

# Ritual performance and the politics of identity

## On the functions and uses of ritual

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The theory of ritual presented in this article is based on the notion “territory.” Ritual performance encompasses a set of techniques to affect the identity of participants: away from individuality and by communal demarcation of a symbolic territorial model in space or time. The form of ritual is seen as autonomous, i.e. as relatively independent of meaning. As a set of identity-affecting techniques, the elements of ritual can be integrated into both religious and secular settings. There is a natural tension between individuality, responsibility and the potentially totalitarian implications of ritual discourse. Ritual is claimed to be relatively harmless with respect to the symbolic territories of designated “sacred spaces,” while it is considered dangerous under conditions of “overflow,” when the elements of ritual are brought into public space. The harmful secular religions of the past two centuries are discussed, culminating in a plea for the separation between Ritual and State.

### 1. Ritual and language

What natural language and ritual have in common is that both, even more so than religion, are universal phenomena of human culture. As for theoretical attention, however, there is an enormous difference between these two realms of human activity. Linguistics has been a rich and relatively successful field, especially after the revolutionary transformations it underwent since the 1950s. In comparison, the study of ritual has dramatically lagged behind. This is unfortunate for a number of reasons. First of all, ritual is intrinsically interesting as a rich area of human self-expression. Since it also is universal, a deeper understanding of it might, just as linguistics did, clarify something fundamental about human nature. Furthermore, ritual differs from language in that it primarily relates to human emotions, some of them alarming, particular in political contexts. It is for this reason, I believe, that the study of ritual has a certain urgency. This has to do with the main thesis of this article, namely that ritual is about the human experience of identity in relation to territory and therefore involves severe ethical risks under certain circumstances.<sup>1</sup>

In order to determine what should be focused on in the study of ritual, it is useful to compare it to what we find in the study of natural language. In linguistic theory, a distinction is made between form, meaning and function. The form of language is studied by the subfields of phonology (sound form), morphology (word form) and syntax (sentence form). Meaning is studied by semantics and use is studied by pragmatics. The syntax of natural language combines fundamental building blocks (words, further analyzed into morphemes and phonemes) into complex sentences.

The fundamental building blocks of ritual are stereotypical acts. It is far from trivial how the stereotypical acts of ritual must be defined, although this is the least controversial area in the study of ritual, to be largely ignored in this article. The stereotypical acts of ritual must be distinguished from individual habit and the acts of obsessive neurotics. Like the words and idioms of language, ritual acts belong to the socio-cultural repertoire of a community. But even there, some further distinctions must be made. Thus, washing one’s hands before dinner may be a stereotypical act of some cultures, it is in principle something utilitarian (a matter of hygienics) and as such not a ritual act. The form the act of washing one’s hands takes is com-

pletely determined by functional considerations. This particular example can be contrasted with ritual hand washing, the form of which is not determined by hygienics but by the arbitrary rules prescribed by some community. But a ritual act must also be distinguished from certain non-utilitarian, possibly rule-governed stereotypical acts, namely those that are just play. There is a certain seriousness about ritual acts that commits the actors to the culture at hand.

The notion “ritual” is notoriously hard to define, but that is of little relevance. After all, linguists hardly have a definition of “language” either. In linguistics, it happened to be more productive to characterize the various subsystems of language (“modules”). In which combinations such modules form a language is somewhat arbitrary and of little concern. A similar approach might be useful in the study of ritual. In this spirit, I will make the following three-way distinction:

- (1) a. simple ritual acts
- b. complex ritual acts
- c. ritual performances

For the moment, I will take the notion “act” for granted, assuming that acts are well-defined, discrete units in the stream of behavior, thereby ignoring some non-trivial problems of demarcation. Simple ritual acts are what we just discussed and they can be defined as follows:

- (2) Simple ritual acts are non-utilitarian acts that are conventional and constitutive of the identity of some group.

The notion “identity,” not too originally, is crucial to my understanding of ritual and, as I will argue below, the more elaborate ritual performances all have one thing in common: they affect the identity of the participants. Before going into such pragmatic aspects of ritual, we first have to define complex rituals. Whereas simple ritual acts can be compared to the words of language, complex ritual acts can at first sight be compared to the sentences of language:

- (3) Complex ritual acts are ordered sequences of simple ritual acts.

On closer scrutiny, it is here that the parallel with natural language breaks down. One could call the set of rules that determines the order of events in complex ritual acts a “syntax,” but that would be metaphorical at best. It is true that the more complex rituals, such as the Vedic rituals studied by Staal (1989), have a structure sometimes reminiscent of the syntax of natural language, including characteristic elements like recursion. However, it cannot be maintained that such structures are universal across cultures. Ritual acts can be arranged in the complex Vedic patterns studied by Staal, but structure can also be minimal as in the Christian ritual of the Eucharist (to be further discussed below). I do, however, agree with Staal in another aspect, namely in the idea of the *autonomy of form* in ritual. This corresponds to the idea of the autonomy of syntax in linguistics. Although some linguists disagree, it is generally assumed that the complex syntax of natural language cannot be reduced to the exigencies of meaning and (communicative) function. The rich complexity of syntax reflects properties of the human mind that are related to mathematical form. Mathematical form is usually essentialist in that it can be specified by necessary and sufficient conditions. This is at variance with the anti-essentialist nature of functionalist approaches, Darwinian or otherwise.

