (choosing an arbitrary figure, it might be a hundred) because the event depends on a certain sense of collectivity to engender the group dynamic needed to create the specific human interactions that society calls a festival. This activity has been, and still is, a vital tool in tuning the individual into the group in very positive ways, and every festival should have a certain component of joy, celebration and affirmation of the human spirit.

Festivals are important vehicles for all kinds of celebrations (see Auguet 1975; Cooper 1990; Derrett 2003; Foo and Rossetto, 1998; Haga 1979; Holme 1988; Ingpen and Wilkinson 1994; Lopez 1978; Macintyre 1980; Simpson 1987; Westrheim 1993; Wyeth 1992), but how can they be defined in terms of their structure? They are certainly marked out, special social environments designed to change the normal state of things, to introduce, for the term of the experience, a set of conditions that take the participant from the normal into the special. These circumscribed situations are designed to provide a multilayered environment that provides a structure for a large range of social needs. The difficulty in gaining an understanding of their structure is that so many different types of events can claim to be festivals and they are radically different in their outward appearance.

Commonalities can be found in festivals. The area of operation is signalled, the times and places selected and preserved, the liminal zones give clear warning that the rules we usually live by are being suspended, and new conditions will operate for a time and in this place. What are the rules of the 'normal' that are suspended, and

what 'special' takes their place?

The 'normal' is a multifaceted interaction with ordinary life in all its manifestations and in cognitive terms is multi-dimensional. The brain is engaged in an environment that changes rapidly, at different speeds, moving from one domain to another with relative ease; say, from work to leisure, and from family to finance. The persona is constantly moving from one world to another, completely reorienting the mind into new configurations, each with its own dynamics and conditions. Some can be dramatic: when the car breaks down; the wallet is left behind; the bill cannot be paid; there is a personality clash at work; or a child is ill. In these situations, the brain performs a complex set of actions and interactions by being able to form 'lines of meaning', through associated matrix conglomerates that can dissolve and be replaced by new combinations as conditions change.

Festivals create the 'special' by creating a certain set of cultural conditions that promote certain feelings or lines of meaning within the individual – they are designed to be joyful. They are controlled, designed spaces where ordinary interactions can be suspended and temporarily forgotten. The celebratory situation fills the participant's world. The festival is a space that asks one to forget the 'normal', with its problems and troubles, and to enter a place that will bring into alignment positive forces of community adhesion and degrees of optimism. The brain is allowed licence to free itself from the normal travails of life and combine with others in free-flowing situations that are designed to enhance consolidation and assert hope and joy. How far the festival structure succeeds in this task depends on good design of the Axis Mundi and of the individual's capacity to 'let go'. Participants must allow themselves to firmly put aside their normal persona and embrace a situation that asks for their abandonment to the new structure. A full 'letting go' can apply to extremes on the festival scale - the sacred being at one end of the Axis Mundi vertical and carnival at the other - but many festivals lie somewhere between the two points.

In broad cognitive terms,⁴² the left-hand side of the brain works to provide

⁴² 'brain imaging studies confirm that the two hemispheres really do have quite specific functions that

the mind with structure, logic and stability. This side of the brain is in full engagement in the normal day-to-day interaction with social systems it interfaces with. The right hand side of the brain processes the creative, the engagement with the new. When a celebration asks the individual to 'let go' it is, in essence, asks the individual to relax the left hand logical structural capacity of the mind, with its attendant emotional controls (judgement of others, suppression of feeling, self interest, fear of the unknown), and allow the right side of the brain, with its attendant emotions (a suspension of judgement, a release to the community, the permission to be freely creative) to become dominant. This 'letting go' is an act of trust, and good Axis Mundi design builds into the structure certain processes that engender this feeling.

Comfort zones can be very sensitive. Certain festivals aim to create excitement and interaction by taking people into new experiences where comfort zones are breached; however, if taken too far, participants sometimes become anxious and negative and they withdraw. Sound Axis Mundi design will always be able to balance these components, producing festival situations that achieve the right sort of 'special'. There was an incident in the Sudan,⁴³ when Carl Jung threw himself into the festival spirit but stopped participating when some dancers seemed to be getting out of his comfort zone and sense of propriety:

When the chief proposed that he give a n'goma (dance) in the evening, I assented gladly. I hoped that the frolic would bring their better nature to the fore. Night had fallen and we were all longing for sleep when we heard drums and horn blasts. Soon some sixty men appeared, martially equipped with flashing lances, clubs, and swords. They were followed at some distance by the women and children; even the infants were present, carried on their mothers' backs. This was obviously to be a grand social occasion. In spite of the heat, which still hovered around ninety-three degrees, a big fire was kindled, and women and children formed a circle round it. The men formed an outer ring round them, as I had once observed a nervous herd of

are 'hard-wired' to the extent that, in normal circumstances, certain skills will always develop on a particular side' (Carter 2003, p.50).

⁴³ Near Lake Albert.

elephants do. I did not know whether I ought to feel pleased or anxious about this mass.

The men's chorus began to sing, vigorous, bellicose melodies, not unharmonious, and at the same time began to swing their legs. The women and children tripped round the fire; the men danced towards it, waving their weapons, then drew back again, and then advanced anew, amid savage singing, drumming, and trumpeting.

It was a wild and stirring scene, bathed in the glow of the fire and magical moonlight. My English friend and I sprang to our feet and mingled with the dancers. I swung my rhinoceros whip, the only weapon I had, and danced with them. By their beaming faces I could see that they approved of our taking part. Their zeal redoubled; the whole company stamped, sang, shouted, sweating profusely. Gradually the rhythm of the dance and the drumming accelerated.

In dances such as these, accompanied by such music, the natives easily fall into a virtual state of possession. That was the case now. As eleven o'clock approached, their excitement began to get out of bounds, and suddenly the whole affair took on a highly curious aspect. The dancers were being transformed into a wild horde, and I became worried about how it would end. I signed to the chief that it was time to stop, and that he and his people ought to go to sleep (Jung 1995, pp. 300–1).

The structures of festivals play with the elements of safety and risk at many levels and in many ways. I use the word 'play' here with a certain intent because the right-hand side of the brain actually does play with ideas, and this sense of play can permeate the whole self.⁴⁴ This sense of freedom brings about feelings of pleasure and joy. The pleasure and joy I am thinking about are caused by natural chemicals released into the brain, bringing about certain joyful emotions. Carter (2003, p.142) comments on these states of mind, brought about by chemical stimulation in the

⁴⁴ In 'the modern human mind of *homo sapiens*, multiple specialized intelligences appear to be working together with a flow of knowledge and ideas between behavioural domains. Experience gained in one domain can now influence that in another resulting in an almost limitless capacity for imagination' (Carter 2003, p. 44).

amygdala, and describes them as a ‘ “warm, floaty feeling” and excessively friendly behaviour—appeasement’ The capacity of the brain to play with ideas in a free-floating way where matrix assemblages can dissolve into new combinations, or join in unusual ways, is never to be underestimated—it was, after all, essential to our survival. Much of this creative energy comes from the prefrontal cortex, as explained by Carter (2003, p.299)

[Y]ou enter an area known as the prefrontal cortex. This is the only part of the brain that is free from the constant labour of sensory processing. It does not concern itself with the mundane tasks in life such as walking around, driving a car, making a cup of coffee or taking in the sensory perceptions from an unremarkable environment. All these can be done adequately without calling on the prefrontal cortex. So long as our mind is in neutral the prefrontal cortex merely ticks over. When something untoward occurs, though, or when we actually think rather than daydream, the prefrontal cortex springs into life and we are jettisoned into full consciousness as though from a tunnel into blazing sunshine.

So, a festival that ‘works’ must be able to bring about a balance in the participants, taking them into the ‘looser’ areas of creativity and the imagination, while being careful not to take people too far outside their left-based comfort zone, thereby creating fear and discomfort. A festival structure must engage the creative, the open, without threatening the ordinary brain functions that ensure feelings of safety and stability. In other words, it must produce a feeling of group joy.

A well-functioning festival has no one formula because the design will always depend on the balance created in particular communities: what is exciting and challenging to one might be fearful and difficult to another. The skill that designers of festivals have to master is to get this formula right for the community that is going to have the celebration, and understanding cognitive workings can help that process be more successful.

Translocation—parades, processions and pilgrimages

In certain kinds of Axis Mundi events, the physical act of walking, or moving along together in a gathering situation, creates certain dynamics that amplify the

feeling of the collective. However, it is useful to differentiate among three types of translocational movement—parades, processions and pilgrimages—which, on the surface, might seem to have common roots but which stem from different social histories and produce dynamics that are very different from each other.

A parade comes from a group's urge to move a chosen cultural expression through a watching crowd: the group displays its symbols of community cohesion and this cohesion is enforced by movement. The parade is an exhibition of values, often with affirmational overtones, displayed by participants to others who can sometimes approve and sometimes not.⁴⁵ The power of expression lies with the paraders; it is a statement of unity agreed amongst them and could be captured by the expression 'showing your wares'. The movement acts as a powerful status strategy for the people moving. They are, in their very action, distributing their sense of identity to a consumer audience,⁴⁶ who stand and absorb it: one has the cultural power, the other has not.

Paraders deepen their sense of unity by operating a strong associative mechanism, often using costumes and props, and this display, in turn, produces a release of joy in the individuals and the group. One has only to look at a Gay Mardi Gras Parade in Sydney to see the confidence displayed by members of a marginalised minority when they are placed into a powerful translocational parade situation. These feelings of confidence are enhanced by the physical dominance displayed by parades (floats are used in most parades) as they move through or past an audience which is often positioned at a lower height.

The paraders can reach the 'special' and display great energy and enthusiasm that is often then taken up in the crowd. There are parades of great spectacle and intense energy such as the Mardi Gras in Rio de Janeiro or Viareggio in Italy, but local events, on a more modest scale, can also be successful. The parades found in many small towns and villages work well because they deepen community

⁴⁵ The Nazi parade along the Champs Elysees in June 1940 for example.

⁴⁶ 'An audience is very different from a crowd, festive or otherwise. In a crowd, people are aware of one another's presence, and, as Le Bon correctly intuited, sometimes emboldened by their numbers to do things they would never venture on their own. In an audience, by contrast, each individual is, ideally, unaware of other spectators except as a mass' (Barbara Ehrenreich 2006, p.187).

association. Everyone knows the people on the floats, they delight in the representation of their community in its different facets—the fire-fighters, the local school children, the church, or the local folk group.⁴⁷ The paraders and the community are one.

Processions, on the other hand, stem from a sense of group unity and solidarity: there is no difference between participant and audience; everyone is walking side by side. The sense of moving all together, in unity, defines the processional experience. Members of the procession move along carrying symbols, signs, flags or other paraphernalia. During the procession participants may be singing or chanting, signalling their feelings as a group, and thereby communicating something that they find important to each other and anyone who happens to be watching. These processions can include religious, community and political groups.

Why do processions have such energy? Our ancestors moved in groups for hundreds of thousands of years, carrying with them their carefully preserved sacred objects—for example, fire was carried in its own special palanquin by the Celts, and sacred scrolls in an ark by Hebrew tribes—and so the particular feeling generated by processions has been with us for a long time. Although we do not necessarily have a deep understanding of the effect walking has on the cognitive system, it would not be surprising if we were to discover alignment processes built into the system when people walk in groups (marching could be seen as an extreme example).⁴⁸

The movement from one place to another in the Palaeolithic era was bound to be a risk-taking venture and fraught with perils and dangers: the senses must have

⁴⁷ Henry VIII spent almost every summer of his reign going around his kingdom in large parades called ‘progresses’ that mapped his kingdom in various ways. York had especially suffered in the dissolution of the Monasteries and was constantly in a rebellious state. In a large-scale parade in the summer of 1541, with hundreds of soldiers and most of his court, Henry made his way through the countryside to York to establish his political power. The whole event had a celebratory tone, with feasts and festivals wherever he went—however, the local councils had to kneel to the king. Instead of bringing an army Henry oriented himself, his court and the people of York into balance again by a physical re-enactment of his typographic relationships.

⁴⁸ ‘As the historian William H. McNeill pointed out in his book *Keeping Together in Time*, there is a deep satisfaction—even a thrill—to the simplest synchronous group activities, like marching or chanting together. He writes of his experience as a young soldier drilling during basic training for World War II. “Words are inadequate to describe the emotion aroused by the prolonged movement in unison that drilling involved. A sense of pervasive well-being is what I recall; more specifically, a strange sense of personal enlargement; a sort of swelling out, becoming bigger than life, thanks to participation in collective ritual”.’ (Ehrenreich 2006, p.25).

become sharpened, reliance on the group more intense; community unity could not be threatened with internal difference. When the group was moving in harmony, held together by symbols of unity, one can imagine a feeling of welfare spreading through the group, an emotional fusion of individual minds to the community.

Pilgrimages are very different from parades or processions although they often involve walking from one place to another, sometimes in hard physical conditions.⁴⁹ As in processions the body is heavily involved in bringing to bear particular cognitive feelings, but, in this case, they stem from a very different source. A long physical struggle can be transformative; the body can change major alignments in the brain as pain and difficulty force new patterns to emerge. These 'sacred geographies' are revered spaces able to be operated in extended physical journeys. The pilgrim is able to put into physical reality the spiritual journey, and the more difficult the journey, the greater the transformation and eventual celebration. As Grimes (2000, p.7) comments 'Ritual knowledge is rendered unforgettable only if it makes serious demands on individuals and communities'. Radical physical and emotional experiences create transformation by creating a major change of metalanguage within human brain.

To qualify as an Axis Mundi event in this study pilgrimage has to be communal⁵⁰. For a pilgrimage to gather community energy, there has to be a shared unity, a meaningful gathering with others, that is intensified by the experience; this can be amplified in several ways. There are certain routes on which many travel, talking and sharing the experience with each other. These are meaningful landscapes that produce intensities of community belief. Human beings have brought to certain spaces in the natural and built environment a host of ideas, symbols, stories, interpretations and beliefs that bring about a synthesis between certain topographies and the human imagination. 'Certain geographical features and locations lend themselves to modelling the unconscious' (Claxton 2005, p.17). With pilgrimages, all sorts of physical anomalies in the landscape are utilised to make meaning of a

⁴⁹ I have walked for two weeks on the *Camino* pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela in Spain (August 1998) and can testify to the physical difficulties experienced on such a journey.

⁵⁰ Pilgrims can travel alone but they would no longer be in an Axis Mundi gathering.

cosmology and act as adjuncts, or supports, to the experience.

Lastly, and most importantly, there is a destination where concentrated achievement of the experience can occur and where the climax of the Axis Mundi experience is consummated. On the *Camino* the arrival at the towering cathedral in Santiago de Compostela after many days or even months on the road is an overpowering experience for many. Even for the non-Christian this is a powerful gathering event that has been intensified by the struggle to get there (Gitlitz and Davidson 2000). The sharing of this apogee with other pilgrims can be very positive and satisfying.

Flower like the heels of the wanderer

His body groweth and is fruitful;

All sins disappear,

Slain by the toil of his journeying (Indian poem quoted in the Bhardwaj (1973) cited in Coleman and Elsner 1995, p.141).

Celebration

Celebration has many faces, ranging from informal get-togethers to full-scale carnivals. When the individuals have finished a *formal* ritual or ceremony, completed serious alignment processes or successfully fixed a transformational moment, the group is relieved of social pressure and tensions. This relaxation is often expressed in a transcendent expression of happiness, that I am going to refer to as a 'celebration'. Bakhtin (1984, p.49) captures the feeling:

The principle of laughter and the carnival spirit ... destroys ... limited seriousness and all pretense of an extratemporal meaning and unconditional value of necessity. It frees human consciousness, thought, and imagination for new potentialities.

I use the word celebration to describe the fun of an informal gathering; it is a party-like activity. A party is the opposite of the formal ritual and has an important role to play in Axis Mundi gatherings. It is an informal get-together usually accompanied by transcendent dynamics (singing, drinking, dancing), but its outward

random and casual nature does not completely disguise its important social function. Week-long carnivals, for example, are organised using this dynamic, and these can be found all over the world.

Celebrations can happen spontaneously after formal events or they can be built into event structures: they can even be the overall reason for holding an Axis Mundi event. Street parties held all over the world on Millennium Night were to 'celebrate' a marker in human history, and the party form was its main constituent. Celebrations can differ in form - they can be a collection of strangers coming together for a special reason or friends sharing the joy of a particular situation - and yet celebrations have strong commonalities. The usual strictures that define formal events (ritual, ceremonies and the like) have been loosened, and forms are more haphazard, producing their own rhythms, tones and behaviours. Their very strength lies in the capacity to generate *communitas* through direct and warm communication. But a tacit agreement exists that the 'party' form within public celebration does have structure and social conditions. There is a group dynamic which unconsciously censures certain behaviours that 'break' the *communitas*, that get out of hand, and contradict the warmth. This is a real danger when designing this sort of event inside celebratory structures: the relaxing of expected behaviours can precipitate aberrant and damaging action. The misuse of alcohol ending in altercations is a good example.

Design of celebration may be quite complex because of its informal structure, the mixture of people, the state of mind they are in, the use of relaxants such as alcohol, the impulsive nature of the expression and the indeterminate direction that these events can take. Designers want to create real celebration but do not want events to become unruly; New Year's Eve public parties exemplify this problem. The desire to create genuine *communitas* is threatened by the built-in risks of confrontation and violence—the Edinburgh Hogmanay Celebrations can be seen as an example of this delicate balance. It is a large scale celebration of the New Year but there is a great deal of drunkenness, some of which results in ugly situations.

Yet investment in these forms of celebration by communities can be very worthwhile. People genuinely sharing their joy of life in an informal communal way can produce some of the most memorable moments in the Axis Mundi canon and, properly designed, such events certainly help to tune the individual into the group.

The ability of the party to produce a level of positive emotional honesty can be vital to community links.

Celebration works best when there is a strong reason, already articulated, to feel positive about shared communication. There were parties aplenty during the French Revolution for example. Ehrenreich (2006, p.102-3) describes well how communities can celebrate something they fervently believe in. She uses the beginning of the French revolution as an example:

The nineteenth-century historian Jules Michelet described the events in the town of Saint-Andeol. [The people] rushed into each other's arms, and joining hands, an immense farandole [a kind of dance], comprising everybody, without exception, spread throughout the town, into the fields, across the mountains of Ardeche, and towards the meadows of the Rhone; the wine flowed in the streets, tables were spread, provisions placed in common, and all the people are together in the evening.

This kind of community exuberance is sometimes difficult to engender. The real spirit of celebration must come from a real sense of community joy. Civic authorities very often want to stage celebrations to show community solidarity but are not able to stir the celebratory spirit in a group of people because the reason for the celebration means little. Designers of Axis Mundi celebrations can come to understand what really forms community joy and use this knowledge to bring about real Axis Mundi energy.

Chapter 4: Use of space

[T]hings and people are mutually transformative: the place changes according to who comes to occupy it and what they do there; the people change as a consequence of the place, which is itself defined not just by its form, but also through the potentialities introduced in the intervals in its territory. This has consequences for seeing landscapes and, eventually, building them. Joseph Mallard writes, 'As transient lives pass through it, we represent it and it represents us' (Muecke 2004, p.78).

Designers of gatherings have been able to utilise the feelings that emerge when people gather in particular places and translate them into Axis Mundi events that favour those feelings that they want to engender. Some designers know that the choice of place is a critical factor in alignment processes. As defined by Muecke, 'A world without places is unthinkable ... we find all cultures emplaced according to their own patterns' (2004, p.13).

Different celebrations suit different places—for example, carnivals do not thrive in churches nor religious events in street parties—but it is the process of 'setting a gathering apart' in a symbolic environment that is of interest to this study. To be especially potent, symbols multiply upon one another within a prescribed area creating special, controlled, symbolic worlds. This is how a 'place' is transformed into an operational symbolic 'space'. Human beings are able to understand the world in this way. As Geertz (1973, p.99) suggests, we need symbols to actually reason:

The thing we seem least able to tolerate is a threat to our powers of conception, a suggestion that our ability to create, grasp, and use symbols may fail us, for were this to happen, we would be more helpless ... Man depends upon symbols and symbol systems with a dependence so great as to be decisive for his creatural viability and, as a result, his sensitivity to even the remotest indication that they may prove unable to cope with one or another aspect of experience raises within him the gravest sort of anxiety.

In order to understand the role played by 'space' in Axis Mundi events designers can take advantage of some of the concepts now emerging from cognitive

studies. The brain creates matrix groupings - the models and associations we need to construct thought - and, using neural pathways, connects these millions of amalgams together in untold combinations, that I will call multi-associative groupings. The designer can build spaces that bring these multi-associative models into particular combinations which, in turn, create certain feelings.

The more that an Axis Mundi event can utilise spaces that trigger deep associations in the participant's mind, the more cohesive, harmonious and intense the experience will become. For example placing a wedding in a wooded glade, a remembrance service in a beautiful garden will intensify feelings. The event can also be intensified with symbols capable of being synthesised, which can activate the susceptibilities that need to be encouraged. The arboreal wedding may have spring flowers woven into a heart shape or the remembrance service display two hundred candles. Symbolic space is working to create the 'special' and can be alive with interactions with the imagination and with the poetic, this helps realise community response. Pennick (1996, p.13) believes we are surrounded by symbols:

The traditional view of the world is expressed wholly in symbolic terms. Whenever we perceive any aspect of nature, symbols are revealed to us. 'In the symbol', wrote Goethe, 'the particular represents the general, not as in a dream, nor as in a shadow, but as a living and instantaneous revelation of the inscrutable.' Every place we experience impresses itself symbolically upon our consciousness, and we express these symbols through religious, poetic or scientific metaphors.

The way in which an Axis Mundi event is 'worked' in a space can have a great influence in determining the result — controlling concentrations of energy or liminal zones can be deeply influenced by the designer's manipulation of space for example. Spaces can intensify layers of meaning, they are operational places where community can model a vision of itself that can be 'acted' out, dramatised, expressed and celebrated. It is not only the topography that signifies in the landscape but also other aspects of the physical world. Muecke (2004, p.14) suggests that we

retain the idea that ritual connects people to place and that this happens not only with traditional ceremonies, but also modern ones. Let us also retain

the idea that, while the concepts of space and time are somewhat abstract and universal, places are specific and contiguous to their human inhabitants who make them meaningful through ritual ... we find place elevated to more universal significance.

In creating AMAS I have divided the use of space into two parts—symbolic space within natural surroundings and human-made constructions—and make some comments on the dramatic⁵¹ potential in spaces. When I refer to the ‘natural’ I mean any space that uses, as a major part of its design, the natural world; a mountain for example. The word ‘constructed’ is used to describe any environment that has been constructed for the purpose of holding a gathering, such as a church. Definitional edges can become blurred and mixed, and I will try to clarify my meanings in examples as they are presented.

Natural spaces

A ‘good’ place in Deborah Bird Rose’s terms is ‘one in which all the elements do their work’. They all nourish each other because there is no site, no position, from which the interest of one can be disengaged from the interests of others (Muecke 2004, p.51)

Long before constructing standing stones or cathedrals our ancestors used rivers, springs, lakes, mountains, trees, glades, islands, beaches and caves to hold their gatherings.⁵² Some such spaces are imbued with power that is hard to define: there is an aesthetic balance, an undefined feeling of harmony, a combination of factors that feed the tuning process, that contribute more than the sum of their parts. Muecke (2004, p.51) suggests that

there may be some inexplicable phenomena to deal with. There may be things that do not reduce to meanings, which are subject to alphabetisation

⁵¹ I use the word ‘dramatic’ to describe the way in which celebrations use theatrical mechanics to bring about certain states in the participants. They are cultural ‘performances’. This usage has to be differentiated from the normal use of theatre, explored in Chapter Five, which might be described as the telling of stories, the art of acting and other traditional ideas of theatre presentation.

⁵² For Australian sacred spaces see Cowan 1991, Lawlor 1991, Mulvaney and Kamminga 1999, Neidjie 1986 and Plomley 1983.

in a Western logocentric effort. To say that there may be things that exceed explanation is not to make a little space for the other's beliefs in one's own system; it is to recognize that this system also has its metaphysical *topoi* (for example, a logocentric drive, the *Aufhebung* of transcendence, or rhizomatic distribution).

Certain Axis Mundi events (the sacred predominantly, but community events as well) thrive on such feelings of transcendence, and these particular dynamics can certainly be encouraged when gatherings take place in 'beautiful' natural spaces. As Noel Arnaud writes: '*Je suis l'espace où je suis*'—I am the space where I am (cited in Bachelard 1958, p.137). It follows that one might speculate that the relationship between certain natural spaces and their capacity to hold the feeling of celebration might be closely linked, at least in part, to our relationships to the natural world through hundreds of thousands of years of survival: rivers provide water, trees fruit, hollows provide shelter.

In what follows, I elaborate on three aspects found in natural spaces that can be important in the design of Axis Mundi gatherings: mountain and caves, rivers and trees. However it must be emphasised that these are only a few examples taken from a very large number of natural environments.

Mountains and caves

Mountains have an intense history as Axis Mundi spaces. Maybe their position in the landscape gave our ancient ancestors a 'centre', a natural Axis Mundi, a place of orientation: there is little doubt that dominant physical features helped survival. Mount Fuji has this quality, for instance; it can be seen from vast distances and seems to be the perfectly symmetrical shape - it is unmistakable, and Hokusai's thirty-six views do not exaggerate its prominence. Bernbaum (1997, p.xiii) comments on the beauty of mountains:

The ethereal rise of a ridge in the mist, a glint of moonlight on an icy face, a flare of gold on a distant peak—such glimpses of transcendent beauty can reveal our world as a place of unimaginable mystery and splendour.

But mountains, on the lower slopes at least, also supplied our ancestors with

water and food, they provided much-needed shelter from attackers and their caves made good homes; the higher slopes were avoided where possible. So peoples living beside, or on the lower sides of these peaks had an intense interaction with mountains.

There can be no doubt that climbing mountains now gives human beings a sense of joy that can be formalised into Axis Mundi spaces; for example, places of worship have a long history of being sited high up on the slopes. Perhaps because we see so far in every direction, we are uplifted by the sense of the breadth and scope of the world, it is a different feeling from the flat and seeing only the local. Seeing so far, being so elevated in that clear and fresh air and seeing the extent of the Earth, our ancestors must have felt close to their gods.

‘Holy’ mountains abound in cultures all over the world, from Mount Fuji to Mount Olympus, from Kilimanjaro to Mount Sinai, and in their heights the gods are said to live. Describing Mount Olympus in *The Odyssey*, Homer wrote that it is

where, they say, the gods’ eternal mansion stands unmoved, never rocked by gale winds, never drenched by rains, nor do the drifting snows assail it, no, the clear air stretches away without a cloud, and a great radiance plays across that world where the blithe Gods live all their days in bliss (cited in Ashton and Whyte 2001, p.36).

Mountains, then, are ready-made cosmological structures that reflect the conception of the Axis Mundi stretching towards the sky/heavens linking the earth/underworld to the mystical stratosphere where mysteries abide. Dante was clear that mountains were ‘Pure and made apt for mounting to the stars’ (1955, p.335, Canto 33, L.145). The Bible states ‘Set bounds around the mount and sanctify it’ (Exodus, 19:23). Lama Anagrika Govinda expresses the view that the

power of such a mountain is so great and yet so subtle that, without compulsion, people are drawn to it from near and far, as by the force of an invisible magnet; and they will undergo huge hardships and privations in their inexplicable urge to approach and worship the centre of this sacred power. Nobody has conferred the title of sacredness on this mountain, and yet everybody recognises it; nobody has to defend its claim, because nobody

doubts; nobody has to organise its worship, because people are overwhelmed by the mere presence of such a mountain and cannot express their feelings other than by worship (cited in Bernbaum 1997, p.xiii).

Croagh Patrick in Mayo, Ireland with hundreds of thousands of people climbing it each year (Plate 3), has a long history of Axis Mundi events. But once a year tens of thousands of people make a special pilgrimage on 'Reek Sunday' (the last Sunday in July) to its rocky top. Many walk barefoot (and some even on their knees) to imitate Jesus's journey to the cross with its fourteen stations (Plates 4 & 5). It had been used as a 'pagan' site that celebrated Lughnasa on 1st August, when women would hazard the weather and bad conditions and sleep at the summit to help fertility. There is Neolithic art on site, possibly used in the worship of the resident god 'Crom Dubh'. An ancient Celtic settlement has been found at its base. But from 441 AD it has been associated with Saint Patrick who, after spending forty days on the mount, is said to have cleared Ireland of snakes and demons.



Plate 3: Croagh Patrick

Source: Sacred Destinations web site. Viewed 16 January 2009<<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/ireland/mt-croagh-patrick.htm>>. Photographer unknown



Plate 4: Pilgrim's feet on Croagh Patrick

Source: Sacred Destinations web site. Viewed 16 January 2009. <<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/ireland/mt-croagh-patrick.htm>>. Photographer unknown



Plate 5: Pilgrims of Croagh Patrick

Source: Sacred Destinations web site. Viewed 16 January 2009 <<http://www.sacred-destinations.com/ireland/mt-croagh-patrick.htm>>. Photographer unknown

Another example of mountains being used as gathering places is taken from

my study trip in 2007 to India and concerns Shivratri Festival in Pachmarhi, central India. This festival celebrates the wedding of Lord Shiva with Parvati and, to mark the occasion, devotees come to the Mahadeo Temple, ten kilometres south of Pachmarhi. The pilgrims come from a long way, sometimes barefoot and carrying large tridents: Shiva's symbol (Plate 6). Some of these metal objects are very heavy and will be carried on the back of just one person. It is their pilgrimage to carry this object the whole way and complete the final ascent, a four-kilometre climb to the top of Chauragarh Hill (Plate 7). People will travel for a long time through great hardship to find a space that brings them illumination. Cowan (1991, p.227) feels that these spaces are invaluable:

I know for a fact that gazing at a spirit-figure on a rock-face somewhere in the wilderness will always be contiguous with a feeling of 'coming home'. The realm of the sacred place exists in a timeless reality which we must not allow to become extinct. Otherwise one day, sooner rather than later, we may well find ourselves standing at the edge of a vast swampland from which the water has evaporated.



Plate 6: Shivratri Festival with tridents

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron



Plate 7: Chauragarh Hill, India

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron

At Croagh Patrick in Ireland and Chauragarh Hill in India, and at thousands of pilgrimage sites around the world, pilgrims enact these translocational events and, in climbing and even in suffering, find the process can have a profound effect on the human psyche—in achieving the goal, set in the natural world, there can be a deep satisfaction, a feeling of joy. There was certainly a buoyancy and celebratory feeling amongst the people, which I experienced at Chauragarh Hill. Here these journeys and experiences are reinforced with belief dynamics that embrace whole cosmologies, strong dynamics of transformation are enforced by this.

If the mountains inspire celebration for their clarity, illumination, holy contemplation and breadth of view, then caves often take on a feeling of the opposite—dark, sinful, lustful, hidden—yet their celebratory use is important. We can find their significance in narrative: for example, the dead King Arthur lies awaiting resurrection into a better world; Wagner’s Tannhauser is trapped in caves of lustful Venus Mountain; Charon awaits the dead to take them across the River Styx; dragons and golems await the unwary; Orpheus descends to find Euripides; and Hell

beckons Dante.

One of the earliest written stories on Earth—from Sumer, 5000 BP—is the tale of Inanna, the Goddess of Heaven and Earth, who goes down into a cave to visit her sister Ereshkigal, with dire results (Wolkstein and Kramer 1983). Other stories abound, from Lord of the Rings with the fateful journey to Mordor, to the Norse myths of Odin who searches under the Earth for the river of life in what Coleridge called ‘caverns measureless to man’ (cited in the *Oxford University Press Dictionary of Quotations* 1985, p.151). Many people approach a cave with a range of emotions, including a fear of the dark or curiosity about what might be hidden in the depths. Rational modernists might suppress these feelings, knowing that there are no metaphysical beings inside; however, the extinguishing of a torch can bring back these irrational terrors of the unknown. These responses go back in deep history. According to Lewis-Williams and Pearce (2005, p.84):

For Upper Palaeolithic people physical travel through caves was probably identical to psychic travel through the tiered cosmos. The tiered cosmos in the mind was verifiable by visionary experiences that could be had anywhere but, especially, by climbing down through the subterranean labyrinths to see the fixed visions of predecessors, some probably believed to have been made by the spirits themselves. Religion was thus not something separate from real caves; rather, the material and the spiritual were inseparable.

Many festivals are held at the mouths of caves⁵³ or even inside, in spite of their tenebrous atmospheres. Shivratri in Pachmari in central India, mentioned previously, also has a celebration in local caves below the sacred mountain. Thousands of pilgrims gather and walk through the caves singing and chanting. Similarly the Miao people, in Gaopo in China, base many Axis Mundi events in caves, including dance festivals and burying the dead. One of the biggest celebrations is near Kalamunda in Malaysia where there is a large procession to the

⁵³ ‘There is a common misconception about prehistoric cave occupancy. As a general rule, Aborigines did not live in the deep and dark recesses of caves, but camped at the entrance and only ventured into the passages for special reasons’ (Mulvaney & Kamminga 1999, p.23).

spectacular Batu Caves on Thaipusan Eve in late January or early February (Plate 8).

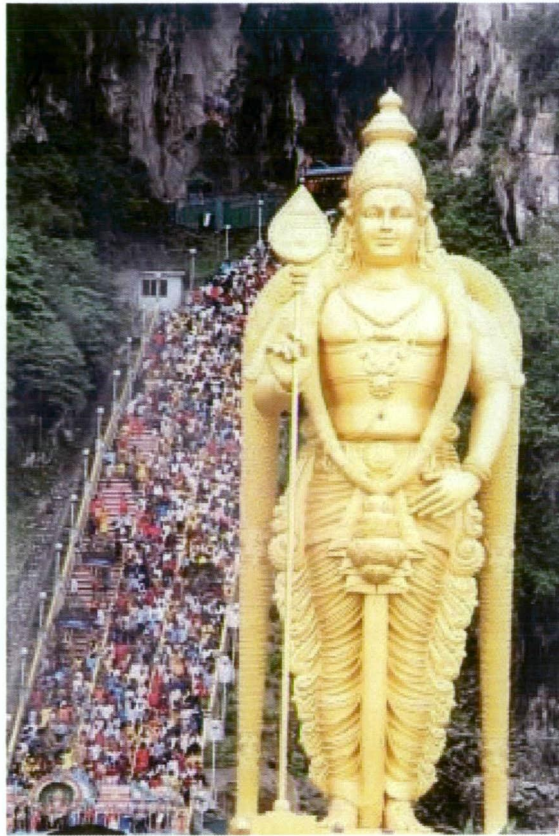


Plate 8: Batu Caves

Source: Sqidoo web site. Viewed 10 August 2009. <<http://www.squidoo.com/thaipusan>>.

Photographer unknown

Rivers

Springs and rivers may deeply influence the design of Axis Mundi gatherings. For over two million years and longer, human beings have needed to be very near water: their survival depended on it. Is it any wonder, then, that springs—whose clear sweet water poured in torrents and waterfalls, sparkling and gushing, filled with fish—were attributed to the gods and became Axis Mundi gathering points? With hot and cold running water now on tap, it is difficult to understand the wonder that water sources held for the prehistoric peoples. Belief systems were bound to build up around them in stories and thus they became places of worship: many churches were built on spring sites. Even now in the modern world there are active sacred sites placed around springs.

Rivers are also prodigious food sources, supplying plants and fish and even the hunting of animals that come to their banks, and these images, too, get caught up in the symbologies of gatherings.

Rivers continually inspire feelings of pleasure both on their banks and on the water itself. They are steeped in every form of cultural interrelationship and have inspired many kinds of Axis Mundi events. Some adult Christian baptisms use immersion in the river to engender a deep sense of cleansing and renewal. During *Divali* in India worshippers use the Ganges to send millions of small candles downriver set in their own little leaf boats. In Thailand the sixtieth anniversary of the coronation of King Bhumibol Adulyadej was celebrated with a procession of fifty-two royal barges down Bangkok's Chao Praya River. People cannot help but respond to the physicality of water, when manifest in the natural intensity of a river. People are attached to its smell, its sparkly nature, its sound, its changing and constantly intriguing colours, its nacreous intrigue, and its capacity to provide life-sustaining water. Such feelings might well be intrinsic to our natures after such a long evolutionary relationship.

The river is a major life-giving force and is also used symbolically. At the Kumba Mela Festival Hindus who wash in the Ganges River believe they are involved with the most profound energies on Earth and will receive blessings and be released from further suffering. It is a real interaction with the natural energy of the water and, simultaneously, a total immersion in a religious belief.

In Axis Mundi design, it is noted that the river starts in a youthful stage and grows bigger until, in its mature stage, it returns to its beginnings in the world's oceans; this makes it an ideal metaphor for human life. Myths abound. Osiris, the Egyptian god of the dead, is deeply associated with the flooding and retreating of the Nile and, on that same river, Moses was set adrift in a wicker basket with a baby in it. The Greeks saw the dead crossing the River Styx with Charon at the helm and the Buddhists in Japan told of the dead approaching the Mitsuse-kawa (River of Three Passages). Many features on a river can become a focus for gathering events: for example, the waterfall brings with it a sound of life-giving water and signals purity. It produces negative ions that trigger biochemical reactions that produce serotonin and these chemicals create feelings of positive energy. To hold an event near one of

these features inspires and uplifts. Lakes, on the other hand, can be difficult spaces to create events: their 'energy' is dispersed, points of focus are hard to find, and gathering dynamics are problematic to engender.

I have worked on many river events, both on the water and on the banks, and each time the river itself has defined the Axis Mundi energy. River processions place our normal interactions with image and sound into heightened states, especially at night when lights are reflected onto the water and the background is black. Sound travels across water without impediment, creating amplification at a far distance. On land a festival can be placed into the inner bend of a river, creating a celebratory concentration that fosters a certain community warmth, safety and enclosure as the river moves past, creating a backdrop of both natural and mythological significance.

In my design for the Yarra River Event in 1984, among the large boats and barges going past in the night, a small wooden rowing boat, with a child holding a moon lantern and a violinist playing music, floated by the thousands of people that had gathered to watch. It was a simple but powerful image bringing together layers of semiological meaning; but it was the river, with its timeless flow, that really empowered the message.

Trees

There are few symbols more potent and more ubiquitous in human cultures than trees, and they often feature physically in Axis Mundi events, both as a natural physical focus to gathering (the sacred grove⁵⁴ for example) and as an ongoing symbol (the Tree of Life is an example). Our simian ancestors inhabited trees, their limbs and tails almost synthesising with the branches. Trees provided our ancestors with shelter, safety, food, shade, wood, tools and sleeping quarters. Our physical relationship with them is intense. Bachelard (1957, p.201) describes this feeling:

Thus a tree is always destined for grandeur, and, in fact, it propagates this destiny by magnifying everything that surrounds it. In a letter reproduced in Claire Goll's very human little book, *Rilke et les femmes* (p.3,) Rilke

⁵⁴ A constant focus for religious celebration with famous examples in Greece, Germany and the druidic culture of Britain. They can also be found in Asia: Japan, China and India.

wrote: 'These trees are magnificent, but even more magnificent is the sublime and moving space between them, as though with their growth it too increased'.

The tree's capacity to be utilised as an Axis Mundi is closely tied to our own sense of ourselves, and examples are found in cultures all over the world. Trees give us a metaphor that links notions of the underworld, the earth and the sky creating their own Axis Mundi. Odin hung upside down from the Tree of the World (Yggdrasil) to gain knowledge of the runes, while the three witches (Norns) tended the tree by collecting ash and earth to feed it. Buddha sat under the Bodhi Tree to reach enlightenment, and children read stories of the Faraway Tree. The Welsh Tree of Life, for example, links life and death; the Ents save Frodo in Tolkien; the Burning Bush calls prophesy; the silver birches of Russia bring blessings; and the yews in British graveyards symbolise the sacred. Perhaps the greatest of all tree symbols is the Tree of Knowledge found in Eden, where Adam and Eve ate the apple.

In the context of a gathering, few of us are free of some relationship with a tree, or a set of trees. We remember an event that ties us to this growing entity; the tree we planted when a child was born, a fiftieth birthday or a memorial of death, a tree planted in honour of something the community finds important or the tree that was used as a focus when a couple was married in the shade of the branches.⁵⁵ Ritual processional avenues are created by rows of trees; the Memorial Avenue of trees in Cowra, Australia, is an example where, under each tree, there is a plaque to a dead soldier.

The tree also creates focus. It can hold Axis Mundi energy by its very presence and acts as a cipher for us to utilise. A tree can be a code to open memory and a way of creating feelings of intensity. We can even use the tree, in its almost inexhaustible signifying flexibility, to stimulate the imagination and see, even in ourselves, the roots of our nourishment and development; the thickening of our experience as maturity and strength grow; the experimental branches of our own life's experience; the blossoming we have achieved; the fruit we have dropped; the

⁵⁵ A large elm tree is used in Williamstown Botanic Gardens in Victoria, Australia for weddings.

seeds we have dispatched; and the nourishment we have given, even in death, to others. Bachelard (1958, p.33) comments on these 'great images', noting they

have both a history and a prehistory; they are always a blend of memory and legend, with the result that we never experience an image directly. Indeed, every great image has an unfathomable oneiric depth to which the personal past adds special colour. Consequently it is not until late in life that we really revere an image, when we discover that its roots plunge well beyond the history that is fixed in our memories.

The 'spirit of the trees' manifests itself in the Green Man that forms the central focus for many Spring festivals. The untamed spirit of the tree and its fertility status can be summed up in this archetypal figure who appears in many forms and at various levels in many cultures and who takes part, often in person, in community celebrations. The face appears whenever there needs to be a representation of the 'wild fertile', the spirit of the woods, or the anarchic Puck wearing hawthorn around his neck. Harding (1998, p.11-12) notes that

the Green Man can be found all over Western Europe and parts of Asia and North Africa. He is not a gargoyle, he is an archetypal image. From Mesopotamia of the third millennium BC to the close of this present era the Green Man has been there, hidden in the texts of the great epics and peering down at us from the roofs of the great cathedrals of Europe... As the god that dies and is born again he appears in mythology as Dionysos, Osiris, Odin, Tamuz and Jesus Christ. As John Barleycorn he is the Corn Spirit who dies and is reborn each year. He stares down from the door of Chartres Cathedral and smiles from the pillar of a Jain temple in Rajasthan. He can be seen dancing ahead of the May Queen in procession on May Day at Knutsford in England and in Borneo he is found painted on the walls of Christian churches. He is probably as old as mankind itself, always there, hidden in the woods, peering from the leaves. Puck, Jack in the Green, the Old Man of the Woods or simply the Green Man: we know him without understanding him.

The roles the Green Man plays are varied and can range from the demon to the symbol of winter, to the spirit of spring with its fertility (Plate 9). Pennick (1996, p.23) relates how

celtic lore tells that the first woman was a rowan tree and the first man an alder. In the light of this myth, when the human being enters a tree at death, it is a return to the origin: part of the soul of the deceased enters a tree planted on the grave. In Wales, Scotland and Ireland there are a number of notable trees that mark the graves of bards and heroes. Similarly, the origin of the wooden coffin comes from burial within a hollowed-out tree trunk.



Plate 9: The Green Man at Beltane Festival in Edinburgh

Source: Official Beltane Fire festival web site. Viewed 3 February 2009. <<http://www.beltane.org/>>. Photographer unknown

Even the leaves and blossoms of trees become objects of celebration. In the Neo Valley in Japan a cherry tree planted by the Emperor Keitai in the 6th century blossoms every spring (Plate 10), and white flowers, which subtly change their hue, attract visitors from a wide area. Alternatively, the Autumn festival in Bright in Victoria, Australia brings into focus the end of the growing cycle and celebrates the leaves turning red and orange. The festival attracts twenty thousand people to an



Plate 10: Japanese cherry tree

Source: Hanami Cherry Blossom Viewing. Viewed 18 January 2009.
<<http://kikuko.web.infoseek.co.jp/english/hanami-spots.html>>. Photographer unknown

autumn parade that captures the beauty of the trees at the time of their retreat. Autumn gatherings also contain a nostalgia, a certain sadness, and are the marking of an end to fullness. This feeling of oncoming cold and senescence is deeply reflected in the dying of the leaves, these are symbols of the end of the annual life cycle and are a reminder to all about the autumn of all our days.

In short, designers of gatherings do well to pay heed to the power of natural spaces as places to hold Axis Mundi events. As Bachelard (1958, p.xxxvi) encapsulates:

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect.

Constructed spaces

Bill Hauritz was the director of the Maleny Folk Festival in Queensland, Australia and describes the feelings he wanted to create in the festival space:

If we can build this microcosm in the folk movement, when people step into the Maleny Folk Festival, it is a brave new world. It is so gentle that anyone can feel welcome and feel part of it without feeling they're being lectured and without feeling intimidated, whoever they are and whatever they believe in. That is the general rule of the festival and I hope that all festivals can have this as their common goal (Hauritz cited in Cameron 1995, p.4).

I have written about the power of hills and mountains to create Axis Mundi gatherings but humans have gone to a great deal of trouble to make artificial hills of their own exactly to better control the space. One of the biggest in the world houses the Buddhist Temple of Borobudur in Java -built with a million cubic metres of stone; it took thirty years to construct around 800 AD (Plate 11). Once a year, on the Buddha's birthday, Borobudur becomes a centre of Buddhist pilgrimage when monks from many different parts of Asia converge on the temple to celebrate the Festival of Waisak. Plate 12 shows an artificial hill built in Avebury, where prehistoric people gathered. So committed were people to building a hill within their ritual landscape that they moved 8.75 million cubic feet of earth by hand to raise the landscape to 130 feet in height. (It would have taken 18 million hours to make.)⁵⁶ In India the Great Stupa at Sanchi is among the most sacred places for Buddhists in the world, and here one finds a barrow, which is an artificial hill built on top of a natural hill, with large sculptured gates to provide intensifying liminal experiences (Plate13). The various barrows in Bru na Boinne in Ireland are prehistoric examples of the same idea (Plate 14).

⁵⁶ Silbury Hill web site, viewed 16 August 2009.
http://www.google.com.au/search?sourceid=navclient&aq=0h&oq=&ie=UTF-8&rlz=1T4GGLG_enAU310AU310&q=silbury+hill+england



Plate 11: Borobudur Temple

Source: Macintyre 1980, p.123.



Plate 12: Silbury Hill, Avebury

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron



Plate 13: Great Stupa, Sanchi

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron



Plate 14: Bru na Boinne

Source: (Found on sign on site) Photographer Neil Cameron. Artist unknown

I have also written about the tree being deeply placed in our prehistoric past and described how it is used as a centre for gatherings; but the symbol is also used in

a constructed way. Take the traditional May Day fertility dance (Plate 15).



Plate 15: Victorian Maypole, 1907

Source: Transition Town Farnham <<http://images.google.com>>. Viewed 18 January 2009.

Photographer unknown

These tall poles flourished in England around the 16th century and are found in many cultures in different forms. They are seen to have ancient beginnings and to represent fertility rites. The idea is to dance around them weaving the ribbons, which are attached to a wreath at the top, into complex patterns that come slowly down the pole making the dancers move in closer and closer. The dance is sometimes reversed until all the ribbons are free again. These can be complex dances and sometimes take a lot of training to get right. Although associated with Northern Europe, these poles have been found elsewhere, including India. Wherever it is used it concentrates feelings of the tree and its fruitful bounty and this concentration may be read as an Axis Mundi event because it brings about a concentration of energy, an uplift of celebration through its movement and accompanying music. It also has symbolic power in creating a dance that brings the circle together in ever tightening bonds – it is a delightful moving poem to human unity centred on healthy reproduction.

The Christmas tree is perhaps the most famous and well used symbolic tree that creates Axis Mundi energy around it. Its ‘invention’ is accredited to Prince Albert of Saxe-Coburg and Gotha in 1840, at which time it hung with fruit ribbons and candles. This tradition of decking out trees dates might go back into antiquity and might have been a symbol of the hope of new growth in the middle of winter: a

tree resplendent with green, decorated with symbolic fruits and lit flames of life, might have been the perfect emblem of survival in the starving winters that faced our ancient ancestors. This symbol still has the power to gather people in their millions around a centre of energy that can spread messages of friendship and community coherence.

Constructed spaces of all kinds are used by humans to facilitate gatherings ranging from the sacred to carnival. Some spaces are built with gatherings in mind (churches, temples, show-grounds) and some are claimed on a temporary basis (the city square, the village street, the local park). Designers must utilise constructed spaces that suit the chosen given event and this process can be critical to the success of gatherings. I have presented some thoughts on why the natural environment is so effective in drawing participants into the 'special', but built environments must be just as compulsive.

The great Gothic cathedrals of England⁵⁷ are helpful in addressing this question, and their construction also pinpoints how the natural and social are often deployed simultaneously. The church, for example, is often built on a water source that is seen as sacred and slowly accrues many layered cosmological complexities.⁵⁸ The towering spire outside of the church resembles some mountain peak soaring towards the sky: like hills these spires orient; they have a high energy and upward thrust – a physical Axis Mundi momentum towards the sacred. The external stonework often takes images such as trees and plants as its themes, invoking feelings inspired by the natural world; the tree window at York Minster or the Rose Window on the north transept of Westminster Abbey come to mind. These designs bring about alignment processes; the arboreal is translated into towering columns, spreading into flowering branches above. The light enters as it does in a wood producing that unique and special feeling of the sacred glade. It is a model of the pellucid. As Schama (1995, p.229) observes, 'Instead of conceiving sacred space as

⁵⁷ Reference Cheam 1974, Erlande-Brandenburg 1995, Gardiner 1997, Grunenfelder 1973, Harding 1998 and Mannion 1995.

⁵⁸ Hollywell Church near Avebury in England has not only the name to signify its origins but the actual spring is still there. Winchester Cathedral foundations are often flooded by the water source it is built on.

a shelter closed off against the forest wilderness, it was meant to embody it'

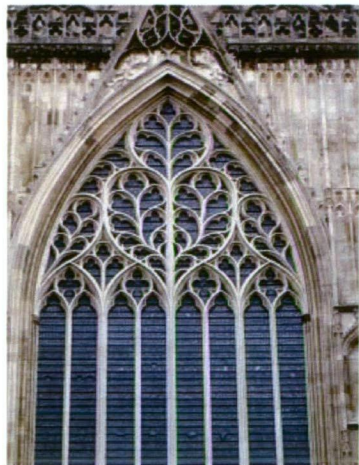


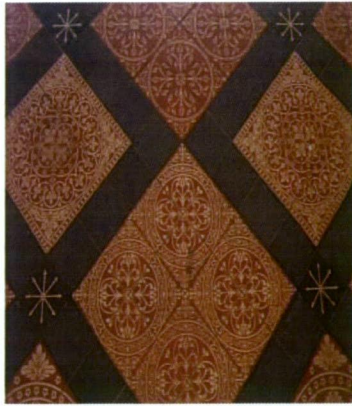
Plate 16: King's College, Cambridge

Source: Cambridge 2000.com

In the church, the natural world is invoked at every level (Plates 16-20). There are flowers, leaves and blossoming plants carved into the stone, sewn into the church altar cloth, placed into the floor and onto stained glass windows and carved into stone. Schama (1995, p.15) also sees these connections:

It is why groves of trees, with their annual promise of spring awakening, are thought to be fitting décor for our earthly remains. So the mystery behind this commonplace turns out to be eloquent on the deepest relationships between natural form and human design.





Plates 17, 18, 19 and 20: York Minster

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron

Indeed, the entire church is a nature-scape constructed by human hand and designed to produce susceptibilities to spiritual transformation that have developed through evolutionary history. The sun and moon and stars are represented, and the clouds, sky, winds, mountains and sea are incorporated at many different levels. The underworld is also vividly portrayed with all of its subterranean elements in the vaults and crypts. Schama (1995, p.14) suggests that the pagan lies just beneath the surface of this hagiography:

The cults which we are told to seek in other native cultures—of the primitive forest, of the river of life, of the sacred mountain—are in fact alive and well and all about us if only we know where to look for them.

Entering such a space, especially in the context of a gathering, the participant crosses a liminal zone (the ornamental doorway covered with sculptures of saints), touches the Holy Water (referencing the power of water mentioned in the river section), genuflects, bows the head, listens to the bells ringing, and now is aligned to the special world of a church service. As the service starts, the participant integrates with others in a controlled space; they are actors in social performance, each contributing to the involvement of the others, all within the meta text of the Christian faith - layers of sedimentary meaning are intense. There is no divergence, doubt, or deviation from the tried and true ritual framework that is designed for deep affirmation, which deepens the pathways of belief and ingrained multi-association by faultless repetition. The overwhelming power of the cathedral space creates intense

feelings that create the Axis Mundi spin in particular and predictable ways.

An Axis Mundi held at its full vigour in an English medieval cathedral is considerable: the 'theatre of the sacred' is unfolded. It is a working *locus amoenus*, with little room for equivocal attitudes as the sun pours through stained glass windows, illuminating the stories of the Bible in refulgent light. The sculptures, processions, floor tiles, towering spire and muttered prayers are all part of the experience. The church is also a musical instrument that resounds with organ and choir, with high notes soaring upwards, the deep notes reaching into the earth. The fragrance of incense fills the air, pulling at olfactory memories that associate the scent with feelings of uplift (the sticks are mostly made from the essence of flowers). The taste of the wine and bread bring on feelings of communication with God, a consumption of God—a literal embodiment triggered by the senses that respond positively to eating and drinking, the basic survival needs. It is an admixture of sound, vision, smell, taste, and touches deeply entrenched feelings in a meta-landscape of meaning. According to Aliade

the man who understands a symbol not only 'opens himself' to the objective world, but at the same time succeeds in emerging from his personal situation and reaching a comprehension of the universal ... thanks to the symbol, the individual experience is 'awoken' (cited in Arguelles 1972, p.53).

This armoury of symbolism is critically important to any designer seeking to evoke particular Axis Mundi effects. For instance, in St John's Cathedral in Brisbane, Queensland, in Australia I worked with artists enacting their reactions to the story of Jonah. The cathedral space was able to amplify expression in powerful ways because of its universal design and its capacity to 'hold' serious Axis Mundi events. By breaking up the space into separate domains of ritual action and by asking the audience, who could walk anywhere at random in the church, to carry candles to illuminate the space, the performance created 'pools' of intensive atmosphere in which the artists and audience could operate. Yet it was a secular event being enhanced by the design of a sacred space honed over centuries to make events work.

The combinations of the natural and the constructed space which I have referred to above interweave and separate as designers cross-reference the dynamics

and forms that they want to bring to bear on an Axis Mundi event. They work from the energy produced from the sacred and from community affirmation but also produce the conditions for the energy to be produced. They choose and construct spaces to affirm the higher values of life on the village green, the war memorial, the church and the community hall.

But some events thrive on spaces that gain their energy from completely different environments, where the natural world is all but excluded. An Axis Mundi event formed from carnival energy gets its potency from appropriation; for example from energetic takeovers of city spaces. It thrives on an inversion of the normal civic world and turning it upside down, creating the special from upheaval or aberrant behaviour. These gatherings typically thrive in spaces that tightly concentrate people in city streets and piazzas. The energy thrives on the night with its contrasts between dark alleyways and brightly lit streets. If they take any energy from any natural form it must be the cave, for it taps into the underworld, the hidden, the mysterious and the earthly. The symbolic imagery is nature turned inside out with mutants, monsters, masks, giant puppets, devils and the dead. Claxton describes the power of symbols that come from the depths:

That is what a symbol does. It is an idea or an image that begs to be experienced in terms of its associated tissue of partly personal and partly universal, partly semi- and partly sub-conscious, associations. It wants you to impregnate it with meaning, much of which is not going to surface itself into consciousness (2005, p.307).

When we examine the space filled by carnival it is almost always 'set aside', or made special, by its aberrant functions. Carnival spaces look for the normal to be converted into the special; street landscapes are perfect for this. We live our normal lives in the car-filled streets, with citizens obeying the social rules and all investing in order and civic cooperation. Carnival takes over these ordinary spaces and turns them into areas of licence, of wild behaviour: there is dancing, drinking and indulgent behaviour. It is only for a while, after which normal order is restored and society goes back to its day-to-day life. Nevertheless the carnival space remains in people's imagination, overlaying the normal with their memories of wild licence. It reminds them of the times when they had freedom and fun and when they had

permission to be irresponsible. The designer has done their job well by creating disorder in a carefully constructed Axis Mundi plan.⁵⁹

The dramatic potential of spaces

Whether or not an Axis Mundi event is held in natural or constructed spaces, or combinations thereof, the use of 'theatrical elements' of the space is vitally important. Sound, for example, should be examined to determine whether it is heard clearly enough, how it projects, how it multi-layers, and whether it rings or muffles? How do the lights work and what do they illuminate? How do they create meaning? When are entrances and exits most effective and when do rhythmic lows and highs occur? The list is long as designers slowly bring together the different vectors into a cohesive whole that is called Axis Mundi space. Although the factors discussed here seem obvious, it is surprising how often the choice of space is carelessly made with, say, festivals ending up in car parks or weddings in echoing sport halls, which are spaces designed for a very different usage.

Designers of gatherings might pay particular attention to the theatrical potential of a space because the ways people will 'feel' inside a particular space are of vital importance to the effectiveness of the event. The space becomes a controlled area where a coded set of dramatic atmospheres prevails and the designer uses these atmospheres to create environments of susceptibility. It is these kinds of atmosphere I want to briefly analyse here by reference to some of the dramatic situations created in Axis Mundi gatherings.

First is the theatricality produced by light. In the differences between day and night, reactions to a situation will radically change. People feel different at night; they are more vulnerable and sensitive to certain sounds, sights, smells not present or

⁵⁹ In spite of the wild nature of carnival and its seemingly archaic energy, designers well know that carnival is very carefully structured. Otherwise it would not work. Geertz suggests that 'culture is best seen not as complexes of concrete behaviour patterns—customs, usages, traditions, habit clusters—as has, by and large, been the case up to now, but as a set of control mechanisms—plans, recipes, rules, instructions (what computer engineers call "programs")—for the governing of behaviour. The second idea is that man is precisely the animal most desperately dependent upon such extragenetic, outside-the-skin control mechanisms, such cultural programs, for ordering his behaviour' (Geertz 1973, p.28).

perceptible in daylight. Comfort zones and emotional landscapes shift and meanings alter. A candle flame that is insignificant in the day becomes loaded with semiological meaning in the dark; it takes on multiple meanings. Night closes the space down physically but fills it with imagination, intensifying sensory experiences. Focus changes rapidly; ancient parts of our brain become active. Alternatively daylight gives space a breadth, an openness, where all is seen; the human being is powerful again and in control. While the night intensifies feelings of the depths, day opens up the heights. For some cultures, this can literally signify the difference between heaven and the underworld, in Mexico, for example, on 2 November (All Soul's Day) The Day of the Dead Festival is held. This festival demonstrates the theatrical nature of light. During the day images of skeletons flood the streets and masks, puppets and costumes are all used in grotesque parades and other interactions⁶⁰. Death has invaded the living world but in the sun it scares no one. Yet at night these same images take on real power as people go to the graveyards with candles and gifts and briefly inhabit the spaces reserved for the dead. The gatherings have become serious and powerful as people remember those they have loved and see, in the space, a return of their spirits, at least for this one night.

Another important difference in the theatrical use of space is whether participants are inside or outside. Feelings of safety and security can be engendered indoors but change rapidly in the open air where people feel more vulnerable to the forces of nature. This can be simply illustrated by two events I organised at The Festival of Voices choral festival in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia. On one night we held a performance of choirs for a thousand people inside a purpose-built concert hall and on the next night hundreds of people sang together around a bonfire while sipping mulled wine under the stars. Each gathering had its dynamics and each used space in very different ways: one was a passive viewers' event and the other participatory—each had its strengths and weaknesses.

The moving person shakes off the feeling of inactive absorption; focus becomes more varied, the body enters into the rhythm of movement, people bump

⁶⁰ Skeleton cakes and sweets can be eaten.

into strangers, they touch each other—this can be reassuring or intrusive. In standing still the body can be a silent receptor used to channel the content of the space into the internal meditations of the mind. Context is everything: the embrace of a stranger at midnight on New Year's Eve is very different from the embrace from a loved one at a funeral. Space can determine content and provokes the imagination.

In sum the dramatic potential of space in gatherings contributes a great deal to the tuning process. In indigenous and traditional folk communities gatherings are repeated and have a consistent form (see St John, 2001); they have found their structure in the past and now have a form that is unchanging, regular and expected. However, Axis Mundi events frequently have no ready-made spaces to operate within or traditions to fall back on and designers have to work with unsuitable spaces with no pre-forma guides. Yet the space in which Axis Mundi events is placed may be the determining factor that separates success from failure, and while designers may know that, they may not know how to engage with those making the decisions about where events are held.

Therefore designers often have to struggle to create gathering dynamics in spaces that are very difficult to enliven. It is vital they find the right spaces. Axis Mundi gatherings must suggest the positive parts of community and transfer its members into the imaginary; a world suspended, separated from normal reality. They must invent a semiological whole. They could be described as 'dream spaces' that create within individuals an intimate link between inner imagination and the aspirations of the general community. When this is achieved it brings about contagious feelings of joy: 'There does not exist a real intimacy that is repellent. All the spaces of intimacy are designated by an attraction. Their being is well-being' (Bachelard 1958, p.12).

The activation of the dramatic possibilities of a space, then, must be subtle in its operation. It must bring about a working model that creates the real and imaginary and allow the private self to become involved, and it provides opportunities for communal transcendence. The social drama of an Axis Mundi event can operate in a space much more effectively when it is given, either from the natural world or from constructed forms, a space in which possibilities open up to facilitate a synthesis between the inner world of the individual and the outer world of community.

Therefore designers must choose spaces with a great deal of care, tuning each to the particular kind of gathering that is going to be enacted. Understanding the inner workings and desired mechanics of the gathering will help all designers to choose and activate their celebratory spaces with more accuracy. Bachelard (1957, p.202) puts it this way:

As Rilke said: 'Through every human being, unique space, intimate space, opens up to the world ...' Here space seems to the poet to be the subject of the verbs 'to open up,' or 'to grow.' And whenever space is a value—there is no greater value than intimacy—it has magnifying properties.

Chapter 5: The use of the arts and the influence of inducements

It is hard to think about any community Axis Mundi gathering without considering the arts. Yet observers of the arts might watch a belief ritual, an agricultural show or a carnival and never see the connection between the arts and these activities. But they are there: the choir sings, the farmer dances and the music of the masque creates magic. All these seem to be in a different world from contemporary opera halls, art galleries and theatres, and it is true that they do inhabit different realms, driven by different motives and aims. In gatherings the arts are not a sideline, a frill or an extra but one of the foundation stones; without structures that allow artistic expression most gatherings would be bereft of the very energy that gives them life in the sense suggested by the Axis Mundi. As explained by Claxton (2005, p.309):

The mesh of associations that underpin a conscious symbol is deep as well as broad. In a good metaphor, two different domains of experience are juxtaposed in a way that further discloses the nature of one of them, or even both. Together they create a harmony that enriches the melody of each. But in art, when it moves as well as illuminates us, the symbolic tension created throbs with deeper notes as well. The archetypal bass-notes of the mind become part of the resonance.

In short, the arts are modes of expression that provide interactive avenues of communication in many expressive languages, each able to mobilise different parts of our humanity, build emotional and intellectual environments and produce powerful expression. The rumba music of the festival, an evening lantern procession, the laser beams in an arts festival or the masks worn by the people of Papua New Guinea, all operate from a base indebted to arts practice in one form or another.

The arts engender an aesthetic element in gatherings to create Axis Mundi dynamics and forms. They become a major channel of expression that transcends the normal world, are able to hold and express community's feelings, and build a multi-

layered apparatus that intensifies, amplifies and concentrates particular aspects of experience. The ability to be moved by music, to feel a release in dance and movement, to hold significance in stories, and to use imagery to convey subtlety and layers of feeling infinitely multiplies human communication and understanding.

It is important to differentiate who is involved in the arts and at what levels. Active involvement infers people participating in the arts. It can be seen in folk and indigenous cultures around the world, where each person is often given the right to join in and participate in an arts process creating a common semiology and holistic representation of community's life: each person is steeped in traditions and creativity adheres to the *volksgeist*, the central *communitas*. Examples can be seen at a Rio de Janeiro carnival with tens of thousands of people taking part, each expressing in song and dance their most joyful feelings as well as tuning into a centralised form and structure. In contemporary Western society processes of active participation in the arts in community gatherings is far from clear. Inherited forms, passed on through generations of practice in indigenous or folk societies are greatly weakened in modernity, with few people being automatically able to join in traditional arts activities such as dancing, singing and the visual arts. There are few common songs to sing, set dances have been lost and, in my experience in staging community events, the people in Western society often remark that they feel unable to 'do something' creative.

But some communities do use artists⁶¹ of various kinds to rekindle and facilitate interaction in Axis Mundi events. It is useful in this study to view the way artists work in gathering from two points of view. They can aim towards active participation in the creative process or an audience /artist interaction, both can work well in creating Axis Mundi energy. Some artists teach community members to express themselves through an art form (community choirs for example), or by allowing artists to construct situations where people can join in (a procession or parade for example). Some gatherings on the other hand have no apparatus for community participation and designers see community members as viewer/audience

⁶¹ I use the word 'artist' here to include a practitioner within any art form.

as the artist presents their work. Certain designers involve artists of great power, who can energise an Axis Mundi event by the sheer brilliance of their work. A single work of art may concentrate feeling and focus a sense of wonder and *simpatia*:

Sometimes a person with a particularly striking way of looking at things manages to convey it to others by representing their view in a work of art. That person's view may be seen as more beautiful than our own and by absorbing it—and perhaps...stimulating our own visual [or other sensory] pathways in such a way that they start to function more like the artist's—we may start to see things that way for ourselves (Carter 2003, pp.177-8).

In the next section various art forms are examined in the context of Axis Mundi gatherings but it must be remembered that they often merge in various combinations and interactions: within gatherings the arts are often multiple experiences.

Dance

We cannot underestimate the importance of dance in Axis Mundi gatherings. Gardner (1983, p.222) provides an historical perspective:

[W]e can define dancing as culturally patterned sequences of nonverbal body movements that are purposeful, intentionally rhythmic, and have aesthetic value in the eyes of those for whom the dancer is performing. Dance goes back many thousand[s] of years, in all probability to Paleolithic times, for masked dancing sorcerers and hunters are depicted in the ancient caves of Europe and in the mountain ranges of South Africa. In fact, of all the human activities depicted in the caves, dancing is the second most prominent, right after hunting, with which it may well have been associated.

We do not know all the uses to which dancing has been put, but the anthropological evidence suggests at least the following. Dance can reflect and validate social organisation. It can serve as a vehicle of secular or religious expression; as a social diversion or recreational activity; as a psychological outlet and release; as a statement of aesthetic values or an aesthetic value in itself; as a reflection of an economic subsistence pattern,

or an economic activity in itself. Dance can serve an educational purpose, in an initiation rite, by acting out transformation through which an individual will eventually pass; it can be used to embody the supernatural, as when medicine men dance to invoke the spirits; it can even be used for sexual selection ... And in many cultures, dance can serve several of these functions, either simultaneously, at different times, or in different milieux.

We may presume that dance has been used in communities in pre-history. In my Indian field study in 2007 in the Bhimbetka Caves I found what might be a line of dancers painted on the wall 4000 years ago.⁶² Certainly this way of interlinking hands is common to folk dancing in many parts of the world (Plate 26).



Plate 21: Bhimbetka Caves in India

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron

Take for example, observations by Philip Thornton, an anthropologist, as he watched the people of Aldomiresti in Romania:

⁶² 'At one recently discovered site in England, drawings on the ceiling of a cave show "conga lines" of female dancers, along with drawings of animals like bison and ibex, which are known to have become extinct in England ten thousand years ago. So well before people had a written language, and possibly before they took up a settled lifestyle, they danced and understood dancing as an activity important enough to record on stone' (Ehrenreich 2006, p.22).

They were moving round at a terrific speed, packed so tightly together that men and women looked as though they were soldered together. For forty minutes, without a single pause, that human chain pranced and giggled its way over the dusty, broken ground. Oblivious of hunger and fatigue, they were lost in their intense concentration on the rhythmic patterns and syncopations of the dance (Thornton 1937, p.330).

Ehrenreich suggests 'dancing is contagious; humans experience strong desires to synchronize their own bodies' motions with those of others' (2006, p.25). When dancing we are rewarded internally with feelings of pleasure and release, this delight comes to the surface; there is often enchantment on the faces of dancers, and the sheer glee that individuals can display when dancing communicates their own personal joy. In this sense, dance in a traditional village might be seen as a 'language' able to communicate a whole host of messages and perform many community functions within the group.

The reasons for dancing may stem from diverse emotional spaces and serve a wide variety of social needs. But it is revealing to examine the particular vocabulary of people's body language. Rhythm is an example. In group situations the individual dancer either adopts a certain rhythm that is followed by others or joins in the group's rhythm, producing a common and internalised sharing of the body's beat. It produces intense communication that transcends words. Rhythms can vary widely and according to Ehrenreich,

To cite [Walter J.] Freeman ... 'to dance is to engage in rhythmic movements that invite corresponding movements from others.' Dancers synchronize, reciprocate, or alternate—all of which are forms of entrainment open to the infant. Entraining with others into a shared rhythm—marching, chanting, dancing—may trigger a primitive sense of irrational and beguiling belonging, and a shared mindset (2006, pp.26–7).

Or think of meaningful movement. Dance can mimic the social context it inhabits. Groups often develop dances that model the communities that evolved them. This circular tendency strengthens internal social patterns by literally 'dancing' the group's beliefs, morals and identity. It aligns participants with groups at a social and physiological level. The circle dance is an example. Found in communities all over

the world, this dance symbolises the strength of the community, it forms and enacts underlying feelings of association. On a previous study trip in Bulgaria to see a dance festival in Strandja in 2004, I watched group after group embody the idea of *communitas* at a local festival. The people danced, holding each other's hands, in a long line, always returning to the community circle, that signals strong energies of associative bonding. They were moving, gripping, touching, coming apart and coming together, smiling and laughing, thereby communicating in movement the ideal of community cooperation. Sometimes a couple entered the centre of the ring, the man turning and leaping and slapping his boots and the woman whirling and swaying to the rhythm. The dance had become a living, moving symbolic pattern of elements of the group's fundamental structure. Ehrenreich provides a neurological explanation (2006, p.27):

Why should humans be rewarded so generously for moving their bodies together in time? ... When nature requires us to do something—like eating or having sex—it kindly wires our brains to make that activity enjoyable. If synchronous rhythmic activity was, in fact, important to human collective defense, natural selection might have favored those individuals who found such activity pleasurable. In other words, evolution would have led to stronger neural connections between the motor centers that control motion, the visual centers that report on the motions of others, and the sites of pleasure in the limbic system of the brain. The joy of the rhythmic activity would have helped overcome the fear of confronting predators and other threats, just as marching music has pumped up soldiers in historical times.

We do not yet understand the neuronal basis of this pleasure ... The answer may lie in the discovery of *mirror neurons*, nerve cells that fire both when an action is perceived—when the parent sticks out his tongue, for example—and when it is performed by the perceiver.⁷ In other words, the perception of an action is closely tied to the execution of the same action by the beholder. We cannot see a dancer, for example, without unconsciously starting up the neural processes that are the basis of our own participation in the dance.

Until fairly recently, many communities danced in the West as part of their ongoing social life. Bush or folk dances prevailed in villages and the middle and

upper classes held balls that had their own forms of dancing or more 'refined' forms of folk dancing. These served well in gatherings of all sorts; certain sorts of dancing were even seen at funerals: the Seveluga people in Ghana for example dance wildly at funerals. However, in recent times, in Australia for example, this practice of community dancing has fallen away somewhat, and it has lost much of its popularity. (Most dancing happens now in night clubs). Although it is present among ethnic groups and folk-oriented communities, most young people have little to no contact with community dancing of this sort. However there has been a revival of dance in communities with professional dancers working directly with communities.⁶³

Costume and mask

Anthropologists have studied the use of costume (including body decoration and body piercing) and mask (including face painting) in a variety of religious and community frameworks and find commonalities. Ehrenreich (2006, pp.17–8) comments:

Yet for all the local variations, there are certain commonalities or at least common ingredients, that can be found in ecstatic rituals and festivities worldwide and throughout the ages. As Turner observed, 'Each kind of ritual, ceremony, or festival comes to be coupled with special types of attire, music, dance, food and drink...and, often...masks, body-painting, headgear, furniture and shrines.

Costume and masks are used theatrically, depicting stories; they are used to embody deities, monsters and animals of every description; they act as uniforms for special events such as marriages; and they are worn to determine status. Some displays of costume and mask are spectacular and some sober and conservative; they vary greatly. Costume and mask can convey meaning to observers, and affect how the wearer feels. As a Roman Catholic bishop dons his cope (robe), amise (shoulder scarf with collar), his mitre (hat) then picks up his crozier (staff), he is immediately recognised as a senior official in the church and holds that authority as he leads a

⁶³ See Fisher and Shelton 2002

church service. But he too can 'feel' the part, he is no longer ordinary, he is transformed: 'Holy garments for ministering in the Holy Places' (Exodus 39:1).

Equally a performer who puts on a small sequined costume to dance in the Mardi Gras is also transformed and ready to enter the special atmosphere of carnival. The person inside the costume is pulled into the special and is taken away from the normal and placed into a role, with its histories and ritual intents. The individual and the community can now recognise and understand the transformation of the individual within the special cultural gathering and this lends itself to unity.

Let me examine the costume and mask in carnival in more detail. One of the ways that people can live inside the carnival is to take on the role of others, abandon usual habits, become an alter-ego or another persona. Costume and mask help make this transition. The application of make-up, glitter, sequined clothes, feathers, gold and silver can provide people with permission to express the outrageous parts of their personality, the parts usually suppressed in normal society. Parts of costumes become highly exaggerated and change the basic shape of the human form. People in carnival become all sorts of things that can include animals, machines, birds, devils, as well as many sorts of phantasmic characters. According to Bakhtin (1984, p.7):

Carnival is not a spectacle seen by the people; they live in it, and everyone participates because its very idea embraces all the people. While carnival lasts, there is no other life outside it. During carnival time life is subject only to its laws, that is, the laws of its own freedom. It has a universal spirit; it is a special condition of the entire world, of the world's revival and renewal, in which all take part. Such is the essence of carnival, vividly felt by all its participants.

Freedom is expressed variously. For instance, men dressing as women are a constant theme in carnival (women dressed as men are rarer⁶⁴). Men will spend a great deal of time and money creating images of the 'spectacular female', sometimes

⁶⁴ There is a thin history of women dressing like men in Axis Mundi events. Examples can be found in various gay parades—the Greenwich Village Halloween parade for example—but the need for females to become men and embrace a male energy seems to either be suppressed or has little need to express itself this way.

living out their normal sexual identification to such an extent that the carnival image becomes neither a man nor a woman, but an amplified picture of the exploded 'queer' personality. Once dressed in carnival chic, an erotic 'camp', the men transcend their ordinary persona and signal an extravagant pride, an excessive exaggeration of gender. Men seem to experience a sort of release of constraint in finding freedom in the female 'Other'. Their personalities do not imitate normal female behaviour; instead it is some outlandish female side of themselves that the release mechanisms of carnival evoke.



Plate 22: Man dressed as a woman—La Maja Desnuda Carnival in Spain

Source: Rodero 1992, p.60. Photographer CG Rodero

Male/female inversion using costume and mask is not the only way in which participants can enter through the gates of the carnival—they can adopt the appearance of an actual person, one that might even be dead. Take the spread of Elvis Festivals such as that in Parkes, NSW, Australia where many carnival goers become 'the king', using Elvis costumes as a transformative device.



Plate 23: Elvis Festival in Parkes

Source: www.news.com.au. Viewed 23 May 2009.

<http://images.google.com/images?um=1&hl=en&rls=GGLG,GGLG:2005-33,GGLG:en&rlz=1W1GGLG_en&q=elvis+festival+parkes&start=18&sa=N&ndsp=18>

Photographer unknown.

These behaviours would be embarrassing if adopted in normal society, but coding and atmosphere in the carnival framework creates other rules and associative dynamics in which transference of identity is permissible. Participants must prepare carefully, and ‘give’ themselves to the part, abandoning the self to the ‘spirit’ of the part. For example, people in Trinidad spend time designing and making very elaborate costumes that they wear at the carnival (see plate 24). Participants in Beltane in Edinburgh, Scotland practise for several months before donning their May Day costumes (see plate 25). The Indian lower cast Theyyams villagers in Malabar represent the Gods by preparing themselves, over an extended time, for sacred gatherings (see plate 26).



Plate 24: Trinidad Carnival costume

Source: Viewed 7 January 2009. <<http://www.allahwe.org/History.html>>.
Photographer unknown



Plate 25: Beltane May Queen

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron



Plate 26: Masks in Malabar

Source: Seth 2000, front cover.

Photographer Pepita Seth

In terms of the Axis Mundi and an understanding of the mechanics of the energies released by their use, it might be said that costumes aid transformation to the 'Other', which brings about internal realignments and evokes certain behaviours. It also creates affirmation and association in the realm in which it is coded. In a sense, however wild and elaborate, costumes create a method by which the wearers become associated with the characters they 'play'. The introverted normal is changed into the extroverted special: the participant is contained in a certain Axis Mundi shape. When costumes become similar and more uniform it creates a sense of unity, a common association. Male participants at the famous Pamplona Festival in Spain wear white with a red scarf; Bulgarian women make their costumes from patterns steeped in tradition; the mourner at a funeral in the West wears black—all these are examples of costumes acting as unifying codes.

A costume also protects and camouflages. It provides a way of melding into the community gathering and there is no better demonstration of this than with the use of mask (Ebin 1979; Mack 1994; Segy 1976; Strathern 1990). Masks can be as simple as ochre and clay or as elaborate as those in Plate 26. One of the most mysterious mask festivals is the Venice Carnivale. There are various formal events

among them including the *Volo dell'Angelo* (Flight of the Angel), the *Festa delle Marie* (Celebration of the Marys), *Gran Corteo Storico* (Great Historic parade) and the *Sfilata delle maschere* (Mask Procession). Yet, much of the festival is spent in darker, purlieus areas in back alleys and small squares: it is an underworld released, obscured by mask. It is held in carnival season in Europe, which, depending on the moveable feast of Easter, is between the end of January and the beginning of February. It is a misty time of year with early sunsets, where even the casual walker can be swept into a liminal experience, with masked figures playing music, moving in strange groups or just standing under archways. At such times the world moves into space where the normal rules of behaviour are suspended, and different energies are mobilised.



Plate 27: Venice masks

Source: Carnival of Venice. Viewed 16 January 2009.

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carnival_of_Venice> Photographer unknown

Masks can be found in religious contexts where people become possessed by the spirit of the mask such as Theyyams villagers in Malabar in the plate above. But they can also be used in theatre settings, the Basle Festival is an example, where people wear extravagant masks that animate character. In thousands of community festivals masks aid those who tell stories and relate myths and legends; this can be

seen in Bali for example in the telling of the Hindu Tales. Each mask is a channel to another persona within the self and the chance to be the 'Other'.

Sometimes costumes and masks can morph into visual displays that are used in gatherings to create spectacular visual images or series of visual images, that make up what might be termed 'spectaculars'. The costumes and masks are placed into elaborate colourful environments often enhanced with music, dance and movement. This activity has a long history and some examples will be explored in more detail later in the study so I will just touch on these worldwide events here. It takes a great deal of preparation and thousands of creative people's work to create the particular magic of a visual spectacle and examples of this spectacular display can be seen at Olympic Games Opening and Closing Ceremonies, carnival parades such as Rio de Janeiro (see Plate 31) or the parades found at the Nice Carnival.



Plate 28: Carnival in Rio de Janeiro

Source: Jorge Saenz photographs. Viewed 16 January 2009.

<http://images.google.com/images?hl=en&rls=GGLG,GGLG:2005-33,GGLG:en&rlz=1W1GGLG_en&q=Jorge+Saenz+Rio+carnival+photo&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=X&oi=image_result_group&resnum=1&ct=title>

Photographer Jorge Saenz

'These events 'turbocharge' the everyday; in some ways they engender an altered state. To me, spectacles are larger-than-life events and, most

importantly, visceral experiences' (Rockwell interviewed by Chee Pearlman cited in Rockwell with Mau 2006, p.20). By their very size and elaboration a spectacle can move the ordinary into the special. However, the sheer size and splendour of a spectacle does not guarantee its capacity to deliver feelings of *communitas*. Larry Harvey, the producer of the Burning Man Festival⁶⁵ held in September in Nevada, points out:

There is plenty of 'spectacle' around us, but it doesn't produce human interactions. It's merely consumed. It doesn't have the power to generate new experience. That process whereby interaction generates new experience has a name: it's called 'culture.' It's possible to have a society without any culture. Ants have it. But we're conscious and therefore free and don't have that luxury ... I'm not saying you could live this way in normal life ... I'm talking about the experience itself. I think it's a powerful experience that can affect the way people live their lives the rest of the year (Harvey interview cited in Rockwell 2006, p.126).

When it comes to community gatherings the use of costume and mask can provide images and integrate itself into the environment of the Axis Mundi, creating a sense of wonder and energy and, properly used, can provide a means to bring about a feeling of *communitas*.

Music and sound

Powerful Axis Mundi experiences can be created with music, singing and sound effects⁶⁶. Music is fundamental to gathering, yet we do not fully know why music has such an effect on us. According to Carter (2003, p.239):

⁶⁵ The Burning Man festival is a very large scale gathering where participants gather in the white desert and create all sorts of visually extraordinary events including the burning of a large man-like sculpture.

⁶⁶ 'Music seems to produce specific emotional states that all people share, and as a result, it allows us to communicate our most intimate emotions without having to talk about or define them in a loose net of word ... Our pupils dilate and our endorphin level rises when we sing; music engages the whole body, as well as the brain, and there is a healing quality to it' (Ackerman 2000, p.217).

Music is generally regarded as one of the more elevated endowments of the human world. It seems to be one of the few things we do simply for pleasure—a pure piece of hedonistic icing on a cake of necessities. Yet evidence is accumulating to suggest that our brains are moulded by our genes to create and understand music rather as they are made to form language. Children as young as five months are aware of tiny shifts in musical pitch and by eight months they can remember a melody well enough to show surprise if a single note in a familiar tune is altered. There is no known mechanism by which purposeless functions come to evolve. Music is therefore likely once to have had some survival benefit, and the most probable one is that it is a prototype communication system

Barrow (1995) suggests that we are receptive to music because we have evolved to listen to the sounds of nature, which gave us the information we needed to survive. We are intimately tuned to, say, the sound of an animal's footsteps, the rumble of thunder and the sound of water and these carry complex emotional messages of rhythm, tune, syncopation and harmony. Carter (2003, p.244) provides a scientific explanation:

Jaak Panksepp thinks the emotion-tugging effect of certain types of music lies in its similarity to vocal (but not verbal) signals that carry emotional messages between animals. The tension-building sequence with delayed resolution that typically brings about the chilly spine feeling, for example, has features in common with the sounds made by infants—both human and animal—when they are parted from their mothers. In animals these cries have been found to trigger a drop in oxytocin—the brain chemical most closely associated with parental bonding—and they also bring about a drop in the mother's body temperature. When the mother is reunited with her baby, the child responds by 'resolving' the cry—a vocal performance not dissimilar to closing a phrase of music with a satisfyingly final note. At the same time the mother's oxytocin level goes up, and her body becomes warmer. Women have been found to feel the tingle more keenly than men, which fits in neatly with this theory.

Perhaps, then, the tingle is a faint echo of the shiver that helps to motivate a mother to seek out her lost infant. Other emotional frissons we experience when notes take a particular turn may relate to similar signals.

Music is certainly a powerful communication system reaching our unconscious in powerful ways. Ackerman (2000, p.214) expands this idea:

As Cooke observes, '... a word awakens both an emotional response and a comprehension of its meaning, whereas a note, having no meaning, awakens only an emotional response.' What sort of response can a few notes of music awaken? Awe, rage, wonder, restlessness, defeat, stoicism, love, patriotism ... What passion cannot Music raise and quell? John Dryden asks in his 'A Song for St. Cecelia's Day'.

Music certainly has a deep impact on our emotional states and is important as a mechanism in fostering involvement in all sorts of gatherings. Cognitive scientists are beginning to understand more about its functioning. Carter (2003, pp.242 and 244) sums up these processes:

The particular musical moments that are most frequently reported as tingle triggers are sudden shifts of harmony, or sequences that set up an expectation of a particular resolution (the progression from E to F sharp, for instance, sets up the expectation for G to complete the phrase), then delay or subvert it. The emotional pattern in all such moments is relaxation—arousal—tension—relief—relaxation.

As well as sending momentary shivers up the spine, music can tell stories, prompt us to dance, make us happy, aggressive or sad, hurry us along or put us to sleep. The right sort can even dictate what type of wine we buy in a supermarket.

The brain has to do a great deal of construction work to make music from the mere beat of sound waves against a membrane in the ear. The process is similar to that which turns visual stimuli into meaningful images. Each component of the incoming information—pitch, melody, rhythm, location and loudness—is processed separately, then the parts are brought back together and reassembled, along with whatever emotional response they

elicit ... the sound is processed in parallel by the limbic system, which notes only its emotional tone ... The tingle factor probably arises from this primarily unconscious emotional processing. The fact that it is not a function of the conscious brain (even though we may become consciously aware of it) explains why it seems to work for ... people.

Singing in a choir, for example, can engender group unity and provide euphonious atmospheres. According to Ackerman (2000, p.105):

When we sing, not only do our vocal cords vibrate, but so do some of our bones ... Chant 'om,' or any other mantra, in a solid, prolonged tone, and you will feel the bones in your head, as well as the cartilage in your sternum, vibrate. It's like a massage from the inside, very soothing. Another reason it may be so conducive to meditation is that it creates an inner white noise, which cancels out extraneous noises, making your body a soundproof booth ... The drumbeat in a macumba ceremony seizes one in a crescendo of fury that climbs higher and higher, as if scaling the Himalaya of one's belief. All these sounds repeat hypnotically. Every religion has its own liturgy, which is important not just in its teachings but also because it forces the initiate to utter the same sounds over and over until they are ingrained in memory, until they become a kind of aural landscape .

Music can facilitate community cohesion, dancing, moving and singing together; it can evoke a range of emotions; and, sometimes with a single singer, can bring about political cohesion, feelings of unity, synchronistic communication of happy and sad emotional states, stir people to laugh and cry, create wild parties and connect worshippers to the sacred. Music can be central to the celebratory experience or be a tool to facilitate other arts experiences; in theatre, dance and the visual arts for example. It can engage people deeply in a restful state of mind and in a very active physical state, and it constantly creates communion between the self and celebratory expression.

The sound of silence, the cessation of music, can also be especially powerful. As Bachelard (1958, p.43) puts it:

Sounds lend color to space, and confer a sort of sound body upon it. But absence of sound leaves it quite pure and, in the silence, we are seized with the sensation of something vast and deep and boundless.

Skilled designers of gatherings appreciate this effect. For example, at the Woodford Folk Festival each year, held just north of Brisbane in Queensland, Australia, the music is stopped at twenty to twelve on New Year's Eve. There is a two-minute silence to commemorate people who have died in the year, and tens of thousands of people observe this tradition in complete silence, creating intense psychological power.

Theatre and story

Theatre is usually associated with an audience sitting in a theatre watching actors perform but in gatherings theatre has a much wider role to play. I might call this kind of theatre 'celebratory theatre'. It has many styles: street theatre, religious storytelling, puppets (see Jurkoski, 1988 and Wazkiel, 1992), circus (see Bolton, 1987), epic open-air theatre (Coult and Kershaw, 1983) and provides elements inside spectacle events. Some examples will be examined later.

At the heart of theatre in this context is story telling. Story itself is a form of information collection particular to the human brain. I talk of 'story' here in its broadest sense, not necessarily in its narrative fictional form but as a system that holds sets of knowledge in tight relationships. The story is a technique the brain uses to 'bring together' knowledge into cohesive wholes – a unit that glues together the information. This 'glue' could be found in the sub-strata of Axis Mundi events in groups all over the world and is explored later. According to Carter (2003, p.276)

our brains are constantly seeking to make neat patterns of the information that comes in, and incomplete or fragmented memories (which we all inevitably possess) do not sit easily in our mental filing system ... The brain also likes events to follow a standard narrative formula: beginning, middle and appropriate conclusion.

Story makes up who we are, and theatre's ability to tie streams of thought into cohesive and meaningful matrix conglomerates has provided people with, not

only a way of thinking, but also a source of exchangeable wisdom and understandings of what it is like to be a human.

Celebratory theatre asks for a relationship with its audience different from performances in specially built theatre spaces by intensifying a level of participation, by placing performance into extraordinary spaces and by bringing it right into people's world. It can make the normal special; it can transform the ordinary by its reflexive nature; it is ephemeral but lasting.

What do I mean by celebratory theatre? I will choose one example out of many to illustrate.

In May 2006 director Jean-Luc Courcoult brought a theatre event to London; it had been developed to mark the anniversary of Jules Verne's death. The author had written the *Steam House* in 1881, the storyline revolved around a steam-driven elephant. The company could have taken the story and retold it in a normal theatrical method but instead it built just such an elephant. By bringing the elephant to life and moving it about the London streets the company transformed the ordinary into the special and brought about a feeling of celebration.

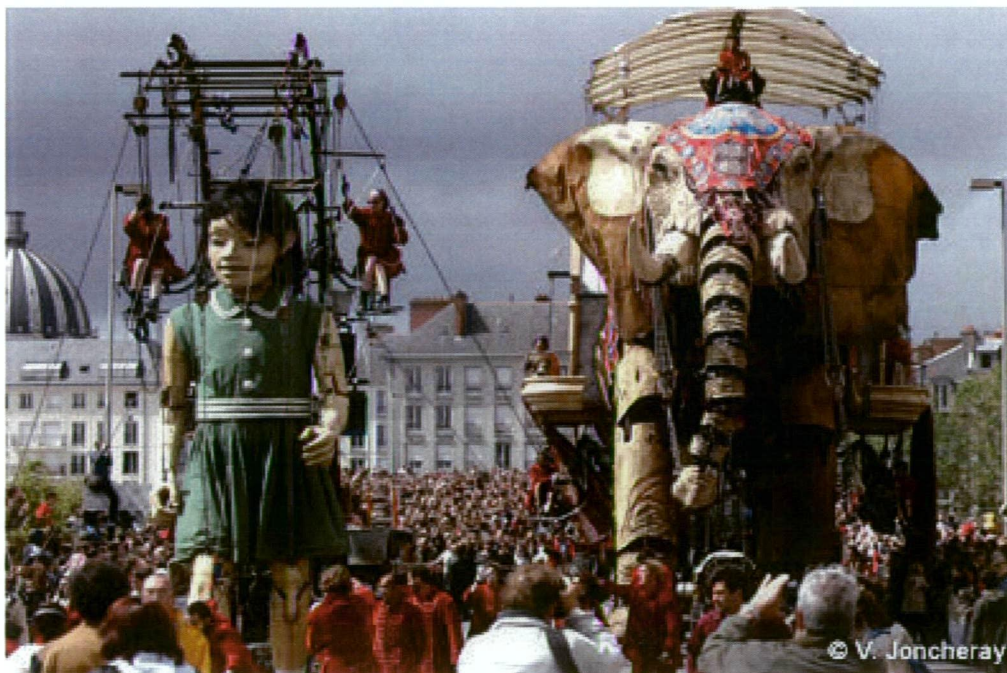


Plate 29: Royal de luxe

Source: Royal de luxe web site. Viewed 15 January 2009.
<<http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/IMG/jpg/20-01-2.jpg>>

Photographer unknown

Following are press comments on the *Royal de luxe* website home page (The Sultan's Elephant Web Site viewed 8 January 2009, <<http://www.thesultanselephant.com/comments/comments.php>>):

One of the most awesome, ingenious, superlative-exhausting things I have ever seen...They should send it to Washington (Catherine Bennett, *The Guardian*, 11 May 2006).

A million people came to central London to enjoy a staggering spectacle that has changed the way we think about street theatre ...The Sultan's Elephant was a marvel (Susannah Clapp, *The Observer*, 14 May 2006).

In London just last month, over a million people were captivated by the story of a little girl and a time-travelling [sic] elephant. Even now it seems incredible, but the spell that 'The Sultan's Elephant' cast on those who saw it meant that for those few precious hours, everyone involved felt a sense of kinship and connectedness. Part of a single life-changing experience. And all in a single city (Speech by Culture Secretary Tessa Jowell to the IFACCA World Summit on Arts & Culture, Newcastle Gateshead, June 2006).

We are entranced. We have not stopped smiling or looking dreamy for days. If you didn't know us better, you'd say we were in love ... But this week we have rediscovered the child in our self and are a-quiver with enchantment ... Yes, yes, I know. But the truth is that I, like everyone else, came out to have a quick look and felt bound to stay to have a second, and a third ... We watched as if in a dream (Howard Jacobson, *Independent on Sunday*, 13 May 2006).

What made busy strangers move from a normal working state of mind into the special energy of the Axis Mundi? The two images, one human and the other animal, engender strong associations in many people. The little girl is the epitome of sweetness, innocence and youth and evokes feelings of parental protection and affection. The anthropomorphic process is strong in the representation of the

elephant: a symbol of wisdom, strength and gentleness.⁶⁷ However, these images are special because the company built them many times their original size and, by doing so, amplified and intensified feelings of deep association.

But even these extravagances might not have produced a feeling of community in the onlookers: it took the animation to make it transcendent. I know from using big puppets that when they are manipulated skilfully, they 'become' the embodiment of the things they are representing; however, it only takes a few mistakes in movement to belie the image, to turn it back into the normal. Talented puppeteers work hard to 'bring life' to these inanimate objects, to give the inert materials a part of their own energy. It is at such times that disbelief is suspended, and the elephant and girl become strangely real. It would seem to be impossible for an enormous girl to seem to be animated. 'We watched as if in a dream' Howard Jacobson remarked (see above); 'a sense of kinship and connectedness' said Tessa Jo well (also above). The performance had caused a rupture and become a catalyst, unsettling the normally busy and tension-filled streets of London with something that resembled a common community that spoke of another world, one that had a stronger sense of sharing and wonder. It seemed to say that if this moment were possible, then anything is possible. It was this realisation that might have caused the sense of celebration among the audience. The performance threw its audience into a new state of mind. On such matters Koestler (1964, p.45) comments:

There are two ways of escaping our more or less automatized routines of thinking and behaving. The first, of course, is the plunge into dreaming or dream like states, when the codes of rational thinking are suspended. The other way is also an escape—from boredom, stagnation, intellectual predicaments, and emotional frustration but in the other direction; it is signalled by the spontaneous flash of insight which shows a familiar situation or event in a new light, and elicits a new response to it.

Using narrative, theatre can also present new political ideas and lampoon old political dogmas. As Cronon (1996, p.157) observes:

⁶⁷ In Asia it is said that Buddha was reincarnated as a white elephant.

We internalize narrative as ideology. Ideology is a story told by people in power. Once we identify ideology as a story—powerful and compelling, but still only a story—we realize that by rewriting the story, we can begin to challenge the structures of power.

The San Francisco Mime Troop was often in conflict with the legal authorities in the late 1960s for just such politically motivated performances. Travelling theatre companies in Elizabethan times, who pulled into market squares, were constantly being banned by the authorities.

Written and spoken words

The written word, in its visual form, does not have a strong role in gatherings when compared with other art forms. It may have a certain impact when displayed and can engender a celebratory spirit with community gatherings.

An outstanding example of the written word was the mobilisation of the word ‘Eternity’ at the Sydney Olympic Games in 2004. The use of the word ‘Eternity’ was inspired by a tramp, who wrote the word in chalk all over Sydney over many decades in the early 20th Century. The particular section of the Opening was a tap-dancing scene to celebrate Australian workers. It represented a model of the Sydney Harbour Bridge with the word ‘Eternity’ written up in fireworks⁶⁸. This was a re-enactment of the Sydney Millennium Celebrations where the same word was lit up on the real bridge. The word became iconic for the community, gave focus and created resonances. It deepened the Axis Mundi morphology, placing the whole event into a semiological interaction with life and death and the nature of transience.

⁶⁸ For more on the celebratory use of fireworks see Plimpton, 1984.



Plate 30: Sydney Harbour Bridge

Source: ETERNITY at the Olympics web site. Viewed 16 January 2009.
<<http://www.wesleymission.org.au/publications/eternity/eternity.htm>>.

Photographer unknown.

The ETERNITY at the Olympics web site describes the event in the following way:

Crowds of partygoers on the foreshore, many of whom knew nothing of the term's significance, cheered spontaneously. It was the word for the moment.

Ignatius Jones produced the celebrations in Sydney. He said he had chosen to honour Stace's legacy as a fitting way to mark a new era:

"It's incredibly Sydney. It symbolized for me the madness, mystery and magic of the city. On the one hand there's the meaning of the word in its temporal sense—and on this night of fellowship and good cheer, it shouldn't just be about one night. The word says that this celebration should be eternal in human life ...

Arthur Stace wrote that word, in that elegant copperplate, in chalk and in crayon, for thirty-seven years, on the sidewalks of Sydney—over half a million times ... (*ETERNITY at the Olympics* web site, viewed 12 January 2009, <<http://www.wesleymission.org.au/publications/eternity/eternity.htm>>).

If the written word has a small role to play in gatherings, the spoken word has a great effect in many types of Axis Mundi events. The spoken word is the human being's main form of communication. Words can inspire people's feelings of involvement in community gatherings. To choose one

amongst many, Martin Luther King's famous speech '*I had a dream*' entered history and inspired an international feeling of racial condemnation at the gathering in Washington on 28 August 1963. A poetic moment, spoken eloquently, can concentrate and unify a whole generation. As Bachelard explains:

By its novelty, a poetic image sets in motion the entire linguistic mechanism. The poetic image places us at the origin of the speaking being.

Through this reverberation, by going *immediately* beyond all psychology or psychoanalysis, we feel a poetic power rising naively within us. After the original reverberation, we are able to experience resonances, sentimental repercussions, reminders of our past. But the image has touched the depths before it stirs the surface ... Here expression creates being (1958, p. xxiii).