To the extent that the structure of ritual shows mathematical order, then, its form is autonomous and not reducible to meaning or function. As for the actual structures found in ritual, to the extent that they show mathematical pattern, they are more comparable to certain forms of art than to the syntax of natural language. What distinguishes art and ritual from

natural language, is that the syntax of natural language is universal as a matter of biological necessity, while the “syntax” of art and ritual is conventional, i.e. not a matter of necessity but of socio-cultural and aesthetic preference. This is also why the syntax of natural language can be studied from the point of view of individual psychology and biological ontogeny. Ritual, in contrast, does most definitely belong to human culture and always involves *social* psychology, no matter what benefits it has for the individual.

Nevertheless, I believe that even the mathematical patterns found in art and ritual are typical of our kind and bear the footprint of the biologically given human mind. An example is ornamental art. All over the world, its artists have realized the symmetries (translation, mirror, etc.) that are theoretically possible, including recursive patterns (cf. Koster 2002). The many patterns found in human cultural expression find their natural place in the emerging field of ethnomathematics (Ascher 1998). Apart from these matters of form, I also believe that the efficacy of the rhythmic and repetitive patterns found in ritual has a biological basis.

Examples of complex ritual acts are ordered sequences of prayers. A prayer is a simple ritual act in the above sense, but many cultures organize their prayers in cycles, for instance by aligning them to certain moments of the day. Illustrations are the fixed sequences of prayers spread over the day in Islam and in monasteries. In the Jewish tradition, prayers also follow a fixed daily schedule and are collected in a *siddur*, which derives from the Hebrew root meaning “order”. A syntactically interesting sequence (cycle) of prayers is provided by the rosary in the Catholic arsenal of rituals and many other examples can be given of this kind. Note that certain complex ritual acts are sometimes called “ceremonies,” usually to distinguish them as secular rituals from the more religious rituals. Since I believe with Staal (1989) that the presence or absence of religion is irrelevant in the most basic theoretical characterization of ritual, I will discard the distinction between ceremonies and other organized forms of ritual, some of them also referred to as “rites.”

I will now turn to the most important and interesting form ritual behavior can take, namely the form of a ritual performance. I crucially define a ritual performance in terms of performance space and identity “management”:

- (4) A ritual performance is a community’s symbolic demarcation of a territory in space and time by complex ritual acts and techniques affecting the experience of identity of the participants away from individuality.

I do not claim originality for these definitions since elements of them can be found in numerous other definitions and characterizations in the literature. Since Van Gennep’s work on rites of passage (1960 [1909]), for instance, it has been fairly common to characterize ritual in terms of its dealings with human identity. Van Gennep’s notions were further developed in classical work by Victor Turner (1969), who described ritual in terms of “liminal states” and “*communitas*,” as an anti-structure to the usual structure of society (cf. also Emile Durkheim’s (1985 [1912]) notion “effervescence”). Turner’s liminal states are very much like what I call identity shift below and that ritual can lead to an intense experience of community (*communitas*) is commonplace in ritual studies.<sup>2</sup>

The reader will observe that, like Staal (1989), I do not define ritual performance in semantic (mythological, religious) terms. I agree with Staal that there has been an overemphasis in most studies of ritual on myth and religion or, even more off the mark, on the transfer of cultural and social values to the younger generation (Staal 1989: 123).<sup>3</sup> The possibility of completely secular rituals is also missed in common conceptions – as expressed for instance by Mircea Eliade – “that ritual effects a transition from the realm of the profane to that of the sacred” (Staal 1989: 123). With Staal, I believe that the distinction of the sacred and the profane is accidental and typical of non-universal forms of dualism.

Staal's own theory is most intriguing, but it leaves some important questions unanswered. After rejecting most theories found in the anthropological and sociological literature, Staal concludes that "ritual is pure activity, without meaning or goal." On the whole, Staal has the tendency to see the benefits of ritual, both in terms of individual spirituality and in terms of collective identity, as "useful side-effects". The essence of ritual for him remains the absence of meaning or utilitarian function. In my own view, ritual is a "technology" with a very clear purpose that cannot sensibly be seen as just a side-effect: the reduction of the sense of individual self of the participants in order to achieve a sense of *communitas* with respect to a territorial model. There is a rich literature explaining how more or less meaningless acts and chants contribute to that goal.