In terms of creating energy for the Axis Mundi, the words spoken at some funerals are outstanding examples of words that inspire deep feelings of unity at a time of distress. There are many such quotes from religious texts, poems, writings and sayings, amongst them a poem from Joyce Grenfell:

IF I SHOULD GO

If I should go before the rest of you,
Break not a flower, nor inscribe a stone,
Nor, when I am gone, speak only in a Sunday voice,
But be the usual selves that I have known.

Weep if you must. Parting is hell,
But life goes on,
So, sing as well!

(Grenfell, thinkexist.com visited 12 January 2009, <http://thinkexist.com/quotation/if-i-should-go-before-the-rest-of-you-break-not-a/383060.html>).

I have only just touched on arts usage in Axis Mundi events and they will be explored within Axis Mundi examples later in the text.

Inducements

Certain dynamics, forms, spaces and arts activities can encourage the individual to tune into gatherings, but sometimes the individual brings about tuning dispositions on their own account. The individual can use various practices that, in themselves, bring on altered states; for example, alcohol, drugs, repeated movement, sound, fasting, meditation, sleep deprivation, and fear experiences.⁶⁹ As Dawkins has put it, 'any nervous system can be subverted if treated in the right way' (cited in Smail 2008, p.171). To help understand these processes I have separated them into two groups, *external* and *internal* inducements.

External inducements are those used to tune into an event using a stimulus to 'bring on' a particular state of mind: drink and drugs are the usual source. The party gatherings found inside carnival, for example, can tend towards external self-inducement. The individual can have a 'quick hit' and immediate access to the carnival world with no effort other than imbibing an intoxication: the normal can quickly become the special. According to Smail (2008, p.174)

the mechanisms that influence the body chemistry of the self ... we can call autotropic. One category consists of the chemicals or foods we ingest for their mind-bending effects. Alcohol is the most obvious of these autotropic chemicals and the most culturally widespread; opiates and other chemicals that alter cognitive patterns are not far behind. Many of them, the opiates included, are psychotropic in the usual sense of the word because they mimic or alter the effects of dopamine, serotonin, norepinephrine, and other chemical messengers.

Internal methods do not use artificial stimulants to create a tuned state. Internal practices are often used in sacred situations where the supplicant moves into so-called blissful states of 'divine' communication. As our pathways, cellular amalgams and modular interrelationships change from normal functioning into states of release, so the tensions of ordinary life are lifted, and some feel freer, happier and

⁶⁹ '...the individual's perception of the world is itself affected by the status of his motor activities: information concerning the position and status of the body itself regulates the way in which subsequent perception of the world takes place' (Gardner 1983, p.211).

more adventurous under its spell. They also feel closer, more amenable towards their fellow human beings. Carter (2003, p.162) describes happiness and pleasure in the following way:

Happiness is not a single, or a simple, state of mind. Its many components are:

- physical pleasure
- absence of negative emotion
- meaning.

Pleasure is the result of a rush of dopamine in the reward system. It can be brought on by a simple sensory or sexual thrill, or by a more complex route—the sight of someone you love, perhaps. It lasts, however, only as long as the neurotransmitters continue to flow ...

Absence of negative emotion is essential for happiness because as soon as strong fear, anger or sadness enters, pleasure is reduced. The amygdala is responsible for generating negative emotions, so to prevent them flooding the brain this part of the limbic system must be quiet ...

Absence of sorrow and pleasure are still insufficient to create an all-pervading sense of well-being. For this, activity is required in the ventromedial area of the prefrontal cortex—one of the areas that is deadened in depression. The ventromedial cortex creates a feeling of cohesiveness—without it the world seems pointless and fragmentary.

External inducements

Carnival, in its broadest sense, often depends upon drink and/or drugs to work upon the participant, thereby providing liminal pathways into a special state. The most famous drinking festival in the world is probably the Munich Beer Festival (*Oktoberfest*) where participants drink six million large jugs of beer each year. There are many festivals where declared or undeclared drug and alcohol use is normal—rock concerts are good examples. It is important to make clear that different types of external stimuli produce very different experiences. The drink/drug practice provides a range of altered states depending on the predilection of the user, the type of

stimulant and the cultural placement of the event.

The interface between the external stimulus and the structure of the Axis Mundi celebration is a delicate one, and the right sort of external inducement is sometimes difficult to place. Many types of events demand a 'loosening agent' to bring about a state of mind that will allow a more cohesive grouping, but these powerful agents can spin the event out of control. There are many examples where drinking has become riotous and has caused injury and even death: many drug-related casualties have come about through substance abuse.

Axis Mundi designers have often built into their various gatherings the permission to consume mind-altering intoxicants, ranging from hallucinogenic practices amongst the Yanomamo of Brazil, 'ecstasy' at raves in Australia, whiskey at Irish wakes or Guinness at folk festivals. In well-structured gatherings, individuals are placed into cultural structures that will 'hold' the intoxicated person and channel the experience into various frameworks of positive social interaction. Many contemporary events would not achieve any sense of *communitas* without a large intake of external intoxicants. The generation of joy at these events is almost, if not entirely, dependent on the artificial effects of powerful stimulants. Rather than the stimulant being a passage to celebration, the augmentative agent can become the central activity where all meaning and *communitas* are located. Some New Year's Eve gatherings demonstrate this.

The methods used to bring on an altered state can be quite gentle and benign. Eating is a good example. The way that food is used in festivals and other Axis Mundi gatherings is well known, and food can have many different roles to play. It can be used, say, in a ceremonial structure to facilitate formal meetings and state banquets or utilised ritually in various ways (the Eucharist and the Japanese tea ceremony are examples). It is often a foundation stone of gatherings where members of a community eat together and share special foods. Eating awakens evolutionary susceptibilities and the mechanism of eating is very important to understand for Axis Mundi designers. As Bakhtin (1984, pp.281 and 283) explains:

The encounter of man with the world, which takes place inside the open, biting, rending, chewing mouth, is one of the most ancient and most

important objects of human thought and imagery. Here man tastes the world, introduces it into his body, makes it part of himself ... Man's encounter with the world in the act of eating is joyful, triumphant; he triumphs over the world, devours it without being devoured himself. The limits between man and the world are erased, to man's advantage.

This element of victory and triumph is inherent in all banquet images. No meal can be sad. Sadness and food are incompatible (while death and food are perfectly compatible). The banquet always celebrates a victory and this is part of its very nature. Further, the triumphal banquet is always universal. It is the triumph of life over death. In this respect it is equivalent to conception and birth. The victorious body receives the defeated world and is renewed.

When the fears that surround food scarcity are dissolved in a feast-like situation, feelings of good will are released and mutual trust increases. Sitting down to eat with others can build social affinities that cannot be underestimated. Bread and Puppet Theatre based in Vermont in the USA used to bake bread before a theatre performance to fill the space with that most comforting of smells, bringing about an immediate visceral involvement. Carter (2002, pp.85-86) comments:

Having nutrients pumped into the blood keeps you alive but it does not give the same pleasure as a meal that has to be prepared, served, chewed and swallowed. This is why so many essential functions are elaborated with rituals. The preparation of a feast ... when final action is complete the rush of pleasure is replaced by a sense of contentment and—note the word—fulfilment.

Internal Inducements

The internal autotropic state is very different and has various effects and 'enlightened experiences'; for example, where a person uses physical movement to bring about an aligned spiritual state. For example, the Whirling Dervishes bring on states of 'bliss' in their regular turning; Indian sadhus can bring about states of 'oceanic' consciousness with constant rhythmic movement; and gospel singers sway in time as they sing in harmony—all achieving integrated states of mind within the group. In addition, Islamic prayers call for prostration (Salat al-Fajr) at certain times

during the day to create the 'special' in a communication with Allah. Buddhist monks at a monastery near Mount Aso rise each morning and run around a large bell as they listen to the sounds made by the plangent beat.⁷⁰ All these practices, when repeatedly performed by the individual within a community that has a common aim: to create feelings of alignment within the group.

Sometimes even voluntarily putting the body through extremes of pain can bring about transformation and permanent change: in traditional initiation ceremonies the young often go through severe hardships, such as fasting and sleep deprivation to achieve altered states that will achieve a change in status. Lacey and Danziger (1999, pp.57 and 102) describe some of the effects of fasting in the following quotation:

Fasting was the church's way of harnessing hunger to spiritual purposes, and Easter came at the end of the forty day fast of Lent. Occurring when it did, in the final months of winter when the barns and granaries were getting bare, there was a sense in which Lent made a virtue of necessity. But fasting was a process which elevated material concerns to a higher plain—a means of personal purification and the way to get God on your side.

Midsummer was also the season when that other sardonic observer of peasant life, the Flemish artist Pieter Bruegel the Elder, painted his famous tableaux of crazed rural festivals. At the very end of the Middle Ages, Bruegel depicted country folk wrapped up in fits of mass hysteria, and the historical accounts of these rural frenzies have explained the delirium in terms of the slender diet on which the poor had to subsist during the hungry gap. People were light-headed through lack of solid food, and modern chemistry has shown how the ergot that flowered on rye as it grew mouldy was a source of lysergic acid—LSD, the cult drug of the 1960's.

⁷⁰ 'Lately, however, neurophysiologists armed with MRIs have also gotten into the game, using Tibetan monks to demonstrate how meditation produces measurable changes in brain activity. Though it would be difficult, using current technology, to extend this sort of study to church liturgies and other rituals, it is nonetheless easy to imagine that liturgies would tend to have similarly soothing consequences for many people in attendance' (Smail 2008, p.176).

Other forms of mind-altering activity, such as constant chanting and meditation, can be beneficial to *communitas* and align the initiate. This was common in the early Christian churches. According to Lacey and Danziger (1999, p.104):

The chanting of the liturgy was one of the centralising forces of Christendom. Today it is usually referred to as the Gregorian chant, from the tradition that it was developed by Pope Gregory the Great ... these mesmerising melodies which had their roots in the Hebrew chants that were taken over and adapted by the first Christians. The chant was the product of practice and elaboration by the countless churchmen and women of the first millennium whose lives were given meaning by this inspiring and transcendent sound.

Having worked a number of times with the Tibetan monks, based at the Dalai Lama's centre in Dharamsala, I can say that many people reported to me that the harmonic chanting seemed to create a very powerful feeling of calm.

Another self-inducement process found in gatherings is the trance state, which is still prevalent in Asia; for example, the Balinese stab themselves with Kris knives; extreme Sufis skewer their cheeks, and the Theyyams of Malabar in India roll in fire. Trance is now quite rare in the West,⁷¹ but glossolalia (talking in tongues) experiences can be found in small Christian sects especially in America. It is unclear what brings trance about—drumming, chanting and movement can all contribute—but wherever trance lies in the *Axis Mundi*, it is one of the states most difficult to understand. Following is an account of trance states of 'convulsive' cults in Paris in the early 18th century:

⁷¹ The West used to have trance as part of religious tradition. 'Within the ancient world, many deities served as the objects of ecstatic worship: in Greece, Artemis and Demeter; in Rome, the imported deities Isis (from Egypt), Cybele, the Great Mother, or Magna Mater (from Asia Minor), and Mithras (from Persia). But there was one Greek god for whom ecstatic worship was not simply an option; it was a requirement. To ignore his call was to risk a fate far worse than death or even physical torture; those who resisted him would be driven mad and forced to destroy their own children. This god, source of both ecstasy and terror, was Dionysus, or, as he was known to the Romans, Bacchus. His mundane jurisdiction covered vineyards and wine, but his more spiritual responsibility was to preside over the *orgeia* (literally, rites performed in the forest at night, from which we derive the word *orgy*), where his devotees danced themselves into a state of trance. The fact that the Greeks felt the need for such a deity tells us something about the importance of ecstatic experience in their world; just as their pantheon included gods for love, for war, for agriculture, metalworking, and hunting, they needed a god to give the experience of ecstasy a human form and face' (Ehrenreich 2006, p.33).

While the assembled company redoubled their prayers and collectively reached extreme heights of religious enthusiasm, at least one of their number would suddenly lapse into uncontrolled motor activity.

They thrashed about on the floor in a state of frenzy, screaming, roaring, trembling, and twitching ... The excitement and the disordered movements, which might last for several hours, usually proved highly contagious, with certain convulsionaries apparently serving as a catalyst for the onset of various bodily agitations in others (Kreiser cited in Ehrenreich 2006, pp.7–8).

Many observers see trance as a random act where individuals slip into a ‘wild’ state that wholly takes over normal action. They do indeed seem to be ‘taken over’ by an energy which is ‘out of control’. However, in most cases, while in ‘another and abnormal state’, they are inside a very regulated religious structure. They do not go mad, committing random and incomprehensible acts, but rather act out strictly pre-planned actions within a well-supported framework. As Ehrenreich (2006, p.17) explains that

even at the height of the supposed frenzy, cultural expectations guided behaviour, determining the special roles of the sexes and age groups, and going so far as to regulate that ‘wildest’ of experiences—trance ... In others, such as certain West African-derived religious rites or !Kung healing rituals, the achievement of trance is welcomed as a mark of spiritual status and is sought with great discipline and concentration. Each ecstatic ritual, as the ethnographers who followed the colonialists learned, was specific to its own culture, endowed with different meanings to its participants, and shaped by human creativity and intellect (2006, p.17).

Cognitive scientists still do not know a great deal about what happens when people go into a trance, but it is obvious that many normal brain functions become inhibited and new alignments are brought into being. It is also possible that certain individuals are more prone.⁷² When placed into intense religious frameworks the

⁷² ‘Not everyone can be possessed, for not everyone can know how to respond to the demands and

trance state can be attributed to an outside power or deity rather than to a cognitive function that causes it, thus giving the participant 'divine' qualities.

The elements of dynamic, forms, the arts and self-inducements, with their myriad of sub-elements, make up the palette of the Axis Mundi designer. The aim of these events, within the context of the Axis Mundi, is to promote community development and, by bringing these elements together in the right way, provide any community with a rich series of events that promote cohesion, empower positive and open attitudes and richly texture people's lives. The jigsaw must be completed to produce a worthy design can only be enhanced by understanding the inner workings of gatherings.

expectations of her god. So the ecstatic rites of these diaspora religions were not mad orgies, as whites often perceived them, but deliberately nurtured *techniques* of ecstasy, derived from ancient traditions' Ehrenreich 2006, p.187).

PART 3: WHY AXIS MUNDI EVENTS HAPPEN

A curious excavator of traditions stumbles over something protruding above the surface of the commonplaces of contemporary life. He scratches away, discovering bits and pieces of a cultural design that seems to elude coherent reconstitution but which leads him deeper into the past ... an excavation, beginning with the familiar, digging down through layers of memories and representations toward the primary bedrock, laid down centuries or even millennia ago, and then working up again toward the light of contemporary recognition (Schama 1995, pp.16–17)

In the next four chapters I will explore why Axis Mundi happened and why they are still used in society.

We do not know when formal group gatherings began to emerge as useful tools to facilitate the community; however, we have some clues, dating back to the Middle Palaeolithic. Various grave goods were discovered that provide clear evidence of formal gatherings.⁷³ In spite of having only fragments of evidence of deep pre-history's gathering habits, it can be assumed that gatherings have been with us from very early on, perhaps from the very beginning of our development. To understand the occurrence of Axis Mundi events it would seem logical to trace the social imperatives that have made gatherings so important. These social imperatives have been with us from the beginning and I believe that they were the reason that gatherings happened, a clear understanding of their function will illuminate the workings of Axis Mundi events, not only in history but also in

⁷³ The earliest grave goods indicate formal gatherings to bid the dead farewell. The first funerals are difficult to pin down exactly but we do know they have been with us for a long time. *Archaeology; Theories, Methods and Practice* stated the following: 'The problem of establishing whether a burial is deliberate or not—and therefore whether it is associated with the idea of respect for the dead—becomes particularly acute when one moves back in time to consider the Neanderthals of the Middle Palaeolithic period. On current evidence, the practice of deliberate burial began at this time. The best evidence for the burial of decorative items with the dead comes only from the Upper Palaeolithic and later periods, although it has been claimed that a famous Neanderthal burial at Shanidar Cave in Iraq was accompanied by pollen, indicating an offering of flowers' (Renfrew & Bahn 1991, p.398).

contemporary society.

Without becoming too reductionist, human groups had to do a number of things very well as a cooperative group if they had any chance of survival, and this meant that the individual human brain had to be able to evolve to deal with these social imperatives. This has produced a brain very attuned to communicating with other humans: working in groups helped mould the evolutionary design of the brain. The human brain did not evolve arbitrarily or accidentally. It was not able, by some quirk, to form groups that survived; in fact, it was the other way around—the human mind evolved to work within the group.⁷⁴ The human group was made up of individuals with brain designs that facilitated ‘tuning’ into cooperative units, and it was in this interaction that Axis Mundi events facilitated. This is why gathering evolved as part of our social life.

In the next four chapters I will examine seven different social imperatives that were needed to survive and how gathering aided these processes. They are concerned with association, amelioration, genetics, communication, transition, environment and cosmology. I will also track them through into contemporary times, explore their influence on today’s gatherings.

But to start this tracking process I have to select a starting point, and I have done so by creating a typical model prehistoric village called Kelby. I will now explain the layout of this village before continuing into the next chapters.

⁷⁴ ‘We also, way back in evolutionary history, decided to go with the survival strategy of sociability—not just the ‘safety in numbers’ approach of a herd of wildebeest, but the development of an expanding social network of reciprocal roles, relationships and responsibilities. Members of an ordered society enjoy the benefits of many survival buffers that the singleton—the ‘lone ranger’—does not’ (Claxton 2005, p.310).

The village of Kelby

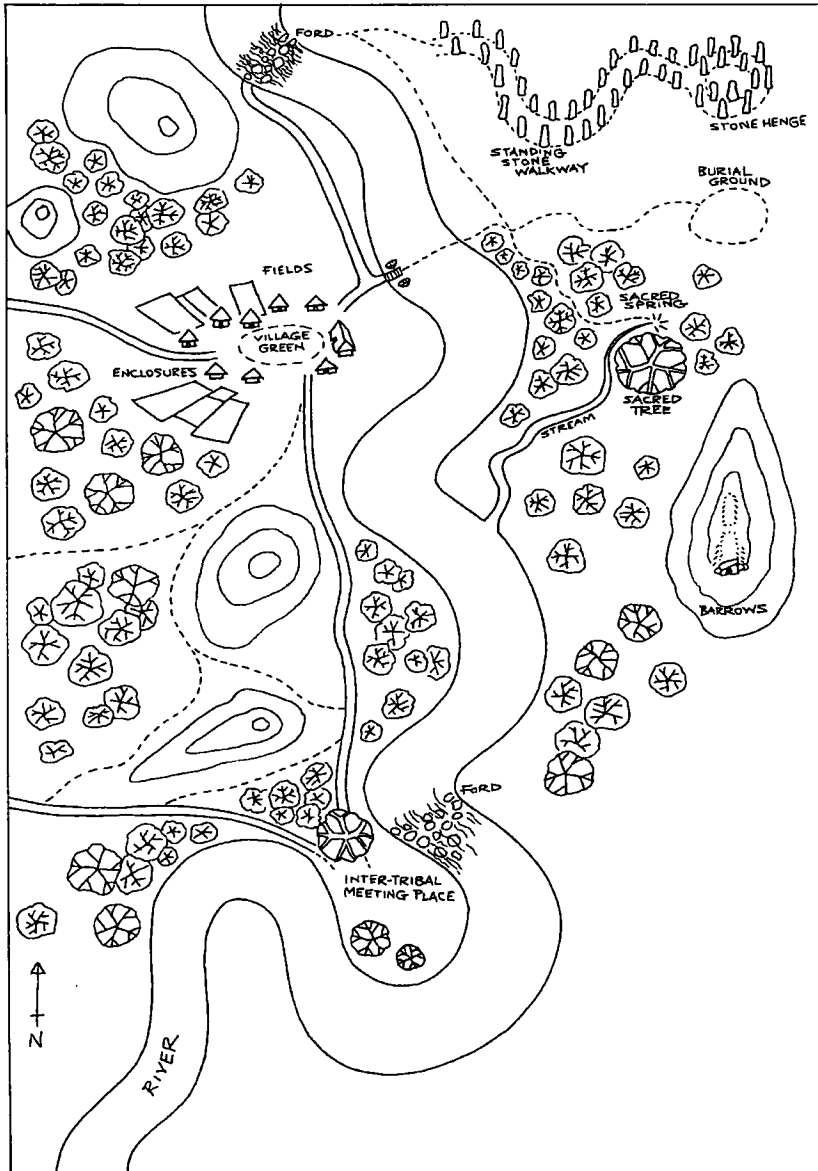


Figure 5: The village of Kelby

Source: Neil Cameron

The social imperatives in the next chapters are examined within a historical continuum, which takes, as its starting position, the imagined, but typical, prehistoric village of Kelby. (The reasons why this particular model was chosen are explained in Chapter Two). Although the starting point is arbitrary, I have chosen 5000 BP as being a time in prehistory that we have a great deal of information about and which therefore seems to be a robust anchoring point. A brief description of the physical

layout of the area will be helpful to understand the chapters that follow. This village is situated in Britain and has twelve hundred inhabitants. It is very isolated, on the bend of a river,⁷⁵ in heavy woodland. Within the life of the village all seven social imperatives are prevalent, and the Axis Mundi events that facilitate them are clearly seen. Isobel Smith gives us an overview of these kinds of villages:

Assembly of the scattered families or tribal units takes place at one or more intervals during the year, at the slack periods in the agricultural ... or stock-tending cycle, and affords opportunities for the transaction of the necessary business of tribal life. In addition to those matters which may come within the political field in its broadest sense, such other matters can be attended to as the holding of initiation ceremonies, matchmaking and weddings, the exchange of stock and seed-corn and perhaps of more durable goods. Rites and ceremonies are performed to ensure the fertility of the flocks and herds and the growing of the corn, and finally to celebrate the harvest (cited in Pryor 2003, p.170).

The inhabitants live in small huts made of wood and wattle, with straw or grass roofs. The men hunt in the surrounding forests, and the women forage for food and look after the domestic lives of the community. Some animal husbandry is practiced and vegetables and grains are grown. They have no written language. They are bordered on two sides by adjacent tribes.

The group has found and developed six workable spaces to enact gatherings - spaces that provide dramatic, symbolic and liminal geographies. The first space is the village circle, which is surrounded by the people's houses. This area brings together a dramatic centre and is a circular enclosure of *communitas*. It is ideal for some Axis Mundi events that have no sacred elements and ideal to concentrate group gatherings such as informal celebrations in the carnival style. It is the space where the sacred has its loosest hold and all sorts of 'merry' activities happen there. To reach some other spaces the villagers have to cross the river at a ford that is passable most of the

⁷⁵ The name Kelby means 'place by the flowing river' in Celtic. Celtic names web site. Viewed 12 August 2009. < http://www.name-meanings.com/celtic_name_meanings.php?choice=meaning&gender=&s=340>.

year. The land on the other side is set apart and is the 'special' (see Pryor 2003). At the northern-most point is a long line of double-standing stones culminating in a stone circle, which acts as a sacred space and also a calendar.⁷⁶

South of this translocational space is a large tree set into a glade that is useful for more informal sacred events. It is a 'holy tree' that blossoms in spring, produces fruit in the summer and seems to die in the winter. The group's symbolic expression and the tree become synonymous, and the individual and group's identity can be seen to be represented here. It is used for marriages, initiations and other more informal gatherings. Nearby is a spring that is used for namings and as a 'wishing' place. Not far away is a small hill with burial barrows on top: only the leaders and priests are buried there, and the rest of the community are buried in a graveyard below. This space is reserved for religious rites and interactions with the dead and is only used in special contexts.

Circle, stone pathway, tree, spring and hill are used as a complex series of sacred spaces with stabilising and predictable elements of ritual. They are unchanging, immutable and reliable. They are spaces that can be controlled, dramatised and modelled on the group's cosmology. The events act as intensifiers and concentrate sacred ideas in their own dramatic area. '...to transform a situation in which there is experienced obscurity...into a situation that is clear, coherent, settled, harmonious' (Galanter and Gerstenhaber cited in Geertz 1973, p.78).

So Kelby has a selection of spaces that can be used in isolation or as part of a series—one leading to the next. They are spaces that must have imaginative licence, as Bachelard would describe it:

Space that has been seized upon by the imagination cannot remain indifferent space subject to the measures and estimates of the surveyor. It has been lived in, not in its positivity, but with all the partiality of the imagination. Particularly, it nearly always exercises an attraction. For it concentrates being within limits that protect (Bachelard 1958, p.xxxvi).

⁷⁶ For the local people the idea of 'calendars' is inseparable from the seemingly magical ways of nature. The calendar is not there to only act as a time keeper but also to contain ideas of the sacred. Seasonal events were tied in with the Gods.

I will now examine how gatherings facilitate social imperatives, starting in the village of Kelby five thousand years ago and moving into contemporary society.

Chapter 6: Axis Mundi gatherings and social imperatives 1 and 2 - associations and ameliorations

Associative activities

The first essential social imperative for the group is to form tight stable associational structures. By combining together as a group and by communicating together, individuals could form efficient units to hunt, gather, mate and protect territory. Associational activity was not based on some decision made by a certain group; instead, it evolved as a drive shared by all. The human mind has evolved to do this job efficiently, as explained by Claxton:

Group living depends on a degree of harmony, and this requires, some of the time, the ability to align your plans and intentions with other people. If you suddenly decide that you have had enough of the hot savannah and go off for a swim in the middle of the hunt, you are not likely to get your share of the subsequent feast. Cooperation depends on concentration, commitment and self-control, and all of these need the power to inhibit alternative courses of action, and their concomitant desires (2005, p.272).

But the group also had to be able to change, adapt or abandon those self-same stable structures as conditions changed. In other words, they had to be creative and inventive, and they had to solve the problems that an uncertain life produced. Clinging to unrealistic ideas of stability could create a dangerous complacency, and so they had to remain flexible. The design of the brain reflects this dual capacity, with the left hemisphere dealing with the building of logic and structure and the right developing a rich creative imagination. The brain is very susceptible⁷⁷ to the forming of stable, strong, associative structures at the very centre of human information

⁷⁷ 'The psyche is not of today. Its ancestry goes back many millions of years. Individual consciousness is only the flower and fruit of a season, sprung from the perennial root beneath the earth (Jung cited in *Divine Madness: Archetypes of Romantic Love* by John Ryan Haule, Chapter Four, Viewed 7 April 2019. < <http://www.jrhaule.net/divine.html>>.

exchange⁷⁸ and can also be creative and imaginative and therefore this understanding is pertinent to this study.

Building stability and creating flexibility had to be evolved in partnership, in a kind of balance within the group. This tension is played out in every community, and associative Axis Mundi events that brought the group into certain harmonies aided this process. Carter comments about the joy found in common bonding. ‘Joy comes from surmounting the barrier between us by sharing our feelings and comforts ... there is more to this communion than mere talking—there is trust’ (2003, pp.240–241). Axis Mundi events were critical in facilitating tight cooperative social units that could, on the one hand, formalise their solidarity and, on the other, create such strong cultural unity that change could be achieved without complete social breakdown.

It was vital then for *Homo sapiens sapiens* to form a tight social unit, and one of the ways that this was achieved was through commonalities of identification and cultural cohesion. Vital aspects of life were focused to form firm associative groups where each member felt ‘part’ of a whole; this was the basis of what we commonly call ‘community’. It seems reasonable to assume then that associational communities were (and are) vitally important to human survival. I will now trace how gatherings have aided processes of association within a group and helped to form tighter associations of all kinds.

I will start with Kelby and then track how groups form associative Axis Mundi structures in contemporary society.

Associative functions in civic and community gatherings in Kelby

Kelby’s people hold gatherings to facilitate various social functions that focus the people into a strong associative community. They have developed into a solid

⁷⁸ ‘Group living could have set the stage for the evolution of humanlike intelligence in two ways. With a group already in place, the value of having better information is multiplied, because information is the one commodity that can be given away and kept at the same time. Therefore a smarter animal living in a group enjoys a double advantage: the benefit of the knowledge and the benefit of whatever it can get in trade for the knowledge’ (Pinker 1997, p.192).

group, mainly made up of family groupings, whose members share a common culture and language. They have strong, established fealties and agreed law and punishment systems, traditions and understood histories. These are all tied into an overarching associative cosmology accepted by all. All communities seem to need common associations, as Geertz (1973, p.131) points out:

The need for such a metaphysical grounding for values seems to vary quite widely in intensity from culture to culture and from individual to individual, but the tendency to desire some sort of factual basis for one's commitments seems practically universal; mere conventionalism satisfies few people in any culture.

I am going to divide these associative gatherings into two types—the civic Axis Mundi and community Axis Mundi. Both are vital in their social function but separate in aim and different in design. Civic celebrations have strong top-down functions where the authority of the group is demonstrated and ‘theatricalised’⁷⁹ in social performances holding alignment processes that contain a certain official authority. These Axis Mundi designs must have strong upward thrust towards a common meaning (the sacred end of the axis) that aligns the group with a higher energy—the authority of the gods in this case—and must resist the lower downward thrust towards carnival and sensual fun. Community celebrations, on the other hand, have a bottom-up dynamic concerned with affirmation through conviviality and a release from the tight hold of the civic. Their Axis Mundi has a strong downward movement (towards the carnival end of the axis) allowing deep human urges to emerge where informality and enjoyment can have free rein. As might be imagined, these two associative structures can sometimes form a difficult social tension that I shall comment on later in this chapter.

Civic events

Civic gatherings encompass many social functions that produce elements of strong association. They strengthen the feeling of strong leadership that gives the

⁷⁹ ‘Employing a useful term introduced by Singer, we may call these full-blown ceremonies “cultural performances” ’ (Geertz, 1973, p. 113).

group a sense of stability and protection. They bring into symbolic realisation the structures of the law; they process a number of group matters, from rubbish disposal to making war; they realise historical continuance that enforces feelings of confidence and are in charge of future planning. They organise and demonstrate through all their activities a strong feeling of authority.

These civic gatherings enforce stabilising structures and encompass another important function; to steer the group through unstable times without collapse. Civic gatherings must provide a formal apparatus for change when certain important group elements need adjusting by being able to establish a stable sense of unity within the group and thereby avoiding destabilisation and breakdown. It is at these times that groups need existing Axis Mundi models which stabilise the challenges of radical change.

In Kelby the leadership consists of a male or sometimes female leader assisted by a group of elders chosen from within the group.⁸⁰ The leadership is determined by a primogeniture system that brings stability because inheritance is a predictable, stable line of continuance. The law and its jural adjuncts, the group's history, tribal decisions, defence, trade and a myriad of civic functions are organised from this power base. However, the group is not large and the leadership is integrated into the community. This system is realised in Axis Mundi gatherings using strong ritual to continually reinforce the system of law and leadership and this, in turn, signals stability and strength and activates deep associative dynamics. These civic gatherings are designed to provide theatricalised models into which individuals can tune their own internal sense of inclusion.

Civic associative events have developed slowly through time and been incorporated into tribal tradition, but why would certain experiences strengthen civic cohesion? I will use a particular example, in which the leader gives thanks to the ancestors (the 'Touching the Hand' ceremony) to answer this question.

The ritual happens at the same time every year, which enforces stability—

⁸⁰ There are many ways in which our ancient ancestors organised their leadership—elders, councils, priesthoods, ethnic alignments, and even forms of democracy where the most popular was 'voted' in by consensus.

people feel they have *always* had this event at this time; it is unthinkable not to have it; and it is part of their identity. (Civic cohesion relies on this factor by institutionalising the event, making it part of the social framework). Placing any event in spring aligns it with the joyful, hopeful time of nature's rebirth, thus allowing these potent community feelings to be utilised and then synthesised into the system's display of authority. The upward vertical energy of the Axis Mundi (a stretch towards meaning) uses symbolic concentration and group ritual to align the civic to the sacred. The top of the hill is chosen for this particular event. The hill is symbolic of the vertical energy, the closeness to the heavens, the mystery of the sun, and the giver of life, it is as far as the upward energy of the Axis Mundi can stretch. The leaders of the group are buried in barrows there. It is a place 'set apart'; it is a sacred area full of dread and mystery, and it is empowered with atmosphere. The community comes together in a place of psychic intensity, and this always provokes feelings of strong association as the group huddles closer together.

The leader is carried in procession up the hill at night, seated in a palanquin. The palanquin immediately establishes him/her, as the head of the civic administration, to be 'above' the group, and by being carried the leader is seen to be the most important of persons. Barbara Ehrenreich (2006, p.14) comments: 'What people found in the crowd, Freud opined, was a chance to submit to a leader playing the Oedipal role of "primal father"'.

The council of elders gather as much symbolic concentration around the leader and themselves as possible, intensifying and layering the semiology. They carry branches from the 'sacred' tree.⁸¹ A wicker basket containing significant objects from the past (this represents an approval from the ancestors) is carried by the leader. He/she also carries a special spear and shield, symbolising physical prowess. These sacred objects are controlled by the council, who are the only ones to touch these precious things. The people wear special costumes that vary, depending on status and age; there are also markings on the faces made with vegetable dyes that have particular meanings and which are understood by all. A man walks ahead

⁸¹ Sacred objects often transcend being mere symbols and can be seen as real objects of magic carrying great power. Many of these functions can be seen in Western society, at Lourdes for example.

wearing the mask of a horse that is seen to be the symbol of the leader.⁸²

The people have constructed an intense liminal zone that takes them from the 'ordinary' to the 'special', by making their way up a hill at night carrying only fire torches. The leader is eventually placed into the sacred area where the dead leaders are buried at the apex of the hill where no one else can enter. Drums are used to align emotions and, in this case, there is no 'wild' music, with its suggestions of individual action, but, rather, the slow heart-like drumbeats that synchronise with the solemn and the formal. The formal must be activated here; in the civic there is no space for casual and unpredictable behaviour; the individual cannot become aberrant. The civic must allow the feeling of fear, stimulated by the proximity of the dead, to become all pervasive and cause panic and withdrawal—control is the message the medium signals. All ritual mechanics are utilised to deliver a ritual that has power, control and authority but no hint of spontaneous action. Geertz (1973, p.112) expands:

It is, again, the imbuing of a certain specific complex of symbols—of the metaphysic they formulate and the style of life they recommend—with a persuasive authority which, from an analytic point of view, is the essence of religious action.

For it is in ritual—that is, consecrated behaviour—that this conviction that religious conceptions are veridical and that religious directives are sound is somehow generated. It is in some sort of ceremonial form ... that the moods and motivations which sacred symbols induce in men and the general conceptions of the order of existence which they formulate for men meet and reinforce one another. In a ritual, the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world, producing thus that idiosyncratic transformation in one's sense of reality.

The leader goes into the barrow area alone, with the group waiting anxiously outside. Theatrical tension is heightened by wilder drumming. He emerges and, in a slow ritual, touches the hands of the whole community who line up to be touched.

⁸² The horse in this area is still hunted as food; the animal's weak back does not allow riding.

The ancestors have now passed on to the living their blessings, and the leader, who is now imbued with the authority of the ancients, is all powerful. The group goes back to the village in a wildly uplifted mood, empowered by the ritual, with drums being played in syncopated rhythms that encourage dancing. The civic authority (the leader and council) has been enforced, and the group has been through an Axis Mundi event that promotes community binding and deep association—even with the dead.

Another way in which the civic authorities reinforce their hegemony in Kelby is with human or animal sacrifice. These events relieve reciprocal violence within a group and bring about a stronger more harmonious association. They instigate a formal (safe) killing that is approved by the group, which relieves group tensions that might otherwise build up and explode in violence.⁸³ The only people that can authorise this legal killing are civic authorities. Sacrifice has been used by groups around the world and Girard (1977, p.8) puts forward arguments why this is:

The victim is not a substitute for some particularly endangered individual, nor is it offered up to some individual of particularly bloodthirsty temperament. Rather, it is a substitute for all the members of the community, offered up by the members themselves. The sacrifice serves to protect the entire community from its own violence.

In Kelby, the local cultural manifestation of the group's need to sacrifice 'the victim' is realised in the sacrifice of a bull to the ancestors at the beginning of spring. The animal is paraded along the standing stone walkway and killed ceremonially inside the stone circle. During the procession the mood of the people becomes more and more tense, but after the dramatic killing, the blood-letting, they feel relieved and joyful. The group has come together in a state of tension and finished in a strong state of association: the meal of beef afterwards also produces affiliations.

The whole civic structure of Kelby is inherited and rarely questioned. Axis Mundi events reflect a need to bring into theatricalised being the inner system of

⁸³ Examples of reciprocal group violence can be found throughout history—see Bali 1962, Easter Islands in the 1860s.

administration. The leader, the elders, the magic holders are all working in their roles as group facilitators to bring about synthesis (Goodman,1989). The individual accepts this situation with little question and is 'tuned' seamlessly into the system.

Community events

Community events in Kelby have a differently shaped series of Axis Mundi events. In autumn, when the summer harvest is over, several domestic animals are killed for a feast before the onset of winter. The people cook the meat, brew an alcoholic drink and have a party in the village circle. The upper vertical of the Axis Mundi is diminished and the lower vertical extended. As the night goes on the people get wilder and sing and dance to ever more energetic music. People shout and throw their arms around one another, they smile and laugh and tell each other how good life is in their village. Lively and insistent music determines the emotional tone. These gatherings might look to the modern eye like wild parties, but there is a strong structure within. Ehrenreich (2006, p.17) describes these events in the following way:

[E]vents witnessed by Europeans in 'primitive' societies...were not spontaneous outbreaks of 'hysteria,'...nor were they occasions for the suspension of all inhibitions and a general 'letting go.' The behavior that seemed so 'savage' and wild to Western observers was in fact deliberately planned, organized, and at all times subject to cultural rules and expectations.

Although this autumn festival is the biggest community gathering, others, similar in shape, are held throughout the year. At these gatherings the people use food and drink, and singing and dancing to bring about an informal bonding and cultural alignment that affirm *communitas*—sensual pleasures are utilised. Somatic energies abound and formalities are put aside. This Axis Mundi configuration is alive with energy and is produced from the human need to reach 'oceanic' states of consciousness in which a breakdown in tight matrix assemblages within the mind allows transcendent experiences to occur. This process produces senses of euphoria and liberation: normal worries are put aside and a certain buoyancy and confidence is manifested in the group. People feel, for example, togetherness, a unity of association, and a strength and confidence in their culture. They are having fun

together.

Community events also have strong feedback loops, and where civic structures could be seen as fairly inflexible, community gatherings are much more fluid. The community is allowed to be creative and spontaneous. As long as it does not contravene civic and religious beliefs it has certain latitude to express what it feels. People can play out their feelings within traditional boundaries: they can make up their own songs and stories, children are included and incorporated, and ruptures, catalysts and pollinations can occur.

Community events aid all sorts of other social activities. In rites of passage, for example, after the 'formal' sections are over, community gatherings act as a decompression chamber, allowing new social alignments to be recognised. The newly initiated young women, for example, are allowed to dance with the older women for the first time, or after a marriage the two families dance together to cement the new ties. Most community events have as a sub-agenda, whether realised or not, that of increasing association.

Civic and community associational events in contemporary society

Civic and community gatherings have become complex, as societies have increased in population and sophistication over the past five thousand years, but even now Axis Mundi events often depend on making strong associative structures: the need for associative events stays very much in place in modern society. Civic leaders use gatherings to bring about social stability, relying on status demonstrations, reference to various cosmologies, and events that promote common cultural ties. Communities still hold more flexible, informal get-togethers that, although pleasure-based, promote community unity. Examples of these two branches will appear later in the chapter.

Civic Axis Mundi events have consistently aligned with the sacred to capture a certain authority and create public stability. But, at the same time, communities have wanted to explore the lower end of the Axis Mundi vertical to create centres of earthly pleasures that form associative bonds through the personal, the sensual and even the forbidden. They have wanted to hold gatherings that, symbolically at least, throw off the constraints of structured rule, as realised in Dionysian gatherings in

ancient Greece, the 'Saturnalia'⁸⁴ in ancient Rome and the 'Festival of Fools' in medieval times⁸⁵ in Europe. Civic authorities allowed carnival gathering to happen and, at all times, tried to impose forms that would not run out of control and create situations of aggression and civil unrest. By allowing social pressures to be released in controlled situations community events resembled social 'pressure cookers', where, judiciously, steam could be let off. For example, take the relationship of London's local authority and the Bartholomew Fair in Smithfield, London, during the 17th century. Ackroyd (2000, p.147) describes this:



Plate 31 Bartholomew Fair

Source: Spartacus Educational web site. Viewed 27 January 2009.
<<http://www.spartacus.schoolnet.co.uk/LONfair.htm>>.

Painting by Rudolf Ackerman 1808.

Smithfield itself began as a simple trading area, for cloth in one place and cattle in another, but its history has always been one of turbulence and spectacle. Great jousts and tournaments were held there in the 14th century; it was the ritual place for duels and ordeal by battle; it was the home of the gallows and the stake. That festive nature was also evident in less forbidding ways. Football matches and wrestling contests were commonly staged and

⁸⁴ Held over a week starting on 17 December and dedicated to Saturn.

⁸⁵ These festivals also were held in December.

the appropriately named Cock Lane, just beyond the open ground, was the haunt of prostitutes. Miracle plays were also part of the entertainment.

The trading market for cloth had become outmoded by the middle of the 16th century but 'the privileges of the fair' were still retained by the city corporation. So, instead of a three-day market, it was transformed into a fourteen-day festival which resounds through the plays and novels of succeeding centuries with the cry of 'What do you lack? What is it you buy?' From the beginning of its fame there were puppet shows and street performers, human freaks and games of dice and thimble, canvas tents for dancing or for drinking, eating-houses.

The fair was eventually closed in 1855 because of its unruly nature and rowdy community activities were not accepted by Victorian society. Although example after example of gatherings to this present day demonstrate the balance between community and civic expression and what will be allowed by whom: these situations can be complex. Designers have to be cognisant of these complexities and thus establish associative events in ways mindful of the delicate dance between liberation and control, between different processes of territorialising and de-territorialising, different speeds and different levels of engagement. Geertz (1973, p.80) suggests:

Thus, as 'man is the most emotional as well as the most rational animal,' a very careful cultural control of frightening, enraging, suggestive, etc., stimuli-through taboos, homogenization of behaviour, rapid 'rationalization' of strange stimuli in terms of familiar concepts, and so on—is necessary to prevent continual affective instability, a constant oscillation between the extremes of passion.

Thus designers tread a fine line between civic control and civic disruption, and the tension between civic and community agendas plays itself out in Axis Mundi events, large and small. Those in power in the civic realm fear the wilder influences of the community when liberated from their authority. So they try at all times to create stabile civic events that demonstrate strict inner rectitude, but these celebrations can fall very flat, exhibit hardly any lift and can be boring. They need the energy and involvement of the community to create the vital momentum to create

sustained momentum. A number of examples now follow.

Civic Axis Mundi gatherings

Westminster Abbey and coronations

As I have said previously one of the ways that civic leaders establish their authority is by aligning with the sacred, and in doing so they reinforce their ethical position. Westminster Abbey in London is an Axis Mundi space that clearly demonstrates this connection: 'Religious symbols formulate a basic congruence between a civic power structure and a specific metaphysic, each being sustained and reinforced by the borrowed authority of the other' (Geertz 1973, p.90). Indeed, the Axis Mundi dynamics demonstrated by the architecture of Westminster—the huge space, the choral capacity, the symbolic concentrations, the ritual alignments—have all been utilised, by the Church and by civic forces represented in royalty and the English establishment, to form strong associative structures.

The following extract is from the Abbey's official website:

An architectural masterpiece of the 13th to 16th centuries, Westminster Abbey also presents a unique pageant of British history—the shrine of St Edward the Confessor, the tombs of kings and queens, and countless memorials to the famous and the great. It has been the setting for every Coronation since 1066 and for numerous other royal occasions. Today it is still a church dedicated to regular worship and to the celebration of great events in the life of the nation. Neither a cathedral nor a parish church, Westminster Abbey is a 'Royal Peculiar' under the jurisdiction of a Dean and Chapter, subject only to the Sovereign (Westminster Abbey Home Web Site, viewed on 12 December 2008, <<http://www.westminster-abbey.org/history-research/a-brief-history/>>).

At the present time the Queen is the head of the Church of England and forms an inseparable bond between Church and State. All Axis Mundi events held in the Abbey enforce the idea of the British State and, by extension, the idea that the British State is 'blessed by God'. The Church, on the other hand, has benefited from this

sympiotic relationship because its identity is continually tied into the power structures that rule the nation. It celebrates, for example, outstanding British heroes in statues and memorials, thereby placing them firmly into the sacred; it is a 'tour de force' of British associative civic structure, with strong Axis Mundi upward energy.

Westminster Abbey is an interesting Axis Mundi site. Church services (gatherings in their own right) are held each day, but it is in its role as one of the State's major outlets of civic expression that it attracts real international attention, especially at the coronations and funerals of royal figures. Recorded on television around the world,⁸⁶ these civic events are firmly placed within a regal expression of power and prestige. These major Axis Mundi events use ritual and formal interaction, with spectacular parades through the city, elaborate costumes, high quality euphonious music (even pop music, for example Elton John's song during Princess Diana's funeral) and demonstrations of authority by the Queen, attended by prime ministers and heads of state from all over the world.

One example of these events is a coronation, which starts with a large-scale parade, which acts as a liminal zone between the informal and the formal. It features a full military guard, a gold coach pulled by white horses accompanied by marching bands, and the heir to the throne surrounded by traditional signs of power and wealth. The parade provides intense associative signals for people (the subjects) who line the streets cheering and clapping—they feel they are one nation and this is their resplendent leader, it has a deeper resonance than a mere entertainment.

The heir arrives at Westminster Abbey, where world leaders have gathered, triumphant music is played by Britain's best musicians, and the clergy and guests are magnificent in formal regalia. The civic Axis Mundi moves in a strong and unifying upward direction—no demonstrations of heterodoxy permitted. But the people are not excluded; full associative communication is operating through television. There are icons that provide intense symbolic concentrations referring to the glories of the British past—for example, the crown containing the Kohinoor diamond signals wealth, the sword demonstrates authority, the sceptre (with a cross) symbolises

⁸⁶ Princess Diana's funeral attracted 33.5 million viewers in the US alone. Statistics from <www.thestar.com/news/world/article/663231>.

power and justice blessed by God, the rod (with a dove) represents peace and mercy, and are all used to represent authority. The dramatic potential of cathedral dynamics is demonstrated via the use of choirs, processions, organ music and rich church ritual. This ritual is officiated by the Archbishop of Canterbury: the church and the state act in perfect accord using history, the myth of the strong leader and transcendent dynamics to produce a celebration of intense emotional focus that stirs associative feeling among members of the national group.

The monarch, as the major participant, has been taken through intense ritual functions of transformation that allow the person to readjust and realign themselves to the new position. The individual goes into the church a prince or princess and comes out a monarch. It is no small matter for a single human being, however well trained, to take on this mantle. The Axis Mundi event helps to establish the transformational change in the individual as well as the change within the broader civic structure.

ANZAC Memorial event

Another way in which civic authorities maximise power and prestige is to create around an event or situation that has great significance for the community, a gathering of potent Axis Mundi energies. Important victories, notions of national success, historically defining moments and community members' successes can be used to reinforce civic authority. The ritual that surrounds the remembrance of those who have 'fallen' in defence of the realm is one example; and the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) Memorial Event is one such event through which to examine the issues of most note for those who design gatherings, (See Kitley 1997).

This event reveals intense associative forces at work. When men and women die to protect the group, they sublimate their individual urge to survive in favour of their community; thus they become powerful symbols of association. The community recognises this and constructs celebrations to acknowledge their 'supreme' sacrifice and, in doing so, it intensifies its own internal associative bonds.

The ANZAC Memorial event was started in order to commemorate the Battle of Gallipoli, which was fought against the Turks in 1915 (28,150 Australians were

killed or wounded); however, it now memorialises the men and women lost in all subsequent conflicts as well. Ceremonies are held all over the country, and servicemen and women or their descendants march in regiments along a ritual route, and members of the community line up to acknowledge them as they pass by. The event climaxes in a constructed ceremonial space, usually with steps leading up to a plinth and cenotaph, (Latin for empty tomb). By way of an example my focus is on an ANZAC event held in 2001 in Canberra, Australia's national capital. By examining its design it will illustrate the methods used by civic authorities to bring about particular associative feelings within an Axis Mundi event.



Plate 32: ANZAC Parade

Source: Department of Veteran Affairs. Viewed 4 July 2009.
<http://www.dva.gov.au/images/oawg/war_cemeteries/258.jpg> .

Photographer unknown

Plate 32 shows a large-scale ritual topography behind the marchers that produces alignments built into the city landscape for this usage; the ANZAC Parade was built in 1965 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the Battle of Gallipoli. The line of the procession follows a route of great intensity especially designed to evoke feelings of association and match them to an external landscape of deliberate design. The alignment of the landscape is very accurate—the cenotaph with its sacred flame, the parade route itself, and the ‘line’ going through the exact centre of

the old Government and new Government buildings and continuing to the tip of the giant flagstaff flying the Australian flag—are all measured to the metre. I have worked with this alignment by presenting a community ritual on this harmonising line (Canberra Festival, 1995–1998): the stage set and coordinated movement was ‘exactly’ aligned with the ritual landscape and took advantage of the city’s ritual geography to achieve a feeling of balance, symmetry and order.

The participants, include a declining number of veterans (sometimes with carers, often members of the family), parade together through the streets to the memorial area for a formal ritual gathering. Walking together (a relaxed march) has a particular dynamic in a parade that brings the people into the same rhythm that produces a levelling, touching intimacy. It might be noted that the older veterans get driven along with jeeps but there are no signs of tanks, missiles or other overt objects of violence. The veterans, marching in time, are bedecked with intensifying symbolism such as uniforms, medals,⁸⁷ flags, poppies in their button holes,⁸⁸ banners and other military insignia. The form discourages any deviation from the planned ritual. It is sacred, immutable and serious: music played by military bands concentrates these feelings, the groups march with a respectfully sombre air. They are living reminders of the death of their comrades. They are evoking the translocational gathering dynamics found in parades by walking past an audience displaying their cultural placement. The audience lines the streets, sometimes visibly moved, as the emotional energy produced is very powerful: members of the community who fought for the community bring about intense feelings of association. The watchers are moved from the ‘normal’ into the ‘special’ through the communication of a concept. The whole event is constructed to produce intense and specialist areas of realisation—that people fought and died to protect the group, which is closely associated with the governing civic authorities. The event is so important that it has been made into a national holiday, with news and television

⁸⁷ Each symbolic signifier is intense in its multiple histories. The medal has derived from charms worn around the necks by pre-historic peoples with inscribed icons and has continued through the ages as a symbol of State recognition. Sometimes it has the royal head on it signalling royal approval.

⁸⁸ Poppies were first used to symbolise the battles of the First World War as these flowers grew on the battle fields. But also carries renewal symbology.

reports helping to stimulate a national awareness, a conglomerate effect. The public event connects with the individual as Geertz states: 'The human nervous system relies, inescapably, on the accessibility of public symbolic structures to build up its own autonomous, ongoing pattern of activity' (1973, p.90).

The veterans and participants gather in the sacred area at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The Head of State places the wreath (the symbol of new life) onto the plinth, and then there is a hymn and prayer,⁸⁹ an address, a recitation, a period of silence and the national anthem. Every action is designed to form intense emotional foci using ritual intensifiers. But it is the trumpet solo of the Last Post⁹⁰ that acts as the emotional apogee as Muecke (2004, p.107) describes this:

It is a trace of rhythmic energy, an almost perfect sine-wave emerging from a body and entering every sympathetic, permeable body in the listening host, which, in its life-movement, alternates inside and outside, self and Other, sound and the whisper of breath. The sound swells, other forces come together and intensify into something that might be called an event, perhaps a ritual. Its performance is designed to ensure cultural growth, or at least instil a structure of feeling. And as the final tone of the 'Last Post' fades on the breeze, there is hardly a dry eye at the Shrine of Remembrance.

Sometimes civic authorities will design their own Axis Mundi events and they sometimes colonise and inhabit Axis Mundi events held by the community. In various commissions I have taken on as a designer of civic events, many of the dynamics I have described above come into play. These events, when lacking sincerity, are hard to organise. The community, whose members are supposed to engender the energy for the event, (what I refer to as the horizontal spin in the Axis Mundi) sometimes have little enthusiasm to celebrate the civic. In cases like this, authorities often fall back on the 'quick hit' solution (found in many spectacles) for

⁸⁹ This event is deeply aligned with the sacred. 'The force of a religion in supporting social values rests, then, on the ability of its symbols to formulate a world in which those values, as well as the forces opposing their realization, are fundamental ingredients. It represents the power of the human imagination to construct an image of reality in which, to quote Max Weber, "events are not just there and happen, but they have a meaning and happen because of that meaning"' (Geertz 1973, p.131).

⁹⁰ The Last Post is the traditional trumpet solo in the British Army that marks the end of the day.

its impact, namely fireworks, celebrity appearances, famous rock bands and the like. On the other hand, when a civic authority has a real desire to stimulate genuine community feelings, it can create very moving events (the ceremony in Australia to mark the deaths caused by the Balinese bombers exemplifies this motivation).

I will now look at an example where the civic and community find themselves with different agendas.

Australia Day

This 'national day' holiday is one example of civic Axis Mundi events that now finds itself in contradiction. The associative dynamics inside Australia Day have many contradictions between the civic and community agenda because of the date chosen. It is a national holiday dedicated to an idea of nationhood, which should have all the aspects of association; but there are in-built inconsistencies. The national government wants to make these gatherings successful—it wants affirmation of the State, a sense of community support, a feeling of national unity and a positive feeling of identity. It desires a spontaneous rising of community energy to drive an Axis Mundi in full flight, reaching for the highest ideals and tapping the joy of the carnival at the same time. In practice, this aim is very difficult to achieve because there is a basic contradiction in the design that creates a dichotomy in the community that, in turn, suppresses wholehearted *communitas*. For affirmation processes to be fully realised, there must be a united community response, an energy which can coalesce around the axis.

Australia Day is on 26 January and celebrates the day a British colony was founded at Port Jackson (Sydney Cove) in 1788. This day then, for the Indigenous peoples, marks the first day of their suppression. So choosing this particular day enforces a colonial point of view on the notion of a united Australian nation. The Union Jack section of the Australian flag for example acts as a symbolic concentrator, but rather than bringing together associative energies that include all Australians, it clearly signals exclusion and colonialism. The government have tried to encourage a feeling of nationalism and civic pride but they find themselves in contradiction and, instead of forming into strong conglomerates, they form dichotomies, clashes and controversy. They can cause a certain amount of momentum in certain groups of

people, but in others it creates a widespread feeling of the 'inappropriate', especially amongst Indigenous Australians.⁹¹

This celebration might try to stretch to the higher level of the Axis Mundi but might very well be accused of hypocrisy. The celebratory day can encourage the 'party' dynamic at community level but, without a real sense of strong association, the community is likely to gain celebratory energy by the external induction of alcohol. The result is a rather confused general community who share BBQs and enjoy the summer sun, trying to link with some idea of nationhood, and with event designers unable to stimulate the energies that create real lift and spontaneous celebration.

Although there have been various attempts to bring the nation together on that day, with the prime minister addressing the nation, citizenship ceremonies celebrated around the country, firework displays and other events, the day chosen can never realise its community gathering dynamic completely. This situation is because it represents only a certain kind of Australian ethos. For any event to reach maximum momentum of the horizontal (the community energy that provides the spin) requires complete community inclusion. The only way to fully realise the Axis Mundi is a change of date, and this would bring about a healing of the rift and allow genuine community celebration for all the community.

In contrast, the strengths of genuine association in a community event can sometimes be readily observed by examining the design of a small rural fair.

Community Axis Mundi Gatherings

Bream Creek Show

The Bream Creek Show is typical of community gatherings held all over the world where identified communities, whose associative structures are well in place, gather with the desire to celebrate their collective strength. Bream Creek is a small town in Tasmania, Australia, with a hinterland population of several thousand. The

⁹¹ This controversy has caused various actions of protest to be taken by indigenous Australians and their supporters over the years.

people can, because of their strong community links, stimulate, concentrate and intensify the group's positive feelings about itself and welcomes many outsiders. The gathering emphasises the positive associative forces in and with the group and produces celebratory feelings among a much larger constituency.

In general terms two factors are important at community festivals. The first is that an associative celebration deeply reflects community structure: *communitas* cannot be achieved very easily in communities that are disparate and socially dispersed.⁹² However in Bream Creek deep community associations work at a number of different levels. The second is that the *motivation* behind a celebration can be critical in animating communal energy. In Bream Creek it is local people who have organised this annual event and the associative feeling generated is potent and extends over several months as they prepare for the gathering. The Bream Creek Show has various, typically 'country' activities, among them:

Rides, Ringside Entertainment, Draft Horses, Merry Go Round, Produce, Craft, Gyrocopters, Cooking, Photography and Art Displays, Wood Chopping, Parachute Jumping, Wool Displays and Competition, Food and Local Craft Demonstrations ... 'a small country show with a big heart' (The Bream Creek Show web site, viewed 12 August 2008.
<<http://www.breamcreekshow.com.au/attractions.html> >).

⁹² Suburban housing estates are notoriously difficult to stimulate horizontal celebratory energy.



Plate 33: Bream Creek Show

Source: Bream Creek Show web site. Viewed 4 March 2009.

< <http://www.breamcreekshow.com.au/attractions.html> > Photographer unknown



Plate 34: Bream Creek Show

Source: Bream Creek Show web site. Viewed 18 January 2009.

<<http://www.breamcreekshow.com.au/attractions.html>>

Photographer unknown

The festival successfully amplifies forms that lie deep in the community, which, in turn, activate strong and ancient associations: food, animals, plants, family relationships and community unity. Its slogan ‘a small country show with a big heart’ shows modesty and pride, and it signals a positive Othering policy with its symbolic ‘big heart’. There are competitions for the best cake or produce, largest pumpkin,

potatoes or carrots and a great deal of interest surrounds this. Animals are paraded with pride, everyone is interested, and champions are chosen.

These events have histories and narratives and tap into the ancient relationships of survival: finding food, physical prowess, relationships with animals and plants, genetic strength and community unity. Skills are displayed that come straight from the community's activities—wood chopping, horse riding, sheep dog trials—but they are theatricalised and celebrated. Much of the atmosphere is created by the meeting of family and friends who have known each other all their lives, and the festival creates a space to renew those relationships in an amplified situation of association. I can place this event in the middle section of the vertical Axis Mundi because it aspires to no heights of meaning and it rejects the underworld of wild sensual pleasures, but it does not lose its intense associative aspects. The sacred would formalise and freeze the general sense of fun and the carnival would reveal sensual hidden depths that the local people would not welcome—both would disrupt the associative process. The festival succeeds because it has a common cultural base whose affirmation structures are clear and healthy. They multiply associative meaning within the group because there is nothing to oppose the expression, but they also welcome the stranger into the festival and this creates a friendly open feeling. These warm feelings about place produce strong and pleasant atmospheres, they turn 'place' into operational celebratory spaces where the community explore and design areas of associational cultural expression, as Bachelard (1958, p.xxxv) describes:

these investigations would deserve to be called topophilia. They seek to determine the human value of the sorts of space that may be grasped, that may be defended against adverse forces, the space we love. For diverse reasons, and with the differences entailed by poetic shadings, this is eulogized space.

The Bream Creek Show welcomes outsiders, but some associative gatherings can be the opposite. Close association can, by its very nature, become exclusive and enclosed. This can happen for a number of reasons: ethnic groups can close ranks because of discrimination; socially deprived populations can adopt siege mentalities, and the inhabitants of country areas can become hostile to strangers because of isolation. These communities often hold Axis Mundi events that bristle with hostility

when outsiders attend. In some cases designers can build structures that slowly open the event to people from outside of the community, and, after some years, there can perhaps be a free and healthy flow of external influences established. In working with these kinds of communities the designer has to be very careful not to open up the gathering situation too much and break down the inner structures of association, and sometimes it is even better not to include outsiders.

Royal Agricultural Shows

Community events can be taken over by commercial agencies whose aim is to use the strong associative structures to sell products. It is interesting to compare the Bream Creek Show with its city equivalent in the city of Hobart—the Royal Agricultural Show (similar institutions are found in all major Australian cities). These gatherings originated to celebrate the agricultural way of life and to form associative links between country and town.

The Axis Mundi energy came from a certain pride that the farmers exhibited, and these energies were communicated to urban dwellers that depended on the farmers for food. Any downward thrust towards carnival was provided by the side-shows that would appear at every gathering. The whole Axis Mundi was genial, life-giving and community-based and was energised by a relationship to the source of life—food. But the development of supermarkets and shopping cities tended to break down the relationships between urban populations and their country cousins. Consequently, urban Royal Agricultural Shows throughout Australia have become more and more populated with operators who have limited interest in the farming side of the show but only have commercial interests. The organisers have become concerned that there are now two communities running in parallel—the agricultural on one side and commercial operators who provide a certain sort of entertainment on the other.

The Royal Shows in major cities have lost much of their original associative dynamic: the ‘farm-yard animal factor’ still attracts some people but much of the atmosphere is now provided by the presence of mass popular culture. The show bags demonstrate this tension. Highly priced bags, often containing cheap items that tie into popular culture, are sold, and these items are unrelated to the agricultural

community. The agricultural community has been subsumed by the tacky and blatantly commercial operations of the rides and carnival whose objective is to create visceral thrills and fast food to a young audience. There is drinking at night that can cause trouble and alienate families. Royal Show organisers try to bring back strong community feelings to redeem the real objective of these gatherings; however, they find that popular culture is so strong that a resurrection of the land's relationship to people is difficult to achieve. The agricultural values have become stressed and fail to create the bonded community horizontal energy that makes truly associated celebration.

I have presented some of the aspects found in Axis Mundi events that increase and decrease associative factors. These factors must be understood by designers in order to activate certain feelings in the community. The associative factors that stimulated the people of Kelby and the people at Bream Creek are not different. To form energy in both civic and community Axis Mundi events the designer can rely on the susceptibility of the group to want to gather together to share a common link, a feeling of inclusion, and a concentrated exhibition of what is important to them. As I have noted, this energy can be hijacked by negative forces whose motives can be suspect, and the real worth of an Axis Mundi event can never be sustained through facsimile or pretence. I have found that analysing positive community associations and amplifying them in various ways, in concentrated and well defined spaces, can produce events of real worth and enrichment. This positive approach is especially important in a community that is in trouble through social ills, natural disasters or crises. Turning to the group's sense of community values, even in extreme circumstances, can result in gatherings that have a positive and cathartic impact.

I have only shown a tiny sample of examples here that describe associative Axis Mundi events. Association drives almost all events in one way or another and, once understood, can be a powerful understanding to use in Axis Mundi design.

2. Amelioration activities

Before discussing Ameliorative events I would like to examine what makes up dissociative energies. This will give a firm foundation when it comes to understanding ameliorative Axis Mundi gatherings.

The Other

The cultural build-up within any group is always realised by concepts of difference, as well as structures of association.

It is impossible for the brain to resist its own workings, and a vital part of our evolutionary cognitive architecture is that the brain is able to evoke feelings of allegiance and association. We cannot change this susceptibility or prevent this function from operating, although its cultural operation within a given society is particular to that group. But in circumscribing ourselves as a group, we cement links by association to determine what we *are*; however, we also employ feelings of dissociation to define what we *are not*. The ability to define identity by seeing what we are *not*, to develop abilities to build borders, create inner cultures noticeably different to outsiders and reject the idea that the Others are 'us', is common to all groups; in fact, it can be used as a definition of community—feelings of alterity are compulsive. I call this process of dissociation 'Othering'.

Othering manifests itself on many levels and in many ways—class, ethnic grouping, colour, culture, geographic position, age and gender all play a part: it is part of the mechanics of thinking. The dynamics of Othering are constantly changing our perception of identity, allegiance, inclusion and exclusion and therefore are very relevant to a study of gatherings. Open and closed attitudes operate within the Othering process and both influence the design of Axis Mundi events in a community. In *open* Othering the external is seen in a welcoming light, difference is seen as something to be learnt from and diversity is accepted as enriching. Some other groups, however, can activate opposite feelings and take up a *closed* Othering position, one of exclusion and rejection. Communities can be examined in this light and their Othering dynamics analysed and points of openness and closedness

determined. Furthermore, both types of Othering (open and closed) can have positive and negative effects.⁹³

Understanding how Othering dynamics work gives designers deep insights into the processes of certain gatherings, especially in the case of amelioration. The associative and dissociative feelings activated through gathering structures can be powerful and sometimes even overwhelm the structures that are meant to hold them: witness the football riots throughout the world. Yet, the mechanisms that provoke these emotions can reach the heights of transcendent cooperation, as can be seen in gatherings around the Berlin Wall in 1989 for example. The cognitive mechanics that activate Othering can achieve the full extent of human emotion, from extreme paranoia and fear (a rejection of the Other) to a sense of human cooperation and sharing (the acceptance of the Other).

Other is always there and can easily move into conflict situations because of different ideologies and beliefs. A group that hopes to thrive in the long term must create amelioration processes with outsiders that allow communications to flow between them and, where possible, keep the peace. These exchanges have to be organised efficiently, as breakdowns can result in violence.

Groups have to develop activities that would allow the Other to enter their cultural milieu, and withdraw with stable conditions in place. These assemblies are often highly ritualised because a break-down in cordiality can also lead to violence. Axis Mundi events are not only useful to this process, they are essential.

Ameliorative functions in events in Kelby

In the village of Kelby dissociative forces affect the group in many ways as it draws tight associative structures around itself: the Other is identified in the

⁹³ Let me demonstrate this with an extreme example—the German attitudes to Hitler in the Second World War. The German people were driven by the social situation to adopt an intense closed Othering attitude to anyone who was not of their culture: they had no time for the Other and even genocide was seen as palatable. This was a closed Othering attitude which was obviously negative. However, the British in opposing them were also forced to adopt a negative Othering process towards the Germans to be able to wage war on them because they believed that an open Othering should be a human right. We might say here that their closed Othering was a positive action, whereas the German closed action was a negative one.

neighbouring groups. In every stone-age village there is a problem of defence; borders and territories have to be protected. This means that skirmishes are common and physical threats are made to the outsiders who transgress the group's territory. However, every group has to allow certain amounts of social intercourse to take place with the outside: there is trading to be done, marriage arrangements to be made, and important exchanges of knowledge and information and treaties to be agreed upon. This means dealing with these neighbours, and Axis Mundi events are designed to ameliorate the ever-present dangers from the Other.

Kelby has two neighbours, and there have been permanent quarrels and skirmishes over borders as long as anyone can remember, therefore a social apparatus is needed for amelioration when the groups meet. There is a certain time of year when the three groups get together, when the fruit trees are in harvest, and this provides a surfeit of food for the gathering and there are plenty of animals to be hunted. All three groups realise that eating food in a friendly atmosphere at a time of plenty will alleviate aggression—the tension around food acquisition is dangerous to creating harmonies. The river supplies ready water. The area chosen for the gathering is well away from the village and is firmly separated from the sacred areas used by the people. The sacred is a very associative activity and can conflict with other people's beliefs; therefore it is avoided. In ameliorative situations, strong associative structures are kept at a low level. The event is held on the inner curve of a bend in the river in a semi-neutral zone. The people of Kelby prepare the space at the river by allocating three separate areas: one for each group (sequestered areas are equal in size and status): all three groups can be together but each has its own territory. The entrance to the bend is narrow, and all participants are asked to put weapons in a particular hollow tree for the duration as well as collect a small stone from the river edge and bring it with them as a pledge of peace.

The meeting situation is very formal. Actions are pre-planned and take a predictable form: each group understands the traditional actions. They are conciliatory and anodyne in nature, animus feelings are neutralised—any breach in this protocol would immediately bring about tensions and even violence. Positive ameliorative dynamics can quickly turn negative if the unexpected occurs. There is a circle in the middle of the space that is a neutral axis acting as an interchange point—

a space of operation, a no-man's-land—that symbolically produces dynamics of common association and brings about a breakdown of Othering. (Parades are not used because they immediately enforce particular cultural expression; instead people walk in small groups.)

The space becomes an area of unity, separateness is reduced and sameness amplified.⁹⁴ The formality and set procedures allow local enmities to be placed aside, temporarily frozen, to discourage quarrels. Gifts are exchanged and compliments are given in formal ways. After the official business is concluded there are times of informality and these are the most dangerous periods. Food can be shared indicating friendship and equanimity. Dancing and music can also be used to control and ameliorate these situations;⁹⁵ but the mead they drink can set off aggressive energies and must be controlled by strong leadership. When each group leaves they collect their weapons and dispose of the stones. The Other is again recognised, and different rules come into play; envoys will have to make new arrangements to meet again.

Ameliorative functions in events in contemporary society

Ameliorative Axis Mundi events have been used throughout history to bring together groups with strong dissociative agendas. They can be found in almost every culture, and the forms they take do not differ greatly from the events found in Kelby. One famous example in Tudor times demonstrates how these situations work. In 1520, in an attempt to form an alliance with Francis I, king of France, Henry VIII, king of England, travelled to an area just outside Calais to have a meeting. Both kings took their courts, numbering thousands of people, and set up in a field between two villages. Through the middle two weeks in June (summer is always a good psychological time for such events) there were sports, jousts, balls, masques, fireworks, great feasts and, most importantly, gatherings. The setting was resplendent

⁹⁴ If a particular group became dominant and the other became vassals then this change in status would immediately produce a change in form and provide another kind of ritual space that would reflect the increased status of one and the decreased status of another. The Axis Mundi design would then change to meet this new contingency.

⁹⁵ 'In fact, the seasonal rituals and festivities of larger groups—several hundred people from different bands or subgroups gathering at an astronomically determined time—probably also served a reproductive function, providing an opportunity to find a mate outside of one's close circle of kin. In this endeavor, talent at music and dance might well have been an asset' (Ehrenreich 2006, p. 27).

with pavilions made of gold cloth and gems, silken tents, a crystal pavilion and even a gilt fountain. It became known as the Field of the Cloth of Gold (it severely stressed the treasuries of both kingdoms). This get-together might seem to be very different from Kelby, but the structure of the ameliorative Axis Mundi events is not dissimilar. Both situations chose relatively neutral spaces away from the main seats of power, both planned activities which brought the people together rather than separated them, and both organised spaces not only where sovereignty could be established but also neutral meeting areas where there could be a joining. In other words, the events tried to minimise difference and emphasise community commonalities.



Plate 35: Field of the Cloth of Gold

Source: Cloth of Gold web site. Viewed 18 January 2009

<http://www.tudorplace.com.ar/Documents/field_of_the_cloth_of_gold.htm>.

Artist unknown

In contemporary times, ameliorative events are common and still operate in many loci and at many levels of complexity. To examine these events at work I have chosen the Opening of the Olympic Games in China in 2008 and the annual Holi Festival that takes place in India.

The Beijing Olympic Games Opening Ceremony

The Olympic Games Opening Ceremony displays very strong ameliorative features and is the biggest and most spectacular event of its kind on Earth. China hosted this event on 8 August 2008. Fifteen thousand performers staged the show, which was directed by film maker Zhang Yimou and choreographer Zhang Jigang.

Two hundred and four nations took part, with ten thousand five hundred athletes, eighty heads of state and ninety one thousand audience members.⁹⁶ The television audience numbered several hundred million.

There is a delicate balance between associative structures reflecting the aspirations of the host nation and the ameliorative aims of the international community. The home country is always allowed to reflect its own culture in certain sections, but this can be a sensitive process that can become controversial very easily⁹⁷ (as all ameliorative events can). In China's case, there was the political problem of Tibet and a negative civil rights record that had to be ameliorated. No host country can portray itself as racist, mono-religious, politically exclusive or be seen to represent elements that reject the international ethical standards to which the Olympic movement subscribes. Sydney, eight years before, had had to tread carefully in its representation of Aboriginal people for example.

Before discussing the actual ceremony there is a lead-up event that deserves some attention—the torch relay. This event demonstrates that the ameliorative factor in certain events can be difficult to bring off successfully. In Australia, in the year 2000, the torch relay had brought hundreds of thousands people out to watch the flame as it made its way around the country. This small torch, a simple symbol of world unity, stimulated powerful transcendent feelings and brought about strong emotions.⁹⁸ The Chinese, on the other hand, decided to take the flame around the world.⁹⁹ They wanted to signal their ameliorative aims on an international stage. But the event was placed into a situation that proved too much for this simple symbol to

⁹⁶ Statistics from AC Associated Content (Sports) web site, viewed 5 February 2009. <http://www.associatedcontent.com/article/945617/2008_olympics_interesting_statistics.html>

⁹⁷ The Black Panther salute incident in the 1968 Games for example.

⁹⁸ The flame could be seen to represent the human spirit, a symbol of life and hope. The gesture of handing it on constantly to many kinds of people produced a simple but powerful translocational ritual. It is a good example of a powerful Axis Mundi structure being invoked by a simple gesture. For many Australians, this straightforward relay represented their links, as a culture, with the whole world, a coming of age, a feeling of universality. Bachelard says that 'the imagination, by virtue of its freshness and its own peculiar activity, can make what is familiar into what is strange. With a single poetic detail, the imagination confronts us with a new world. From then on, the detail takes precedence over the panorama, and a simple image, if it is new, will open up an entire world. If looked at through the thousand windows of fancy, the world is in a state of constant change' (1958, p.134).

⁹⁹ It was called the *Journey of Harmony* and took 130 days and covered 137,000 kilometres.

cope with. Protests were made in many countries over China's occupation of Tibet and, in a public relations disaster the flame was blown out in Paris by a dissenter. As an associative event in its home country it had worked well, but as an international Axis Mundi it failed to fulfil its ameliorative role.

The Opening Event, with its many powerful ameliorative factors well in position, was able to transcend the political trouble, at least on the surface. The stadium was placed into a whole ritual site that was enforced by fireworks as the ceremony progressed. The 'Bird's Nest'¹⁰⁰ Stadium itself created a useful metaphor that signalled the warmth and welcoming nature of the nest and evoked images of freedom of flight, the dove of peace. As noted by Bachelard, 'when we examine a nest, we place ourselves at the origin of confidence in the world, we receive a beginning of confidence, an urge toward cosmic confidence' (1958, p.103). Rather than a cold, solid, outside wall that signals exclusivity, the stadium exterior seemed to be transparent, encouraging the idea of permeability and ameliorative access. This process of inclusion was perpetuated inside the space with audience involvement. Audience excitement was vital to the atmosphere—the more the audience showed approval and association by cheering and clapping, the more the television audience felt part of the group. There were many techniques used by the designers to involve the audience: cheerleaders in the crowds, count downs, and red pieces of cloth waved (Chinese flags would have been too exclusive). The 'crowd brain' is fully engaged. Smail (2008, p.171) describes this in cognitive terms:

the category is largely composed of actions or behaviors that directly influence brain-body chemistry in others by altering the production or reuptake of neurotransmitters in their brains in ways that lie largely outside their voluntary control.

At the beginning of the ceremony the stadium (an amplified version of Kelby village green) was darkened and fireworks flashed around the edge creating tension, but the audience had coloured lights that flickered in the dark, producing an effect of the stars at night. Although the audience was in darkness, it was still included and

¹⁰⁰ It has further matrix connections in China with a specialist soup and even a popular soft drink.

involved. The design created *communitas*, and the audience was providing energy and light. On stage, hundreds of drummers, with light-filled drums and illuminated drumsticks, played in an impressive synchronised pattern, their beat establishing tight unity. The costumes were designed to emphasise mass cohesive associative movement.

After they had completed their section, the drummers' tight formality suddenly broke down and they waved and smiled to the audience across the world—ameliorative channels were wide open. This feeling was given more support by the lifting of the interlocking Olympic circles, representing the five continents, in the middle of the area surrounded by thousands of gentle lights with soft harmonising music—the designers hoped it signalled world unity placed into a peaceful setting.

The drums, fireworks and the five rings had set the Axis Mundi ameliorative process into maximum spin. A small girl (bringing about feelings of universal caring) sang a song of welcome (the song *Ode to the Motherland* had a Chinese flavour but international atmosphere—it was time to ameliorate not associate), as children, dressed in ethnic costumes ran freely across the space carrying the Chinese flag. (Strong ameliorative dynamics were used here to counterbalance the deeply associative act of the national flag display to follow.) This dynamic was quickly reversed when soldiers showing precise marching displays then took the flag—this signalled national security defended by marshal strength. Meanwhile, the flag was raised and the national anthem sung—the host country was in full associative form and was now allowed to demonstrate its own culture.

The next section celebrated only a certain part of Chinese culture: one that signalled delicacy, tradition, education, harmony and sensibility—Mao's Cultural Revolution was side-stepped for example. Although the event was now completely associative, it presented no exclusivity. It was very poetic and translated history into gentle artistic expression. The reality and the imagination merge, as Bachelard (1958, pp.xxxiv–xxxv) says

to touch more simply upon the problems of the poetic imagination, it is impossible to receive the psychic benefit of poetry unless these two functions of the human psyche—the function of the real and the function of the unreal—are made to co-operate.

To counterbalance this display of Chinese culture, the next section segued into symbols of internationalism. For example, the symbol of the bird of peace (reference to the bird's nest theme in the architectural design) morphed into symbols of whales and the natural world, as well as pictures of people from all over the world. The world audience was now fully engaged again in the ameliorative state. This was spectacularly realised by a very large world globe emerging from the ground, with two singers, of eastern and western origin, standing on top. The international symbol of amelioration, the Olympic flame, was lit with accompanying fireworks. The athletes then entered the stadium, and the formal ceremonial Opening began with speeches of welcome. The climactic song lyrics *You and me* signalled world unity and a successful engagement of the ameliorative.

From one world
heart to heart
we are one family
for dreams we travel
thousands of miles
we meet in Beijing
come together
the joy we share
you and me
from one world
forever we are one family

(Wikipedia web site, viewed 12 February, 2009).

The delicate dance between national association and international amelioration was carefully balanced in the design and, at least for a while, national politics were suspended. Political issues did not vanish, but the gathering had employed design mechanisms that created a neutral space where communications could flow freely between nations and amelioration achieved.

The Holi Festival in India

Whereas the Olympic Opening Ceremony was formal and civic, community feelings of amelioration can be expressed in a more relaxed way. An example is to be found at the Holi Festival in India. Although this event is now secular, it originates in

Hindu mythology with the loving relationship between the God Krishna and his female devotees. This gathering happens all over the country and involves people from every caste, religion and economic background.¹⁰¹ The evening before the festival there are Hindu ceremonies that encourage an associative spirit in the people: a fire is lit and offerings of wheat, small sweets and other food stuffs are put into the sacred flame.¹⁰²

The next day the associative structures of the previous day give way to a wider and more inclusive gathering—the associative gives way to the ameliorative. Everyone comes into the street and throws coloured dye at each other in the spirit of fun.



Plate 36: Holi Day on Majuli Island, India

Source: Photographer Neil Cameron

¹⁰¹ This mixing has been found through the ages. Bakhtin writes about the middle ages in Europe. 'On the contrary, all were considered equal during carnival. Here, in the town square, a special form of free and familiar contact reigned among people who were usually divided by the barriers of caste, property, profession, and age. The hierarchical background and the extreme corporative and caste divisions of the medieval social order were exceptionally strong. Therefore such free, familiar contacts were deeply felt and formed an essential element of the carnival spirit. People were, so to speak, reborn for new, purely human relations. These truly human relations were not only a fruit of imagination or abstract thought; they were experienced. The utopian ideal and the realistic merged in this carnival experience, unique of its kind. This temporary suspension, both ideal and real, of hierarchical rank created during carnival time a special type of communication impossible in everyday life. This led to the creation of special forms of marketplace speech and gesture, frank and free, permitting no distance between those who came in contact with each other and liberating from norms of etiquette and decency imposed at other times. A special carnivalesque, marketplace style of expression was formed' (Bakhtin 1984, p.10).

¹⁰² A pyre represents the quelling of evil represented in the bad spirit Holikaat by Krishna.



Plate 37: Holi Festival

Source: Vasudev 2007, p.56. Photographer Amit Mehra

The following is an excerpt from my Indian Study Journal (4 March, 2007—Majuli Island, Assam, India) when I attended Holi (see plate 36).

I am walking through the area and the people are shy about covering an outsider with paint. They give me a mark on my forehead and some paint on my face but it is only symbolic- they don't give me the full treatment. On the other hand, they are covered in paint from head to foot and even a dog is rainbow-coloured. They dance and shout and throw paint bombs—both wet paint stored in bicycle pumps or dry paint that makes a shower of colour in the air. One man tries to escape by wading into a small lake and is pursued by a group until he is covered in red paint. The atmosphere is very happy and there seems to be no aggression in event of anarchy. I also watch a film of Holi on television (source unknown) in one of the big cities (not identified) and thousands of people are involved in this mock battle. Some of the machines to spread the paint are fire hoses that throw paint dozens of metres in the air.

The coloured paint acts as a mask, reducing status, caste and identity to an ameliorative level. Uma Vasudev states that 'the intentions of this festival [is] to

damn you to anonymity. Perhaps that is the point' (2007, p.53). Holi is a spring festival and allows feeling of the pent-up winter months to explode and can be compared to the carnival events held in Europe. In Rajasthan the women have revenge on the male hegemony by attacking the males, surrounding them in circle dancing and hitting them playfully with broom handles called Jharoos (Vasudev 2007, pp.53–54). The festival plays with the male/female dynamic. This poem by Ustad Mushtaq Hussain Khan might sum up the spirit of the event:

Oh, see how he sprays my face
with coloured water
no, no how can I be game
for such play!
My breasts hang heavy,
drenched in hues
that shoot out from his
spray gun
and even cause my blouse
to rip apart
but happily do I concede defeat , my love
to this game of joyful colours
(Khan cited in Vasudev 2007, p.55).

This Indian carnival is very lighthearted and aims at a playful level. But this release of ebullient energy is very controlled and is dealing with dangerous feeling beneath the surface concerning religious and political dissention. Although special foods are eaten, no alcohol is drunk (Hindu and Islam systems frown on drinking), which probably saves the event from any violent behaviour. As a way of bringing together disparate groups in a day of ameliorative healing Holi Day is designed perfectly. It reaches a high degree of horizontal momentum because the community all join in and enjoy the playful energies. It maintains a delicate balance within the Axis Mundi model by gently reaching towards the sacred, but not so much that it imposes a rejection of other cosmologies, and down towards the carnival, but not so much that it becomes wild: it creates a joyful community concentrate without overemphasising the symbolic.

Summary

Associative and ameliorative Axis Mundi events are two of the ways in which communities have formed their identity, whether they are villagers in Kelby, the middle ages or contemporary peoples. These powerful forces will be found operating in all human gatherings. For any designer of an Axis Mundi event, a deep understanding of these forces that are at work in a particular community is essential. The associative energies can be utilised to bring about positive gatherings within the group and dissociative energies can be ameliorated.

Chapter 7: Axis Mundi gatherings and social imperatives 3 and 4: Genetics and Communications

Genetic imperatives in Axis Mundi gatherings

Genetic factors appear in many types of gatherings because the social concerns about consanguinity and fertility have always been vital aspects of survival and need ‘working through’ in the community: social mistakes in the handling of genetic inheritance would spell a quick death for any associative group. The importance of various aspects of genetics have waxed and waned depending on the local conditions but three important social factors emerge in the area of genetics that affect the study of gatherings. Firstly, it is of vital importance that the dangers of incest are made clear to the community and many gatherings are designed to warn people about these risks.¹⁰³ Axis Mundi events help set up systems that steer consanguinity in the right direction and also help process situations of intermarriage with other groups. Ehrenreich (2006, p.27) describes this phenomenon:

In fact, the seasonal rituals and festivities of larger groups—several hundred people from different bands or subgroups gathering at an astronomically determined time—probably also served a reproductive function, providing an opportunity to find a mate outside of one's close circle of kin.

Secondly Axis Mundi events continue to emphasise that genetic inheritance is of vital importance and should be given every chance of improvement. Gatherings directly and indirectly promote the idea, through mythology, story and traditional folk-lore, that the physically fit human should reproduce with other physically fit humans, not only bodily but in the mind. Miller (2000, p.10 and 21) suggests that:

Evolution found a way to act directly on the mental sophistication of this primate species, not through some unique combination of survival challenges,

¹⁰³ Some Australian Indigenous peoples have complex ‘skin’ structures (the word skin describes a set of laws governing who can have relations with whom) guaranteeing a strong genetic continuance. The Warlpiri people near Alice Springs have ‘skin’ practices that are very complex indeed, with many members of the small group being unable to talk to or even look at various members of families they have married into.

but through the species setting itself a strange new game of reproduction. They started selecting one another for their brains... we were neither created by an omniscient deity, nor did we evolve by blind, dumb natural selection. Rather, our evolution was shaped by beings intermediate in intelligence: our own ancestors, choosing their sexual partners as sensibly as they could ... We are the outcome of their million-year-long genetic engineering experiment, in which their sexual choices did the genetic screening

Thirdly, it has always been important to evolving groups to keep fertility levels high, both in human terms and in the flora and fauna that surrounded community groups. Early human groups were especially vulnerable to extinction if there was not a continual supply of children to supplement short life spans and so that they could find a fertile food supply at all times.

Axis Mundi gatherings have always been strong vehicles to convey these important aspects to the community and to control these forces within the group. I will examine these three basic elements of consanguinity (the taboos around incest), genetic improvement with the encouragement of healthy breeding and fertility in the context of gatherings and the issues surrounding fertility.

Genetic factors within Axis Mundi events in Kelby

In the community of Kelby, created here for heuristic purposes, there are Axis Mundi structures that discourage inbreeding in the group. Marriage is carefully controlled because the group understands that too close a marriage can result in genetic weakness. Consequently, who is permitted to marry whom is carefully recorded by the elders and handed down from generation to generation. Naming ceremonies for young children are accompanied by genealogical recitations to keep check on the dangers of consanguinity. In get-togethers a tight rein is held on young people's courting behaviour.

Fear of transgression in the matter of consanguinity is built into the belief system, with severe punishments for any that cross the invisible line. Tales are constantly told of the dire consequences of rash actions. Some ceremonies formalise the exposure of guilty couples who have strayed from rigid rules and some couples may be sent into exile. These concentrations of dire admonition stand as a powerful warning to anyone who transgresses and warn the whole village of the dangers of

inbreeding. Another law forbids the mating with animals and is punishable by death: stories and legends describe half creatures, half human monsters that threaten the stability of the community and are represented in various guises in gathering events.

People born physically and mentally disabled are dealt with in a range of cultural practices. In extreme cases they are killed at birth, in others they are isolated in outer areas, with controlled access to the group. In mild cases they are adopted by the group but often mistreated. In many cultures, the inbred 'monster' comes to represent a type of Other and is found in characters in fairy story, myth and legend as dwarfs, giants, hunchbacks, monsters and 'idiots' always pushed to the outer. (These figures are often 'played out' in theatrical events).

In counterbalance to such practices some Axis Mundi events celebrate genetic health. These are concerned with encouraging strong males and females to mate together and produce healthy, genetically strong offspring. This practice manifests itself in both male and female domains ranging from physical combat in men's gatherings to the exhibition of female 'beauty' in women's; the concept of human 'beauty' being fundamentally based on signals of health—regular symmetrical features, good skin, shiny hair, good muscle tone and a healthy physiology.

There is a light-hearted festival (*the festival of the flowers*) that has, as its base, a serious genetic message. A male and female are chosen as symbolic representatives of genetic health and the young people, both virgins, are deemed, by consensus, as the 'best looking' couple in the group. (The couple are deemed 'handsome' because they display features of genetic health – healthy well shaped bodies, good thick hair, etc). At a full moon¹⁰⁴, augmented with a large bonfire, the group gather in the village circle, tradition masses the group into an inward facing unit that creates central dynamics and feelings of equality – there are no separations, no one is higher or more emphasised than another, the villagers are creating a solid approving physical unit of solidarity. The atmosphere is light with plenty of drinking: it is an Axis Mundi that does not emphasise the sacred and is based more in a

¹⁰⁴ The moon provides a good light and the fact that it is night time creates atmospheres of mystery and intensifies the group's cohesion and feelings of solidarity. The fire produces feelings of safety from dangers that lurk in the dark, as well as light for the event.

carnival spirit. The massed community circle creates the perfect horizontal line and fertility and genetic forces power the uplift. Two processions come into the area from different parts of the woods: one of young men surrounding the chosen male and the other young females surrounding the chosen girl - all are covered with flowers, the symbol of fertility. Each is playing music - drums for the men and flutes for the women. By separating the sexes and forming musical counter-point rhythms within each group both male and female energy can be created. (The fact that they have emerged from the darkened wood creates a theatrical tension both in the participants and the waiting villagers): it creates a liminal zone of intensity. These two groups move around each other waving and shouting and after much toing and froing, the two groups merge and dance together symbolising a joining of these energies. The music too merges and becomes one. At a certain point the couple kneel facing each other with their arms out at the point that marks where the vertical and horizontal Axis Mundi meet and the community wrap the couple in hundreds of flowers. The male and female energies have been joined symbolically and the whole event moves into a dance and celebration for the whole community that lasts well into the night. Although this has been a cheerful event it has serious messages to convey and that is the importance of genetic health.

If results of inbreeding appear in the community's narrative as monsters, then so does the love story between the virile man and the fertile woman; it is a constant theme that appears time and time again as an ongoing manifestation to encourage genetic health.

One of the ways of offsetting the very real threat of inbreeding and one of the ways of improving genetic stock is to encourage interbreeding between tribes. This is an action filled with possibilities and risks as tribes are vulnerable from attack at times like these. I wrote about ameliorative processes that Axis Mundi events can facilitate in Chapter Six, and they are particularly useful when it comes to intermarriage. In Kelby, as in many Neolithic groups, marriage arrangements are discussed and agreed upon at annual assemblies at the river bend and certain times

are chosen for weddings¹⁰⁵. It has been the practice for brides to leave the village and join their betrothed's communities, rather than the other way around.¹⁰⁶ Thus young girls, who have only known Kelby's culture, must be taken from their homes and families and might have little contact with them again. The wedding structure has evolved to alleviate the pain of parting for the girl and her family. Rather than 'giving her away', the marriage ritual demanded that the girl be ceremonially 'stolen'; thus preserving the 'face' of the parents and the group. The bridegroom's friends make a tribal 'gang' who approach Kelby amid noise and threats, and, in a sudden rush, enter the bride's house and seize the young woman. The Kelby villagers stage a mock fight and weep and wail when the girl is 'taken'. The actual marriage happens in the groom's village later.

The role of the leader is structured into many celebratory events, and various aspects to leadership are theatricalised, formalised and secured but these links are also linked to genetics. Unlike many contemporary societies where the mythological role of leader is played out symbolically in Axis Mundi events, in Kelby, where there is a small gene pool and real day-by-day threats from neighbouring groups, the actual genetic strength of the leader has to be demonstrated. The community becomes very nervous when an inherited leader is not the best example of physical manhood or womanhood. This is worked out in a ceremony in the village called *the lifting of the stone*. There is a direct relationship between the leader's ability to act as a warrior and protector (the 'alpha male') and this is demonstrated in an Axis Mundi event. (In the case of a female leader, she is allowed to choose a champion who will act for her – usually a relation.) The leader or champion is processed through the ritual landscape that leads to the hill, this brings about a liminal situation that slowly turns the normal into the special. The elevated hill is chosen, rather than the village circle: this event needs a space that separates the leader from the group, the situation is no longer inclusive. It also reaches towards the sacred end of the Axis Mundi in its elevated position. It is held in daylight for this act is a public demonstration – it needs daylight and a lack of nocturnal tension. The leader, accompanied by priests

¹⁰⁵ These times are often arranged for the Spring and Summer – times of rebirth and fertility.

¹⁰⁶ For men to join the other group would have caused problems of male allegiance, whereas women could change tribes without the fear of a physical threat.

(who act as neutral judges) walk onto the top of the sacred hill, an area elevated from the group, the drumming is solemn and steady encouraging a 'formal' feeling. The leader or champion must face a physical challenge to 'prove' his strength and is asked to lift a large stone¹⁰⁷ and turn around three times. If successful the execution of this task is followed by a large-scale feast. When the leader (or the champion the female leader has chosen) cannot lift the stone owing to illness or old age, the leader is deposed and the next leader appointed.¹⁰⁸

Strong genetic and reproductive issues run through other gatherings in the village and are a predominant feature in much of the Axis Mundi activity. Naming ceremonies, for example, are important because they keep track of the progeny of the village. The naming of a baby signifies whose baby it is, who its mother and father were, and this is announced to the whole community. In Kelby, namings are held at the sacred tree and water from the spring is used to symbolically wash the child: the symbolism of this ritual space is rich in metaphor and they all point towards genetic inheritance factors.

Other factors reveal themselves in parts of the Kelby calendar with the issue of fertility: fertility is vitally important in all the flora and fauna around them and the strength of the group has to be kept up through the women being fertile. Although hunting and gathering are practised, the villagers also keep domestic animals and grow crops. Fertility directly affects the supply of food in a village like Kelby: famine is a real possibility and even in a good winter people can suffer from lack of food. Thus, the villagers take any opportunity to encourage fertility in the earth, the best example of this is the *blood ceremony* held in spring. The priest leads the whole group to the stone circle, one of the most sacred of ritual spaces and creates an intense atmosphere by the powerful act of sacrificing a bull and a cow and pouring their blood onto the earth hoping to appease the Gods.¹⁰⁹ (The resulting meat is used

¹⁰⁷ A theme played out in many situations—see the Arthurian story of the sword and the stone or *Henderson the Rain King* by Saul Bellow.

¹⁰⁸ For the discussion about the death of the leader see various anthropological texts that explore how a leader is deposed and sometimes even killed and a new leader is 'born' from the ritual. Frazer (1993) particularly explores this change-over and illuminates its sensitivities.

¹⁰⁹ This kind of blood ceremony has been a common practice in many communities. Sometimes the ceremony calls for the killing of the couple from the flower ceremony or, in times of great extremis,

to form the basis of a large scale feast). The Axis Mundi dynamics are able to produce an intense communication with their Gods within a concentrated ritual space, a catharsis in the group by the act of killing the bull and cementing community unity with the feast afterwards. The gathering has been able to form structures that allow a multi-layered symbolic operation to function that gives full vent to the tensions and fears that surround this life and death matter, bringing into being theatrical enactments of the real risks that threaten but also produce social mechanisms that imbue the problem with hope and optimism.

For every woman in the village, fertility is of deep concern: their own fertility and the birth of a healthy baby are imperative to the village's welfare. This constant pressure is expressed in another Axis Mundi event, which is a pilgrimage that all young women make in the community. It involves a hazardous journey over many days to reach the top of a particular hill and touching a flat stone at the top—an Axis Mundi event that acts as a talisman for the creation of new life. The arduous pilgrimage has transformative mechanisms; the special hill provides symbolic elevation towards the Gods; the talisman of the stone imbuing the journey with a final cathartic act. In addition to this formal journey, the women often gather in small groups to perform various rituals concerned with fertility, and these happen at the river spring area that readily acts as a symbol of birth. Here the tree becomes an Axis Mundi space with the sacred tree acting as a central point. Prayers are made and the women tie onto the tree grass models in human form, hoping the symbolic act will create the magic needed to conceive.

Thus, in Kelby, as in so many Neolithic groups, a great number of Axis Mundi events take place around these genetic and reproductive concerns. The villagers engage in a constant series of symbolic actions that balance the issues of inbreeding, genetic strength, leadership concerns, marriage, namings, fertility and sexual matters of all kinds, as well as courting, taboos about sexual activity and the mysteries of creation. The group has to deal with sexual energies that arise in many gatherings such as dances or celebrations after ceremonies and channel them in

the chief priest or even the leader (see Frazer 1993) is sacrificed. An example is the 'Wicker Man' ceremonies, practiced by the ancient Scots, where sacrifices were placed into a great human figure made of wicker and burnt.

directions that, at all times, promote the survival of the village.

Genetic imperatives found in Axis Mundi events in the middle ages

I have touched on many gatherings in Kirby that are influenced by genetic factors and it might seem that, in the western world at least, these factors have all but vanished. However many of these evolutionary matters remain firmly embedded in modern societies.

Sacred events within medieval and renaissance Christian Europe for example spelt out the dangers of inbreeding and promoted christenings and the sanctity of marriage as safeguards. They encouraged genetic health through images and stories of the sacred mother with the perfect child, or the idea of physical perfection, rooted in Greco-Roman revisionism, as witnessed by Michelangelo's David, for example. Symbolic Axis Mundi events that celebrated genetic strength can be most easily seen in various sports such as jousting. This type of celebratory gathering spanned the 12th to 17th centuries and demonstrates strong associative and sometimes ameliorative qualities, carrying powerful messages about genetic selection, especially when it is embedded in aristocratic structures of status and position. Although horses were of medium weight and lances made of light wood, jousting was a very dangerous activity; Henry II of France died as a result of this contest in 1559. The lords would meet for this and other sports that demonstrated their genetic health as leaders, and they were happy to carry the 'colours' of the high-born women who watched them compete. Feasts were held at night and status was displayed in full regalia. Bakhtin (1984, p.10) describes this:

Rank was especially evident during official feasts; everyone was expected to appear in the full regalia of his calling, rank, and merits and to take the place corresponding to his position. It was a consecration of inequality.

Few knights would consider marriage to the low-born, although they could claim their *droit de seigneur*, and these knightly rituals led to aristocratic intermarriage in the context of displays of genetic potency. The provenance of these gatherings was not necessarily understood at the time, but the tournaments and

accompanying feasts played out an almost perfect picture of cultural expressions of genetic energies mixed with status building. I have used jousting as an example because these events were a direct physical competition between kings and their men. The royal leader was expected to 'prove' his genetic vigour in the 'lists', watched by his subjects who looked for any weakness in the man they would follow into real battles (Plate 38). The 'gentle' women would find a 'proper' husband for the group to continue the line.

The Axis Mundi was created by knights, bedecked in the colours of their particular family that clearly marked their genetic inheritance, galloping towards each other with lances that could kill a man. The atmosphere of demonstrative genetic strength was not symbolic here but was acted out in reality. Women had chosen their champion by tying onto the lances their own colours that produced a symbolic language with complex layering. This event did not stretch towards the sacred nor descend into carnival but took its Axis Mundi energy on the horizontal plane by tapping into events of mortal danger which were fraught with tension and demonstrated in an immediate way how genetic advantage could win the 'fair' lady. This can be summed up in the image below of the fighting men and the women watching from above.



Plate 38: Jousting

Source: Wikipedia web site. Viewed 19 July 2009.