In spite of Staal's justified rejection of the generality of religious interpretation, the relation between religion and ritual is too common to be ignored. However, from the point of view taken here, the most important unanswered question in Staal's theory is that it fails to highlight the far from accidental connection between ritual, death wishes, martyrdom, conformism, repression, violence, and even war. These potential negative aspects of ritual contexts are also underexposed in other theories and it will be the ultimate focus of this article. I will ignore the important temporal demarcations of ritual and limit myself in what follows to the spatial marking of a territory. What my proposal of spatial demarcation comes down to is that ritual performances create a symbolic *territorial model* by filling a certain designated space with the prescribed ritual actions – but also with symbols, as we will see. In all cases, the actions affect the awareness of individual identity, by breaking it down, by providing alternative identities (for instance by role reversal), or by replacing it by an awareness of collective identity.

It has often been observed that ritual performances are usually bound to a designated location. In Staal's description of the Vedic Agnicayana ritual, one of the first things he says is that the "ritual takes place inside an enclosure" (1989: 71). The ritual enclosure has been an essential part of ritual from pre-historical times to the present. I therefore will pay just as much attention to the ubiquitous presence of ritual space as to the rituals themselves: the function of ritual performance cannot be understood without consideration of this territorial aspect.

In ancient times, ritual enclosures were open spaces in forests or places demarcated by stones. Very often, a sacred space was defined by the presence of a significant object, such as a holy oak or stone. In materially more advanced societies, such elementary enclosures were replaced by temples, churches, synagogues and mosques. But also the secular rituals of modern times are, in principle, always performed in a designated place. Thus, the political rituals of nationalist movements often happen at places demarcated by some real or mythological historical site or near a monument. Occasionally, nationalistic cults developed "temples" of their own. If modern soccer is a ritual, as I believe it is in many respects, the field or the stadium can be seen as its "sacred space". Sacred spaces can be further demarcated or focused by the presence of altars, by music, scents (provided by animal sacrifice or by incense) or by the burning of candles. These are all elementary and fairly universal means of arousal to mildly soften the sense of self.<sup>4</sup>

Due to various circumstances, sacred spaces are not necessarily public venues. Sacred spaces can also be created at home, for instance by the presence of house altars or by transforming the dinner table in certain ways, as at the beginning of Jewish Shabbat (originally in relation to the still symbolic territory of "Israel"). Muslims away from a mosque orient themselves towards Mecca during prayer, which can be seen as an ambulant way to transform one's location into sacred space.

So, why is the creation of a "sacred space" so important in ritual performances? Why do rituals involve a territorial model? The answer I will give is based on the study of an unexpected and somewhat ignored domain in theories about ritual: the political religions of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. I define "political religions" as ritual frameworks that seek to extend their

symbolic “sacred space” to real territory. Examples are all the nationalisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century (including Zionism) and, of course, fascism and bolshevism.<sup>5</sup>

In his profound book on the development of political ritual in Germany between Napoleonic times and Hitler, George Mosse (1975: 208) places the rituals of nationalism and nazism in precisely the context that concerns us here:

The idea of the “sacred space,” a place that could be filled only with symbolic activity, dates back to primitive times and pagan worship, later taken over by Christians. Such space was considered, throughout history, as a necessary prerequisite to liturgical action. The new politics [of nationalism and nazism (JK)] can be regarded as one successful way in which this sacred space was filled: with parades, marches, gymnastics, exercises, and dances, as well as ritual speeches.

Ritual performance is like planting a flag on a symbolic piece of land, it is the tribal impulse of claiming a territory for the collective body at hand. Ritual is not a rational response, but a most effective set of techniques to manipulate identities for the sake of tribal loyalty. It is appealing to deep emotions, the direct, visceral experience of collective unity at the cost of one’s individual and more rational self. In fact all otherness and distinctiveness, individual or otherwise, internal or external, is the natural enemy of the ritual mode.

As long as ritual responses are confined to the “sacred space,” the territory is only symbolic, the “sacred space” being a model of the real *Lebensraum* that might eventually be claimed. But it is clear that there is something inherently aggressive about territorial, tribal impulses. Such rituals create a symbolic territory for “us,” in opposition to the claims of “them.” The aggressive potential is directly shown by the habit of building one’s “sacred space” on top of some other group’s sacred space. Very often, Christian churches were built at the former sacred sites of paganism. In Rome, it can still be observed (for instance in the basilica San Clemente) how Christian churches were built right on top of Mithras temples. Such sacred sandwiching is also found elsewhere in the world. A recent example is found in what happened in 1992 near the north-central Indian city Ayodhya, where Hindu extremists destroyed a renowned historical monument, the 16<sup>th</sup>-century Babri Mosque, followed by an official plan to build a Hindu temple on its ruins. The mosque, in turn, was supposed to be built on top of an earlier Hindu temple at a site dedicated to the god Rama. The riots that broke out after the destruction of the mosque led to the deaths of nearly 3000 people.