<http://searcht2.aol.co.uk/aol/search?query=Jousting+&restrict=wholeweb&invocationType=hf_talktalk_po_ws_unauth>.

Artist unknown

Carnival also dealt with themes of genetic inheritance but from another point of view. The Festival of Fools¹¹⁰ was held in many European countries, including France, Germany, Spain and England, from the 8th to the 14th centuries. It was a typical social or symbolic reversal festival¹¹¹ where the people had a carnival that mocked church and state authorities (usually held on the 1st January—the Feast of the Circumcision). Bakhtin (1984, p.10) describes it thus:

carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms, and prohibitions. Carnival was the true feast of time, the

¹¹⁰ Modern versions, be they more sedate, are held in various locales, including Belfast in May and Burlington, Vermont in August.

¹¹¹ 'Symbolic inversion may be broadly defined as any act of expressive behaviour which inverts, contradicts, abrogates, or in some fashion presents an alternative to commonly held cultural codes, values and norms be they linguistic, literary or artistic, religious, social and political' (Stallybrass & White 1986, p.17).

feast of becoming, change and renewal. It was hostile to all that was immortalized and completed.

The Festival of Fools circumvented many of the usual laws of normal life, and beggars, prostitutes, criminals and the impecunious all joined this indulgence—they were allowed social freedom for a short time.¹¹² But inside the structure of this festival there was a mockery of the genetically weak.¹¹³ The free form gave the genetically healthy a chance to pour their scorn on any form of disabled human stock and act out this rejection of the genetically weak. In Victor Hugo's description of this carnival in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* written in 1831 (the book plays with ideas surrounding genetic inheritance) tells us much about the feelings generated by these carnivals. The hunchback, Quasimodo is chosen as the King of Fools in the Festival:

all the beggars, all the lackeys, all the cut-purses, together with the scholars, had gone in procession to fetch from the wardrobe of the basoche the pasteboard tiara and the mock robe appropriated to the fools' pope. Quasimodo allowed himself to be arrayed in them, without a frown, and with a sort of proud docility. They then seated him upon a parti-coloured chair. Twelve officers of the brotherhood of fools, laying hold of the poles that were attached to it, hoisted him upon their shoulders; and a sort of bitter and disdainful joy seemed to spread itself over the sullen face of the Cyclops when he beheld under his deformed feet all those heads of good-looking and

¹¹² 'The material bodily lower stratum and the entire system of degradation, turnovers, and travesties presented this essential relation to time and to social and historical transformation. One of the indispensable elements of the folk festival was travesty, that is, the renewal of clothes and of the social image. Another essential element was a reversal of the hierarchic levels: the jester was proclaimed king, a clownish abbot, bishop, or archbishop was elected at the "feast of fools," and in the churches directly under the pope's jurisdiction a mock pontiff was even chosen. The members of this hierarchy of fools sang solemn mass. At many of these feasts kings and queens were elected for a day, as on Epiphany and on St. Valentine's day. The custom of electing such ephemeral kings and queens (rois pour rire) was especially widespread in France, where nearly every popular banquet was presided over by them. From the wearing of clothes turned inside out and trousers slipped over the head to the election of mock kings and popes the same topographical logic is put to work' (Bakhtin 1984, p.81).

¹¹³ 'We must stress the role of popular-festive giants. They were common figures in the shows produced at fairs, in which they still appear in our days together with midgets. The giant was also the protagonist of carnival parades and of the processions of Corpus Christi. At the end of the Middle Ages a number of cities that employed permanent "town jesters" also had permanent "town giants" and even "families of giants," paid by the city and obliged to take part in all the pageantries' (Bakhtin 1984, p.343).

well shaped men. Then the whole bawling and tattered procession set out, to make, according to custom, the internal circuit of the galleries of the Palais before parading through the streets (Hugo 1910, p.46).

He is quickly deposed and condemned to his mutant life in the bell tower of Notre Dame – itself a structure reflecting the Axis Mundi. Bakhtin (1984, p.197) describes these roles:

In such a system the king is the clown. He is elected by all the people and is mocked by all the people. He is abused and beaten when the time of his reign is over, just as the carnival dummy of winter or of the dying year is mocked, beaten, torn to pieces, burned, or drowned even in our time. They are 'gay monsters.' The clown was first disguised as a king, but once his reign had come to an end his costume was changed, 'travestied,' to turn him once more into a clown. The abuse and thrashing are equivalent to a change of costume, to a metamorphosis. Abuse reveals the other, true face of the abused, it tears off his disguise and mask. It is the king's uncrowning.

Genetic imperatives found in Axis Mundi events in contemporary society

In much of the modern world knowledge about genetics has made redundant or marginal many of the genetic factors that surround Axis Mundi gatherings found in Kelby or in the Middle Ages. With a world population of over six billion and the lack of isolation now experienced by most people on the planet, there is widespread genetic mixing and therefore genetic inbreeding is not the problem it was, for most communities anyway. But genetic health, reproduction and fertility are issues that are still played out in modern events.

The law insists on the formal submission of names (what the Christian church calls 'the banns') that allow a check on genealogy, and too close a marriage is illegal. In many countries the idea of the 'mutant monster' has now been replaced by a liberal attitude towards the disabled, and it might seem that the tendency to vilify the genetically weak has almost vanished in celebratory practices. Fertility is also widely understood, and there seems little need to spill blood on the soil to create new life. However, in spite of these informed attitudes, strong genetic themes run through gatherings in our society in complex and sometimes unconscious ways: for many people, the genetic themes which gained cultural expression in Kelby still prevail. I

will now look at three contemporary examples of genetically influenced Axis Mundi events to illustrate some of the major points I have made above and explore how Axis Mundi events are made culturally potent by these energies. I will cover the taboos surrounding incest, fertility and sexual energy in the Nice Carnival, symbolic genetic matching in the marriage of Prince Fredrik of Denmark to Mary Donaldson, and demonstrations of genetic strength found in the annual horse race in Sienna. I have chosen these particular three events out of examples around the world because they display the features I am describing in a clear way.

The Nice Carnival in France

I have chosen the Nice Carnival held in France in January/February (around the time of Mardi Gras) as a rich example of how genetic themes still emerge in our society. This particular festival still encourages fertility expression that can be found in their flower parades and still pours scorn on the genetically weak in the carnival parades. The Nice Carnival is a strong ameliorative event: it welcomes everyone¹¹⁴ and attracts 1.2 million visitors each year, taking over the inner city of Nice and creating its own special world. Established in 1294, it is one of the oldest recorded carnivals in Europe, famous for its oversized contorted masks, parades through the streets, flower festival and wild carnival atmosphere.

Two major events held at the Nice Carnival demonstrate aspects of the genetic questions that relate to fertility and mutation. Both events are translocational and use the parade format along the Promenade d'Anglais. The first day-time parade is the *Bataille De Fleurs* (the Battle of Flowers), which has large floats decorated with thousands of flowers, many of which are thrown at the watching crowd - flowers are used all over the world to represent the start of the fertile year. Set amongst these symbols of fertility are young and 'beautiful' women, including the 'Princess', that ultimate symbol of the alpha female. Bakhtin (1984, p.8) describes

¹¹⁴ There are many ways in which carnival breaks down associative feelings and 'opens' the semiology to the Other—masks, interactive parades and events, costumes, drinking, sharing food and minimising local cultural concentrates. '... Goethe correctly stressed that carnival is the only feast the people offer to themselves; they do not receive anything and have no sanctimonious regard for anyone. They are the hosts and are only hosts, for there are no guests, no spectators, only participants' (Bakhtin 1984, p.249).

these symbolic activities thus: ‘Moments of death and revival and of change and renewal always led to a festive perception of the world. These moments, expressed in concrete form, created the peculiar character of the feasts’. (Bakhtin writes of the feast here as the feast of the ‘carnival’ rather than food itself). In the Nice ‘Battle of the Flowers’ we can see an Axis Mundi event that links modern culture with the life and death struggle of small evolutionary groups. It might seem that today’s audiences with food aplenty would be uninterested in a symbolic parade of fertility and they certainly attend the parade with a light fun-like attitude rather than investing in a serious fertility undercurrent and yet the parade brings people from all over Europe and few of the spectators can resist the ancient appeal of these ancient symbols. It is a diurnal event bringing the flowers to life in the rich sunlight, lively music is played to stir the audience into life, and each float is a concentration of the fertility of life. It is an affirmational event demonstrating the continuance of life after a barren winter; the young women hold symbols of this feeling in a plethora of blooming.



Plate 39: Nice Carnival ‘Princess’

Source: Google Images: Bataille de Fleurs. Viewed 26 April 2008.
<<http://alliedfloristsofhouston.org/floral-industry-news/Images/nice-2003.jpg>> Photographer unknown

In the second event—the *Corso Carnavalesque Illumine* (Parade of the Illuminated Carnival)—the fertility and the symbolic values of flowers give way to

images that show the other side of the genetic and reproductive picture. The Axis Mundi momentum is driven by carnival - images of the contorted 'King', monsters, figures of death and sexual erotica. Three hundred giant head masks are paraded through the streets dancing and cavorting: they are many times larger than a real head and make the performer's body appear ludicrously small and ridiculous.



Plate 40: Nice Carnival heads Source: Petanque and Pastis web site. Viewed 26 April 2009.

< http://petanqueandpastis.typepad.com/photos/uncategorized/021406_2054.jpg> Photographer unknown

Clownish figures, ubiquitous in all sorts of celebratory gatherings, are funny because the character often displays genetic weakness—big noses, clumsy behaviour, oversized hands or feet, length of body and physical impediments of all kinds. The audience is still susceptible in carnival mode to mock these figures of genetic weakness. Although these are only a faint trace of the deep taboo of mutation, they reveal an ancient concern about the emergence of the aberrant. 'The grotesque,' says Victor Hugo, 'is everywhere: on one hand, it creates the formless and the terrifying, on the other hand the comic, the buffoon-like' (cited in Bakhtin 1984, p.43). The translocational parade form keeps these mutant figures firmly on their floats; they are controlled and they can be mocked with safety. 'This grotesque image cannot be understood without appreciating the defeat of fear. The people play with terror and laugh at it; the awesome becomes a "comic monster"' (Bakhtin 1984, p.91). Bakhtin elaborates on this carnival figure:

This is the ever unfinished, ever creating body, the link in the chain of genetic development, or more correctly speaking, two links shown at the point where they enter into each other. This especially strikes the eye in archaic grotesque (1984, p.26).



Plate 41: Bizarre figures with children

Source: Dimension-Internet web site. Viewed 26 April 2009 <http://www.dimension-internet.com/corso_de_nuit/index.php Accessed 26 April 2009>.

Photographer unknown

The carnival celebrates the sexual energy that creates all life. The gathering signals the end of constraint and liberation of sexual codes for a certain period. The full power of sexual desire and sensual appetite is brought out into the open to be celebrated and indulged. Thus sexual union between the genetically healthy is expressed in all its vigour. The Axis Mundi is now in its lower state, digging deep into the sensual and the corporeal but, rather than seeing this as a degradation, it has many healthy social usages including the release of pent up frustrations and feelings of suppression. In Nice loud drumming and pounding music energise the carnival: males and females, dressed in brief but extravagant costumes, dance wildly, and figures of decadence wave enticingly to the audience. All suggest sexual licence and indulgence, but, as I have mentioned before, the structure of carnival is well organised, and although there is sexual licence, it is put into a controlled form. In other words, these events do not end up with wholesale licence and anarchy because

the civic authorities have a tight rein on the carnival expression and it is not allowed to go ‘too far’.

Royal wedding in Demark



Plate 42: Wedding of Prince Fredrik and Princess Mary of Denmark

Source: Hello Magazine. Viewed 2 May. 2009.

<<http://www.hellomagazine.com/specials/danishroyalwedding/cover.html>>.

Photographer unknown



Plate 43: Australian and Danish flags

Source: Hello Magazine. Viewed 2 May 2009.

<<http://www.hellomagazine.com/specials/danishroyalwedding/cover.html>>.

Photographer unknown

Although modern society seems to have shaken off the genetic factors found in the marriages in Kelby, many practices, similar to those ancient times, are found in traditional marriages today. The ‘mock’ stealing of the bride by another group is still practised in certain folk cultures in Europe (Romania for example) and modern weddings still have a ‘best man’, the families are seated on opposite sides in the church, and the ‘giving away’ of the bride is still ritually practised. But to demonstrate how important genetic symbols can become within contemporary Axis Mundi events, it is worth examining royal unions.¹¹⁵ My example below brings together two aspects of symbolic genetic health played out in an Axis Mundi event: the first is the alpha male/female relationship and the second intermarriage. These concepts are brought together in an Axis Mundi ceremony and celebration by a system of symbolic semiology that has evolved and is represented by royal families.

The marriage of Crown Prince Fredrik of Denmark to Mary Donaldson, a ‘commoner’ from Hobart, Tasmania, on 14 May 2004 is a good example of these factors. The event’s horizontal spin depends on the idealisation and mythologising of genetic forces: the royal couple play out an archetypal idealised ritual that brings into deep concentration the joining of alpha couples to enhance genetic strength—he is seen as handsome, she as beautiful, their children will be healthy and ‘lovely’.¹¹⁶

The way in which design structure deals with the two family groups coming together (plus aligned friends) is an example of how ancient practice underpins modern planning. The two family groups were placed on opposite sides of the church space (they had their own ‘territory’ but formed one whole group which is redolent of the meetings held at the river’s bend in Kirby when groups are ameliorated within an event); the event happened in a cathedral signifying the sacred where all animosities were suspended and the two groups brought into cultural *communitas*. Guests and participants were brought into the space using liminal enforcement (large impressive doors, sounds of the organ, soldiers lining the walkway) and all were

¹¹⁵ Royalty play out and amplify many of the themes of celebration by theatricalising, through myth, ritual and symbolic action, the inner structures found in small scale average weddings that are rituals of lesser social significance.

¹¹⁶ When the royal couple had a baby (Isabella Henrietta Ingrid Margrethe) in 2007 bonfires were lit, not only in Denmark but also in Tasmania, demonstrating the special relationship between the two countries.

wearing special clothes that signal celebratory agreement.¹¹⁷ The archbishop was dressed in the greatest splendour, enforcing his authority as the mediator not only between God and the congregation but also between the two sides of the 'union'. It was not just two people who got married but also a whole set of new alignments were formed between two families, and a new understanding between royalty and the people with fresh agreements, relationships, responsibilities and communications. The Axis Mundi structure was in full spin.

But there is a wider picture here and that is that the prince was marrying a commoner and a foreigner and so there was a further 'bringing together' between two social classes and two countries. It was an intermarriage which brought with it signals of potential genetic strength free from the fears of inbreeding. Genetic matters were theatricalised in a symbolic form watched by hundreds of thousands of enthusiastic people who might often be unaware of the ancient susceptibility being activated.

The father must be seen to 'give away' the daughter. The symbolic use of rings, music, the ritual of 'joining together' of the couple and a host of other signifiers were build up to the formal moment of acceptance of a new inter-group arrangement. The central figure of Christ hanging above the altar gave a symbolic blessing, and the music - a choir, a harp and a single trumpet – were all symbols of 'heavenly' harmonising music played that produced certain predisposed feelings. There was no carnival spirit here; these events needed to have a formal shape. Bakhtin (1984, p.67) explains:

Laughter is not a universal, philosophical form. It can refer only to individual and individually typical phenomena of social life. That which is important and essential cannot be comical. Neither can history and persons representing it—kings, generals, heroes—be shown in a comic aspect.

Two groups, in a harmonic atmosphere, achieved a positive agreement, and this is represented in the celebration that followed. The couple emerged together, in

¹¹⁷ The groom is wearing a prominent display of military semiology, including a sword, reflecting his ancient role of the protector and the bride is in white and carrying flowers which symbolise fertility.

unity, into the public view and passed through a line up of soldiers making an archway of swords.¹¹⁸ This was witnessed by people around the world by a telecast. The alpha male has combined with the alpha female. Large screens were set up outside the church and the royal couple stood later on the palace balcony with their new parents-in-law for the crowd to communicate their approval. The final coming together was symbolised by the couple waltzing at the reception and dinner. The Prince and Princess, who dance alone, were circled by all the guests, who clapped and cheered and slowly made the circle smaller and smaller until the group became one—the final symbol of the inter-marriage, the Danish/Australian couple were now accepted by all.

Apart from the obvious social overlaps, the intermarriage has no great political import and it is on the mythological level that the deep interest of so many onlookers rests. The royal wedding is a theatricalised space where the day-to-day rules of ordinary life can be suspended and the genetic dreams of the 'alpha' human are allowed to blossom. It is a celebratory place where the individuals' reality is transferred into archetype and they play their symbolic parts.¹¹⁹ In reality, Fredrik and Mary are two people getting married, but in the poetic world of the Axis Mundi they are acting out a serious drama of genetic survival: it is a polished and smooth ritual performance of archetypes representing the most basic instincts.

Turning now to the examination of an event that will serve as an example of the energies of genetic *strength* inside gatherings, I have chosen the well-known horse race in Italy, the *Palio di Siena*.¹²⁰ It is one amongst millions that range from sports to Miss World contests but it does demonstrate the basic tenet.

¹¹⁸ An ultimate signal of approval, for any sword could be lowered and kill the couple.

¹¹⁹ 'Indeed they may and often do possess quite different symbolic hierarchies but because the higher discourses are normally associated with the most powerful socio-economic groups existing at the centre of cultural power, it is they which generally gain the authority to designate what is to be taken as high and low in the society. This is what Raymond Williams calls the "inherent dominative mode" and it has the prestige and the access to power which enables it to create the dominant definitions of superior and inferior. Of course the "low" (defined as such by the high precisely to confirm itself as "high") may well see things differently and attempt to impose a counter-view through an inverted hierarchy' (Stallybrass & White 1986, p.4).

¹²⁰ Italy is well known for its medieval competitions. The Calcio Storico in Florence, for example, is a bare-chested football game played without rules on the 24 June and is a good example of symbolic genetic competition played out inside celebrations.

The Palio di Siena



Plate 44: Palio di Siena

Source: AOL image search. Viewed 15 April 2009.

<http://i56.photobucket.com/albums/g161/defrostindoors/racing/1608palio1R_199387a.jpg>

Photographer unknown

This horse race goes back to the 14th century when a horse race was organised across the city.¹²¹ It now happens in a race around Sienna's main square (Piazza del Campo) every summer. Ten bareback riders race three times around a course that has been covered with thick dirt. Barricades are erected to guarantee the safety of the crowd, but, apart from a start and finish, there are no rules. The jockeys, who are rarely from the town itself, are dressed resplendently in colours that represent particular Siennese communities.¹²² The prize is a large and specially designed flag. The winner¹²³ is the *horse* (the rider can have fallen off) that finishes the race with its bridle pennant still on its head. Apart from the burst of high energy in the race itself, celebratory feeling is stimulated in the large crowd with a colourful

¹²¹ Racing horses are often used for celebratory purposes. The Melbourne Cup Spring Carnival run through the Spring racing carnival brings the country to a halt each year on the first Tuesday of November. As a note, the tradition of wearing hats by women at spring festivals can be traced back to symbols of fertility in pre-Christian Europe.

¹²² There are 17 areas ('contrade') and only ten are allowed to race at one time. The ones that miss out on one race compete in another. It is raced twice a year, on 2 July and 16 August.

¹²³ The official 'loser' is the one who comes in second.

parade (the *Corteo Storico*) beforehand that includes knights in armour, a carriage pulled by white oxen, flag throwing, music and drums, with all the performers in medieval costume. The carabinieri (police) charge around the course to clear spectators with their swords drawn. The church is also involved by blessing the horses. Then the great bell is rung in the ancient tower and a cannon fires to start the race.

This event is powered by intense feelings of dissociation produced by the competing communities of the city that have spent much time in preparation for the race.¹²⁴ The event, taken in its widest sense, is ameliorative, as it has such a high tourist profile that, outside of the direct competition areas, tourists are welcomed as neutral observers. But underlying the competitive elements of the event is a symbolic display of genetic strength. This is particularly focused by the threat of death. This race is very dangerous to the riders—they ride bareback and slip off the horses in the tight bends—and horses are often injured during the racing. It is an event where people can be killed. (Certainly it can be fatal for the horses, so much so that animal rights organisations have protested.) The young men pit their strength, agility and skill against each other. It is an ultimate male genetic gesture that symbolises the fittest and strongest: they carry phallic whips made out of bulls' penises, the horses amplify the violence, speed and energy of virility, and the male followers of each rider sometimes fight with each other in the crowds, so intense is the rivalry. This relationship with death can be found in other celebratory activities where death is a real possibility and the male (and sometimes female) genetic strength is tested—bullfighting in Spain is a famous example, as is the Running of Bulls through the streets of Pamplona in July each year where hundreds of people jump out in front of charging bulls.

¹²⁴ These communities are fiercely competitive and even now are highly contained, with even marriage being kept inside the groups.

Communication in Axis Mundi gatherings

I explored the idea earlier that an important factor in human evolution is the human animal's capacity to communicate and act with others as a group, in order to survive and adapt. Geertz (1973, p.48) comments '...the increasing reliance upon systems of significant symbols (language, art, myth, ritual) for orientation, communication, and self-control all created for man a new environment to which he was then obliged to adapt.' Communication systems that would understand and retain essential information inside a group consciousness and be able to pass this information from one generation to another were critical. Axis Mundi events were essential concentrates in this process. Groups produced common cultures to all learn the same things, as Carter (2003, pp. 240–241) explains:

We cannot know the world by inserting objects into our brains ... Why not? It is because the world is infinitely complex, and any brain can only know the little that it can create within itself. If everything each of us knows is made inside our brains, how can we know the same things? The answer is simple. We can learn almost the same things.

As populations grew or environments became more challenging, more sophisticated systems of communication were developed. Human beings have evolved minds that can absorb information in a number of ways. Smail (2008, p.131) puts forward this explanation:

It makes sense to assume that natural selection used some genes to build the life-regulating elements of the nervous system and perhaps others to engineer key traits like a theory of mind or linguistic capacity, but it used the remaining genes to build a plastic brain capable of learning the necessary array of behavioural traits and coding them in synapses.

Contemporary theories of multiple intelligences have produced at least nine ways¹²⁵ that humans can absorb information and have also identified that each human

¹²⁵ Howard Gardner nine multi intelligences: linguistic, logical, visual, body kinaesthetics, musical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and existential.

is different; that is, some respond well in some forms and less efficiently in others.¹²⁶ Axis Mundi events were (and are) very helpful in facilitating not only information exchange at many different levels but also information retention. The regular ritual created constant repetition that established deep neural pathways in group members that were capable of faithful reproduction. Ritual formalised and specified knowledge in a maze of information.

Because of the flexible and sometimes dramatic nature of the gatherings,¹²⁷ this repetition transmogrified into different forms of intelligences—such as music, space and dance—all being able to be held in different forms, with each providing a buttress to the other and preserving the body of knowledge on which they all depended.¹²⁸

In any gathering many forms of communication may be set into the design, creating Axis Mundi structures that integrate with many forms of social operation. For example dance, music, singing, the visual arts, movement, speech, body languages, gesture, touching, sound, smells and many more¹²⁹ can merge together in different formations each enriching the next. I explored these usages in Chapter Five.

In this section I want to explore the roles that narrative and story have in

¹²⁶ It must remember that all information was passed down from one generation to another by non-written means and, like Chinese whispers, vital information could be contorted, resulting in disastrous situations.

¹²⁷ 'The sort of scenes that stick in our minds are those that for one reason or another were experienced in a state of emotional excitement. This is because excitement, by definition, is brought about by a surge of excitatory neurotransmitters that increase the firing rate of neurons in certain parts of the brain. This has two effects, both of which have obvious survival value. First, it increases the intensity of perception, producing that 'crystal clear' feeling and sense of slowed time that people typically report when they are in the midst of a crisis. Second, it boosts long-term potentiation, so events that happen in such a state are more likely to be remembered and avoided (if nasty) or sought after (if nice) in future' (Carter 2003, p.268).

¹²⁸ We only have to look at Indigenous groups in Australia to see how information was stored in a variety of ways using multi-intelligences, vital information (and understandings) which were sung, danced, painted, woven and held in story and landscape.

¹²⁹ 'Nearly all cultural roles exploit more than one intelligence; at the same time, no performance can come about simply through the exercise of a single intelligence. In fact, even Marcel Marceau's capacity to use his body with such precision may well involve contributions from several intellectual domains. Skilled use of one's body has been important in the history of the species for thousands, if not millions, of years ... There are languages other than words, language of symbol and languages of nature' (Gardner 1983, p.206).

facilitating these various forms of communication in structures that ‘hold’ meaning for the individual and group. The ability to form narrative within the human brain, to make a story that explains reality, has been a vital part of evolutionary development and is deeply ingrained in gatherings of many sorts. Geertz (1973, p.100) comments on this need:

But it does appear to be a fact that at least some men—in all probability, most men—are unable to leave unclarified problems of analysis merely unclarified, just to look at the stranger features of the world's landscape in dumb astonishment or bland apathy without trying to develop, however fantastic, inconsistent, or simple-minded, some notions as to how such features might be reconciled with the more ordinary deliverances of experience.

The ‘story’ can be large or small, it can hold meta-concepts within cosmologies or occupy a modest role in bringing understandings to day-to-day gatherings. But, in every case, it is a way of communicating a sense of reality that holds communities in a common bond and that can also be used by designers to span the divide between the group and the Other. Story can build these bridges because there is no story that is local and specific in its *structure*; like gatherings themselves, the internal form is constant. Story is seen as an individual collection of incidents pulled together into a cohesive narrative but this notion can be expanded to embrace the actual process by which the random items *become* narrative. I will use the word *storification* to describe this process where life is made into story, where feelings, ideas, and group information is transformed into a cohesive matrix of understanding that we know as stories. This process is vital in planning Axis Mundi events. Geertz comments (1973, p.82):

in man neither regnant fields nor mental sets can be formed with sufficient precision in the absence of guidance from symbolic models of emotion. In order to make up our minds we must know how we feel about things; and to know how we feel about things we need the public images of sentiment that only ritual, myth, and art can provide.

Story is among such ‘public images of sentiment’; this is important because

gatherings are one of the ways in which life is 'storified' to bring new understandings to the real. Stories are not corporeal but they do reveal how the body feels; they have no embodiment, yet they have power to hold knowledge and understandings. They touch our emotions. Human beings know from their lived experiences that although they know they are watching a film, for example, they can immerse themselves fully in that un-reality and forget that the images on the screen are illusions and 'become' part of the experience. This process is mysterious and in cognitive terms very little is known about how people leave reality and immerse themselves in a good, powerful, resonant story.

Narrative and story in Kelby

In the village of Kelby story operates on at least three levels and Axis Mundi events have an important role in giving them a focus and concentrational dynamic. The first is the level of common exchange where Axis Mundi gatherings give a focus to the ordinary communicational information needed in the day to day. These are stories told at community gatherings of all kinds, where informal and community gatherings bring news, an exchange of views, and even gossip, often held in story form, and are very useful communicational conduits that help to cement and strengthen associational ties. These forms are flexible and have strong pollinating functions that allow different levels of exchange to be carried from one to another in an informal manner.

The next role of story is the collection of tales, which are more permanent than the stories found in common exchange although they do have some interpretive licence. They are more enduring narratives that hold the life of the village together as histories, legends, imaginings and tales of adventure. These are secular stories communicated in all groups and that come out in all sorts of community gatherings, including theatre, in which people act out the story with characters and props.

The third role of narrative holds the sacred stories of Kelby cosmology, and these are sacrosanct, inflexible and immutable. These are the stories of creation, sacred continuation, explanations of meaning and ethical lessons. Story as a form of sacred communication is of vital associative importance in Kelby because it provides ways in which individuals can make sense of the world within a community setting.

The many stories told at every level make a cohesive whole in the collective imagination, allowing full associative flow to happen and feelings to be synthesised. Geertz (1973, p.81) expands this idea:

In this context our mental task shifts from a gathering of information about the pattern of events in the external world per se toward a determining of the affective significance, the emotional import of that pattern of events. We are concerned not with solving problems, but with clarifying feelings. Nevertheless, the existence of cultural resources, of an adequate system of public symbols, is just as essential to this sort of process as it is to that of directive reasoning.

Many stories flow through the Axis Mundi events held by the group. In a secular context the villagers tell inherited stories about past heroes and heroines, as well as tales of betrayal and love, attacks by monsters and the repulsion of enemies by brave leaders. Not all stories are inherited, and many incidents and events are partly or fully imaginary; all are held in the group's canon. Each story is local in its detail and has its particular qualities, but all relate to the following nine basic narrative plots that are deeply related to group survival, and most conclude with warnings about the consequences of deviance for the group or about the receipt of rewards for adherence to community values.

1 The monster. These are stories that relate to danger from an outside non-human threat. The unknown is represented as a power that seeks to destroy the group but is almost always overcome; even if the forces of the monster do overcome the group, the story tells of their eventual salvation. In an isolated community such as Kelby, much is unknown, and lack of general scientific knowledge makes certain imaginings very powerful: the un-dead, half beasts and the deviant represent insidious evils that might strike at any time. The monster can also find its form in the aberrant human being; the diseased, the malignant, the mad and the malformed - characters that I commented upon earlier.

2 Leadership. The inclination for all groups to have leaders and central arbiters results in tales of successful and unsuccessful leadership. the struggle for power; how good leaders overcome bad; how leaders triumph over the enemy; how they take the group through a bad situation; or how tyranny is overthrown. In the

village these tales help carry forward the ethics and values that the people see in a leader. If a leader behaves in ways that are not in the interests of the people, the stories constantly point out this deficit.

3 Stories about love and the ethics of bonding. These narratives tell of the love affair, with its many permutations, but are concerned with the ethics of romantic interactions and the results of bonding, and these stories often stem from concerns about consanguinity and the social disruption caused by transgression. For the villagers there is a constant tension between the emotional interaction of various individuals and the consequences of inbreeding and the stories play with these themes, teasing these serious issues out through imaginative narrative.

4 The puzzle. In such stories there is an issue that is unresolved which may threaten the group and an investigation occurs that solves the puzzle. Unresolved questions in the real world can often mean danger to the people whose understanding of world can be critical to survival. This is so important that a large amount of brain space (dominated by the right hand side of the brain) is used to be able to work out problems. Stories provide fictions that not only explain the process of solving a particular problem thereby making the solution more understandable but also delights the mind in its resolution - our cognitive susceptibility to solve problems is 'played out' in narrative.

5 The journey. These narratives tell of journeys made into the unknown. It may be a heroic individual who takes the journey, or it can be a group whose members experience the translocation. These stories describe the journey through danger to achieve something of value, or search for something or somewhere such as a new home. They often contain images of descent and ascent, the struggle against evil and other dissociative forces. Again these stories are based on survival susceptibilities that human beings have been imbued with. The tension caused by experiencing the new (and often dangerous) is counterbalanced with sedentary inclinations that could be just as hazardous (complacency, atrophication and refusal to accept change for example).

6 The parent and child. These narratives tell about the protection of the young and the handover of knowledge and power from one generation to the next, and the conflict between generations that can emerge from that process as well as the love

which child and parents can show to one another. These stories constantly explore social forces that can destroy unity and family life and the dangers of this to the group.

7 *The disaster.* These stories tell about ungovernable forces that can overthrow a group such as disease, natural holocausts, imprisonment of the people and wholesale disruption, and often involve some resolution and a final victory over adversity. These stories are very powerful in the group's psyche because they live on the edge of natural disaster (the river might overflow at any time) and the narratives constantly tell of heroic efforts to overcome disaster and re-establish group stability.

8 *The magical.* In the struggle to understand processes that are a mystery to the group, tales concerning the magical are told: of fairies, of animals that can talk, and of people performing impossible acts. As in other types of stories these help explain and make sense of the many things they experience that they do not understand. By fictionalising the unknown at this level it is brought under control, incorporated into the lore of the village, unexplained events can be digested into a folk system without threatening to destabilise the group.

9 *The sacred.* The cosmology tells, for example, of the creation of the world and the gods, the reasons why certain things happen, why the natural world is the way it is and why certain behaviours are important. Often the secular stories flow in and out of these sacred narratives.¹³⁰ The need for a single meta-story that holds the concepts of how the people were formed, how the world was made, how the seasons work and the history and rationale of many other fundamental natural forces is of great importance to the group. More than any other narrative it is this one that holds together the subject matter of the communication. I explore cosmology more in Chapter Nine.

Within these stories consistent archetypes emerge within the structure of the narrative: the hero, the tyrant, the wise person, the betrayer and many others. Within each of these basic plots there is a great deal of room for tone, emphasis and texture.

¹³⁰ Sacred Greek stories had this capacity to tell a secular story (Homer's *Ulysses* for example), but the Gods play a strong role. However, when the stories moved into exclusively sacred realms (a ritual to the Gods or a sacrifice) the secular nature of the story falls away.

The stories can be sung, acted out, told by storytellers, painted, danced, ritualised, used in decoration, patterned on clothes and expressed in many other ways. The communication channels that convey these essential narratives are multiple – they are the fabric of the group, it is the lore of the village and holds people together in a common culture.

In Kelby, who tells these stories and at what Axis Mundi events? Secular stories are enacted at almost all gatherings in one form or another and although the Gods are often involved in the stories, the ‘theatre’ has a loose, informal style. For example, a tale of a great hero is acted at the Spring Festival by a group from a family that has inherited the job of performing these stories. They use mask and dance and song to narrate a tale about a hero who goes to find Spring and frees her from the clutches of a monster made of ice. Other stories tell of a great battle fought between two families and how the village is wrecked as a consequence. While some of these stories are moving and contain serious subjects, they tend to be presented in lighthearted fashion and enjoyed for what they are. These narratives are in stark contrast to stories drawn from sacred cosmology. Here participants become channels for the Gods and tell the creation story of the emergence of the River Spirit. The audience is in a state of mortal fear during these narratives and there is a high degree of nervousness and hysteria, for them the Gods have come amongst them, and the sacred forces are believed to be dangerous. The River Spirit is a large puppet kept in a sacred place and only emerges at this time. The performers have been fasting in isolation and communicate through the movement of the River Spirit’s manifestation. The villagers watch a performance in which the River Spirit fights a monster and, in her victory, guarantees that the water will flow for the next year. The River Spirit is both worshipped and feared by the villagers. In one sense they know it is just a puppet worked by familiar people, but within this special gathering the symbol becomes real as imagination transcends the normal reality. Bachelard (1958, p.100) understood this process: ‘Thus values alter facts. The moment we love an image, it cannot remain the copy of a fact’.

Story then communicates a whole reality to the village, holding in its structure almost everything that human beings need to make sense of the world. It forms a common synthesis, a shared imagination of all aspects of life, capable

being embraced by all. Life is held in tight complete matrix forms that are made to 'round off' and are placed into frameworks that balance and resolve within a poetic expression. Bachelard stated 'We should need, then, purer "reagents" than those of psychoanalysis to determine the "composition" of a poetic image' (1958, p.69). The story is one the great energies held in Axis Mundi events acting as a driving force in so many situations.

Communication through 'story' in the middle ages

The integration of secular and sacred stories, each constitutive of the other, is a feature of all societies, and the more basic narratives can be traced in most gatherings. They are vitally important because 'story' is the glue that often holds Axis Mundi events together. An examination of elements of European history reveals how important story has been within gathering events and is worth some examination. The Greeks developed a form of secular theatre embedded in a religious context. Many of the stories involved the Gods and the theatres themselves were dedicated to various deities. Four of the nine muses were seen as the source of stories Calliope (epic poetry), Erato (lyrical poetry), Melpomene (tragedy) and Thalia (comedy). This form of theatre was able to express almost everything the Greeks held to be important. The Romans too used stories within their gatherings in ways that forged their identity. Bakhtin (1984, p.255) describes what Goethe thought about stories' power to express:

During his Italian journey Goethe visited the amphitheatre of Verona. It was, of course, deserted. Apropos of this visit, Goethe expressed an interesting idea concerning the self-awareness which this amphitheatre brought to the people; thanks to it, they could perceive the concrete, sensual, visible form of their mass and unity.

Crowded together, its members are astonished at themselves. They are accustomed at other times to seeing each other running hither and thither in confusion, bustling about without order or discipline. Now this many-headed, many-minded, fickle, blundering monster suddenly sees itself united as one noble assembly, welded into one mass, a single body animated by a single spirit.

In Britain in the Middle Ages, members of the church created a style of theatre to pass on their sacred stories, and, from the 10th century onwards, they presented plays with accompanying antiphonal singing (call and response). One of the best examples of sacred stories driving community celebration is the Mystery Plays at York Minster where working guilds took on different scenes and played out stories from the Bible and the lives of the saints. They were translocational, with a stage or 'pageant' being placed on a cart and pulled around the town—there were forty-eight pageants in York, which ranged from the *Fall of Lucifer* to the *Passion*. The Mystery Plays were revived in York in 1951 in the Festival of Britain.

The story of 'story' is a large one and many histories trace the sacred and the secular and their interactions, their inevitable clashes and their joinings together in Western communities. Secular storytelling was investigating life on many levels, many of which the church would have sanctioned and some it would not.¹³¹

These translocational pageants evolved into established stages¹³² at the turn of the 16th century in Britain when theatres became professional within built environments and actors tended to move away from the difficult and insecure life of a travelling player and the gatherings found on the festival circuit. The church plays had also died out and religious tales were confined to church teachings rather than enactments. Travelling players remained nevertheless, taking secular stories to all sorts of folk celebrations; however, they were often seen as mountebanks and rascals scorned by authorities and church alike.

But folk traditions also held stories in various forms, from the visits of professional storytellers at fairs and markets to the local enactments of traditional

¹³¹ '... the author [Goethe] presents an extremely characteristic scene which takes place in a side street. A group of masquerading men appears. Some of them are disguised as peasants, others as women; one of them displays the signs of pregnancy. A quarrel breaks out among the men, and daggers made of silver foil are drawn. The women separate the fighters; the pregnant masker is terrified and her labor [sic] starts in the street. She moans and writhes while the other women surround her. She gives birth to a formless creature under the eyes of the spectators. Thus ends the performance' (Bakhtin 1984, p.247).

¹³² The thrust stages found in the Globe Theatre in Shakespeare's time closely resembled the cart 'stages' of previous generations that had been used in markets and fairs: the stage projecting right into the audience of 'groundlings'.

tales by members of the community itself. Story had ceased to be the major focus in gatherings and these tended to take a smaller role in various festivals. However in Asia and in indigenous societies story still held a major position in many sorts of celebratory gatherings. It was still possible to see story emerging in both its secular and sacred forms in these societies and still possible to see the mixing of these forms that I described above. In India for example the stories of the gods still play a major part in gatherings of all sorts.

Communication through 'story' in contemporary society

In the 1960s many theatre companies tackled political and social issues that were highly charged at the time and integrated with community groups in presenting them. They broke out of conventional theatres and looked for integrated relationships with non-art groups. This movement brought theatre and story back into the community. Amongst the most well known of these companies in the English speaking world were *Bread and Puppet Theatre* (See Schumann 1970) from Vermont, the *San Francisco Mime Troupe* in California and *Welfare State International* in Britain (See Coult and Kershaw 1983). This movement has continued to grow, and now there are professional artists of all disciplines working with story in Axis Mundi events in the community. Unsworth (2002, p.89) describes the power of the story:

Into that true, ungovernable realm of the story, where the imagination is paramount, taking us to places not intended, often not foreseen, by framers of the words and the makers of music.

I have chosen three disparate events in three different countries in very different cultural milieux to demonstrate how storytelling can act as the central energy for Axis Mundi events in modern society.

The Craigmillar Festival Theatre Show

From 1975 to 1978 I was director of an arts team that was part of a large scale social project that was to have an important social impact in many areas. In 1973 Helen Crummy, a housewife living in a socially deprived housing estate in Edinburgh, started a local festival to allow young people to show their talents. There

were twenty five thousand people living in a high density geographical area suffering from widespread unemployment, crime and many of the social ills that are found in 'slum' living. She was convinced that if the local people were given a chance to show their many positive aspects (determination to change, enthusiasm for education, the success of many social programs that they were running) she could reverse the bad reputation that surrounded the community.

This small beginning was to blossom into a full-scale festival Axis Mundi event and a large social organisation run by local people and fully financed by the European Community Fund and was to win international acclaim. At the heart of this social success was the idea that a festival gathering could change social conditions. This idea was a new one but one that met with success. By stepping out of the reality of negative living, the local people constructed an imaginary space, filled with creative potential, alive with the potency of empowerment, where visions of change could be communicated. These visions of change relayed through theatre performance were then translated in social and political strategies that could be acted upon¹³³. The use of the arts and festival expression to alleviate poverty was a unique idea in Scotland in the 1970s, although now, in contemporary society, these techniques have been adopted by many as a powerful tool for social change.

At the heart of the festival and its twelve-month program of arts and social action was a theatre performance, which was the telling of a story. This was an Axis Mundi event firmly placed in a political program and is a good example of what I call 'visioning the future'. The local people constructed performances where a better future was imagined. Subtly embedded within the plots were various social actions that could lead to positive results: this was a new kind of theatre that transformed political ideas into positive action. The community could take charge of its own problems. It was through a celebratory atmosphere of community empowerment that energy for change could be stimulated. The story took the form of musical, with local people acting many parts (itself an empowering act) and also employed, and this was

¹³³ 'by creating `models for cultural action' within the counter-cultures, which then spread through their networks to influence cultural practices in other spheres, alternative theatre made significant contributions to the changing patterns of cultural production generally' (Kershaw, 2005, p.254).

a critical factor, theatre professionals to construct the pieces.

These performances ran for several nights during each annual festival and played to thousands of local people. I will describe one plot that exemplifies the kind of message they sent. In the 17th century, in the area of Craigmillar, a very young woman, Maggie, drowned her own child—it had been born illegitimately and she had been driven to this desperate act by vilification. She was sentenced to death and hanged. Members of her community claimed her body and began to take her coffin back to her home. It was a hot day and they stopped at a tavern for a cold drink. Suddenly the coffin lid was pushed aside and Maggie stood up and shouted that she was alive— thereafter she was called ‘half hangit (hanged) Maggie’ and her resurrection was well known at the time. The law would not allow a re-trial and she was allowed to return to the community and live a normal life. The Craigmillar team took this story and constructed a musical in which the complexities of Maggie’s crime were explored and a parallel drawn between her position and the position of all people caught up in the desperation of poverty. In Maggie’s resurrection the local people could see that they too could ‘come back from the dead’ and rebuild their lives in spite of what had happened before.

The events focussed a great deal of energy and had strong social feedback dynamics. They allowed strong associative potentialities to emerge and their transcendent qualities slowly but surely led to transformation—an excellent example of the cathartic powers of the Axis Mundi in particularly difficult circumstances. Helen Crummy (1992, p.236) comments on the power of a festival to achieve other much needed resources:

...by marrying the passion of political action to the fun Festival, we fought for and won many battles to gain and basic amenities necessary for twentieth century urban life. Essentials such as the Jack Kane Community Wing, a six year high school, a Greengables nursery, two industrial estates and the modernisation of pre-war houses.

The Sea Grass Story

From 1988 to 1990 I worked as part of a team of environmentally based artists and produced three events called the *Sea Grass Story*. The leader of the project Ian Cuming is an Australian artist who is a well-know puppeteer, but he is also committed to the protection of the environment. His family lived in the sea-side town of Hastings in southern Victoria, Australia. In the late 1980s a large new industrial port was built in the immediate area. There were deep concerns about pollutant discharges into the water from this development and the effect that this would have on the sea life. The Westernport and Peninsula Protection Council had become very active (one of its leaders was Ian's father, Brian Cuming, a retired scientist). The Council had identified that all marine life depended on the sea grass that covered the sea bed and provided food for many animals, and it was this plant that was threatened by the pollution. With it gone, all animals in the food chain would be endangered. As Brian Cuming wrote at the time:

Surfactants that are discharged into Western Port contain an oily substance that coats the seagrass leaves, which are exposed at low tide. Fine mud sticks to the leaves, stopping the seagrass from photosynthesising. The only way to get the seagrass back is to stop this discharge (cited in the Source web site. Viewed on 30 May 2009.
<<http://thesource.melbournewater.com.au/content/archive/August2000/portsform.asp>> Western Port and Peninsula Protection Council).

There were many ways through the political machinery that the local people could communicate their concerns, but, as an artist, Ian Cuming recognised that the group's concerns could be placed into an arts project that told the story of life under the sea. The whole situation could be 'storified' and communicated in a different way. He realised that to be really effective he must involve the whole community, and this meant placing the project into a gathering, an energetic Axis Mundi event which would attract local people.



Plate 45: Sea Grass Story—Stilt walking figure

Source: project record. Photograph: Meme MacDonald.

Rather than paint a black and white picture where the oil port became the enemy and the environmentalists the heroes, a much more subtle approach was made. Story is perfectly capable of holding more than one meaning and is also able to hold messages that relate to the unexplainable, or a meaning unable to be directly translated. Borges (cited in Follmi, July 21, 2006) sums up the invisible but powerful effect that an aesthetic can have:

Music, states of felicity, mythology, faces marked by time, certain twilights, and certain places wish to tell us something, or told us something we should not have lost, or are on the verge of telling us; this imminence of a revelation that does not take place is, perhaps, the aesthetic fact.

So an annual event was established by the artists and was based in the heart of the community and would be a large celebration for the local people. During that time arts teams worked with the community, running workshops of all kinds. Children, for example, expressed in art works their feelings and ideas about what lay under the surface of their bay, and young people helped build and manipulate large and small scale puppets of boats, sea birds, monsters and underwater animals. Drama workshops were offered to a wide range of people, who explored the issues of the food chain and the interrelationships that existed along that chain. Professional artists,

scientists and technicians of all kinds were employed to bring these different strands together into a performance that communicated relationships, feelings, atmospheres and thoughts. It became a collage and a dream-like event. To illustrate, ‘mud people’ emerged from the sea floor, the spirit of the sea became pregnant, fish and birds moved through the audience, and strange ships sailed past covered with skulls. Meaning was open, interpretation was moveable, and there were no rights and wrongs, the narrative was more like daydreams.

The story of the sea grass became imbued in the community in a number of different ways. Hundreds of people were involved and large audiences came to watch performances; the theatre experience, the story, transcended the idea of actors performing a ‘play’ and instead the whole became a community celebration, a secular prayer to the sea, and an understanding of a community’s affections and needs. Gatherings after a show could also be considered important, with members of the community coming together, talking excitedly, I felt there was a feeling of *communitas*, of something being achieved and transformed. It was not just the subject matter that had moved so many people but also the sense of community communication. Intense associational energy had been activated, and this, in turn, engendered an atmosphere of celebration.

Although the momentum for the Axis Mundi had been started by the artists and the local environmental group, its energy was continued by the large community response – each year the same people returned to perform and numbers grew each year. Intense feedback had been achieved by the power of the story and the various communication levels activated allowed the narrative to gain Axis Mundi momentum.

Passion plays

The communication of sacred stories through Axis Mundi events is exemplified in the story of Christ’s Passion (the last week of Jesus’s life). This story is still re-enacted all over the world. In Mexico, for example, there are many events, one of the best known being held in Iztapalapa: this ritual started in 1833. Four thousand local people attend the performance where Jesus carries the cross (the Via Crucis) through its various stations. The young man playing Jesus must be very fit—he wears a real crown of thorns, he is beaten, the cross itself weighs two hundred

pounds and he must hang from that same cross during the crucifixion. In Tzintzuntzan during the Semana Santa it is the pilgrims who suffer. Many are hooded and crawl along on their knees to the Templo de San Fransisco. Real barbed crowns of thorns and flagellation whips are sold locally to participants. The following account describes the festival:

The week is filled with mysterious rituals and processions (complete with crimson hooded horsemen entering the church on horseback) that have much to do with the grafting of Catholicism to ancient Tarascan culture. Central to the week are the parades of penitents lead by seven massive crosses which have been entrusted to seven families for several hundred years. During Holy Week the crosses are taken from storage in the homes and paraded repeatedly, with great ceremony, through the village ... It is said that as recently as the 1970s, in a village in the mountains near Tzintzuntzan, penitents had themselves crucified with thin nails (Flickr web site. Viewed 10 March, 2009. <<http://www.flickr.com/photos/shadowplay/128468352/>>).

In the United States there are many examples of less gory presentations, in Agua Dulce and Eureka Springs for example where the re-enactment does not demand bloodletting. Similar events are also found all over Europe and some have been running for a long time—in Spain the Lieida performance has been presented since 1481, with five hundred local people taking part. But the most famous are the performances staged in Oberammergau in south Bavaria, Germany every ten years¹³⁴. Each performance involves two thousand local people,¹³⁵ who stage it every day from April to September. Over half a million people from all over the world attend this event, which has its own theatre space that holds over five thousand seats.¹³⁶ All performers must have lived in the town for over twenty years and even now are supposed to be ‘honest and upright’ citizens. There are one hundred and twenty speaking parts, live animals, an orchestra of sixty-five and a choir of forty-eight. Here the telling of a story has become the central focus for a whole community.

¹³⁴ All years ending with O. (2000, 2010, 2020, etc.).

¹³⁵ Preparations start the year before on Ash Wednesday when the actors start to grow their long hair and beards—no wigs are allowed.

¹³⁶ The stage is open and the performance is put on in all weather—the audience are protected by a roof.

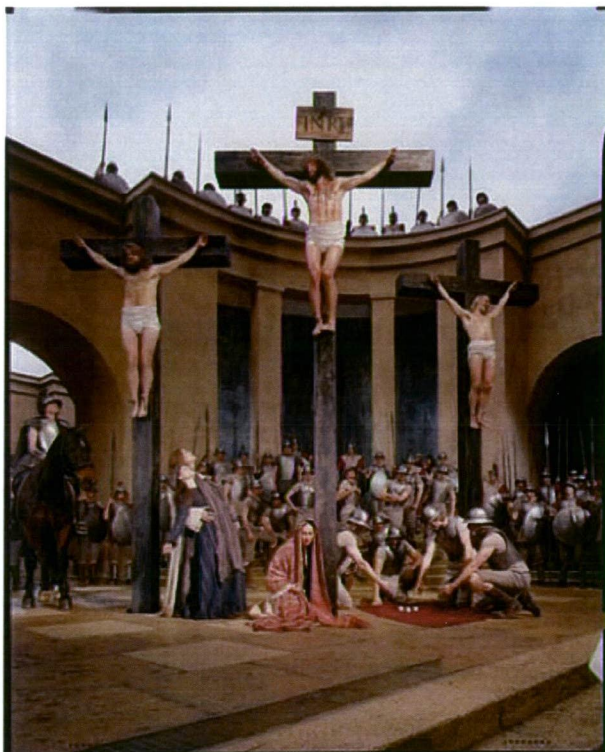


Plate 46: Oberammergau Passion Play

Source: Passion play. Viewed 14 February 2009. <[passionplay-oberammergau](http://www.passionplay-oberammergau.com/index.php?id=59) web site
<http://www.passionplay-oberammergau.com/index.php?id=59>

Photographer unknown

In 1634 during the Thirty Years War the plague came to this town and the local people performed a passion play in the cemetery over the graves of the plague victims. They swore an oath that if the disease left them, they would stage this performance on a regular basis. The play has been presented in the town for nearly four hundred years, and in 1990 there was a serious updating that eliminated many negative comments made about Jews and also allowed more women to perform. It has a very rich history with many famous people attending, including Henry Ford, Hitler and Pope Pius XII. The performance takes seven hours and has a three-hour break for food. There are sixteen acts with tableaux vivants (frozen tableaux) of Old Testament scenes throughout. Here is a description from the *New Statesman*:

It is a breathtaking, six-hour blend of opera, devout ritual and lavish Hollywood epic. You would never guess that this cast of thousands are all amateurs ...

'It's not only acting,' explains Burkhart [actor who plays Jesus], 'it's also a religious experience.' But it is not an act of worship. 'It's not a church, it's a theatre, and I am not a priest,' he says. 'You can play the human side of Jesus. You can't play the Son of God.' 'It's not real,' agrees Haublein [Lutheran pastor Carsten Haublein], of a play that replicates Holy Communion, but does not duplicate it. 'It's not a play of the Church. It's a play of the inhabitants.' Yet like a religious rite, it has become an integer for their lives. The death rate drops before the play, and rises thereafter. Huber's mother sang her father a Passion song on his deathbed. Oberammergau is a place where religious theatre is uniquely important. The identity of this village has fused with the identity of its play ...

For Christians ... this transcendental play is a mystical, emotional adventure, where the biblical narrative rises up from the flat pages of a dusty book to become vivid flesh and blood. Yet, even from a secular perspective, it is still an astonishing metaphysical phenomenon, in which a story so central to our culture lives and breathes anew (William Cook—Article *Passion parade*. Viewed October 2008 <<http://www.newstatesman.com/200010020036>>).

Summary

The three strong genetic factors (consanguinity, genetic strength and fertility) were key factors up until recent times in the West and, on the surface, seem to fade. But in a close examination all sorts of concerns, ancient feelings are still very potent in many gatherings. Our susceptibility to react to certain aspects of genetics is still there and is still very strong. These are important factors to take into consideration in any design.

I have also examined communication through the story structure in the specific examples above although the forms are widespread: opera, circus, mime, song, music, drama, parades, processions, pilgrimages, puppets, contemporary visual arts projects, ritual, ceremony, poems, books, film, media, masks, folk expressions and many more all provide conduit to tell 'story' within Axis Mundi events. Even

taken from a post-modern point of view, where the narrative gives way to more interpretative 'open' texts, the story still gives shape and form to many non-narrative situations. (The work *Royal de Luxe* described in Chapter Five is an example).

For designers, the way that story communicates meaning is of critical importance. Story can drive an Axis Mundi event or fragment into various smaller units. It can also act as themes that empower many activities where the actual story is never told. However it is used, Axis Mundi events usually contain a central story, a deep narrative, which acts as the main communicational interface for community expression. Muecke describes this in Australia:

While in Australia there is a surface debate about the meaning of history, deeper narratives seem to obey an atemporal logic, behaving more like natural phenomena, slowly, like climatic change, or powerfully, like sudden storms. Greg Denning, an historian of the imagination rather than a collector of facts or factoids, says that some of the things we have to imagine are the deep narratives that engulf our cultural experience. Sometimes deep narratives are mistaken for the Unconscious, but the Unconscious is too much a creation of model-makers to be real. Deep narratives are not unconscious. Deep narratives are consciously present to us, but always in transformed ways. That is why it takes imagination to see them (2004, pp.11–12).

Chapter 8: Axis Mundi gatherings and social imperatives 5 and 6: Transitional and Environmental events

In this chapter transitional and environmental events – and their interpretation through Axis Mundi celebrations or gatherings – are analysed. By ‘transitional’ I mean rites of passage, marking moments of change or times where change must be processed, event that mark when one thing becomes another. By ‘environmental’ I mean the reaction people have to the physical world they live in, how the environment is reconfigured into certain social understandings.

Transitional events

Transitional Events in Kelby

In order to survive, human beings have needed to be able to accommodate change: it is a social imperative without which groups would ossify or stagnate and eventually perish. Communities use Axis Mundi gatherings to maintain stability through times of change. All societies, and the individuals within them, face change at different stages of their existence, and this must be dealt with by the group. These changes can be destabilising, and gatherings help bring new alignments into being by providing bridges from one state to another. Change can happen as a natural growth process that moves from one condition to another, but it can also be enforced on a community by outside forces, some of which are anything but benign. I shall now trace more fully the reasons why Axis Mundi events greatly aid communities’ capacities to deal with change, starting by reference to the village of Kelby.

Without the ability to bring about a new order of alignment villagers in Kelby would experience instability and perhaps even disintegration of the social fabric. Axis Mundi events help keep the group firm and the gatherings are used for social unity. MacAloon (1984, p.22) talks about the importance of these events in the prehistoric:

... prescientific cultures have, in their liminal settings (predominantly ritual ones) ... given us many examples of metacommunication and the learning of metapatterns ... the metaphorical borders within which the facts of experience can be viewed, reflected upon, and evaluated ... A cyclical ritual is a frame within which members of a given group strive to see their own reality in new ways.

Kelby has at least two types of event mechanisms that process change both in the individual and the group. The first deals with *expected* events that have proforma structures which allow transition to come about. These are rites of passage—namings, initiations, marriages and funerals—that involve individuals and their relationship with the group. They also include community/civic events such as seasonal markers, remembrances, changes in the law, status sorting and leadership rites. The second deals with *unexpected* transitional events—disasters or wars for example—that may have neither precedent nor model to enact.

Rites of passage are powerful tools to process change. The newly born are paraded through the village twelve weeks after birth and named at the sacred tree during a ceremony. Young girls and boys are put through particular initiation procedures that are very dramatic and transformative for them personally but are designed to move the individuals into their new status as adults. Marriages are also of great importance, and I have described these ceremonies earlier. Funerals are very elaborate, with tri-phasic procedures taking up to a year. Within the Axis Mundi, although they stretch a little upwards leaning towards the sacred, as these activities must be blessed by the Gods, they very much depend on the horizontal energy of community involvement to achieve intensity. All rites include every member of the group in these gestures of continuance; everyone is processed through these rituals, at one moment becoming the centre of rite acting as its very apex and at others a person deeply involved in bearing witness. Of such practices among Neolithic peoples Campbell (1949, p.383) comments:

The tribal ceremonies of birth, initiation, marriage, burial, installation, and so forth, serve to translate the individual's life-crises and life-deeds into classic, impersonal forms ... The whole society becomes visible to itself as an imperishable living unit. Generations of individuals pass, like anonymous

cells from a living body; but the sustaining, timeless form remains. By an enlargement of vision to embrace this super-individual, each discovers himself enhanced, enriched, supported, and magnified. His role, however unimpressive, is seen to be intrinsic to the beautiful festival image of man—the image, potential yet necessarily inhibited, within himself.

The rites are planned carefully and each person in the community will expect to go through them. Their ritual geography is a tried and tested set of environments and the semiological language used is clear and imbued with power. Ceremonies roll on as part of life, generation after generation, with each consolidating the group.

In addition to personal and family ceremonies, civic ceremonies and rituals are practised each year that deal with processing change, and these include law procedures, status changing, coronations and the like. Ehrenreich (2006, p.17) emphasises the preparation needed for them:

When later Westerners studied indigenous rituals in a relatively nonjudgmental way, they learned that such rituals and festivities were far from spontaneous in their timing, for example. The occasion might be a seasonal change, a calendrical event, the initiation of young people, a wedding, funeral, or coronation—in other words, something that could be anticipated for weeks or months and carefully prepared for. Appropriate foods had to be gathered and prepared in advance; costumes and masks designed; songs and dances rehearsed. These were group efforts, the result of careful and sober planning.

Axis Mundi events have a strong role to play in Kelby at these various and diverse ‘markers’. It is not surprising that the villagers have developed strategies to stop the flow of normal life for a moment to create a special space to evaluate and formalise change: they were essential moments in the group’s survival. Ordinary life can be suspended at the gathering, the change can be focused upon and adjustments made, and with re-alignments in place, the villagers can move on. Gatherings are a process where the boundaries between present and past are readjusted. In social terms, the new can only come into healthy balance within the group when elements that have outworn their usefulness are relegated to the past. Changes can be difficult because, at the time of transition, a great deal of insecurity and de-stabilisation takes

place as deep-rooted ideas of identification are changed within the individual and, on a macro-scale, deep social pathways are adjusted in the community. Axis Mundi events are very useful in creating the 'special' isolated dream-like spaces where life's changes can be processed in ritual and symbolic landscapes. In the village there is no better example of marking change than the turn of the year ceremony – it is called *New Day*.

All seasonal moments (solstices and equinoxes) are charted by stone circle readings,¹³⁷ and other key dates are taken from monitoring the phases of the moon. The celebration of the new year is held at the full moon after the mid-winter date. Although there is a mid-winter ceremony conducted on the day of the solstice that involves communications with the deities, and concerns the calling of spring, the new year celebrations are separate—they have a different purpose entirely. The people call this new beginning of the yearly cycle 'New Day', and its real function is to stage an event that allows the old to fade and the new to be embraced—it is a rebirth of the spirit. Campbell (1949, p.16) understood these cycles:

Only birth can conquer death—the birth, not of the old thing again, but of something new. Within the soul, within the body social, there must be—if we are to experience long survival—a continuous 'recurrence of birth' (palingenesia) to nullify the unremitting recurrences of death.

As an Axis Mundi event the people do not include the upward stretch to the sacred but embrace the downward movement towards carnival. The horizontal energy is provided by a kind of wildness in the community, everyone dancing and drinking until a strong *communitas* is reached, individual separation being abandoned in a unity that emerges to leave the past behind and embrace the future together. At 'New Day' the people make a large fire and burn everything they no longer need for the coming cycle. They dance, drink and sing around the fire reaching intense moments of associational *communitas* through these transcendent

¹³⁷ Not all Neolithic groups measured with circles. In Bru na Boinne in Ireland the winter solstice was observed when a shaft of light came through a small aperture at the head of a small shaft leading into the middle of a burial barrow.

techniques. At a special moment a 'mumas',¹³⁸ a figure made of straw and sticks, is thrown into the flames to much revelry and abuse. An Axis Mundi energy has been created here that allows transition and uses fire—the strongest symbol of transformation—to destroy the old and, in its life giving energy, symbolises the new. It is a wild night of release where the satisfaction of bodily appetites enforces a feeling of life and new beginnings are approached. Bakhtin (1984, p.435). comments:

The old dying world gives birth to the new one. Death throes are combined with birth in one indissoluble whole. This process is represented in the images of the material bodily lower stratum; everything descends into the earth and the bodily grave in order to die and to be reborn ... All these images throw down, debase, swallow, condemn, deny (topographically), kill, bury, send down to the underworld, abuse, curse; and at the same time they all conceive anew, fertilize, sow, rejuvenate, regenerate, praise, and glorify.

But what happens when the group is in turmoil, when rapid and unexpected change occurs and where there is no pro-forma structure available to process the change? War is one of these situations. Kelby has suffered many of these upsets through the years and has used Axis Mundi events in various ways to ease the people's condition. Although the village does not wage what we might call full-scale war—in the modern world we would see its conflicts as 'skirmishes'—there have been incidences where invading groups have ravaged the community, killing and looting and setting fire to houses.

The aftermath of these events has left survivors desolate and fragmented: fertile young women taken, young men killed and infrastructure badly damaged. There was no Axis Mundi structure in their lexicon to help ameliorate their plight and yet exigent social action was needed to bring the community together again. However, in one such incident the people staged a ceremony of healing that stimulated their recovery and energised associative potentials again. The long-house had been burnt, but the totem of a horse that had graced the building's entrance,

¹³⁸ Imagined word with no derivation.

although badly damaged and scorched, had survived. The people formed a procession carrying belongings of the dead and those missing and, with the totem leading, went down to the river.

No one had planned this event and the actions were spontaneous. Amid ululations the remembrance items of the victims were placed in the water and were swept away. At first the horse head was placed in the water and cleaned but then it was recovered and walked back to the village. This symbol had become the centre of an Axis Mundi event and created a central focus for the spirit of recovery. It was placed in the middle of the circular village enclosure, and the people danced around it and sang songs late into the night. This event created a spark of hope that could ignite more and more associative links to strengthen and revitalise. Campbell (1949, p.249) comments on the importance of our own histories:

To bring the images back to life, one has to seek, not interesting applications to modern affairs, but illuminating hints from the inspired past. When these are found, vast areas of half-dead iconography disclose again their permanently human meaning.

The people now celebrate this event each year with the horse parade and a peace-keeping prayer, although the origin of the actual event is long forgotten.

Transitional events in contemporary society: Rites of passage

In the light of transitional gatherings, when I examine a modern Western country such as Australia, certain factors have changed through the years and there are divergences from the past in some areas. I will take rites of passage first. The indigenous peoples of Australia have rich rites of passage traditions but I will concentrate on the non-indigenous population as I have no expertise in the local indigenous culture.

Throughout history rites of passage have played an important role in people's lives and, generally speaking, they have been organised and controlled by the religious structures of their particular society. In Europe they have been held by the Christian Church, with baptisms, confirmations, marriages and funerals being run on traditional designs that have evolved through the ages. Namings, for example, are found in communities all over the world. At heart they are similar in design and aim

to formalise new life within a cosmology, to focus love and acceptance of the infant by a community, and to establish genealogy. Funerals too show similar structures and work with ideas that mark the passage of the human into a cosmological situation of rebirth, be it elemental rituals in Bali, cremations in Japan or Catholic burial services.

In Australia and other Western countries, Christianity is no longer a potent force within the society. For almost two millennia the church has carried namings, initiations, marriages and funerals within its form. However, as belief has dwindled, so too have the number of people using the church for rites of passage gatherings. For many communities there is now a vacuum in the culture that makes such rites difficult to process. Outside of church practice few means are available to name children or initiate the young. In addition, civic ceremonies to marry couples and bury the dead can be sterile and empty.

This moment in history is interesting; these rites, which stretch back into deep history, are now struggling to find expression. However, a surprising number of people, including artists, are now designing secular Axis Mundi events that have great power and meaning. Civil celebrants now have a great deal of freedom to officiate over all types of rites of passage, and the Humanist Movement¹³⁹ in Britain is especially active in this regard. Some examples of this new approach can be seen in the following ceremonies.

Stella Peterson's naming ceremony

A couple, who were members of the Queensland Folk Federation, asked our arts team to design a naming ceremony for their newly born child, Stella. They placed the ceremony in the middle of another event attended by eight hundred members of the folk organisation, who had gathered to plant trees at a festival site in Woodford, an hour north of Brisbane. There are no pro-forma structures for secular naming events outside of structured religion and the design team had to create a significant semiology from scratch to

¹³⁹ An international group focusing on peace and an alleviation of violence and was founded by Mario Rodríguez Cobos in 1969. It trains people to perform transitional rites of different types in the United Kingdom, including licensed weddings.

bring about a satisfying ritual gathering. Gill (cited in Muecke 2004, p.112) asks us to consider the deeper meanings:

stop giving prime attention to the *meaning* of signs, to their representational contents, in order to focus instead on their *practical effects*. To give up trying to decode the significance hidden behind symbols, but to ask what forces they draw on or shore up, and through which mechanisms they are likely to trigger certain effects.

After several hundred trees had been planted, the workers gathered beside a small lake at dusk to witness the event. A procession with musicians made its way through the audience, engendering translocational responses, to a small slope at the side of the water, itself a symbol of cleansing. They were carrying fire-torches and handed out candles to the audience. The use of fire instead of electric light immediately created a warm and life-giving atmosphere and the distribution of candles (symbols of the spirit of life) allowed each audience member to feel associative intensity and visceral involvement. The mother, father and baby led the group. They were dressed in clothes the parents found significant: the child was dressed in a special naming outfit.¹⁴⁰

Although the tree planters were people interested in the environment, they did not know each other and so the design used transcendent elements to cause a deepening of association: a choir sang appropriate songs, readings were presented and presents brought to the baby that described what she would need to have a strong life. The weekend participants planted a tree and everyone attending could help place earth in the hole. At the apogee the mother and father stood forward and lifted Stella Peterson; after they had 'showed' her to the audience and announced her name, the group shouted 'Hello Stella' and clapped and cheered: the elevated baby triggered intense emotional feelings of protection for the young. Fireworks beside the lake were set off breaking the formality with the rockets and fountains, and Stella's name appeared in the darkness as a fire effect. The audience then processed to a large marquee to celebrate.

¹⁴⁰ Special clothes for babies to wear at their naming are used all over the world; an example is the traditional white Christening gown.

The event had certainly been very moving for the parents and family and close friends, but it had also mobilised strong associative energy in the group that focused transitional potentialities at many different levels. The group of strangers had shared something profound. Their desire to plant trees and the naming of a baby had become entwined, each reinforcing the other and creating a multi-levelled *communitas* based heavily in the natural space. The horizontal community energy had been energised by the same factors that had stimulated the people of Kirby: music, dance, movement, ritual, deep concentrational energy and the visual arts all played their part. The event had stretched for the secular sacred, to put profound meaning into the wonders of birth but also to enact the basic urge of humans to produce strong, genetically healthy children. Intensity of feeling is achieved at the point of the most profound.

'Schoolies' week event

In Australia, community initiations into adulthood are not practised widely. Christian churches still organise confirmations or adult baptisms, and various ethnic communities¹⁴¹, Indigenous people¹⁴² or non-Christian religious¹⁴³ groups practise traditional forms of initiation within certain ethnic and indigenous frameworks that they have developed over eons. The idea that a young person should experience a particular initiation process¹⁴⁴ outside of religious structures has fallen from use. However, the staging of events around young people at key points that ease their transition into adulthood might still be a good social practice.

Without the processes that have been organised by groups for millennia young people pass through key moments with little recognition by the society. Consequently, they frequently resort to inappropriate and dangerous behaviours that are self-defeating in their wish to leave childhood behind. A good example of this aberrant behaviour is the Australian practice of *Schoolies Week*. Year 12 students

¹⁴¹ Hindu girls coming of age ceremony; *Ritu Kala Samskara* for example.

¹⁴² The Djapi ceremony in Numbulwar, North East Arnhem Land for example.

¹⁴³ *Bar Mitzah* in Jewish communities worldwide.

¹⁴⁴ Preparation, intense ceremony and community acceptance of new status.

hold a week's celebrations after they have finished their last school exams. They have been in education for about fourteen years and this is their school-leaving ceremony: it is a transitional point of importance.

This moment is important in their lives and, instead of placing the moment into a structure of supportive community process, the young people gather in large numbers to engage in drunkenness, drug taking and sexual adventures. There are few liminal situations, no preparation, and members of the family and friends outside of the age group are not necessarily welcomed. The Gold Coast, near Brisbane in Queensland, is a holiday area with many hotels and units, and young people gather there for 'schoolies'. As a consequence of their wild behaviour there are casualties. Here is a young woman's account of her experiences:

A group of my friends and I were drinking at the apartment we had rented during Schoolies. After we felt we were on the buzz, we decided to head down to Surfers to the beach party. We were all pretty wasted but we had already agreed on a plan to look out for each other. We were dancing on the beach, yelling and laughing—having a great time like everyone else around us.

We'd been dancing for a while when a group of older looking guys walked past and we caught their eye. They were whistling and calling out to us, so we waved them over to come and dance with us ...

I started feeling really sick all of a sudden and sat down in the middle of the group. Sitting down didn't help—my head was spinning and I puked everywhere. Everyone started laughing, but one of the guys came over and asked if I was OK. He helped me to my feet and led me away from the group to get some air. A couple of my friends started to follow to see if I was alright—he said that I just needed some space, I'd be OK and they didn't need to worry 'cause he'd look after me. They went back to the rest of the group and he led me over to the sand dunes. I don't really remember much else that night. When I woke up the next day I was alone and still on the beach. I looked around and saw my bag, shoes and skirt were next to me. It really freaked me out because I don't know what happened (Queensland

Web Site—Schoolies. Viewed 23 March 2009. <<http://www.schoolies.qld.gov.au/schoolies/case-studies/>>).

The Queensland Government subsequently mounted initiatives that might ameliorate this difficult situation by providing information packs, warnings, and special programs during the week with sports and other less harmful activities.

On the Sunshine Coast, another coastal ‘Schoolies’ focal point in Queensland, I was asked by the local community organisers to design an event that might bring a ‘real sense of ritual’ to the situation. After studying traditional structures of initiation found around the world, I organised an Axis Mundi event that attracted thousands of young people. The design encouraged naturally induced states of transformation through transient experience rather than by drunkenness and drugs. The large gathering gave the Axis Mundi a great deal of concentrated energy as well as encouraging a deep involvement by inviting a great deal of participation.

Positive affirmational states were achieved by bringing about a ritual that recognised both the achievement of going through school and the passage into tertiary study or the working world. We created strong liminal edges that helped tune the young people into the transitional moments and also used formal ceremony to make the actual transitional point more potent. People who have no traditions of this sort, who are drinking and taking drugs, and are deeply tuned in consumer popular culture, are very hard to ‘reach’ with an alternative Axis Mundi event; however, most young people attending the ritual did react positively by attending and staying at the event.

The organisers had funded an alcohol-free rock concert later in the evening, and so our arts team had a one-hour window to create some feeling of transition. We worked with dozens of young people in the days leading up to the event, and adopted their ideas and thoughts about how the event should be run. Young people were filmed during the day of the gathering and asked about their hopes for the future. Their responses were made into a short film that everyone could watch. In addition, they could write wishes for themselves and their families on message poles that were carried in a parade in an area next to the beach.

During the ritual we played a carefully chosen score of popular music that

had strong and uplifting lyrics about friendship and a sense of justice. The young people crossed a specially built bridge that was covered with their symbols and wishes for the future. The liminal symbolic act of physically crossing a bridge placed the youngsters into a ritual framework and allowed them to feel that they were moving into a new adult situation: the ceremony moved the vertical movement away from the carnival and into the sacred. A procession of adult performers¹⁴⁵ carrying symbols of a new life and wending their way through a burning archway, a dangerous activity, acted as the climax that crystallised this transitional moment. The idea that adults would place themselves into danger for them intensified associational bonds, sending a clear message that this transition in their lives was important, and was being taken seriously. The event was very popular and thousands of young people took part.¹⁴⁶

A modern funeral

After a friend, Andrew Feebey, died quite suddenly and peacefully, his widow asked me to help design his funeral. The design of modern funerals in Australia has changed radically over the past forty years. The church services that usually hold funerals have often been replaced by secular rituals run by funeral directors. With the diminishing idea that the deceased is 'going to a better place', the funeral has moved from being a 'rite of passage' (the dead going to another life)¹⁴⁷ to a 'celebratory' form that celebrates the life of the dead person. Thus the event's primary focus is to assist the mourners through the experience rather than see the deceased go to 'another life'. This is a major shift and one that has left many people unable to find a new secular Axis Mundi form to express this particular moment. After all, if there are no longer prayers, group singing or any cosmological ideas, what is left to console and reassure?

¹⁴⁵ Occupational health, safety and welfare rules would not allow the young people to walk through.

¹⁴⁶ More of these events have been experimented with in the last few years in Queensland events.

¹⁴⁷ 'Into thy hands, O Lord, we commend thy servant N., our dear *brother*, as into the hands of a faithful Creator and most merciful Saviour, beseeching thee that *he* may be precious in thy sight. Wash *him*, we pray thee, in the blood of that immaculate Lamb that was slain to take away the sins of the world; that, whatsoever defilements *he* may have contracted in the midst of this earthly life being purged and done away, *he* may be presented pure and without spot before thee; through the merits of Jesus Christ thine only Son our Lord. *Amen*' (Pastoral Offices in the Book of Common Prayer, p.489, viewed 24 March 2009. < <http://vidicon.dandello.net/bocp/bocp4.htm>.>).

Many funeral directors have been sensitive to the need for secular funerals that help the bereaved, but rituals often still seem clinical, impersonal and formulaic. Although many people want to participate in the design of an Axis Mundi event such as a funeral, they do not know how to proceed. Understandably they want to go through a process that reflects the person they have loved and interact with those memories in a positive way.

A major change in the way bodies are processed has also occurred.¹⁴⁸ Cremation was first made legal in South Australia in 1891, and by 1951 about a quarter of the Australian population was being cremated.¹⁴⁹ By the turn of this century it had risen to 54% and has been going up by half a percent each year ever since.¹⁵⁰ Because of the way that cremation works, with mourners inside a space designed to take the body into the 'fire', new ritual traditions had to be developed. There were no longer translocational dynamics as coffins were no longer walked to the graveside; there was no open-air interaction at the graveside and no lowering of the body into the ground. The psychology created around the cremation with its indoor spaces, coffins disappearing through a small curtain, understanding that there would only be ashes left, needed new ritual forms. By internalising the event into specialist spaces the ceremony had also removed the funeral from public gaze,¹⁵¹ which made death a less familiar occurrence for most people. In addition, cremations have a bi-phasic nature where a secondary ritual involving the disposal of the ashes occurs after the funeral. If the form of the transitional rite has changed, or its basic premise has altered, the disposal of the body is radically different, and thus all traditional symbolic language has become unusable. How then can new forms of

¹⁴⁸ Much Christian belief is predicated on the idea that the bodies will rise at Judgement Day and therefore embalming and burial are traditionally favoured over cremation, which aligns with the fiery medieval image of Hell.

¹⁴⁹ Statistics from Encyclopaedia of Cremation, viewed 24 March 2009.

<http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=DN6KqKI3YEC&pg=PA431&lpg=PA431&dq=Cremations++in+Australia+funerals+statistics&source=bl&ots=LBpOkIz71z&sig=HbQsW7Kk0PyHrbMtBc7nMCi_LoU&hl=en&ei=qJrISfajJozFjAeB0MnUAW&sa=X&oi=book_result&resnum=1&ct=result#PPA453,M1>.

¹⁵⁰ In the USA it is 27.12, Japan 99.41 and Italy 6.62. Statistics from Death the Last Taboo web site, viewed 24 March 2009. <<http://www.deathonline.net/disposal/cremation/australia.cfm>>.

¹⁵¹ In Varanasi in India bodies are paraded through the streets with mourners wailing and sometimes music being played. The bodies are publicly burned on the Ghats (steps leading down to the river) and the ashes placed in the Ganges.

funerals be designed and who can design these new Axis Mundi events? Ien Ang (1997, p.81) describes these new events and who might run them:

Civil religion has become a major category in the study of religion, although mainly in North America. In 1967 Robert Bellah published a paper—‘Civil Religion in America’—that placed the designator ‘civil religion’ firmly on the agenda of not only studies in religion but also sociology and anthropology. It is a phrase that also deserves a place in global cultural studies. By civil religion Bellah was thinking of the dispersal of religious and mythic functions outside the conventional religious institutions and into culture itself. In this process various bodies and institutions took on religious and quasi religious functions that attempted to fulfill some of the religious needs that were no longer felt to be supplied by religious institutions, which, in the USA, were the Christian churches. In some cases there was a more conscious effort to appropriate religious discourse for a wider social and cultural agenda.

Although there has been a radical shift in the ritual’s shape, the inner structure of the ceremony remains the same. It is a *transitional* event, and a funeral’s aim is to allow the mourners to accept and realign themselves (a major shift of the mourner’s inner alignment) to the permanent loss of someone they love.

Funerals always contain one component (in our society, the committal) that enforces the understanding that the person who has died is gone from life. The remainder of the service, however, can be tailored to personal needs and may vary widely. Andrew Feebey had been a national park ranger and his love of the environment gave a natural link to the cycles of life. The coffin was bio-degradable and in order to reflect his personal life was painted with images of plants and shells by an artist.¹⁵²

¹⁵² The Ga people in Ghana build coffins at great expense that reflect the life of the deceased. For example, if he was a taxi driver, the coffin will look like a taxi.



Plate 47: Andrew Feebey's coffin.

Source: Artist and photographer Faridah Cameron

The ritual was held in a standard crematorium. Relevant readings were chosen, music played that he had loved, a slide show of pictures from his life was shown and, instead of the coffin being moved away through the curtain, the congregation processed past the coffin and covered it with eucalyptus leaves. They could also touch the coffin or pat or stroke it. A small family group and close friends remained for the coffin's final exit. A wake was then held in a bush location invoking the power of the natural world, where specially chosen food and drink were served and people were asked to tell any story or express any emotion they wished as the afternoon progressed. These impromptu expressions of affection were set in a semi-formal framework, with a master of ceremonies inviting these comments at appropriate times. This process allowed spontaneous responses and in doing so allowed a warm and touching view of the deceased to come about. The ashes were planned to be distributed later, perhaps at sea with a small group attending.

Transitional events in contemporary society: Marker events

Turning away from modern designs of rites of passage, I will now explore transitional events that are used by the general community as 'markers' of change. These Axis Mundi gatherings happen in every community, 'marking' moments of community change from coronations to victory parades.

New Year at the Woodford Folk Festival

New Year events have been held throughout Europe for millennia. In Scotland, celebrations at New Year are world famous¹⁵³ and can be traced back to Celtic roots. Originally the Scottish New Year was held on 31 October—the Celtic ‘Day of the Dead’. It was believed that the dead would return from the underworld that night and would try to cross the doorway of their original homes. If this act was achieved, they could remain there and not return to death’s kingdom.¹⁵⁴ These ghosts were prevented from crossing the doorstep¹⁵⁵ by being given gifts to go away. Through time these beliefs became a folk tradition: the ‘ghosts’ are now represented by children who go from house to house to receive presents of sweets and fruit. *Halloween* in Britain and *Trick or Treat* in the United States are derived from this practice. In 1752 the new Gregorian calendar was adopted, and New Year became officially 31 December /1 January, subsequently leaving most of the Day of the Dead practices behind.¹⁵⁶

The New Year marker seems compulsive with celebrations around the world; it is a concentrated moment of spontaneous communitas; a group looking together into the future. MacAloon (1984, p.23) describes this:

But it is not thought that ritual metalanguage is essentially cognitive or philosophical. It is, as D. H. Lawrence said, ‘a man in his wholeness wholly attending.’ In the plural this would be rendered ‘men and women, of a given group and culture, wholly attending, in privileged moments, to their own existential situation.’ Emotion and volition, as well as cool cognitiveness, encompass their metasituation.

In Australia, New Year’s Eve is a widespread moment of celebration; people come into the streets and want to celebrate together. Although they drink alcohol in a

¹⁵³ In Edinburgh hundreds of thousands of people attend the New Year gathering.

¹⁵⁴ Christianity placed new celebratory concepts onto this Celtic event and 1 November became All Saints Day.

¹⁵⁵ The Warlpiri people of the Tanami Desert in Australia have similar concepts.

¹⁵⁶ Some traditions from this old festival did transfer to the present New Year celebrations. The Scots still practice ‘first footing’, where a tall dark stranger must be the first one to step over the threshold of a house after midnight. (Tall, dark stranger presumably represented a person who could not possibly be a ghost returning to their home.)

party atmosphere, the whole celebration is fuelled by a real desire to associate and enjoy a sense of community. If one visits any community in Australia it is likely that there will be New Year celebrations. Civic organisations such as councils and state governments often struggle to find forms to place this celebration within; they often experience trouble because of excessive drinking and see the event as a problem rather than a community gathering that can concentrate positive *communitas*.

The New Year celebration in Sydney is an example of coordinating people's wishes to celebrate a new beginning as a cohesive event and is now watched by five million people around the world on television.¹⁵⁷ The celebrations start with pre-show events, illuminated boats in the harbour, and fly-pasts, local stages are built to facilitate music and dancing. Roads are closed and tens of thousands of people move through the streets and line the harbour's edge. The climax of the night is the world famous fireworks display: pyrotechnics are fired from down-town city buildings and at odd points along the Parramatta River. However, the real climax is on the Sydney Harbour Bridge itself where five million dollars worth of fireworks are sent into the new year sky. It is a revealing example of how spectacle can work, where the sheer size, scale and brilliance of the explosions lift the 'normal' into the 'special' thereby releasing feelings of wonder and transcendence at this one point. This *Axis Mundi* event brings about the transition into a new year by its sheer scale.¹⁵⁸

Other designers and organisers have seen the potential of the New Year period and tied it into strong festival structures that promote community identification and association. One of the most successful New Year events has been the Woodford Folk Festival¹⁵⁹ in Queensland, where organisers have realised that the urge to celebrate this marker can be harnessed into a real community gathering of high quality that utilises the energy of seasonal placement. They have reduced drunkenness by making it a family night with lots of music and dancing. They have

¹⁵⁷ Statistics from Telegraph.co.uk web site. Viewed 19 March, 2009.

<<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/australiaandthepacific/australia/4045458/Video-Sydneys-spectacular-New-Years-Eve-fireworks.html>>.

¹⁵⁸ Some New Year celebrations can have a small event as a focus. Millions of people come to hear the ancient Bosingak Bell (built in 1396) being rung 33 times (representing the 33 realms of Buddha) in Seoul for example.

¹⁵⁹ Woodford Folk Festival is now the biggest folk festival in Australia.

tuned events to bring in the New Year with countdowns, good wishes and expressions of optimism. The emphasis is on the carnival but it is a light touch with a great deal of importance placed on staging events that deepen community association and creating a transcendent atmosphere with music and dancing: a lifting out of last year with its attendant problems to a new year filled with optimism.

I directed the New Year event that was held at the festival on 1 January¹⁶⁰ from 1989 to 2003. The subject matter changed each year, but the underlying structure was to put people through an annual ritual of transition that would allow them to release the past and embrace a new beginning. I want to concentrate on one particular event which was held in 2001 that was typical of the form. The event was constructed by an art team of one hundred and twenty and included a choir of four hundred and a parade of six hundred people who were recruited from among festival goers. The performance was attended by fourteen thousand people and lasted an hour and a half, accompanied by live music. Although the event was presented to the audience as a theatre performance, it was a genuine New Year ceremony for the participants and, by transference, for the people watching.

¹⁶⁰ The event was originally a New Year's Eve event but was moved to 1st January for administrative reasons.



Plate 48: Ark image at Woodford Folk Festival

Source: Artist Faridah Cameron. Photographer Graeme Batterbury

I chose the concept of the ark as a basic metaphor and cipher for the participants (Plate 48). It carried the idea that they would choose and represent what was valuable to them¹⁶¹ and, in a ritual, put them into the ark, which would sail into the future, leaving behind what was not important. The ceremony helped them identify what was important to them in their future lives and what could be discarded; the symbolic objects that the participants made or chose were intense representations of their values.

Participants, including children, then built lantern boats and either decorated them with paintings of the things they valued or placed such objects in the hulls of the boats. A group of major artists built the ark itself with symbols they deemed valuable to a wider society. At the beginning of the performance the Indigenous people started a fire using their traditional method of rubbing two sticks together,

¹⁶¹ These valuable things were realised in symbol art made objects that represented emotions, experiences, family members, important objects, etc.

and the flame of this fire was taken and used to light all flames within the ceremony. This formal 'handing on of the flame' by the local indigenous group was a symbolic gesture that gave us the permission to carry on a ceremony on that particular piece of land. This was followed by a parade of six hundred adults and children carrying lantern images that they had made of images of things they felt important in their lives and wanted to take into the future. This procession of precious things was led by an Indigenous girl and a non-Indigenous boy that represented reconciliation and the future. The ark came next, carried by two hundred people, and the precious objects made by the artists and the people were placed inside. Throughout this performance a musical score especially designed to carry the feelings of the ritual was played and sung. A storm was simulated theatrically and the flood enacted and a large dove puppet representing peace was released from the boat and brought back a symbol of the olive branch, a sign of dry land but also a new year beginning. The people were now safely into the new year with their 'precious' things intact. Being of no further use the ark was burnt on a bonfire with fireworks and celebration: the past must go. The transition had been made and the marker moment utilised to do this.

The Axis Mundi design had concentrated on the 'secular sacred' identifying what was important to take into the future and transferring this identification into symbolic and emotional atmospheres that realised themselves in music, art and movement. The burning of the past symbolised by the boat, on such a scale, conveyed the feeling that there was a new start, each person could be refreshed and celebrate life together but only by releasing what had gone before.

Transitional events in contemporary society: Dealing with the unexpected

The need to hold gatherings in times of dramatic change are as important today as they ever have been. The fall of the Berlin Wall on 9 November 1989 is a case in point, when thousands of people went to the wall and physically removed stones and cement to enthusiastic acclaim.¹⁶² The fall of Slobodan Milosevic on 5

¹⁶² I was given a piece of cement from the wall by a friend who was there. Such souvenirs take on an iconic value.

October 2000 is another example of mass celebration in the streets when thousands of people gathered in protest and brought down an oppressive government. Political change can be sudden and radically transitional, as the Russian and French revolutions have shown, and can have wide ramifications. Such moments produce a broad range of Axis Mundi activities involving forms of acting out in reflective response to a given situation. MacAloon (1984, p.23) comments:

It is in social dramas that plural reflexivity begins. If social drama regularly implies conflict of principles, norms, and persons, it also implies the growth of reflexivity: for if all principles and norms were consistent, and if all persons obeyed them, then culture and society would be unself-conscious and innocent, untroubled by doubt. But few indeed are the human groups whose relationships are perpetually in equilibrium, and who are free from agonistic strivings.

Sometimes spontaneous celebrations become traditional. When the Statue of Liberty was being celebrated by a parade through New York on 29 October 1886, office workers threw down thousands of strips of paper on the people below and thus created the first ticker-tape¹⁶³ parade. Similar celebrations have been used to honour Roosevelt, Lindbergh, Eisenhower, MacArthur and the first astronauts who landed on the moon.

Axis Mundi events are crucial in times of emergency as they can bring about hopeful visions of the future. For example, following is an account of the ritual event at Ground Zero in New York five years after the event of 9/11:

The anniversary dawned crisp and clear, a reminder of the beautiful blue-sky morning of Sept. 11, 2001. A brisk wind pushed ripples through a seven-story-high American flag draped across the facade of the adjacent World Financial Center, and the sun broke through nearby skyscrapers just before the first moment of silence, at 8:46 a.m., which marked the time the first plane struck the north tower. Similar pauses were signaled at 9:03 a.m., when the second plane hit; at 9:59 a.m., when the south tower fell; and at

¹⁶³ Ticker-tape were the long strips of paper that carried messages and stock market information.

10:29 a.m., when its companion was reduced to rubble. Church bells pealed across the city, muffled by the hum of traffic on West Street. In past years, those reading the toll of 2,749 names have included children and siblings. This year, the task fell to the remaining half of broken couples—spouses, fiancées, boyfriends and girlfriends, or life partners (September 11—A Look Back web site, viewed 20 March, 2009. <<http://www.lohud.com/article/20060912/SPECIAL01/609120306/-1/SPECIAL0101>>).

In some cases the ordinary procedures that mark a transitional moment are unable to satisfy the members of communities, and nor does the design meet with the people's community needs. In cases like this the community can take control of their own process. There can be no more prominent example than the informal rituals devised by the general public after the death of Princess Diana, which forced the British royal family and the official planners to 'upgrade' their ceremonial design.

Although the people chose as their major Axis Mundi point the heavy wrought iron gates outside Kensington Palace (Diana's official residence), other Axis Mundi points were established through the United Kingdom.¹⁶⁴ The fence was the liminal zone between royalty and the citizens, and it was at this symbolic barrier that people left flowers, teddy bears, pictures, toys, Union Jacks, messages and sympathy cards. The spontaneous mementoes placed at this improvised altar became so numerous that their span reached several yards out into the street. There has not been such a massive public response to any event in Britain in the past fifty years. Canetti describes this powerful feeling:

To an impressive degree the crowd has freed itself from the substance of traditional religion and this has perhaps made it easier for us to see it in its nakedness, in what one might call its biological state, without the transcendental theories and goals which used to be inculcated in it ... The

¹⁶⁴ 'The palaces changed from formal residences redolent with the aura of the Monarch and royalty to places with a new purpose—they became physical locations able to be used for the processes of communal grieving and consolation. Even at the major royal sites, the placing of cards and personal messages, candles, floral tributes and soft toys resulted in the rapid filling of available space at main entrances and driveways ... Utilitarian objects such as steps, walls, fences, railings and gates, garden edgings and trees decked with cards and flowers were given a new use and meaning which temporarily sanctified them' (Ang 1997, p.62).

crowd is no longer content with pious promises and conditionals. It wants to experience for itself the strongest possible feeling of its own animal force and passion and, as a means to this end, it will use whatever social pretexts and demands offer themselves (Canetti cited in Ang 1997, p.1).

People wanted to participate and to act in order to show their feelings. What they needed were gatherings that allowed them to express their feelings but there were no structures in place by which they could do this. So the people invented their own. The public altars were spontaneous and as improvised secular sacred spaces people quickly built upon them. It is not surprising that the British should choose this particular form, as wayside shrines, clootie trees, cairns and home altars¹⁶⁵ are traditional places of expression that allows participation. Such altars concentrate symbolism and provide an outlet for the expression of strong feelings.

[There] was a widespread desire for an active involvement in the mourning process and a need to make grief manifest in a physical way. The making of a gift to the memory of Diana was seen as one way of providing a tangible physical demonstration of the loss (Ang 1997, p.62).

Diana had become an archetypal 'princess' holding the mythological qualities (however misplaced) of bravery, compassion, beauty and nobility.¹⁶⁶ (There are echoes of this archetype in the Nice Carnival and in all princesses events found in spring carnivals). Although the Queen transmitted a formal message on the funeral day, it was the more trenchant voice of Diana's brother at the funeral that perhaps captured the feelings of the populace. The whole ceremony was expanded after the public response was evaluated, and the funeral itself was attended by one million mourners and watched on television by an estimated two point five billion people.¹⁶⁷

As the gun carriage carried her body through London's streets on 6 September 1997, on its way to Westminster Abbey, people shouted messages and threw flowers, and when the coffin was driven down the motorway on its way to the

¹⁶⁵ See Gutierrez 1997 and Linn 1999 for information about altar use.

¹⁶⁶ Mother Teresa died on 5 September that week, but remembrances of her life were overshadowed by Diana's tragedy.

¹⁶⁷ Statistics from BBC home web page—*On this day 6 September*, viewed 24 March 2009.
< http://news.bbc.co.uk/onthisday/hi/dates/stories/september/6/newsid_2502000/2502307.stm>.

family estate in Althorp, people lined the route. Diana's death had become a national Axis Mundi event where people's feelings about themselves and their community were given expression. As an archetype the princess had concentrated what people felt was valuable about life, and her funeral was a tacit celebration of these values.

What is important in this example is that if there is no structure to centre an Axis Mundi, a space to allow expression, people will often make one up in their own way. The need to process their feelings through symbolic space was strong and Diana's death created a horizontal community energy that needed a gathering, a time to concentrate the energy, a time to increase the social feedback dynamics, although, as we know, the civic organisations around the event were slow to realise this.

Port Arthur recovery event

On 28 April 1996 a young man called Martin Bryant shot groups of tourists and local workers in the ruins of the early 19th century penal colony tourist site at Port Arthur in Tasmania. He killed thirty-five people and wounded twenty-one. The community was traumatised and the world's press made their community infamous because of the violence that had occurred. It seemed the massacre had scarred the local area and marked it forever. I wondered if a gathering could be the mechanism that could bring about a catharsis, a recovery.

I worked with local people and my arts team to design a 'recovery event', which was eventually held fifteen months after the shootings, at the first sign of spring, in September 1997. The gathering was planned to 'lift the spirits' of the local people and restore community confidence. The project was very sensitive as there had been many local people killed, including children, and there were many weeks of research and community consultation before the final plan was approved. There was no formula or pro-forma structure to guide a community in this state, and so all the planning was speculative. However, there were some guidelines that tapped into unusual structures.

The fragmented state of the community meant that the event had to be intensely associative. It had to cement new and strong links of confidence through

the area and create strong positive feedback reaction: the event had to be inclusive and involve the whole community. It also had to be participatory because there was no use in 'presenting' a project that people had no part in. People had to become personally and physically involved to achieve a maximum chance of a transformation, and this meant building an Axis Mundi event that contained potential for transcendence. Gardner (1983, p.208) stresses the body's involvement:

This divorce between the 'mental' and the 'physical' has not infrequently been coupled with a notion that what we do with our bodies is somehow less privileged, less special, than those problem-solving routines carried out chiefly through the use of language, logic, or some other relatively abstract symbolic system.

It was the sort of project that, if it was not designed properly, would do more harm than good in the community; in other words, it would bring back painful memories and cause emotional distress without any transitional move forward. The question of where it would be held was critical. Would the local people be able to deal with an event held on the actual massacre site after fifteen months? Was it possible to reverse the negative associations by using celebration as the major vehicle of expression?

After a great deal of deliberation, the local coordinating group decided to construct the festival on the location where the massacre happened. The committee members also stressed that they wanted to keep the gathering secret from the media because they had been so intrusive when the massacre had happened. I felt that a simple community festival held in the grounds would not be enough to allow a strong cathartic process to occur, and I therefore used, in the design, a strong mythological theme—stories such as the descent into hell and ascent into recovery.¹⁶⁸ These universal myths allowed the subject of descent and ascent to be actively 'played out' in stories not associated with the massacre but with enough resonance to be able to express these feelings; in other words, the subject embraced the horror but demonstrated recovery and more hopeful futures. The end result was called the

¹⁶⁸ For mythical reference see Nordic versions (Cotterell 1997), Sumerian examples (Mitchell 2005 and Wolkstein and Kramer 1983).

Festival of Journeys.

Tents were put up for singing and performance; there was also an area for good food and modest drinking. Inside the prison ruins a theatrical area was established in the shape of a bower where a local writer was established as the archetypal 'wise woman' who was available for consultation. Outside the ruins there was storytelling, a local choir, a bonfire and fireworks and lantern parades by the children. A lantern boat, with poetry written on the side, processed through the audience. Almost every facet of the event told stories of disaster and how people, by 'getting together' or by being heroic, could recover and prosper. Ulysses, Dante, Inanna, Greek myths and African tales were all used. The climax of the evening was a bush dance near the massacre site and although the group had supported the idea, we were all nervous about whether it would work. Local people started to dance and, in their celebration together, activated intense associative feeling of *communitas*: people stood in groups with arms around each other, crying and laughing. I found it a very moving experience and, judging by the people's reaction and the debriefing sessions afterwards, clearly demonstrated the power of celebration to bring about positive cathartic processes.

The Axis Mundi event had set up a gathering in extreme conditions but relied on the human susceptibility to positively process community feelings in these kinds of structures. It might have seemed that bringing people back to the site of the tragedy and concentrating the grief would be a retrogressive step but it is precisely the structure used in more formal funerals. By experiencing the drama together, as a community, the gathering structure encourages feelings of support and community unity. It amplifies communal strength and activates strong concentrated associational energy. Myth and story played their part as did the languages of the arts but the powerful and intense cathartic expression was created by an upward movement towards the secular sacred and its ability to transcend the normal and provide spaces of hope and recovery.

Environmental Events

Environmental events in Kelby

The seasons move through their yearly cycles although the rhythm is not entirely consistent. In Kelby it is important to note that even the slightest variation in the yearly cycle can bring famine and drought and spell disaster for the villagers. They have little control over anything in their environment and they believe their interpretations, codifications and predictions about the seasons are vitally important to their future. To measure time the people have a stone circle calendar to guide them, with the four markers of the equinox and solstice built into the circle, and they can also plot the months by observing the moon's monthly cycle. The approximate time of day can be plotted by the sun's position in the sky and the movement of the stars at night.¹⁶⁹ So villagers might say that it is two moons and six suns after the summer solstice so it is now time to trek to a certain place to catch the migrating deer. They also have an environmental code that can 'read' the natural world. An example might be that when a particular flower is in bloom they can find the eggs of a particular bird in a particular place several miles away (Davis 1989). They have started to farm in a simple way but the control of livestock and the growing of certain flora have affected the natural patterns and have eroded the environmental coding processes.