The aggressive potential of ritual frameworks is at its most dangerous when the symbols and rituals are breaking out of their confinements of a “sacred space” and are taken to the battlefields and to the streets. I will describe this phenomenon as “ritual overflow.” It is like a nuclear power plant going out of control. Apart from its ultimate function and risks, ritual performance has much to offer to the individual, particularly in the alleviation of what social psychologists have called “the burden of selfhood.” The need for regenerating ritual is one of the most persistent factors of human civilization and as soon as a ritual framework declines and is seen as out-dated, new forms to cope with the individual’s fear, loneliness and alienation emerge almost immediately. In Europe at least, secular rituals are perhaps as common now as religious rituals.

## **2. Ritual, religion and ego-loss**

I will now show that Staal’s meaningless acts in ritual are very functional after all, namely in the reduction of the individual’s sense of identity. This also has an obvious connection with religion.

Although matters of world picture and ethics were often presented in forms with ritual elements, by far the most important role of ritual can be found in a third major component of

religion, namely its ways of dealing with individual and collective *experience*, particular in its potential to modify the sense of individual *identity*. The religions of the world differ in many respects, but all seem to provide means to escape – “transcend,” if you will – the individual “self” in one way or another. Ego-loss can be total, as in the case of mysticism (or even more so in the case of death), but more commonly loss of individuality takes the milder form of identification, either with a deity, a collective body (tribe, community), or both. Rituals and religions are the oldest and most common frameworks that accommodated the human need for escape from the self. Another traditional context is the military and sometimes the relatedness with the spiritual traditions was exploited and explicitly articulated, as in the martial arts of Taoism and in the Zen traditions of martial Japan.<sup>6</sup> But also in Western traditions there often is an uncanny closeness between religion and the military (Ehrenreich 1997), something to which I will return.

The human tendency towards “flights from the burden of selfhood” (Baumeister 1991) is one of the most common but underestimated factors in history. According to Baumeister, it is not only found in destructive behaviors such as alcoholism and drug abuse, but also in sado-masochistic games, rock concerts, dancing events and in the seeking of spiritual experience. What all such matters have in common is that the notion of a conscious, distinct and fully experienced individuality is undermined somehow. It is this temporary destruction of awareness of the wider meaningful relations of one’s individuality and the reduction of the self to the immediate physical experience of the here and now (as implied by meaningless activity) that Baumeister considers typical of the human escapist impulse. In itself, it is the opposite from productive work, but given its ubiquitous presence, it probably is a necessary form of therapy for those who seek it.<sup>7</sup>

In large parts of the world, particularly in the developed countries, by far the most popular pastime is to share the experience provided by mass sports events. Such events are another form of escape from the self by creating the conditions for intense identification with “the team”. What matters under these conditions is the experience of collectivity, to be part of a crowd with its ups and downs, under temporary suspension of one’s sense of individual identity. I will return to the ritual aspects of mass sports events as well. The experiential component of religion, rock and dancing events, and mass sports may seem to concern rather disparate domains, they have in common that they give the individual the therapeutic opportunity to escape the full experience of his selfhood. All these different domains also show great similarity in the “technical” means applied to achieve the ego-transcending experience – often means involving rhythm and repetition. Apparently, humans possess only a limited repertoire to “break the shell” (as the medieval mystic Meister Eckhart called it) of their individuality.<sup>8</sup>

Identity-reduction through ritual can be *deconstructive* or *constructive*. This distinction is important for the evaluation of Staal’s thesis about the meaningless nature of ritual. An example of deconstructive ritual elements are certain chants and recitations, for instance the mantras found in Vedic ritual (Staal 1986: 342):

(5) kā hvā hvā hvā hvā hvā  
 kā hvā hvā hvā hvā hvā  
 kā hvā hvā hvā hvā hvā

Such elements are meaningless indeed, but what about rituals in which the participants shout at regular intervals slogans such as “Praise the Lord!” or “Long live the Queen!” The occurrence of such meaningful elements in certain rituals shows that it is just too simple to say that ritual is pure action, without meaning or purpose. Rather, the question is when meaningless elements (like in the mantras) prevail and when elements with meaning prevail (like the slogans I mentioned). Roughly speaking, ritual elements can do two things to one’s identity: either reduce and deconstruct the meanings constituting individual identity, or strengthen or

reconstruct meaning. In the latter case, the ritual is instrumental in the formation of a new identity. It is only in the former case that meaningless elements prevail, while in the latter case meaning is absolutely essential.

In order to see what I mean, let me try to clarify the concept of identity a little bit further. Speaking metaphorically, individual identity is like an onion with its various layers. At the core is purely physical functioning and one's immediate awareness of that. At this "lowest" level, identity emerges by varied, individuating sensory input and perception. Further layers of meaning are formed by one's gender, belongings, social relations, status, ethnicity, nationality, roles and history. These layers give further meaning to one's sense of identity and create corresponding forms of self-awareness. In general, and trivially, what makes individuals unique are their various, differentiating layers of identity.