The balance struck between hunting and gathering in Kelby is delicate. The various seasonal celebrations that relate to the community's year include spring fertility rites, summer feasts, autumn gathering after the harvest, and mid-winter events to ask the Gods for the return of spring. All these events are placed into a local cosmology that explains various aspects of the seasons' workings. The yearly rhythm affects each person as the body reacts to each season in intense ways—the winter, for example, is very cold and people, especially children and the aged, die at this time. The seasons also inspire certain psychological feelings: spring engenders hope, a renewed physical energy and an optimism about life, whereas the mid-winter inspires worry, a slowing of activities and sometimes even fear. The body too has its

¹⁶⁹ Celestial movements are held in memory by stories. The pattern of various stars suggest shapes of animals and people and by weaving a story about them as they cross the sky the people can remember where they are and use them as a guidance system.

own seasons as youth (spring) passes into old age (winter), a concept which has not escaped the people of the village. They see these cycles in natural life and set many of their gatherings into its rhythm. On such matters, Bakhtin (1958, pp. 24–25) comments:

time is given as two parallel (actually simultaneous) phases of development, the initial and the terminal, winter and spring, death and birth. These primitive images move within the bio-cosmic circle of cyclic changes, the phases of nature's and man's reproductive life. The components of these images are the changing seasons: sowing, conception, growth, death. The concept which was contained implicitly in these ancient images was that of cyclical time, of natural and biological life.

These various seasonal festivals feel very powerful to the people who are attuned to the natural world because they are integrated into nature's power of life and death; when they summon forces at their gathering that represent the all-powerful Gods they feel that they are evoking the very forces of nature.

Knowing the weather can be as important to survival in Kelby as the yearly climate changes: storms, flood, drought, lightning (causing fires) and high winds can be devastating. In the village with its many gods the weather seems to reflect the emotional agenda of the pantheon—it is all very personal. A god can be angry or pleased. People's behaviour can influence how the gods think, and they can be punished or rewarded.

The events that happen around these meteorological conditions can produce both predictable and spontaneous reactions. The villagers have a procedure to try to keep the river from flooding and every year, as the weather warms up, the people come to the river (the Water Spirit) and give her presents of food and flowers. The calming of the Storm God with a water ceremony is another traditional celebration. Sometimes the villagers sacrifice an animal to appease the divine spirits, and often these ceremonies take new shapes, flexible in their intensity and unpredictable in their execution. Strehlow (*Macquarie Atlas of Indigenous Australia*, 2005, p.37) comments on Australian indigenous peoples' relationship with weather and their ritual life:

Strehlow has claimed that it was the challenge of the climatic unpredictability, with its whimsical bounty and famine, which explains the richness of Aboriginal ceremonial and mythological life, the rigidity of their social controls, and their intimate knowledge of and attachment to their land. Human responses to land are more than mere economic determinism, however, as the Aboriginal emphasis on the spiritual bonds of place confirm.

In general terms, like reading the seasons and the weather, orientation is a crucial process surviving in an uncertain world. Geertz (1973, p.99) expands:

[Man] can adapt himself somehow to anything his imagination can cope with; but he cannot deal with Chaos. Because his characteristic function and highest asset is conception, his greatest fright is to meet what he cannot construe—the ‘uncanny,’ as it is popularly called. It need not be a new object; we do meet new things, and ‘understand’ them promptly, if tentatively, by the nearest analogy, when our minds are functioning freely; but under mental stress even perfectly familiar things may become suddenly disorganized and give us the horrors. Therefore our most important assets are always the symbols of our general *orientation* in nature, on the earth, in society, and in what we are doing: the symbols of our *Weltanschauung* and *Lebensanschauung*. Consequently, in a primitive society, a daily ritual is incorporated in common activities, in eating, washing, fire-making, etc., as well as in pure ceremonial; because the need of reasserting the tribal morale and recognizing its cosmic conditions is constantly felt.

In Kelby various physical places (and Axis Mundi events held in them) help orient the community in the natural (and unpredictable) world: the centre of the village, the stone circle, the tree and other ritual environments orient them with their own lands. But they also have places within a wide hinterland that are prominent and sacred—such as physical features that allow a wide circle of travel without getting lost. These often have stories attached to them and even Axis Mundi events staged around them to establish them in the community mind. (The hill that the women go to pray for healthy children, mentioned earlier, is an example.)

Environmental events in contemporary society: seasonal festivals

The deep links between the environment and people have slowly loosened as the world has become more technologically advanced and relationships to the natural world have changed. Throughout history this change has had a profound effect on how gatherings reflect these social imperatives. Every culture had held seasonal festivals that produced intense feelings about the natural world, but, by the time of the Renaissance, none had the raw energy fuelling the Axis Mundi spin that total food dependency brings. Food production and supply had been regularised via trade and science. Although an unproductive season could still have devastating effects and weather could still reduce people to starvation, on the whole farming had ameliorated suffering. The fear of scarcity addressed by a winter festival was replaced by feasting and merrymaking as civilisations became wealthier. By the 16th century Elizabethans celebrated Christmas in an expansive way. Christmas spanned twelve nights and ended with the Feast of the Epiphany but started after the Advent fast. So eating and drinking, and merry making of all sorts were the order of the day; there was a master of ceremonies called the Master of Merry Disports and performances, games and singing and status reversal events played in the court of Henry VIII and throughout the land.

In Europe festivals had become times of carefree celebration and 'making a fool of oneself'. Welsford (1966, p.70) describes this:

The great seasonal festivals in Christian Europe have a twofold aspect: on the one hand they are occasions for solemn worship, on the other hand they are wild times of feasting, lawlessness and buffoonery. Shrovetide is a season when a good Christian confesses his sins, but it is also the Carnival, when the sober citizen will put on a mask and adopt the behaviour of the fool; the Christmas season was once an equally wild time ... In England the plough which figures in the ritual of Plough Monday is drawn about by young men grotesquely disguised, dressed in white, and is known as the Fool Plough. And, of course, there are many more examples from various times and places, showing that folly was expected at certain important seasons of the year.

But although the standardisation of food supply had its effect on

celebratory cyclic gatherings, when real starvation or drought hit communities in Europe and elsewhere they still respond by appeals to God for help. Sometimes they reverted to the ancient Gods that had still been kept alive, deep inside folk culture. Sometimes rituals became a mixture of both.

Although many traditions are still found in folk festivals in contemporary society that have stemmed from seasonal moments, they are now very diluted. In Australian urban cultures where a veritable cornucopia of various foods can be bought in supermarkets, the knowledge of the seasons and awareness of the vital role the seasons play in our life is slight; we have foods that are now obtainable at any time of the year and are imported from all over the world. The deeply integrated relationship with the supply of food found in times past has ceased to exist in urban areas where most people now live.¹⁷⁰ Festivals relating to food are now often placed in epicurean environments—the eating and drinking of ‘fine’ products (see the Taste of Sydney Festival—mid March).

In Australia the seasonal festivals found in some rural areas are much more heart-felt (see Bream Creek Show in Chapter Six), although even these bucolic relationships are now in states of transition as agricultural methods change and attitudes, especially amongst the young, become more urban. There are examples of some harvest festivals where the crop that supports much of the community is actually treated with abuse. The Chinchilla Melon Festival in Queensland has had seed spitting and watermelon ‘smashing’ as features.¹⁷¹ Elsewhere old authentic seasonal festivals have been replaced with other kinds of celebration. The Innisfail Festival (beginning October), which used to be held by the Italian community at the sugar cane harvest, is now a general festival run by the local council with little reference to the crop that engendered it.

New festivals have been based on the crops themselves but often have

¹⁷⁰ 85% of Australians live in cities. Statistics from ERIC web site, viewed 4 April 2009. <http://eric.ed.gov/ERICWebPortal/custom/portlets/recordDetails/detailmini.jsp?_nfpb=true&_ERICExtSearch_SearchValue_0=ED390594&ERICExtSearch_SearchType_0=no&accno=ED390594>.

¹⁷¹ This kind of food wastage at harvest is found elsewhere. In Bunol in Valencia, Spain the famous tomato war held on the last Saturday in August is attended by 30,000 people who destroy 125,000 kilos of tomatoes.

civic, tourist and commercial aims rather than a celebration of the season.¹⁷² It must be noted that in Australia many of the seasonal festivals relating to food and its celebratory traditions were inherited from Britain and consequently misplaced—winter traditions like Christmas coincide with summer themes for example.¹⁷³ This factor has not only had a disorienting effect on the symbolism, design and atmosphere of seasonal festivals in Australia, it has also had another consequence. The deep connections of pre-historic celebrations to food supply, with its life and death importance produced the ‘grotesque’: the human figure that has an intimate physical relationship to the body and its basic needs (Bakhtin 1984). By the time Australia was inheriting its colonial celebratory traditions this basic connection with life and death had almost vanished in Europe; the fairs, carnivals and festivals had already been sanitised and controlled by civic authorities.

There is one arts group in Edinburgh, Scotland that has rebuilt a traditional seasonal festival with the aim of awakening this seasonal relationship—the Beltane Fire Festival.



Plate 49: Beltane Fire Festival, Edinburgh.

Source: Photograph Neil Cameron

¹⁷² Dragon Fruit Festival in Nanango in early March is designed to promote this exotic fruit and the town itself.

¹⁷³ Reindeer, snow covered Christmas Trees, snowmen and other winter symbols are common.

This particular gathering is a good example of some new design approaches to seasonal gathering. The Beltane Fire Festival has been held in Edinburgh for over twenty years (started in 1988) and now attracts twelve thousand people annually. It is based on the old Scottish Spring festival of Beltane,¹⁷⁴ where people used to clean the hearth¹⁷⁵ and start new fires to welcome the spring. The organisers have translated this ancient gathering into a contemporary event that puts no definitive explanation on its activities—it is an open text that allows for personal interpretation.

The festival is held on a prominent hill in the heart of Edinburgh on the night of 30 April–1 May that pinpoints the cusp of Spring¹⁷⁶. It places its Axis Mundi at a psychological moment in the year's calendar: the severe winter is now waning and making way for the warmer days. As it was in times past, communities want to engage in a gathering that allows expression of renewal at this invigorating moment. The event involves three hundred volunteers backed by professional artists and technicians. The May Queen who represents this upsurge of renewal parades through densely packed crowds, escorted by her protectors, the 'white women' (see Plate 49). They process around the hill amid fire and drums enacting rituals of renewal on the way. The audience (many having drinks) crowd together to see the Queen pass. It is very disorientating as no plan of the event is published, it just happens all around you. As an audience member I was pressed tightly into strangers moving and swaying together to the rhythm of the drums. The event was in the dark, I had no idea of what was going on, the form was unpredictable and showed sure signs that the designers had placed their audience into a particular state of the special: audience had become participant and everyone contributed to the spin of the event. The normal had vanished, anything could happen, my senses were on the alert, the atmosphere was full of ruptures and catalysts, the special had been achieved.

¹⁷⁴ From the Gaelic word *bealltain*.

¹⁷⁵ The crude peat used as fuel in highland cottages was so hard to light that the fire was rarely extinguished and burnt all year. Spring was the moment to clear the fire and start again.

¹⁷⁶ May Day is a traditional spring festival date and celebrations are held all over Europe at this time. The socialist movement (especially in Russia) placed itself on this date to embrace the energy found in the community at this time of year.

A group of half naked 'red men'¹⁷⁷ attack and are beaten off. The 'Green Man' an ambiguous figure of winter performs a dance and ritualistically dies in order to be reborn again. The celebration of Spring becomes less formal after midnight and audience members join with performers to dance and sing until the dawn of May Day itself.¹⁷⁸ It is an intense experience designed to bring alive the feelings of a new season, one of energy and renewal – the design of the Axis Mundi works well in achieving this.

Although this celebratory event might seem like an enactment of old Celtic rites and might even suggest that there is a serious cosmological involvement, this is not the case. It is a secular event, and the people who take part see the various symbols as vehicles for modern expression of environmental ideas. It is a Spring Event using the energies of rejuvenation in a cold part of the world. Even though it uses ancient archetypes to present the event, it is a gathering of its time placed firmly into the 21st century. The seasonal and genetic elements, with themes of fertility that were so important to the original event, have been retranslated into issues and feelings that reflect our lives today. Semiological aspects transmute from one situation to another and bring with them new meanings and interpretations. In an interview by a local city guide magazine Chloe Dear, who has been involved with this event for many years, describes her Beltane experience:

CLO[sic] ... it wasn't just being up all night dancing, it wasn't the intensity of a two hour performance ... there was something quite powerful about remaining focused and intent on carrying out a ritual in front of so many people. I was not myself which is what gave me that power to see it through ... and people did not recognise me, or if they did, recognised I was in a different state that night—I was a White Woman, not Chloe. And all without the aid of any drugs whatsoever—just the whole joyous spirit of Beltane.

Edinburgh Guide: Sounds pretty wild?

¹⁷⁷ Although the 'white women' and 'red men' seem sex-specific both sexes can join in either group.

¹⁷⁸ There has been a folk tradition in Edinburgh that on the 1st May people roll about in the dew at dawn.

CLO[sic]. No seriously, I am very down to earth, pretty damn skeptical, raised as a non-believer of everything. My father is a fully-practicing atheist who hates any form of non-scientific thought! I don't describe myself as a hippie, new-ager or anything like that and nor do I call myself pagan, but Beltane is probably one of the most important elements of my life (Interview with Chloe Dear on *Edinburgh Guide* web site, 13 April 1998. Viewed 1 April 2009. < <http://www.edinburghguide.com/festival/beltane/interview-with-a-blue-Beltane—Interview with a Blue Man>>).

If the folk energy found in seasonal relationships within carnival have declined, so too have these concepts within the sacred. The cosmology that is integrated into season relations with the natural environment¹⁷⁹ has weakened as Christianity has waned within mainstream culture; the Christian Harvest Festival held in September is no longer a potent event in the Australian calendar for example. Ideas about blessing crops or thanking the Divine for food have all but gone. But there is one outstanding seasonal event that does still have a strong relationship with the season and food and that is Christmas, although links with the sacred are now confused. Originally a mid-winter feast in Europe, often held when a particular animal was killed,¹⁸⁰ Christmas was intimately involved with cosmologies concerned with a cyclical movement towards spring. When Christianity replaced 'pagan' activities the 'feast' was adopted to celebrate the birth of Jesus. Even in the present time of plenty the Christmas meal is still a very important part of the yearly cycle and special foods are eaten by family and friends; however, the celebratory links between scarcity and surfeit are now very weak. People can feast at any time.

Environmental effects in contemporary society: the weather

Humans have used weather to their advantage in gatherings throughout history: cold weather, for example, can actually give new impetus to festivals. The River Thames was often frozen through Tudor times and resulted in 'Frost Fairs'.

¹⁷⁹ The death and resurrection of Jesus coinciding with spring for example.

¹⁸⁰ Turkeys, geese, pigs, etc.



Plate 50: Frost Fair on Thames

Source: Agecroft web site. Viewed 12 April 2009

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/River_Thames_frost_fairs> Artist unknown

The winter of 1608 was recorded as exceedingly cold, and people took to the frozen Thames to set up stalls, tents, and booths in much the same manner as we would prepare for a festival today.

One Edmund Howe wrote that there ‘were many that set up boothes and standings upon the ice, as fruit-sellers, victuallers, that sold beere and wine, shoemakers and a barber’s tent.’

Oddly enough, at a Frost Fair in 1683–84, small printing presses were set up on the ice, due to the huge demand for printed souvenirs that stated that the item was bought on the ice of the Thames (Agecroft hall web site, viewed 28 March 2009. <<http://www.agecrofthall.org/newsletter/content/view/73/27/>>>).

There is a positive side to weather and the production of large festivals around the world today: snow produces winter gatherings in Japan at the Sapporo Snow Festival, for example, where very large ice sculptures are built—some with help from the army. The Horyuji Temple, shown in Plate 48, was thirteen metres high and took two thousand seven hundred metric tonnes of ice and four thousand six

hundred people thirty days to build .¹⁸¹



Plate 51: Sapporo Ice Sculpture

Source: Japan Travel Guide—Sapporo Snow Festival web site. Viewed 12 April 2009 .http://www.yamasa.org/japan/english/destinations/hokkaido/snow_festival.html site.

Photographer unknown

The falling of rain is celebrated in Iran on 1 July when children wear rainbow ribbons and are thrown playfully into the water. In India the women celebrate a three-day rain festival called *Rajo* in mid June and take time off from work to celebrate and bathe. Wind is also celebrated by various kite festivals¹⁸² or sailing in hot air balloons.¹⁸³ Water is celebrated at *Songkran* (New Year) in Thailand between 13 and 15 April and there is a large-scale dowsing of many people using garden hoses, buckets and various containers.

The impact of weather on communities in modern times can still produce a strong gathering reaction. In secular contemporary society people no longer pray for rain in times of drought or give thanks to the Gods for living through a disaster, but the longing for rain and the relief of deliverance can emerge as real emotions that can be placed into gathering events.

¹⁸¹ Statistics from http://www.yamasa.org/japan/english/destinations/hokkaido/snow_festival.html Viewed 12 April 2009.

¹⁸² The International Wind Festival in Frejus, France attracts kite fliers from all over Europe. Also see Streeter 1974.

¹⁸³ The Albuquerque Balloon Fiesta held in October is a large-scale gathering.

Weather affects the human body intensely: in whatever way we culturally interact with weather it interacts with us in subtle ways. In local situations any gathering can be helped or hindered by weather. Rain, wind, hot sun, mist and threatening clouds can deeply influence how people feel in spite of the design's aims but the results are not always predictable. A famous example is at the 2007 Glastonbury Festival where heavy rain produced a great deal of mud on site. In some cases this would have destroyed the ambience of a festival; however, this particular event is 'alternative', and the attendees embraced the situation and rolled, played and covered themselves in the liquid brown earth.

Some gatherings are also designed around recovery from natural weather disasters—typhoons, tsunami, floods and drought. A devastating tsunami killed two hundred and twenty five thousand people, including about fifty Australians, on 26 December 2004.¹⁸⁴ Following is an excerpt from an article by Catherine Masters 'Chants and Incense for Remembrance' in the *New Zealand Herald*, dated 27 December 2005:

KHAO LAK—The smell of incense and the peaceful sounds of chanting drift in the still air at the devastated Sofitel Magic Lagoon and Spa resort on the beachfront at Khao Lak in southern Thailand.

Nine orange-robed Buddhist monks sit cross-legged in a row holding a long piece of white string stretched out in front of them. The string is like a pathway, helping the offerings placed in front of the monks—toothpaste, toothbrush, hairbrush, practical things—to travel to the spirits of the tsunami victims. Among the mostly Thai congregation at this intimate memorial service of about 30 people sit two Australians. The mother and sister of Kim Walsh, 39, who died in room number 3122 on the ground floor, clasp their hands in prayer with the others. This ceremony is just one of many held along this long strip of coastline in Phang Nga province on the Boxing Day anniversary of the tsunami (Catherine Masters cited in New Zealand Herald web site, viewed 31 March, 2009. <http://www.nzherald.co.nz/tsunami-in-asia/news/article.cfm?c_id=500851&objectid=10361597>.)

¹⁸⁴ Final number can never be confirmed, as there was no official record of how many Australian citizens were there.

Environmental effects in contemporary society: orientation

Gatherings dealing with human orientation in the natural environment lessened as people became more and more distant from 'raw' nature; consequently, few communities in the west have gatherings of this nature. Communities still use rivers, mountains and trees as gathering environments, but modern humans have become more and more dependent on their own contrived ritual landscapes. In the industrialised countries of the 21st century there is little need to use Axis Mundi events to 'orient' oneself in the natural world; even events that happen in bush locations have clear maps and well-worn paths.

Nevertheless some gatherings are held that have the direct aim of reconnecting us with the natural world. The Mountain Festival¹⁸⁵ in Hobart is an example where events are held that take people into the mountain environment: lantern processions through the woods and theatre events on the side of Mount Wellington are part of the program. There are now 'Green' Festivals in different parts of the Western world. The Outsider Festival, held in the Cairngorms in Scotland at the end of June, invites people to run, climb, raft, bike and walk through the environment as part of the festival: it also includes forums about the environment. The Big Green Gathering Festival at the end of July in the Mendip Hills in England attracts over twenty thousand people; it concerns itself with many environmental projects and powers some of its electricity needs by wind and solar sources.¹⁸⁶ These kinds of festivals used to be the preserve of 'alternative' people, but as consciousness of global environmental issues increases they have also attracted the general public. The Woodford Folk Festival in Queensland, Australia, discussed previously, holds an annual tree-planting program and a 'green' series of events—so far over eighty thousand trees have been planted. The Planting web site describes these activities:

The Tree-Planting Weekends grew, with people bringing friends and families to share in the joyful activity of planting trees and being in the outdoors. They became more than a working bee with the introduction of educational

¹⁸⁵ Held every two years in mid March.

¹⁸⁶ It also has a 'human power' section where 'exercise' bikes are connected to generators.

talks and activities, with some fantastic cultural events thrown in for unwinding at the end of the day. Now the programme of talks, presentations and performances vies with the daily planting and weeding activities, for time in a busy weekend schedule.

The Planting is a natural development of the Tree-Planting Weekend into an event fostering open learning and discussion of environmental issues; with explorations of subjects ranging from raw foods to invertebrates, the local pond to climate change. Primarily though, the event remains dedicated to a nurturing of the site to reach its natural potential as a forested parkland for the enjoyment of present and future generations (The Planting web site, viewed 1 April 2009. <<http://www.woodfordfolkfestival.com>>).

Gatherings are also designed to focus socially on environmental issues. In Tibet the local nomadic people had been unknowingly killing endangered animals to decorate their festival costumes: the local groups hold a traditional festival at the source of the Lancang River. This festival has now been renamed the Green Community Ecological Culture Festival and aims to add environmental awareness to the traditional events—such as wrestling, games and rituals—with an educational program about the endangered animals through films, talks and social interaction. This new initiative has had an effect, as is described by the *China Daily News*:

At the opening ceremony on the afternoon of August 1, Lama Zhuga made a speech telling his followers: 'Conservation suits the ideals of Buddhism and our traditional culture. We should protect our environment on our own initiative, as it is actually protecting ourselves.'

Gama Zaxi, kanbu (scholar) of the Rili Monastery who is also secretary general of the volunteers' organization, led several monks to chant prayers for the festival. Before that, he said that dressing in otter, leopard and tiger furs is not a good part of Tibetan traditional culture. 'We can't be indifferent to other kinds of life while caring only about our own image,' he said (*China Daily News*, 25 August, 2005, viewed 1 April 2009. <<http://www.china.org.cn/english/travel/139702.htm>>).

There are also political/social events where gatherings are used to focus on the environment. The processions held around the world to support environmental

protection are well publicised. One example was the ‘Saving of the Franklin River’ march in Melbourne, in November 1982 that brought fourteen thousand people into the streets with theatre companies and bands. This gathering was to have an important impact on public opinion and the damming of the Franklin River was eventually stopped. Processional translocation dynamics were utilised to the full, giving energy to the Axis Mundi: daylight kept the gathering open and transparent.



Plate 52: Save the Franklin River Protest March

Source: The Wilderness web site. Viewed 12 April 2009.

<<http://www.wilderness.org.au/articles/franklin>> Photographer unknown

Our interaction with the natural environment might no longer be concerned with physical orientation, but, in a sense, gatherings are able to orient us to a new relationship with the environment. Events similar to the Franklin River march are able to provide a conduit between urbanised populations and the natural world, tuning the technologically oriented human back into the natural world and thus beginning to tackle global environmental problems.

Summary

This chapter has seen how transitional Axis Mundi events still remain important to people around the world both for the individual and the community. It seems that we need to have gatherings to allow change to happen and that Axis Mundi events achieve this. Designers then must take cognisance of this when they

design certain events that contain transitional situations, especially in the area of Rites of Passage. By understanding more about the social imperatives and the cognitive reasons that lie behind transition designers will be in a better position to stage them.

As to Axis Mundi events in the environment it seems that this is one area that has really faded from most western societies with their surfeit of food and little need for orientation. I have talked in previous chapters about how the environment is used in the natural world to stage events and this is still important and our sensitivity to climate is still operating but the very survival aspects that fuelled environmental Axis Mundi events in Kelby are very much diluted in contemporary society. Designers wanting to activate these energies might find it more difficult now than in times gone past.

Chapter 9: Axis Mundi gatherings and social imperative 7. Sacred events

People are ‘meaning-seeking animals’:

The view of man as a symbolizing, conceptualizing, meaning-seeking animal, which has become increasingly popular both in the social sciences and in philosophy over the past several years, opens up a whole new approach not only to the analysis of religion as such, but to the understanding of the relations between religion and values. The drive to make sense out of experience, to give it form and order, is evidently as real and as pressing as the more familiar biological needs. And, this being so, it seems unnecessary to continue to interpret symbolic activities, religion, art, ideology—as nothing but thinly disguised expressions of something other than what they seem to be: attempts to provide orientation for an organism which cannot live in a world it is unable to understand (Geertz 1973, pp.140–141).

Our survival has been deeply tied to associative behaviour and thus different communities have always struggled to find common ground when it comes to understanding the world on a sacred level as I mentioned at the beginning of the thesis. The distinction that needs to be made here is the difference between religion and the sacred. These are not interchangeable in the context of an Axis Mundi analytic framework applied to gatherings, and should be separated. I will restate that the word ‘religion’ can be applied when enough social apparatus has been gathered around particular metaphysical ideas to create a belief meta-language that has a distinct unity. This unity can range from large-scale formalised religions and their various sects to small-scale local groups that organise a unity of faith. I will call gatherings within these belief systems *religious* sacred events.

However, feelings and expression of the sacred are not confined to metaphysical belief systems and can be defined as concepts that describe each person’s relationship with ‘higher meaning’; they might be secular in nature and

might be completely individual to a particular person. The sacred can be a philosophy or a set of feelings unrelated to any religious system but nevertheless concerned with the nature of life on Earth and the place of humans in the universe. I will call events stemming from these sets of feelings and expressions *secular* sacred events as opposed to *religious* sacred events which are found inside the religious structures mentioned above. The major religions demonstrate a traditional formalisation of ritual and gathering activity within structures of operation and are well known, but in secular society, a more localised set of sacred thoughts needs a form of expression designed especially to fulfil this function.

Religious gatherings and secular sacred Axis Mundi events span a wide range of moods, actions and emotions. 'No more than there is a single sort of motivation one can call piety is there a single sort of mood one can call worshipful' (Geertz 1973, p.97). They are complex and fraught with interpretive problems, but the central idea that lies behind all sacred gatherings is to express the deepest feeling human beings have about being human and how they relate to the world in which they live. This is a very complex area of operation¹⁸⁷ and I would like to state that I am approaching the matter of the sacred as a series of *structured social processes* common to all religions, beliefs, feelings and ideas that result in these kinds of gatherings: I make no attempt to evaluate any particular cosmology or theology for its validity.

Sacred events in Kelby

In the village of Kelby, belief permeates and underpins almost all gatherings. Beliefs are not separate from the people and cannot be connected and disconnected; they are an integrated part of life, and the people believe that their gods live amongst the people. The villagers have an explanation for the inner and outer workings of the

¹⁸⁷ 'The notion that religion tunes human actions to an envisaged cosmic order and projects images of cosmic order onto the plane of human experience is hardly novel. But it is hardly investigated either, so that we have very little idea of how, in empirical terms, this particular miracle is accomplished: We just know that it is done, annually, weekly, daily, for some people almost hourly; and we have an enormous ethnographic literature to demonstrate it. But the theoretical framework which would enable us to provide an analytic account of it, an account of the sort we can provide for lineage segmentation, political succession, labour exchange, or the socialization of the child, does not exist' (Geertz 1973, p.90).

world and that is held in their cosmology. They have worked out and evolved an explanation of what is happening around them based on the world that they experience. I do not intend here to go into every detail of their belief system, but I will examine just one factor to demonstrate how the villagers' perception of the world determines their explanation of the world. The sun, from their perspective, is the size of a small disc (the size of a penny) and yet it provides the heat and light they need to survive. At sunrise the disc turns into a glowing mass as it moves across the sky, and people are unable to look at it without being dazzled. It is unlike anything else in their environment. They know that during the growing and dying cycles of the year this life-giving disc rises and sets at different places on the horizon and that these have something to do with the fact that the weather gets colder and hotter. This disc does not stay in the sky for the same amount of time during these cycles and seems to move its position for some reason. A real mystery about the sun is that it sets in one place and comes up somewhere else. They wonder how this happens. Is there a new disc every day or does the same one travel underground to find its way back to starting point?¹⁸⁸ The night is also a mystery with small points of twinkling lights which move around the sky too. The moon disc seems much larger but has no warmth, and it gets bigger and smaller each month. Although they do not understand these phenomena, like most human groups they produce a meta-language to explain them.

In Kelby they do not see the sun merely as a physical phenomenon but as a force, an energy, with a personality—as I have said all metaphysical imaging is based on their own experience: they personify it as a life-giving spirit with a male energy. It travels underground each night to sleep in a cave that has an entrance in one direction (west) and an exit (east). This explains why he goes off in one direction and comes back in another. He is also the creator of the world—he mated with the moon and the earth was their child. He travels across the sky each day to see what he has created and how the world is prospering.

The people believe he interferes with the villagers' activities at various times,

¹⁸⁸ The ancient Egyptians believed that the sun moved under the earth (the underworld) through the night in a boat through twelve portals.

but at others times he leaves them alone to work it out themselves. The benevolence is not taken for granted, and the people know he likes gifts. Many Axis Mundi events take place around interactions with this great force. The people of Kelby know that without his good will, which he withdraws in winter each year, they will suffer and perhaps die. A complex series of rituals and ceremonies have been built around this basic cosmology with dozens of other spirits and forces interlocking with the 'father' god—the moon, the river, the weather gods, the plants and animals. The world is a frightening place, but the collective imagination of the people has built up a system that encompasses all mysteries and allows a holistic understanding of the world's workings. The workings of the sun are not dissimilar to the workings of the people—reality and belief are integrated. On these sorts of issues Geertz (1973, p.127) comments:

A people's ethos is the tone, character, and quality of their life, its moral and aesthetic style and mood; it is the underlying attitude toward themselves and their world that life reflects. Their world view is their picture of the way things in sheer actuality are, their concept of nature, of self, of society. It contains their most comprehensive ideas of order. Religious belief and ritual confront and mutually confirm one another; the ethos is made intellectually reasonable by being shown to represent a way of life implied by the actual state of affairs which the world view describes, and the world view is made emotionally acceptable by being presented as an image of an actual state of affairs of which such a way of life is an authentic expression. This demonstration of a meaningful relation between the values a people holds and the general order of existence within which it finds itself is an essential element in all religions, however those values or that order be conceived. Whatever else religion may be, it is in part an attempt (of an implicit and directly felt rather than explicit and consciously thought-about sort) to conserve the fund of general meanings in terms of which each individual interprets his experience and organizes his conduct.

Because the people have used personification processes to understand their world (humans themselves being a strong model in their interpretive methodology), their interactions with the deities become reflective of their own interactions with other human beings. Human beings feel things and so it seems

logical that the Gods must too, and in similar ways.

If the interface between human beings and the Gods are analysed, most cosmologies produce ceremonies and rituals that include a number of features. I have separated them into two parts, one an active engagement and the other a passive underlay. Although I will outline the characteristics which make up these two categories as they may appear in Kelby, these same characteristics are visible in religious events in many cultures to the present day.

Active engagement

Prayer—Asking for help occurs as a daily practice and is sometimes brought about in special circumstances—a drought, an illness, a future wish, a disaster, a hunt. When there is trouble of any kind the people ask for help. In the village this asking takes many forms depending on the situation. There are translocational events, music and dancing, pleading and sacrifice, ritual manoeuvres and use of all ritual landscapes.

Worship—Living in awe with an omnipotent energy produces a range of human feelings, including fear, wonder and mystery. Events are constructed around these feelings, such as gatherings in the stone circle to hold rituals and ceremonies.

Witness—blessing: The deities are watching what is happening and can ‘bless’ human actions (they can also withhold blessing). This blessing happens in a number of events such as rites of passage, new ventures and crop planting.

Sacrifice—giving: The people engage in reciprocal exchange with the forces that make up their world. They ‘give’ something valuable to the gods to persuade them to help in some enterprise. Also the people feel strongly that the gods need to be acknowledged for their kindness and that a failure to do this will result in anger and revenge. Gatherings around this activity are formal with translocational processions, a giving of gifts, making sacrifices, singing special songs and making special movements.

Judgement—punishment: The group functions on various associative dynamics and this unity is assisted by bringing to bear supernatural forces to enforce

the law. The deity is evoked, usually through the shaman, and the wrongdoer is punished in the god's name rather than an individual. When deities rather than the people are the instruments of punishment, the 'personal element' is removed from people living in close knit groups. This procedure emerges in events with punishment rituals and ceremonies that take the act from the normal into the special, distancing it from the community. For serious offences, the people are 'marked' with a spear wound, and, although witnessed by the entire group, the malefactors feel they have been punished by the gods, not the community.

Passive underlay

Explanation—Story: They believe that the gods made the world and therefore provide an explanation as to why things are the way they are. This rationale emerges at many levels within a wide range of gatherings. It is sung about, danced, painted, related as story, discussed, formalised in ritual, and developed into a semiological language both with formal activities and informal manifestations of local expression.

Knowledge—wisdom: The gods can impart their omniscience to people, and there is a special ceremony held to ask for 'signs' that guide people into the future. The information the gods impart guides aspects of village life, invokes the law and influences the 'right' way to proceed in any given circumstance.

Harmony—integration: Belief in the gods provides a strong central associative concentration for the group, and this mono-cultural holism underpins all village life.

Death—the explanation: The deity provides a life after death. This feature is one of the most important of the belief system and provides a rationale for funeral events that gives a positive picture of death. It also gives the deities great power—the giving and taking of life.

Power—authority: The peoples' belief provides a 'higher' authority that gives present actions validation. The gods, represented in icon, attend gatherings of this sort injecting the event with supernatural approval and thereby greatly strengthening the associative bonds of common action.

Protection—a haven: If the gods are happy, they will give divine shelter from the hardships of life. When the villagers gather in their sacred spaces they feel reassured; they hope the forces of the world are on their side and, because of this, their families and friends will survive and thrive.

Ethical Behaviour—a code: The gods expect certain behaviour, or an ethical stance, among the people. This stance is deeply connected with behaviour that improves community association, and the rituals and celebrations concerned with these aspects emphasise the unalterable ‘rules’ that people should live by.

These activities either stand alone as religious activity or are integrated into the other major events in the village, described in earlier chapters. For example, when a death occurs and ceremony is instigated, it includes both active religious activities (prayer and worship) and passive underlay (explanation and death beliefs). For crop planting a ritual is organised with active features (prayer, witness and sacrifice) and passive underlay to support the event (explanation and knowledge).

The twelve functions of belief run through the life in Kelby and form the central gathering energy (there is no ‘deep’ carnival mocking the gods in the village, and punitive action is taken for any sacrilegious behaviour). Elemental life is explained by these cosmologies: a cohesive belief system explains all and acts as an intensifier of associative feelings. While it is undisturbed by outside systems—for example, the admittance of new knowledge that might prove it wrong, or an outsider who might provide a convincing alternative—the people can hold gatherings in a stable holistic framework that can hold every type of social need. The community places the highest importance on their inter-active relationship with the gods—in other words they live a complete sacred life. Each week much time is spent in celebratory tasks that concern belief and, although there is a shaman, all members of the village, including children, work hard to maintain their ‘religious’ life—it is their first priority and a totally integrated social process. As Jung wrote, ‘Meaning makes a great many things endurable—perhaps everything’ (1995, p.373).

Sacred Events in contemporary society

If the multiplicity of religious beliefs throughout history were examined, it

would show that human beings have produced a very large range of cosmologies as meta-narratives that they could live by. But in spite of the differences in cosmology, most belief groups have been consistent in devising combinations of the twelve features previously described and designing events around them. To explore this consistency in the celebration of the sacred, and trace modern shifts in its durability I will concentrate, in the main, on contrasting cultures studied in field work. In India, I will look at two examples that have very active belief systems running through them with all twelve celebratory functions still working, and then turn to Australia and examine the situation there.¹⁸⁹

Sacred gatherings in India

Hinduism is a belief system that spans the whole continent of India, permeates all walks of life and facilitates a great deal of gathering activity. Its cosmological structure allows the twelve aspects of religion I have mentioned to be expressed by the community. It is difficult to travel anywhere in India without coming across religious events of one sort or another that may be read in terms of an Axis Mundi event. When methods of inducement are examined in Indian sacred activities, the celebratory energy is almost always focused through internal inducement with meditation, fasting or movement rather than external inducements such as drink and drugs¹⁹⁰. Indian ceremonial space is widespread, ranging from large temples to small wayside shrines, from holy rivers to sacred mountains, and from village squares to full-scale constructed ritual environments. The arts are fully employed: music, theatre, dance, visual arts and the written and spoken word.

I would like to describe two sacred Indian gatherings which demonstrate various aspects to sacred Axis Mundi events. The first is the Kumbh Mela which is the biggest festival on earth and demonstrates a very large sacred gathering and a temple in Assam which practises animal sacrifices and reveals factors about this activity and its impact on people's feelings.

¹⁸⁹ This statement does not include Indigenous peoples in Australia whose belief practices are outside of the remit of this study.

¹⁹⁰ Although some Sadhus in India use marijuana.

The Kumbh Mela

Every three years Hindus celebrate the Kumbh Mela at one of four locations deemed sacred. The celebratory event attracts millions of pilgrims,¹⁹¹ who travel from all over India. The derivation of the festival comes from the following source:

The word '*kumbh*' means an urn, and '*fneia*' a fair. The festival celebrates one of the creation myths of Hinduism. Brahma, the creator ... started to create the universe. The gods and the demons decided to speed up the process by churning the ocean ... As the ocean frothed, miraculous gifts appeared. The most valuable was an urn of a nectar which made anyone who drank it immortal. The demons grabbed the urn, but the son of Indra, who ruled the heavens, managed to spirit it away from them. Disguising himself as a rook, he flew over the earth, chased by the demons ... drops of nectar fell on those four places during the flight ... Kumbh Melas are held in all four places once every twelve years (Tully 1991, p.13).

The millions of people coming to the festival bathe in the Ganges River at specific times that are considered very auspicious: to bathe is to be blessed. The following is an edited version of my field notes on a visit on one of these 'holy' days.

The great bathing day: Friday 2 February 2007

Voices start over the speaker at three o'clock in the morning and there is a feeling of energy in the night air. The evening before felt charged with a new feeling as people arrived in great numbers to take part. I am met by our guide Wasim and off I go through the dimly lit streets ... I top the hill overlooking the flood plain and there are thousands of sparkling lights covering a vast area. I stop and view tens of thousands of people moving to the edge of the water along a stretch of river several miles long: the moon is full and large in the sky.

¹⁹¹ Numbers vary depending on the year it is held and final figures are unreliable as the event happens over several weeks and it is not possible to accurately evaluate numbers. However, the following quote would give an indication. 'Nearly 70 million Hindus are expected to participate in the 45-day "Ardh Kumbh Mela" or Half Grand Pitcher Festival, one of the largest regular gatherings in the world' (Bbanerjee, B 'Millions of Hindus Wash Away Their Sins', *Washington Post*, 15 January 2007, viewed 10 May 2009. <<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2007/01/15/AR2007011500041.html>>).

The smells assault the senses with smoke from small fires where people huddle around to get warm in this cold morning. Incense, perfumes, dust, chai cooking, snacks on the ovens and a thousand other smells prevail. The participants, too, fill the senses with people from all over India and of every class and caste ... Holy men parade through the crowds with large banners and followed by their disciples. Pilgrims are lighting small candles set in little boats of banana leaves and setting them afloat on the black water. Some people are doing specific rituals, pouring water, surrounding the space with circles in the dust, lighting small (and large) flames, chanting, laughing and chattering with excitement.

When we come to the river's edge the sight is without parallel with so many thousands of people moving into the water with such a feeling of joy—the women do this fully clothed and the men are modestly dressed in dhotis or robes. An old man, with bent legs, wades carefully in the moving sacred water. He bends down and submerges his body and washes his long tangled white hair and then carefully wades ashore. Two little girls are brought down by their mother and slowly move knee deep. The water is obviously cold and the mother signals to her girls to immerse; they look reluctant but one by one vanish under the dark surface and come up shivering but looking very pleased.

Meanwhile the loudspeaker's blast appeals for lost people who are desperately trying to reach their loved ones. I realise it could be serious for a mother to lose a small child in this fantastic melee. The night light casts everything into a strange and blending light brown light with vivid splashes of colour. Police ride proudly through the people on immaculate horses and in another place a policeman beats a man with a donkey for no reason I can see. The people's clothes are very varied with turbans, robes, saris, wraparounds, scarves, blankets and wonderful Aladdin type trousers and shirts. All this is set off with jewellery of every description—two women walk by with golden wheels through noses, a man with a gold and red turban places gold necklace after gold necklace around his neck, fingers weighed down with jewelled rings, an old man carrying a Shiva trident, another with a white robe to his knees moves with a highly carved stick.

There are naked Sadhus with no clothes at all making their way through the crowds knowing their faith will sustain any awkward looks.

There is certainly a celebratory feeling in the air but one of calm and peacefulness. People are delighted to have submerged themselves in the holy river that will release them from the circle of life. In spite of the huge crowd there is no feeling of fooling around, pushing or shoving, or anger or aggression, which could quite easily be the case. The sun rises through the dust and is blood red, washing everything with a feeling of a new day—a new life for many believers (Neil Cameron travel notes).



Plate 53: Kumbh Mela, Allahabad, 2007

Source: Photograph Neil Cameron

This massive event is an impressive example of how religion can create a powerful Axis Mundi without recourse to complex iconography or ritual complexity. In essence, people are simply going into the river, submerging and coming out—a simple act without music, costumes, dance, ceremony or any of the other components common in so many events. This particular event demonstrates the power of the upward thrust of the Axis Mundi and the strength of the sacred to create

celebratory atmospheres. The Kumbh Mela is an activity that reaches the top of the sacred scale within each person gathering together, in those many millions, communicating with their Gods. It creates a very powerful celebration because of what people believe at the most sacred level. It is made strong by the meaning that is contained within the actions and as Tully (1991, p.8) comments in this regard:

The Kumbh Mela is also an inspiring example of the power of myth. If we want a richer diet we have to go to the myths lying behind the great religious traditions, and of course that does not mean putting our faith in lies as so many critics of religion would have us believe. For me, a Christian, it has been very difficult to make that leap from history to myth, and I am still sure that I don't abandon my rational training sufficiently and let my imagination have free rein. That's much easier for the Hindus who will gather in Allahabad because theirs is a religion beyond the reality of history, a religion of the imagination which goes beyond reason. It does not matter to them whether the gods and demons did churn up the ocean or not, it's the meaning behind the myth which matters.

When meaning is injected by belief, a series of ordinary events can take on a deep significance that can bring about intense feelings of celebration. Structurally, the Kumbh Mela has aspects which intensify the ritual environment and link the bathing with complex inner relationships to a holistic cosmology. The liminal zone around the event is very atmospheric. A large city of tents houses the millions of people camped beside the sacred river: there is a festive atmosphere with a community built on common purpose. A large 'sacred' fairground, which could be described as a Hindu theme park, provides pilgrims with countless stalls to engage with various aspects of the experience. On the dates when bathing becomes auspicious, the excitement builds up to an intense point of focus where each individual, enforced by the sheer associative forces of millions of people, is able to feel the joy brought about by a positive integration with the divine.

The environment becomes an active ritual space where physicality becomes sacred—the water takes on a sacred aspect, as do the prayers, the intense smells, the gathering of holy water in small brass bowls, the flowers set upon the river, the full moon and the rising sun, which all become significant, set apart and integrated into

each person's spiritual life. The Axis Mundi is powered by a belief with strong liminal experiences such as sense triggers, movement and meaning, symbolic display, seismological matrix intensities, cultural affirmations and physical interactions.

Although this is a transformational celebration in a sacred context, one of its most distinctive features is that it is uncontrolled from a religious point of view.¹⁹² There is no overriding religious organisation controlling and centring the experience; each person or group is doing this for themselves with an 'open' text of spiritual alignment.¹⁹³ Campbell (1949, p.270) comments on the power of myth:

Mythology is defeated when the mind rests solemnly with its favourite or traditional images, defending them as though they themselves were the message that they communicate. These images are to be regarded as no more than shadows from the unfathomable reach beyond, where the eye goeth not, speech goeth not, nor the mind, nor even piety. Like the trivialities of dream, those of myth are big with meaning.

Kamahkya Temple

Sacrifice of animals (and people) within sacred structures has been a common factor in gatherings throughout history and prehistory. Girard's (1977, p.2) theories that sacrifice relieves a sense of reciprocal violence that builds up in any group is certainly demonstrated in the following example. 'When unappeased, violence seeks and always finds a surrogate victim. The creature that excited its fury is abruptly replaced by another, chosen only because it is vulnerable and close at hand.'

To examine how this function worked I travelled, in my field study in India, to the Kamahkya Temple in the city of Guwahti in Assam, India: this temple uses animal sacrifice as part of the worship. Hindus believe that when Shiva's wife Parvati died, he was so upset that he flew over India with her in his arms. Bits of her body floated down to earth, and this temple was where her yoni (vagina) fell, and therefore

¹⁹² It is the Army and police that handle management organised by the particular state government.

¹⁹³ There are many gurus in attendance with their own ashrams (sometimes numbering several thousand) that do project a certain creed on their followers but most are not attached to any formalised 'church'.

it is the centre of the sacred feminine in the country. It is believed that the goddess menstruates once a year, and so this sacred space is concerned with blood and, consequently, daily sacrifices of kid goats, pigeons and bulls are common. Following is an edited extract from my journal:

Kamahkya Temple: Wednesday 28 February 2007

It is a beautiful place and has a peaceful and serene atmosphere. I enter through the lion gate so called because real lions used to guard it. (The western gate had tigers.) It has beehive temple roofs and it is reputed that a piece of gold was put inside each brick because any on the outside would prove a temptation to thieves. The outside pavements are particularly lovely and made of polished marble and clean and clear to walk on. Pigeons fly everywhere and small goats tip-toe around the perimeter. Before pilgrims enter they wash and purify themselves in a large pool and then receive the blessings of Ganesh (the God with an elephant head). This I do. There are small shrines and statues all around the temple area of the goddess in various roles.

... I am then taken to the slaughterhouse. It is just outside the main door and part of the temple itself, with a small walkway between the two. Sacrificial animals can be bought alongside the temple or worshippers can bring their own ... It is a large open hall and the floor is covered with blood. I suspect one would find this in any slaughterhouse. A large bull is standing chewing the cud and small goats are attached to the temple wall with small leads; pigeons are brought in from the grounds where they are fed by worshippers with corn.

At last it is time for the bull to be sacrificed ... The place is now packed with dozens of people and prayers and sighs build up. An old man who has brought the animal walks with a large axe-like knife to the temple door and prays for a clean one-stroke killing and suddenly turns and walks quickly inside. There is a strange moaning shout and then a team of people emerge holding the head of the bull and take it into the temple to be placed on the altar. People stream out laughing and shouting demonstrating a kind of

joy.¹⁹⁴ *One man dances towards me and shakes my hand and wishes me well. It seems indeed that the slaughter has brought a certain release of feeling and the atmosphere is now calm and happy. The smell of blood, incense and flowers fill the air as a wedding arrives with singing people who parade around the area (Extract from Neil Cameron's Indian Journal).*

I have described two examples of the religious practice in India but all twelve aspects of sacred activity and their Axis Mundi expression are catered for and thread their way through Indian life. It is a country whose gatherings are deeply engaged with religious belief, with sacred structures built in traditional forms through millennia. The designer's role there is to follow the time honoured ways of structuring the events. But what happens when religious traditions are diminished and leave the sacred in the secular realm?

Sacred gatherings in contemporary Australia

Australia is mainly secular as far as gatherings are concerned. Belief celebrations do run within Christian churches and among ethnic sub-groups and indigenous peoples, where belief systems are being practised. There are some 'alternative' and 'new-age' groups whose activities do not touch the mainstream, but there is little gathering activity across the broad face of society that shows a uniform religious structure. Modern materialism and rationalism have mostly supplanted all cosmologies and therefore large religious gatherings have all but disappeared. According to Ehrenreich (2006, p.179) talking about the West:

Despite all the efforts to preserve traditional rites—and all the flare-ups of ecstatic and defiant religious movements—the overall story is necessarily one of cultural destruction and gathering gloom. Ancient rituals were suppressed; syncretic religions marginalized and driven underground; religiously inspired revolutionary cults destroyed.

The influence of belief in all sorts of celebrations is greatly reduced, and while Christianity might be manifest in events such as ANZAC Day or a formal civic gathering, it is a secondary aspect and not the primary reason for the event. Major

celebratory events such as Easter and Christmas have been mostly supplanted by secular and commercial concerns.

Some festivals and events do build bridges between religion and the secular and create Axis Mundi dynamics that span the gap between the diffident average Australian and the sacred. The Woodford Folk Festival, mentioned before, is a secular event but has the sacred present in its program; organisers ensure this at many levels. The festival encourages established religious groups to express their beliefs in a non-proselytising way—giving permission to the Buddhist monks of Tibet to perform rituals, Sufis from the Middle East to demonstrate their sacred dance movements, or Christian work groups to run a café space are examples. Australia's multicultural arts groups are allowed a safe outlet of religiosity by placing the practice of the sacred into cultural spaces without friction and threat. The sacred views held and practised by Indigenous Australians are acknowledged and respected by the organisers who observe a careful sense of protocol to the 'country' they hold their events on and give proper space to the traditional owners of that 'country'.¹⁹⁵ The Indigenous people are included in the opening and closing ceremonies and resources are provided for them to create their own programs. This independence allows the non-Indigenous peoples at the festival to mingle, talk and share a culture that places a high priority on the sacred.

Occasionally, however, very large scale religious events do happen in Australia, and an example is the Catholic World Youth Day held in Sydney in 2008.

Catholic World Youth Day

World Youth Days¹⁹⁶ are organised by the Catholic Church every three years and one was held in Sydney 15–20 July 2008. The official World Youth Day web site¹⁹⁷ states that there were two hundred and twenty three thousand registered participants¹⁹⁸ with one hundred and ten thousand visiting from one hundred and

¹⁹⁵ The Jinibara People.

¹⁹⁶ Although publicised as 'World Youth Day' the event takes place within a gathering which happens over seven days

¹⁹⁷ <http://www.wyd2008.org/>. Viewed 14 May 2009.

¹⁹⁸ Under half the predicted numbers (Mills, J 'Who's Paying for World Youth Day?' posted in newmatilda.com web site, 27 March 2008, viewed 14 May 2009.

seventy countries (averaging six hundred and forty seven per country). The event was designed for young people and used many forms of popular culture to encourage association and mobilise religious enthusiasm. There were a number of events through the week leading up to a climactic Papal Mass on Sunday with Pope Benedict XVI who held a service for four hundred thousand people at Randwick Racecourse. The final cost was one hundred and fifty million Australian dollars, most of which was supplied from the Federal and NSW State budgets (forty one million dollars being given to Randwick Race Course to compensate its losses).¹⁹⁹ The week included many events, some in ritual environments that were very large scale (thirty million was spent in infrastructure to build these sacred spaces).²⁰⁰ Each pilgrim paid fifty to three hundred and ninety five dollars (depending on country of origin) to take part, and the whole event was sponsored by Qantas Airlines, Mercedes Benz, the Commonwealth Bank and the Fortescue Metal Group.²⁰¹

A simple wooden cross (handed on from one host country to the next)²⁰² arrived by aeroplane on the first day and was paraded through the ritual areas to cheering young people. There was a translocational event when pilgrims walked across Sydney Harbour Bridge (redolent of the pro-reconciliation walks of past years). The processional walking event was designed to build unity, encouraging a sense of purpose, promoting bonding using movement to stimulate a sense of involvement. The route across the bridge not only gave the procession a spectacular location but also produced a strong symbol that suggests 'bridging' problems. Another event was the re-enactment of the Passion at seven locations across the city, with the Pope attending the first stage. The climax was the crucifixion played out at

<<http://newmatilda.com/2008/03/27/whos-paying-world-youth-day>>).

¹⁹⁹ Wallace M. 'World Youth Day wash up' posted in On line opinion web site, 5 February 2009, viewed 12 May 2009. <<http://www.onlineopinion.com.au/view.asp?article=8475&page=0>>

²⁰⁰ 'The other 20 per cent [of \$150 million] is staging, building structures, preparing altars and sites for pilgrims ... so we can ensure things can be done safely, toilets, lighting, we've got to put in sound equipment, arrange a host broadcaster' (Jim Hanna, Director of Communications for World Youth Day, cited in Mills, J 'Who's Paying for World Youth Day?' posted in newmatilda.com web site, 27 March 2008, viewed 14 May 2009. < <http://newmatilda.com/2008/03/27/whos-paying-world-youth-day>>).

²⁰¹ A mining company

²⁰² It is also taken to different places on Earth: the demilitarised zone between North and South Korea, Rwanda and Ground Zero in New York. Web Site World Youth Day-08 (address above) Claims were made that by touching it someone was healed.

Barrango Point with the three crosses silhouetted against the evening sky. There was a concert designed in rock concert format with the theme song 'Receive the power' (also the slogan for the whole week) as a climax; this was sung by Guy Sebastian.

On the Sunday the Pope held Mass. This ritual format was designed on a very large scale with the racecourse being turned into an open-air sacred space. A stage was erected that could hold hundreds of people and a full sound system was erected with side video screens. The Mass was sung with musical arrangements that gave it a popular tone: it included a large choir, a symphony orchestra and many senior clerics in full Catholic regalia headed by the Pope himself.

Although there were many events and many techniques of modern spectacle used to create a celebratory atmosphere amongst the young people, the whole week was designed to bring about a certain type of gathering experience. With the exception of the walk across the bridge, which was participatory, almost all the events were consumer based. The designs suggest a passive audience that was brought into a transformative state by transcendent techniques. The transformational experience is aimed at the young who will 'embrace' a cosmology and give support to the Catholic Church. In their design the organisers seemed to aim towards an intensifying of associative feelings, to signal deep levels of State and Church approval, and provide a sense of joy through transcendent experience. They also carry implicit messages that suggests an acceptance of this organisation's view of the 'truth' that will, in turn, bring about self worth and happiness. Each event is informed by a particular stance and puts out a particular religious message that is not negotiable. This is an example of a religious gathering where deviation from a given position is disapproved of—the young person can join the celebrations as part of the whole or remain outside. There is a central 'truth' being celebrated in this Axis Mundi and this is not open to radical change.

Central to the momentum that the young people experienced is the celebrity status of the Pope. The designs of World Youth Day concentrated heavily on the archetypal figure of the 'leader', which, in turn, evokes strong feelings of associational safety. He is presented as a celebrity with the world's press recording not only his words and deeds but also large public displays of obedience and hero worship; he is protected by body guards, met by national leaders and is seen by

hundreds of millions of Catholics as their omnipotent leader.²⁰³ He is also ‘God’s representative on Earth’ and carries with him the Apostolic Succession which claims a ‘hands on’ link with Peter the Apostle and, therefore, Jesus himself. This link gives him a very special place in Catholic eyes and he might be seen by them to be sacred. (The Catholic Church promised that supporters of World Youth Day would be awarded Indulgences for their help.) When this status is placed into modern telecommunication systems, amplified by massive infrastructure and resources of tens of millions of dollars the figure of the Pope becomes the central celebratory impetus—without his presence set into the structures that are provided, World Youth Day would not have the same momentum or impact.

When the meta-language of a cosmology diminishes in society many social gatherings find themselves in a vacuum. When a cosmology dies there is nowhere to express community feelings about life after death, why we are created, ethics, and questions of why we are here. A way of life carried on for eons with its religious traditions (namings, blessings, initiations, marriages, harvest and countless other interactive activities) vanishes and a whole range of important social events go with it. If the cosmology collapses then everything in the list of twelve described above is forfeited and all the aspects concerned with these functions are made redundant. If people believe there is no afterlife and no god then there is no point in having places of worship; there are no gods and therefore no point in thanking the bounty of nature; if there is no ultimate source of help and therefore there is no succour, no explanation of life and no formal celebration of life.

If the sacred is dismissed, societies can be left with gatherings that have no upper reaches in terms of Axis Mundi. This omission nullifies many important social usages, not the least of which is one of the most important tuning functions that form the basis of gathering. This collapse can bring about a vacuum in community interaction in the sacred realm. If people feel that there is nothing more in the world than just living and dying in a meaningless universe, then the vital social dynamics that events have facilitated throughout history and pre-history will be eroded;

²⁰³ The church claims over one billion baptised Catholics around the world. Statistics from BBC Home web site, 1 April 2005, viewed 14 May 2009. <<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/4243727.stm>>.

nihilism does not produce celebration. Science and technology, which have supplanted religion in many places do not carry with them much Axis Mundi apparatus. Society will not have enlivened structures to, say, bury their dead, create initiation, enact moving ceremonies, build ritual spaces, form community unity, form healing gatherings or any of the other forms I have investigated throughout this research. Reaney (1994, p.v) comments:

It is part of our human necessity that we need to be animated by some deep sense of common purpose, of shared meaning, if our lives are not to become pointless irrelevancies. Without an underpinning foundation of explanatory story we find it hard to experience enthusiasm.

I can think of no society in history that has not had a religious system underpinning its sacred events and yet, in contemporary communities, formal religions have greatly diminished. Our associative, ameliorative, genetic, communicational, transitional and environmental events contain little cosmology; religion has, in a general sense, ceased to have a great influence. This erosion has had an impact on the way that people celebrate. The stimulus to reach an Axis Mundi state comes now, in many cases, from external sources (drink, crowd dynamics, drugs and sexual energy) and no longer from internal sources (fasting, meditation and chanting).

The motives to gather for most people no longer emanate from a religious source and the vacuum is filled by all sorts of other interests, including commercial profit making. This also influences where people celebrate. There are few new spaces that contain ideas about cosmology, and traditional ritual environments can fall into disrepair. This leaves the Axis Mundi with no upward thrust and people with few frameworks to aid their search for meaning. Consequently, many events have become impoverished. With no upward thrust the Axis Mundi spins out of control, it loses its balance, and it finally lies inert. Campbell (1949, pp.387–388) elaborates:

the democratic ideal of the self-determining individual, the invention of the power-driven machine, and the development of the scientific method of research, have so transformed human life that the long-inherited, timeless

universe of symbols has collapsed. In the fateful, epoch-announcing words of Nietzsche's Zarathustra: 'Dead are all the gods.'

It is not only that there is no hiding place for the gods from the searching telescope and microscope; there is no such society any more as the gods once supported. The social unit is not a carrier of religious content, but an economic-political organization. Its ideals are not those of the hieratic pantomime, making visible on earth the forms of heaven, but of the secular state, in hard and unremitting competition for material supremacy and resources. Isolated societies, dream-bounded within a mythologically charged horizon, no longer exist except as areas to be exploited. And within the progressive societies themselves, every last vestige of the ancient human heritage of ritual, mortality, and art is in full decay.

It is important to ask if this change matters as far as gatherings are concerned. If religion has diminished with its Axis Mundi apparatus, has society lost something of key value? A society that has no way of structuring a synthesis between the deeper meanings of life—what is found sacred and important about being a human being—and the outer workings of society will find it difficult to build structures that celebrate the wonders of being alive and the mystery of nature itself. Without this respect for self, community and the environment, gatherings can be vulnerable to materialism and exploitation, and these can become the motive of the Axis Mundi.

There are, however, particular kinds of community celebrations that do have some operation of sacred expression without recourse to cosmologies that are not embraced by the community at large. These are 'secular sacred' events that produce an authentic expression of humanity and are therefore released from the agendas of commercialism. This kind of Axis Mundi event feeds and nourishes the part of community which genuinely renews, rejuvenates, revives and restores *communitas*. I see such events as gatherings that have, as their primary aim, a release of celebratory energy based on what is 'set aside' as important, or what is placed into a space that contains notions of what is precious to life—this includes the natural world. The secular sacred explores the feeling of joy and value that can be engendered by concentrating on a certain universality of human expression that comes from an open sharing of what it is to be a 'human'. It concerns itself with *communitas* and

examines what is beautiful and important in people's lives. It is difficult to express these concepts without falling into cliché and pathos, but the secular sacred tries to transcend the material and 'get to the heart' of what is significant to life and, in so doing, builds structural elements to celebrate this. These events can be very uplifting because they appeal to the universal, the poetic in human beings and, rather than closing down interpretation within one single exclusive doctrine, open the door to all. One useful road to designing such events is through the arts and their capacity to communicate these important feelings.

Certain artists from different disciplines explore the secular sacred as I have defined it and utilise structures that can be understood in terms of the Axis Mundi in the community. Communities and artists have organised all sorts of arts events using secular sacred gatherings as the focus that have had a powerful effect on the members. But the energy of the secular sacred to form an Axis Mundi event within the community without any reference to religious concepts can be complex. There are several things to consider.

The first consideration is that an already existing religious form of expression can be used by secular groups without necessarily adhering to the original religious source. Gospel music is an example. There are many groups throughout Australia that sing gospel songs although they are not Christians. There has to be sensitivity here and the use of sacred music by secular groups can be controversial. The secular sacred can associate with the energy of these songs and get sustenance from their authentic voice, which has absorbed energy of the suffering of the slaves inside the most ancient of African sounds. The sacred music of Christianity in the Western tradition can also be sung by non-Christians and achieve a very moving effect—a choir can sing Mozart's *Ave Verum* and both singers and audience can realise its internal celebratory quality. This is true of all sacred music and it can be placed into many kinds of secular events to great effect. Ravi Shankar the great Indian musician said 'In our culture we have such respect for musical instruments, they are like part of God'.²⁰⁴ This applies not only to music. Religious stories, religious symbol, dance and movement, ritual procedures and many other facets of religious practice can be

²⁰⁴ ThinkExist.com, viewed 6 May 2009. <http://thinkexist.com/quotes/ravi_shankar/>.

utilised in secular ways for celebratory use; but they can also attract controversial reaction.²⁰⁵

The second consideration is how does meaning communicate to a general audience where there is no dogma, no story and no central belief? There are a number of artists and community groups trying to bring a deeper meaning into their events by building and designing gatherings that are able to express what is important in people's lives. They are searching for meaningful frameworks that can hold a heterodoxical position and that can adopt an 'open' system of interpretation—one that can be read at many levels without contradiction. These new designs are adapting post-modern attitudes by placing meaning in a multi-dimensional space, allowing a free flow of semiological communication that is able to translate across different domains, and also allowing new and contemporary expression to emerge.

The third consideration is that the secular sacred, especially when it is in ritual mode, can be difficult for modern audiences to take part in. Modern audiences are 'tuned' to entertainment that often relies on spectacle and 'fun' rather than sacred meaning. People attend these events to see and absorb an exciting show and they expect to enjoy themselves. They are not usually asked to get involved in ritual activity that concerns itself with the secular sacred. Modern events have to be slick, on time and full of thrills and have to entertain. This is in stark contrast to a religious ritual or event that has its own time patterns and is sometimes very slow moving; it is there to involve the audience in sacred matters and is not there to necessarily 'entertain'. Groups and designers who engage in this work must tread the fine line between an authentic expression of the secular sacred and involving an audience in something that is exciting and engrossing.

A fourth consideration is that groups can attempt, in their enthusiasm, to try to create the secular sacred by inventing a 'new' religion and express this nascent cosmology in community settings. 'New Age' events often do this by adopting and appropriating assorted amalgams of the world's religions (including indigenous systems) and try to meld them into new alignments: magic and prophesy, goddess

²⁰⁵ The Christian 'Cross' for example, could be very controversial in a non-Christian environment.

worship, belief in aliens,²⁰⁶ Wicca²⁰⁷ and many more are found all over the western world. There is a wide selection of different cults²⁰⁸, sects and organisations that profess to have special sacred knowledge. Whether these belief initiatives really do reach a higher part of the Axis Mundi is open to question and yet many claim a secular and open basis. The various scandals and the proliferation of unsound ideas within these movements have sometimes brought this form of the secular sacred into disrepute.

In spite of these difficulties and pitfalls the secular sacred has an important role to play in community. If Australia has no integrated religious system that can be utilised to explore the upper reaches of the Axis Mundi and thus provide meaning to various important community celebrations, then it will lose many valuable social functions mentioned in previous chapters and find it has no way to explore what is valuable in life. The secular sacred can be very useful in filling this vacuum. Religion is translated into common feelings of human expression and in this 'open' structure human beings can celebrate together with unanimity.

There are many celebrations held around the country that could come under the banner of the secular sacred. These groups have no fixed cosmology or doctrine but, rather, interpret life through ideas that explore life's meaning and experience. These include self-help groups, men's²⁰⁹ and women's²¹⁰ events, environmental gatherings²¹¹ and life-style festivals²¹². I have chosen one example in Australia that particularly sums up the struggle to achieve the sacred secular within a public forum, the Lismore Lantern Procession.

Lismore Lantern Parade

This particular event is one that can be seen to contain no central belief

²⁰⁶ See the Unarius Academy of Science in USA for an example, viewed 10 May 2009. <<http://www.unarius.org/start.html>>.

²⁰⁷ For information on Wicca see Wikipedia website viewed 10 May 2009. <<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wicca>>.

²⁰⁸ See Gallanter, 1999.

²⁰⁹ Sydney Men's Festival held in mid March in Hornsby.

²¹⁰ International Women's Day in Adelaide at the beginning of March.

²¹¹ '350' Day on the 24 October. <www.350.com>.

²¹² Womad festivals held every year in Adelaide.

system at all. It has no cosmology but is a clear example of the types of events that fill the vacuum left by the church; they are expressions of the 'secular sacred'. Lismore is in the middle of an area in northern New South Wales famous for its alternative way of life—the Aquarius Festival was first held at Nimbin in 1972 and became famous for its radical alternative stance. The Lismore parade was started by Jyllie Jackson in 1994 as a parade through the town to celebrate the community—it attracted over twenty thousand people²¹³ in 1996 and is still growing. The present event has a large weekend program with a children's festival, markets and food stalls, entertainment and other events, but the central activity is a lantern parade and a finale ritual in a local park.

This event could be seen as a 'community event' and placed into the strong associative model already discussed in Chapter Seven. But this particular event and others like it are trying to create celebration in their area by using more mythical, and archetypal energies. Usually in community events the emphasis is placed on local character, achievement, history and a commonality of culture—it depends on association (and Othering) for its identity and Axis Mundi momentum (the extreme upward and downward vertical are not used). The arts team²¹⁴ in Lismore does not depend on these factors to create its celebratory energy but rather stretch upward towards the sacred. Unlike most religious organisations that offer celebration through a particular creed or belief system, the Lismore groups allow an 'open' interpretation of the sacred to express itself. Each year the Parade has a theme that is deceptively simple, and in 2009 this was called *A Space for Optimism*:

Our Theme [sic] this year is 'a space for optimism ... ' It came about after talking to many people, including some late night and long car journey conversations about the state of the world (as you do), and of course the bombardment of media in our lives.

²¹³ Statistics from the Lismore Lantern Parade official website, viewed 14 May 2009. <<http://www.lanternparade.com/>>

²¹⁴ Lightup Incorporated.

The Lismore Lantern Parade has always focused on the positive and the beautiful, whilst at the same time acknowledging the shadow and the pain that is also a part of all our lives in some way.

At this point in human history it can sometimes seem that there is not a lot to be optimistic about. We are faced on a daily basis by news of overwhelming environmental, social and economic problems and often optimism can feel unrealistic or foolish.

This year we hope that by recognising the power of optimism, and its shadow, and their roles in addressing the many challenges we face today, we may be a creative force and can, in some way, renew the spirit when all seems lost (Lismore Lantern Parade 2009 web site, viewed 14 May 2009 <<http://www.lanternparade.com/>>).



Plate 54: Lismore Lantern Parade.

Source: North Coast Voices web site. Viewed 4 July 2009

<<http://northcoastvoices.blogspot.com/2009/04/lismore-lantern-parade-saturday-20-june.html>> .

Photographer unknown

The arts team runs workshops for hundreds of people leading up to the event to which everyone is welcome (they have a wide range of people involved, including

the unemployed). Each participant is asked to interpret the theme in a visual image (they concentrate on the use of paper and bamboo lanterns, although there are also music, costume, movement and image making). This opens a dialog, creates a space, and forms an Axis Mundi that concentrates what forms optimism takes in community, creating strong social feedback situations and discussion of how it might be expressed. There is no central message or cosmology; the project is there as an Axis Mundi vehicle to express ideas of what is important and life-giving in the community. Each lantern is a symbol of community expression. Geertz (1973, pp.126–127) expands about symbols and their power:

But meanings can only be ‘stored’ in symbols: a cross, a crescent, or a feathered serpent. Such religious symbols, dramatized in rituals or related in myths, are felt somehow to sum up, for those for whom they are resonant, what is known about the way the world is, the quality of the emotional life it supports, and the way one ought to behave while in it. Sacred symbols thus relate an ontology and a cosmology to an aesthetics and a morality: their peculiar power comes from their presumed ability to identify fact, with value at the most fundamental level, to give to what is otherwise merely actual, a comprehensive normative import,

These social celebrations that present archetypal questions about our lives can be controversial. In Lismore the local Presbyterian Church debated whether the event was ‘pagan’ but then decided it *was* about getting people out to express their positive feelings, suggesting to its members that they *should* join the procession.²¹⁵ It is difficult to establish a secular sacred project in which individuals and groups, unused to this kind of community expression, can participate without feeling anxious about expressing their feelings about the deeper things of life in public. The arts are an ideal medium to allow this expression to happen, and the results can be very powerful expressions of the sacred.

The parade depends on participation and a universality of ideas—myth and archetype transcend local issues. Hundreds of lanterns made by the artists and local

²¹⁵ The Lantern Parade, Southern Cross Presbyterian Church web site, 23 April 2009, viewed 14 May 2009 <<http://www.spcpc.org.au/2009/04/23/the-lantern-parade/>>.

people (some are very large and carried by teams) make their way through the streets at the darkest time of the year. There are choreographed movement, music, costumes and other processional props like flags and masks. There is a celebratory feeling in the air and the event is energised by the people's expressions of life through art. It is a translocational experience with all that that entails and when the procession has passed, the audience follow and enter a park by the river. The whole community watches a more specialised arts performance (although it is still put together by local people) that involves large puppets, words and images in fire, specially designed musical scores and fireworks. Campbell (1949, p.258) comments on the power of such activities:

The forms of sensibility and the categories of human thought, which are themselves manifestations of this power, so confine the mind that it is normally impossible not only to see, but even to conceive, beyond the colorful, fluid, infinitely various and bewildering phenomenal spectacle. The function of ritual and myth is to make possible, and then to facilitate, the jump-by analogy. Forms and conceptions that the mind and its senses can comprehend are presented and arranged in such a way as to suggest a truth or openness beyond.

The Lismore Lantern Parade brings into focus some of the mechanics used to retain significance within a deconstructed cosmology and to make a 'space' for a concentration of meaning that stimulates celebratory feelings within the self and the community. The secular sacred provides an opportunity, in the secularisation process, to become more creative, to use personal feelings more, to be freed from dogma and moribund ritual, and to take more control of the expression and still not lose the ancient myths that form the skeleton of all these events. Joseph Campbell (1949, p.261) stresses this importance:

As the consciousness of the individual rests on a sea of night into which it descends in slumber and out of which it mysteriously wakes, so, in the imagery of myth, the universe is precipitated out of, and reposes upon, a timelessness back into which it again dissolves. And as the mental and physical health of the individual depends on an orderly flow of vital forces into the field of waking

day from the unconscious dark, so again in myth, the continuance of the cosmic order is assured only by a controlled flow of power from the source. The gods are symbolic personifications of the laws governing this flow.

Summary

We can see religious Axis Mundi events fulfilling the need for humans to understand their cosmology in situations around the world in extraordinary cultural variation. These events are often fuelled with the highest energy that the Axis Mundi can provide and they also 'hold' various social functions such as marriage or death rituals within their confines. But in the case of contemporary western society, where religious organisations are in decline, the designer of Axis Mundi events must be able to find the secular sacred within individual and communities. This can be no easy matter but they must be able to build up new events that can concentrate these important feelings and give expression to this important section of the Axis Mundi canon.

Chapter 10: Conclusion

Introduction

This work has been concerned with the mechanics and functions of gatherings in our society. Gatherings are a vital part of our social fabric and affect the ways we all live, they are held in every society for a multiple of important social reasons that include rites of passage such as initiations, marriage and death rituals, community bonding at festivals and the like, and they form links between groups with their ameliorative capacities. They are also vehicles to express what groups feel about themselves and they act as ciphers to express what it is like to be human: they concentrate into poetic and symbolic forms our laws, feelings, imaginings and our relationship with one another, they can be enjoyable and they can be serious, and it is arguable that without them the human race might never have survived.

Yet in spite of their importance there has been little research into their inner workings and their derivations from a design perspective. Perhaps this lack of in-depth study is because the cultural variations that typify gatherings have been the main area of interest for scholarly and practical research. Few have taken on the challenge of discovering an overall pattern in these kinds of events – a pattern that reveals common structural workings for designers to use. Few have laid out strong reasons why these events developed as part of evolutionary history and why they continue to be ubiquitous.

This study has taken steps to remedy this paucity of research by investigating and revealing the basic mechanics found in gatherings; describing and explaining what elements make up their structures; documenting what elements are stable and common to all; and elucidating what sub-elements are flexible, malleable and adaptable to different cultural circumstances. The study has also traced why gatherings became essential to human development and examined contemporary gatherings to see if these essential functions are still at work.

In this concluding chapter I synthesise the major findings of the study and ask questions about the future of our gatherings.

Summary of aims

This research has had six aims. The first aim was to by-pass the cultural expression of gatherings, and examine and define their working mechanisms and identify the major elements and sub-elements. This was done by examining my own work over the past forty years within a practice-based methodology and by reference to a wide and diverse academic and general literature.

The second aim was to find a basic metaphor to describe the energy and movement of gatherings and this was achieved by adopting the universal image of the Axis Mundi. This image could hold ideas of the vertical upward thrust of sacred gatherings and also describe the downward thrust of sensual experience found in carnival gatherings. It could also hold the idea of a horizontal energy that represented the community involvement that drives the vertical axis and produces sustained lift. The study had to develop an analytical system that could ‘hold’ various investigations then revealed in the research. This task was achieved by building up a strong schema that I named AMAS (Axis Mundi Analytical System). It defined alignment dynamics and their sub-elements, the use of space and form, included the concept of induced states, both external and internal, and analysed the ways in which the arts are used.

The third aim was to find out *why* gatherings had been held throughout history and pre-history and to be able to include these reasons inside the analytical system. In tracing the derivations of gatherings and studying their functions it became apparent that they served seven important social imperatives that aided the survival of the group. Gatherings had helped build strong associative bonds within groups; gatherings facilitated meetings and amelioration processes with other groups; gatherings constantly emphasised important genetic facts to which groups had to adhere; gatherings eased information transfer and produced mechanisms to deal with transitional moments in individual and group lives; they expressed relationship with the environment so important to survival; and lastly gatherings produced mechanisms to interact with cosmology.

The fourth aim was to see if new findings in cognitive studies could aid understandings of why the human brain is susceptible to the group experience. To

investigate this matter I read widely in this field. Although cognitive science is a collection of specialist disciplines this research did inform this investigation: how the senses absorb feelings, how the human brain associates and dissociates, how the body and brain work together, how ‘thinking’ models and allows us to perceive, and how we learn and retain information were all useful areas of investigation.

The fifth aim was to see what motivated gatherings in contemporary events. I used the seven social imperatives facilitated by gatherings in prehistory (association, amelioration, genetics, communication, transition, environment and cosmology) to act as through-lines that would reveal why gatherings were held today. I created an imaginary and archetypical village called Kelby, that dates from 5000 BP and acted as a starting point from which I could trace each of the seven social imperatives and project them into the contemporary period. I found that although some social imperatives had diminished there was a remarkable correlation between the social imperatives of the past and the present day.

The sixth aim was to form an overview of gatherings that could help designers of all types better understand the mechanics of gatherings and explain the history of why they are held in our society. By gaining this understanding they could better design Axis Mundi events and prevent the misuse of this powerful social machinery.

Concluding synthesis

I have now presented my contention that gatherings originated to ‘tune’ the individual into the group for reasons of survival. I also maintain that the human brain has architecture to facilitate this tuning and that gatherings provide frameworks that allowed these cognitive susceptibilities to function. I believe that Axis Mundi events acted as a bridge between the individual and the group, and were used to align the single human brain to the group’s collective consciousness. I have put forward the idea that *Homo sapiens sapiens* has developed cognitive susceptibilities to do this and this capacity explains why humans have always gathered and always used the same structures to hold these kinds of events. Rather than seeing gatherings as random series of unrelated events, they can now be viewed as a coherent system

produced by human societies to further alignment processes so vital to survival.

In Chapters Three to Five (Part Two) I presented a systematic breakdown which clearly exposed the structure of gatherings and demonstrated, in the examination of each structural element, and the attendant sub-elements, that gatherings have this underlying commonality. These common elements were tested against the backdrop of a wide cross-section of real examples and there was no exception found to the theory. I could clearly state that gatherings wherever and whenever they happen will include combinations of these common structural elements, although it is clear that they are used in different combinations to suit various and varied situations. From this examination I was able to build a strong, robust system of analysis (AMAS) that laid out these elements and show that this system of analysis proved roadworthy both in the context of academic literature and when tested in the field.

In Chapters Six to Nine (Part Three) I identified seven social imperatives that evolving groups had to cope with to survive and, by reference to a wide set of examples through time and place, was able to show that gathering had helped facilitate these vital survival mechanisms: these seven social imperatives proved to be an effective way of tracking gatherings and their usage over time. They also proved an invaluable tool to examine gatherings in the contemporary world and created convincing links between the past and the present. Although some of these social imperatives have changed in modern society the methodology proved illuminating: the research produced strong arguments that support the idea that gatherings remain because of these social imperatives.

This investigation can be used as a basis for further research rather than be seen as the final word. Cognitive studies, especially, are revealing more and more information about the working of the human brain that in turn, informs clearer understandings of human behaviour in the context of gatherings. Claxton (2005, p.5) stresses this point:

Whether, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we possess an accurate and coherent image of the mind's invisible foundations, or a comforting but valueless collection of archaic fragments, turns out to matter a great deal.

I believe we can examine and appreciate gatherings in a new light in cultural development and see them as vital parts of human development. It is important that these events be articulated as clearly as possible within a robust analytical system so that we can better understand them. Sound design can be achieved for communities to benefit from when the powers of the Axis Mundi are better understood.

As I wrote in the Introduction, I have seen the positive ways in which various Axis Mundi events have helped and enriched communities of all kinds and I have concentrated on examples that reveal this positive effect. I have worked towards a deeper understanding of these kinds of events that will help designers produce more effective events that will assist groups to realise their *communitas* at many levels. In examining how and why gatherings happen in our society, the system of analysis I have developed can give any group or community a 'gathering profile'. AMAS can be applied to any given event or series of events, and it will reveal not only the ways in which the design engages with human susceptibility but convey and justify why events are being staged.

The study did not focus on the negative ways in which gatherings can be used; the control and manipulation of society for example use these same powerful design factors I have presented, to manipulate and suppress: the human susceptibility to gather can be used for human good or to its detriment. People have witnessed great abuse in gathering design through human history and seen its power to bring people into heightened states for negative purposes; Hitler and Goebbels' usage of gatherings is a stand-out example of how these dynamics can be used against the common good. But having a system that can supply a reliable set of constants based on common structure can help identify how and why Axis Mundi events are being staged and, to a certain extent, counterbalance their potential for negativity. As Smail (2008, pp.188–9) writes: 'The clever ideas may lead to good things, like medicine, security, and the emancipation of women. Or they can lead to bad things, like genocide, fascism, and environmental degradation'.

By applying AMAS, a detailed study could be made of gatherings in Australia, for example, which would produce a profile of collective events and information gathered that could be made to improve their usage, worth and motives:

with this knowledge our gatherings can improve in quality and the whole culture can be enriched.

I see Australia as a place that has enormous potential to hold rich gatherings. It is a country that has an ancient Indigenous population whose members still retain a tradition of Axis Mundi events that track back to ancient ancestors and much knowledge of these traditions could be passed onto the mainstream – if Indigenous peoples themselves feel this gesture appropriate. Australia has also a rich community festival tradition that manifests in many ways from rural gatherings to multicultural Axis Mundi events in urban environments, and these could be amplified and resourced to expand and multiply. With the diminution of religion Australians have lost a great many structures for holding gatherings; namings, initiations, weddings and funerals being the most obvious but the rise of the secular sacred can provide powerful community alternatives. The carnival (in its party and spectacle mode), on the other hand, with a large consumption of alcohol and drugs can be channelled into a truly celebratory spirit. Smail (2008, pp.188–9) expands on this point:

Psychotropic mechanisms, once invented, do not necessarily remain fixed in a culture. Some, like gruesome public executions, may have become moribund. Others do manage a certain longevity. It is doubtful that pornography and alcohol will go away in the near future, even if new fashions like virtual sex and Ecstasy might arise and take over some of the market. The one caveat here may lie in our current cultural crisis: the growing homogenization of global society. The universality of basic human physiology may mean that all humans, ultimately, will be tempted by the same package of sensory inputs and body stimulations, and that the capitalistic marketplace, evolving as it does in Darwinian fashion toward optimal solutions, will eventually hit on the perfect package of psychotropic products and mechanisms. This, not freedom, is what Francis Fukuyama should have called 'the end of history.' For my part, I doubt there is much to worry about. The system is built on an unsustainable demand for energy, meaning that the simple fact of entropy will preserve us from 'the end of history.'... We are being swept along by the things that have arisen as our physiologies have interacted in unpredictable ways with the new ecology forged by our Neolithic ancestors.

Many events are driven and controlled by civic authorities (who control many of the grants used to finance Axis Mundi events) and the civic motivation is often tied into economic rationale. AMAS would reveal that many gathering events in Australia are designed by commercial concerns that use Axis Mundi energy to sell goods and self-interested ideas. Our cognitive architecture has built in susceptibilities that can always be exploited. Smail (2008, pp.199–200) again:

On the one hand, the Postlithic era sustained a sociopolitical order that swayed, cowed, awed, and soothed through political and religious liturgies, spectacles of joy and of suffering, patterns of abuse, monumental architecture, and other devices that played off the subvertibility of the human nervous system. Such systems were essential for the creation of imagined communities. On the other hand, the Postlithic economy also began to deliver goods and devices used by individuals to influence their own body states. Some of these practices and mechanisms constitute highly exaggerated forms of mechanisms that existed in Paleolithic societies ... They are felt in the body by means of chemical messengers. Civilizations did not, could not, invent new forms of body chemistry. Instead, civilizations found new devices for exaggerating existing neurochemical states ... None of these patterns was permanent; all were susceptible to the winds of fashion and other unpredictable transformations. We know far too little about how the mind works to understand, yet, how this history might be told.

This study has revealed the importance of gathering events both in our development as human beings and in our society today. The use of Axis Mundi energies can be used either to benefit community development or used to exploit it; but by better understanding the susceptibilities that are built into *Homo sapiens sapiens*, designers can bring about gatherings of great quality that enrich communities at every level and bring about an open ameliorative attitude of common sharing and a sustainable cultural future²¹⁶. To gather together as a people and to be

²¹⁶ 'Sustainability, as it has become formally adopted around the world, has not one but three pillars: ecological sustainability, social sustainability and economic sustainability. Some would argue that there should be four pillars and that cultural sustainability should be included. We agree with this view

able to share and celebrate what it is like to be human will remain a constant compulsion and it will always be able to aid how we express the beauty of being alive. Bakhtin (1984, p.276) describes this impulse as the 'feast':

The feast is a primary, indestructible ingredient of human civilization; it may become sterile and even degenerate, but it cannot vanish ... There are toasts, games, masquerades, laughter, pranks, and dances. The feast has no utilitarian connotation (as has daily rest and relaxation after working hours). On the contrary, the feast means liberation from all that is utilitarian, practical. It is a temporary transfer to the utopian world. The feast cannot be reduced to any specific content ... it transgresses all limited objectives. Neither can it be separated from bodily life, from the earth, nature, and the cosmos. The sun shines in the festive sky, and there is such a thing as 'feast-day' weather.

I leave the last word to Ronald Grimes (cited in Cohen 1991, p.104):

A public celebration is a rope bridge of knotted symbols strung across an abyss. We make our crossings hoping the chasm will echo our festive sounds for a moment, as the bridge begins to sway from the rhythms of our dance.

(Yencken and Wilkinson cited in Hawkes, 2001)'.

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<http://video.google.com.au/videosearch?q=world%20youth%20day&hl=en&rlz=1T4GGLG_enAU310AU310&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=wv#q=world+youth+day&hl=en&rlz=1T4GGLG_enAU310AU310&um=1&ie=UTF-8&sa=N&tab=wv&start=30> >).

6 World Youth Day 2008 Opening Mass. Viewed on 12 May, 2009.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m_mHeD-3y_Q&NR=1>).

7 WYD 2008 - The vigil with the youth. Viewed on 12 May, 2009.

<<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sRSwYksSt5g&feature=related>>).

DVD references

The Olympic Games in China (Watched on DVD: *Beijing 2008* under licence by the International Olympic Committee by CITVC. Viewed on 5 February, 2009).

Appendix 1

Primary events studied within Neil Cameron’s practice that were used to develop Axis Mundi Analytical System (AMAS) are shown in the following table.

Year	Name of event	Place	Role	Type of event	Description	Overall organisers
1973	Craigmillar Festival 1	Edinburgh	Arts worker	Community festival	Festival in slum area including music, theatre and general festival activities	Local community activists
1974	Craigmillar Festival 2	Edinburgh	Arts worker	Community festival	Festival in slum area including music, theatre and general festival activities	Local community activists
1975	Craigmillar Festival 3	Edinburgh	Director	Community festival	Festival in slum area including music, theatre and general festival activities	Local community activists
1975	Study Tour	San Francisco and Boston	Research	International theatre groups	Study tour in the USA with particular emphasis on Bread and Puppet Theatre, Boston	Scottish Arts Council
1976	Craigmillar Festival 4	Edinburgh	Director	Community festival	Festival in slum area, including music, theatre and general festival activities	Local community activists
1977	Craigmillar Festival 5	Edinburgh	Director	Community festival	Festival in slum area, including music, theatre and general festival activities	Local community activists
1978	Craigmillar Festival 6	Edinburgh	Director	Community festival	Festival in slum area, including music, theatre and general festival activities	Local community activists
1978	Easterhouse Festival 1	Glasgow	Event director	Community festival	Deprived housing area festival	Local community activists
1979	Easterhouse Festival 2	Glasgow	Event director	Community festival	Deprived housing area festival	Local community activists
1979	The Bear and the Ragged Staff	Fife, Scotland	Director	Theatre performance	A central event to express festival ethos in small rural town. Large local factory had been closed and unemployment was widespread.	Newburgh Festival organised by local community
1980	Macbeth – an interpretation	Fife, Scotland	Director	Theatre performance	A central event expressing festival ethos in small rural town. Factory closed & unemployment widespread.	Newburgh Festival organised by local community

Year	Name of event	Place	Role	Type of event	Description	Overall organisers
1980	Jumping Mouse and Macbeth	Dublin	Director	Theatre performances	Events at an arts festival	Dublin Festival
1981	Rural site	Fife, Scotland	Director	Community gathering at Halloween	A community ritual about overcoming difficulties	Fife Arts Council
1981	Tempest on Snake Island	Toronto	Arts Team member	Open-air theatre performance	A translocation arts event on the islands off Toronto	Welfare State International
1981	Auchtermucky Festival	Fife , Scotland	Director	Community gathering. Event based in folk history	A festival in a small town based on traditional music	Local people and the Scottish traditional music groups
1981	Study tour	Australia	Study	Research into arts group developing work in the community	A three month tour of Australia interviewing various activists	Gulbenkian Foundation
1982	Whangarei Arts Gallery Event	North Island , New Zealand	Director	Community gathering	An ameliorative event to bring Maori and non-Maori people together	Local people
1983	Yarra River Parade	Melbourne	Director	River parade	Dozens of boats carrying musicians and images	State Government
1983	Recovery event	Macedon, Victoria	Director	Community event	Parade and theatre event based in fire torn area	West Theatre Company
1984	Vietnam project	Melbourne	Director	Community event	Ameliorative event with Vietnam and non-Vietnam members of community	West Theatre Group
1984	St Alban's Gathering Event 1	Melbourne	Director	Community event	Theatre event based in ethnic Immigration	West Theatre Company
1985	St Alban's Gathering Event 2	Melbourne	Director	Community event	Theatre event based in ethnic Immigration	West Theatre Company

Year	Name of event	Place	Role	Type of event	Description	Overall organisers
1985	Mumba Festival	Melbourne	Arts designer	Community parade	Translocation event through streets of city	City of Melbourne
1986	Melbourne Peace Vigil	Melbourne	Director	City festival	Twenty four hour events involving 78 organisations in International Year of Peace	Melbourne City Council
1987	Knox Festival Finale	Melbourne	Director	Festival finale	Music and ritual community gathering	Knox City Council
1988	May Day Parade 1	Darwin	Parade director	Parade through city	Trade Union gathering	Darwin Trade Unions
1988	Fire on the Water	Darwin	Director	Theatre event	Community Ritual	Darwin Festival
1988	Sea Grass Story 1	Hastings, Victoria	Arts designer	Community event	Environment theatre event	Local community
1989	May Day Parade 2	Darwin	Parade director	Parade through city	Trade Union gathering	Darwin Trade Unions
1989	Fire on the Water 2	Darwin	Director	Theatre event	Community ritual	Darwin Festival
1989	Italian Festival	Darwin	Director	Community festival	Italian Community one day festival	Italian community
1989	Utopia	Katherine	Director	Community festival	Gathering around river	Local community
1989	Three figures	Maleny, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
1989	Sea Grass Story 2	Hastings, Victoria	Arts designer	Community event	Environment theatre event	Local community
1990	Sea Grass Story 3	Hastings, Victoria	Arts designer	Community event	Environment theatre event	Local community

Year	Name of event	Place	Role	Type of event	Description	Overall organisers
1990	Knox Festival Closing Ceremony	Knox, Melbourne	Director	Community event	Closing arts event	Knox Council
1990	Lisistrata at Glenti Greek Festival	Darwin	Event director	Community festival	Greek Festival	Greek community
1990	River of Dreams	Alice Springs	Director	Environmental project	Aboriginal and non-aboriginal community event	Northern Territory Arts Council
1990	Tower of Babel	Maleny, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
1991	Macbeth	Katherine	Director	Community festival	Community event in Katherine Gorge	Northern Territory Arts Council
1991	Games Opening	Darwin	Director	International South East Asia Games	Opening ceremony	Northern Territory State Government
1991	The Phoenix	Maleny, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
1992	Games Opening	Darwin	Director	Pacific School Games Opening	Games Opening	Northern Territory State Government
1992	Bombing of Darwin	Darwin	Director	Community event	Theatre performance on the anniversary of the bombing of Darwin	Darwin Festival
1992	Gates of Renewal	Maleny, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
1993	Private ritual	Brisbane	Director	Community ritual	Women who had lost children through domestic violence	Queensland State Government
1994	The Wheel of Life	Maleny, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
1994	The Bridge	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
Year	Name of event	Place	Role	Type of event	Description	Overall organisers

1995	Surat Festival Procession	Surat, Queensland	Director	Town procession	Community event	Regional Arts Queensland
1995	Carmina Burana	Canberra	Director	Finale to arts festival	Community	Canberra Festival
1995	Remembrance	Sydney	Director	Community ritual	Young people with cancer	Canteen
1996	Dream Holder	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
1996	Melbourne International Festival Opening	Melbourne	Director	River event	Community arts event	Melbourne International Festival
1996	Dante's Inferno	Canberra	Director	Finale to arts festival	Community	Canberra Festival
1997	Songs of Fire	Canberra	Director	Finale to arts festival	Community operatic event	Canberra Festival
1997	Festival of Journeys	Port Arthur, Tasmania	Director	Recovery project	After the massacre in Port Arthur a community festival was held	Neil Cameron
1997	The Tree of Life	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community theatre event	Queensland Folk Festival
1998	The Fairground	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
1998	Schoolies week 1	Maroochydore	Director	Young people's project	Schoolies arts event	Sunshine Coast councils
1998	Dreamkeepers	Canberra	Director	Finale to arts festival	Community	Canberra Festival
1998	Closing event	Hobart	Director	Community event	Theatre event in Constitution Dock	Tall Ships Project
1999	The Altar of Precious Things	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
1999	St John's Cathedral	Brisbane	Director	Cathedral week	A secular ritual in the church	Anglican Church
1999	Schoolies week 2	Maroochydore	Director	Young people's project	Schoolies arts event	Sunshine Coast councils
Event	Name of event	Place	Role	Type of event	Description	Overall organisers

2000	The Millennium Beacon	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
2001	The Ark	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
2001	The Festival of the Golden Wheel	Woolgoolga	Director	Arts event	Community theatre performance	Local community
2001	Bicentenary Event	Townsville, Queensland	Director	Open air dance project	Community dance project	Dance North
2001	Brisbane Bicentenary River procession	Brisbane	Director	State event	River procession	Queensland State Government
2002	The Seven Pillars of Wisdom	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
2002	The Ulladulla Festival in NSW	Ulladulla	Director of arts event	Community festival	Night procession with fishing community	Ulladulla Festival
2003	Under the Volcano	Woodford, Queensland	Director	Finale to festival	Community ritual	Queensland Folk Festival
2003-2005	Australia Council Fellowship	Australia, UK, Bulgaria and Romania	Researcher	Research	Cultural development. Interviews with forty 'prominent' Australians about the arts and cultural development.	Neil Cameron
2004 - 2007	Festival of Voices	Hobart	Instigator and director	Choral festival	Multi-programmed choral festival around Tasmania	Neil Cameron
2007	Prayer Bells	Hobart	Director of theatre	Contemporary music in cathedral	Music event in church, parade through streets, singing around bonfire in Salamanca Place	IHOS Opera
2008	Kingborough Music Festival	Kingborough	Arts advisor	Community festival	Music festival	Kingborough Council

International sites visited

India

Event/Site	Kind of Gathering	Date visited 2008
Varanasi, Central India	The Ghats – Religious site	25 January
Varanasi, Central India	Shiva temple in University grounds	26 January
Varanasi, Central India	Ramiyana Temple	26 January
Varanasi, Central India	Durga Temple	27 January
Allahabad, Central India	Kumbh Mela	29 January–3 February
Varanasi, Central India	General research	5 February–12 February
Sanchi, Central India	The Great Stupa	13 February
Pachmari, Central India	The Caves of Bhimbetk	15 February
Pachmari, Central India	The Pandaba Caves	16 February
Pachmari, Central India	The Jatashankar Caves	16 February
Pachmari, Central India	Shivratri Festival	17 February
Nasik, Central India	Trimbakekeshar Temple	20 February
Nasik, Central India	Pandava Caves	20 February
Nasik, Central India	The Ramkund	20 February
Ellora, Central India	Ellora Caves	22–24 February
Ajanta, Central India	Ajanta Caves	25 February
Guwahti, Assam	Temple of Nine Planets – Navagratha Temple	27 February
Guwahti, Assam	Kamahkya Temple	28 February
Muguli Island, Assam	Kamalabari Temple	3 March
Muguli Island, Assam	Holi Festival	4 March

Appendix 2

Australian events visited

Event	Kind of gathering	Date visited
IHOS Opera performance of 'Prayer bells' held in a church.	Community Festival	8 July 2006
Bream Creek Show	Community Festival	18 March 2007
The Princess Mary Celebrations	Civic event	19 May 2007
Melbourne International Festival of the Arts	Civic Festival	11 October 2007
Brisbane Multi-Cultural Festival	Community Festival	14 October 2007
Hobart Show	Civic Festival	24 October 2007
Launceston Festivale	Community Festival	9 February 2008
Funeral of Andrew Feebly	Private Ritual	25 January 2008
The Hobart Regatta	Community Festival	11 February 2008
Marriage of Ric and Sofie Goddard	Private Ritual	25 April 2008
The Festival of the Dreaming in Woodford, Queensland.	Aboriginal Festival	6–8 June 2008
The Tasmanian Storytelling Festival.	Community Festival	6 September 2008
Kingsborough Centenary Events	Civic Festival	8 November 2008
The Hobart Christmas Procession	Civic festival	22 November 2008
The Taste of Tasmania	Community Festival	30 December 2008
The Mona Foma Festival	Community Festival	9 January 2009
Taste of the Huon	Community Festival	8 March 2009
Bonfire Night – South Hobart	Community Festival	23 May 2009
Hobart Winter Festival	Community Festival	19 June 2009
Sydney to Hobart Yacht Race celebrations	Sailing Festival	30 December 2009

UK and Ireland

Event/Site	Kind of Gathering	Date visited 2008
Ely Cathedral	Religious site	22 March
London Museum, London	Research	27 March–30 March
Westminster Abbey, London	Religious site	28 March
Victorian and Albert Museum, London	Research	1 April
Rosslyn Chapel, Edinburgh	Religious site	7 April
Beltane Fire Festival, Edinburgh	Community Festival	31 April
Welfare State International, Ulverstone	Celebratory group	5–6 May
Durham Cathedral	Religious site	7 May
York Cathedral	Religious site	8 May
Lincoln Cathedral	Religious site	9 May
Flag Fen Centre, nr. Peterborough	Reconstructed stone age village	11 May
King's College, Cambridge	Religious site	12 May
Ely Cathedral	Religious site	12–18 May
Norwich Cathedral	Religious site	17 May
Winchester Cathedral	Religious site	18 May
Salisbury Cathedral	Religious site	20 May
Stonehenge in Wiltshire	Stone age site	22 May
Avebury In Wiltshire	Stone age site	21–24 May
West Kennet in Wiltshire	Stone age site	25 May
Glastonbury Abbey	Religious site	26 May
Bath	Civic Festival	27–28 May
St Michael's Mount, Penzance	Religious site	29 May
Stones of Callanish, Lewis	Stone age site	19–22 June
Bru Na Boinne, Ireland	Stone age site	18 July