Powerful agents of identity are the body, one's work and possessions. Being a sexual *persona* creates personal relations, gender roles, commitments and responsibilities. Work and property are also powerful determinants of one's personal profile, all building – or failing to build – self-esteem and status. Our thus-formed identity can be problematic in all kinds of ways and full awareness of it is not necessarily pleasant – and certainly not under all circumstances. Fear, loneliness, a lack of self-esteem, stress and alienation are everywhere. It is here that the problem of "the burden of selfhood" begins, leading to an abundance of human activities aiming at sustaining life while at the same time trying to escape this burden in one way or another. Typical routes of escape involve the deconstruction of the outer layers of meaning constituting one's identity. Semantic stripping is very popular in all kinds of cultural contexts, even among criminals. Thus, Baumeister (1989: 28), citing research on criminal behavior, says the following about burglars:

When breaking into someone's house, they are not thinking of their actions in high level terms, such as "violating the law," "taking another person's possessions," or "destroying someone's happiness." Rather they think in low-level terms: getting the window open, checking for dogs or alarms, avoiding fingerprints. *The broader implications never cross their minds, for they are immersed in the details* [italics added (JK)].

This narrowing of the semantic universe by being immersed in the details of the action-at-hand (called "flow" by Csikszentmihalyi 1990) is precisely what Staal considers essential of the Vedic rituals he observed. Even as to the psychological benefits of rituals Staal seems to agree with what Baumeister concludes about criminal behaviors, namely "that a person can escape from anxiety or other bad feelings by shifting to lower levels." Compare what Staal says about the complex Vedic rituals (1989: 115):

The performers are totally immersed in the proper execution of their complex tasks. Isolated in their sacred enclosure, they concentrate on the correctness of act, recitation and chant. Their primary concern, if not obsession, is with rules. There are no symbolic meanings going through their minds when they are engaged in performing ritual.

The similarity with what Baumeister says about burglars and other activity generating "flow" is striking and, in general, it can be said that some absorbing, monotonous activity is more effective in stripping the outer semantic layers of one's identity the more meaningless it is. Far from being without purpose, the meaninglessness of ritual acts and chants is highly functional as an ego-reducing technique. It is Baumeister's merit that he has identified this phenomenon of the semantic stripping of one's identity layers as the core of the many phenomena that can be seen as escapes from the burden of selfhood. The use of alcohol and drugs, climbing mountains, jogging, pain inflicted in sado-masochistic play, religious ritual and the techniques of spirituality: all of that has the effect that, ultimately, awareness of the outer layers of

one's identity is temporarily suspended and that the self is reduced to a bare minimum, i.e. the immediate awareness of the body here-and-now.<sup>9</sup>

As Baumeister and numerous others have observed, even the lower levels of one's identity can be broken down. Sensory input, for instance, can be completely stripped from its individuating properties by making it completely monotonous (or by numbing it by an overload). All over the world, religious exercises seek to standardize the parameters of physical awareness: by meditation, fasting, reciting mantras, formulas, prayers, by the beating of drums, or even by controlling one's breathing (as in yoga). Such exercises have the potential to alter consciousness, even up to a point that the sense of individual identity is completely gone (as in mystical experience).

This whole spectrum of identity-reducing activities is reminiscent of what Freud called *Thanatos*, the death instinct, that he later in his life opposed to *Eros*, his label for the life instincts. The former is perhaps even more appropriately characterized by another term used by Freud, *the Nirvana principle*, referring to the Buddhist ideal of "blowing out" the candle. Not mystical experience but death is the ultimate form of ego-loss.<sup>10</sup> It is not surprising, then, from this perspective, that death wishes play an important role in religion.<sup>11</sup> Christianity, Islam, and even Judaism, have known episodes in which martyrdom was (and still is) glorified and actively sought.<sup>12</sup> The quasi-religious nationalisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, both in Europe and Japan, cultivated the "noble" ideal of dying for the fatherland. Recent American casualties in Afghanistan were described as "those who bring the ultimate sacrifice." A similar outlook can be found among the opponents of the USA inasmuch as the Taliban and Al Qaeda casualties were considered "martyrs."

Less drastically, many religions have institutionalized direct attacks on Eros in all its forms. Asceticism is ubiquitous in spiritual frameworks all over the world. In the Christian tradition, asceticism was literally described as "dying for the world" (seen as a very desirable goal). Jean Calvin expressed his religious ideals as follows (*Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Book 3, 9.iv):

Still let us ardently long for death, and constantly meditate upon it, and in comparison with future immortality, let us despise life, and, on account of the bondage of sin, long to renounce it whenever it shall so please the Lord.

Since sexuality leads to roles, relations and responsibilities it is a crucial factor in building individual identity and therefore a natural target for those who seek sainthood.<sup>13</sup> Acquiring individual property (and related status) is another form of identity building and therefore another popular target of spiritual movements, from monasterial movements (East and West) to secular radicalism in our own days.<sup>14</sup>

Although I think Freud was correct in identifying two opposite forces in human life, it seems to me that his characterization of the negative force as a "death wish" is too strong and too much focused on the limiting case of total ego-loss. We are not necessarily speaking about matters of life and death but about the management of identity, particularly about the reduction – no doubt to various degrees – of identity awareness. Thus, the behaviors I have in mind also include seeking relaxation by jogging or dancing in a noisy disco. Such activities do suspend the awareness of the "higher" semantic layers of one's identity, but I would not go so far as saying that joggers and dancers are motivated by a death wish. Being dead is just the limiting case, the most extreme form of identity reduction, with the mystical experience somewhere between that and the milder forms of identity reduction.

Summarizing, I believe that the "meaningless" Vedic rituals discussed by Staal emphasize the reduction of individual identity, while collective identity is confirmed and strengthened in a relatively modest way. As for their technical means of ego-reduction, such rituals can use drugs (like soma), recitation of mantras and other formulas. They can also involve chant, syn-



chronous group movements (unison), monotonous music, dance, and, most importantly, the careful and concentrated carrying out of complex prescribed acts. Often such rituals have a relatively elaborate syntactic structure (sequencing of events) and involve relatively little symbolism.

### 3. Mediated identification and the building of collective identity

It would be an error to say that Vedic-style ritual is the general format of ritual across cultures. As a matter of fact, the central ritual of the Christian tradition, the Eucharist, is rather different: it is meaningful in many of its details, it is rich in symbolism, the prescribed acts are relatively simple and it is relatively poor in identity-reducing techniques and syntactic structure. The use of ego-reducing techniques is much more intense in Christianity's "professional" centers of spirituality (monasteries), but in the communal ritual the emphasis is at least as much on collective identity-building (*communitas*) as on identity-reduction.

So far, my emphasis has been on identity reduction by meaning stripping techniques. It is obvious, however, that one can also escape the burden of selfhood by assuming a new identity, particularly by identification with something other than the actual, individual self (identity shift). Much of the attraction of fiction is based on some degree of identification with one or another of the characters of the story. Both on the stage and in real life, one can play a role, i.e. by assuming the identity of some persona. At least since Freud, it has been standard to assume that socialization processes are partially based on identification: with the father, the mother, or some other figure of authority (such as a teacher). Identification can vary from moderate imitation to taking over the full identity of the target: one can behave as Napoleon or, as in the case of psychopaths, believe that one really *is* Napoleon.

The same range of variation is found with what are, at least from the secular rationalist position taken here, fictional figures, such as gods, deities or idols. Thus, one can assume some attributes of a god, but it also is possible to fully assume the identity of a god, as in cases of Shamanic possession or trance.<sup>15</sup> In Christianity, identification with Christ is absolutely essential. According to apostle Paul's epistle to the Romans (6: 6-8), the believer dies with Christ "in the flesh" and rises with Christ "in the spirit". Throughout the history of Christianity, the *imitatio Christi* has been a standard theme. However, according to the more extreme versions, the identification is total, i.e. the believer becomes a Christ himself. This might even show up in some individual in the form of bleeding wounds ("the wounds of Christ"), as in so-called *stigmata*. It is little known that this form of total identification is right in the New Testament itself and might even have been the core of Saint Paul's interpretation of salvation.<sup>16</sup> Salvation in this kind of mystery religion is liberation from what Hellenistic Gnosticism saw as the evil world of matter by undergoing a transformation to a non-material, spiritual (and therefore non-evil) existence. The central ritual of the Catholic Church, the Eucharist, makes the believers participants in this salvation scheme by an extreme form of identification with Christ: the eating of his body and the drinking of his blood.

But then the ubiquitous presence of gods in religious rituals obscures what I believe is the *ultimate goal* of ritual identification: the *community* to which the ritual belongs. As I have assumed all along, if we compare rituals across cultures, it is impossible to maintain that gods are an essential element of ritual. Religions can be non-theistic, like Buddhism, and the secular rituals of modern societies are god-less as well. So, what is the role of gods in rituals? What other significance gods may have for people (for instance as creators or protectors), I believe that, functionally speaking, gods are icons of affectionate identification, ultimately, from the current point of view, just "technical devices" to build group identity. From the point of view of ritual, in other words, deities are part of a group's self-representation and invented

for the sake of group identity.<sup>17</sup> Invented gods form just one powerful, but not necessary set of powerful techniques of group identification, among many others.

It seems to me that experience of group identity can be established or confirmed by *direct* means and by *representational* means of identification. Direct means are displayed if a group behaves as one person (unison), for instance by synchronous movement. This can involve the whole body, by all standing up, sitting down or kneeling at the same time. It can also involve only part of the body, as in the infamous Nazi greeting with simultaneously outstretched arms or in the collective raising of the left fist in communist gatherings. A more stylized and aesthetically more appealing form of synchronous movement is found in ritual dance, as in the performance of the whirling dervishes of Turkey or in the hand movements of the Balinese Monkey Dance. A group can also “speak” as one person, as in speaking choruses, the common recitation of mantras, formulas, the singing of hymns, but also in the simultaneous yelling of slogans. A group can also behave as one person by the opposite of speaking, namely by collective silence for some moment of time. Very often the experience of group identity (with simultaneous reduction of individual identity) is enhanced by common dress (habits, uniforms, costumes), headgear, hair style (including the now very popular shaven head), body paint, tattoos, and, most irreversible, circumcision.

Collectivizing physical appearance also has symbolic aspects and that brings me to the other technique of group identification, namely the manner of representation. A group can be symbolically represented by some object or by one or more persons (including fictional objects and persons). Thus, practically all religions, including the secular-political ones, have sought to represent themselves by symbols derived from objects: menorah, cross, crescent, star of David, national flags, swastika, hammer-and-sickle, etc. Modern-day corporate logos are intended to have a similar function: to create an image that is supposed to evoke a feeling of collective identification, loyalty or even affection. Affectionate identification is more natural and therefore more effective with persons than with symbolic objects. It is for this reason that group identification is very often mediated by persons seen as representing the group (I discard at this point group representation by some animal, as in totemism). The most common type of person sought to represent a group is a person supposed to have the power-to-protect.<sup>18</sup> This is to be expected since the transformation from a sense of individual identity to the experience of collective identity is a thoroughly defensive move anyway.

The power-to-protect requires authority and authority is best served by some form of distance, as every leader knows, even without reading Machiavelli. Identification with a person is only experienced as protective if the target of identification is larger than life and that naturally excludes full familiarity, which would inevitably expose the weaknesses of the leader, an ordinary human being after all. Therefore, the mystique of authority requires distance and fictionalization of the leader’s persona, which was the aim of much propaganda effort, from the emperors of antiquity, to the medieval kings, to the political leaders of today. From fictionalized kings to more abstract figures of authority, the gods, is only a small step. Fictionalized kingship has its limits because it has never been possible to completely shield off the king’s human weaknesses from the public eye. In the long run, the realm of fiction is a safer place for fantasies of authority than real life. It should be noted, incidentally, that not all gods enjoy the same authority. Even polytheism is often hierarchical, which often led to a tribal chief-of-gods. In the great empires of antiquity, there was a further development towards inclusive monotheism, with the high god corresponding to the “king of kings” of the empire. Exclusive monotheism has some relation with an even more centralized political organization, or at least with a more authoritarian ideology.<sup>19</sup>

By far the most authoritarian conception of the divine is the idea of a transcendental god, a god so high that he is beyond all empirical reality. The idea of a transcendental god is the idea of authoritarian distance pushed towards its logical limit, or rather beyond its logical

limit, because, as I see it, the idea of a god that is on the one hand transcendental and on the other hand interfering with worldly affairs is contradictory. In the real world of religion, therefore, the gods of exclusive monotheism are in fact pseudo-transcendental. They can only be talked about in very this-worldly, non-transcendental terms, almost without exception derived from the world of authority and power. The gods of monotheism are never women but always all-powerful tyrants, kings, warlords, and benevolent, patriarchal heads of the family at best. Even if this is all metaphorical according to official theologies, this is how they are experienced.

From the point of view of human identification, all-powerful transcendental gods are problematic. They are too remote to serve as targets of devotion, full identification is excluded and even imitation is out of the question. A Christian can imitate Jesus, but imitation of God sounds blasphemous. Mystical union – a form of ultimate identification – is perhaps possible with Jesus or with a god-within, but never with the transcendental God himself. This is why Christian mysticism was mostly tolerated as bridal mysticism, with Jesus as the groom and his Church or the human soul as the bride.<sup>20</sup> Erotic identification is extremely common among the devotional cults of the world, for instance in the bhakti cults of India.<sup>21</sup> Krishna looms larger in religiously inspired eroticism than Christ ever did, although the latter's role should not be underestimated, from his allegorical role in the Song of Songs to the adventures of Teresa of Avila. Mysticism beyond the common sexual metaphors was always looked upon with distrust, as in the case of the late-medieval Meister Eckhart.<sup>22</sup> For similar reasons, Sufi mysticism is often met with hostility among Islamic fundamentalists, as it somehow tends to violate the logic of transcendence by meeting God closer to home. Identification with a transcendental God nevertheless stands in need of further mediation. Most popular for this purpose are metaphors of submission, for instance those in which God is depicted as the father and the believer as a child, or as God as the king and the believer as his humble servant. In the Islamic ritual of daily prayer the submission is graphically expressed by kneeling with one's face all the way to the ground, but also Christians often love to see themselves as small children of their all-powerful father.<sup>23</sup>

The most far-reaching compromise with non-transcendental paganism is found in Catholicism, which created a whole plethora of mediating figures for devotional identification of the believer: not only Mary and the saints but, most crucially, Jesus (God-incarnated) himself. As soon as earthly mediation between the transcendental God and us humans is permitted, the doors are also open for the derived mediating status of spiritual elites: priests, but ultimately the divinely sanctioned authority of emperor or king. The enormous historical success of Catholicism is partially explained by its ability to mobilize the powers of human affection by overcoming the limitations of transcendence: by its creation of mediators for devotional identification and by its success in integrating the idea of divine mediation with secular power. More than Judaism or Islam, Christianity has been the ideology backing centralized state power by making its power elites part of the web mediating between God and man. But ultimately, whether such secondary or tertiary mediators are used or not, God is a mediator himself, namely an idea mediating between individual identity and collective identity, i.e. the identity of the group represented by the God. Even gods conceived in the most transcendental way possible are almost never experienced as universal. Thus, a Jew or a Christian will find it hard to accept that his high God is not different from Allah and few Muslims will accept Jahweh or Lord Vishnu as indistinguishable from their own target of worship.

Almost without exception, gods are experienced as tribal and by identifying with their God in worship and ritual, believers undergo the desired transformation of an awareness dominated by individual identity to an awareness dominated by the *communitas* of collective identity. Since gods are fiction, they must be introduced by stories defining their identity and meaning, hence the necessity of myths. As soon as rituals involve gods, they have a more

intimate connection with meaning, often re-enacting events described in the myths. At the same time, it should be clear that myth and meaning are accidental aspects of ritual, not essential aspects. From the point of view of a general theory of ritual, myth and the meaning corresponding to it have a technical status comparable to the use of drugs or synchronous body movement or recitation: in order to construct a ritual, elements from this repertoire can freely be chosen, but none in particular is absolutely necessary to make a ritual successful as a form of identity management. It also follows, in this view, that ritual is more fundamental than religion. As for the deconstruction and reconstruction of identity, ritual is the basic notion covering all organized forms this can take, while religion only is about a particular subform, namely the dominant form of construction of group identity (mediated identification). There is plenty of ritual without religion, but there is no religion without ritual.

#### **4. Secular rituals of our time**

It is often said that our own era is poor in rituals, particularly in the West. I consider this view (due to an arbitrarily narrow definition of ritual) completely false. In reality, I believe, the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries have been one of the most creative periods in Western history with respect to ritual, only comparable to the emergence of the great religions in antiquity. It already started in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, with the rise of ritual-rich freemasonry. Before the late 17<sup>th</sup> century (or even the 18<sup>th</sup> century) it is very hard to find a European who says that he or she is an atheist or an ex-Christian but in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, there is an explosive growth of atheism. At the same time, there is a tremendous growth of alternative spiritualities, from the Euro-Buddhism of Schopenhauer to the very popular exploits of Madame Blavatsky. Especially between 1880 and 1920, there is a growth of occult and other spiritual interests in Europe only comparable to what we see in present-day America (see Noll 1994). Many of these alternative spiritualities involved (and do involve) the development of new ceremonies and rituals.

All of this, however, is marginal in comparison to the really big spiritual movements of the past two centuries: nationalism, bolshevism, fascism and organized sports. All of these movements have been the source of rich ritual innovation (often modifying ritual elements of the religions they replaced). My secular point of view does not make a principled distinction between these often violent and banal frameworks (and the often equally violent and banal older religions) and is based on the universal functions of ritual. It sees things from a cross-cultural perspective that naturally abstracts away from identification with the particular belief systems that give value to the various forms of ritual. From this more abstract point of view, traditional religions, alternative spiritualities, nationalistic movements and organized sports are on equal footing as systems that manage the human sense of identity by way of ritual.

Since Voegelin (1938) popularized the term “political religions,” a considerable literature arose about this topic, which often poses the same problem: the political religions are contrasted with “real” religions such as Christianity and Islam and rejected as “pseudo”-versions of the latter. Apart from the fact that, historically speaking, the “real” religions have always been entirely political and obviously arose in symbiosis with political authority, the distinction between “real” and “pseudo” does not make sense from the point of view taken here. Apart from that, I agree with authors such as George Mosse (1975) and others that 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalism, bolshevism and the European fascisms of the interbellum copied many features from the traditional religions, including lots of ritual elements.<sup>24</sup>

Before going into the political religions with their rituals and risks, I would like to discuss two other secular frameworks of identity management, both rich in ritual and both highlighting aspects of ritual that I gave little attention to so far. I am thinking of the military and of organized sports, particularly soccer. Both involve the idea of struggle with some enemy and

both can be manipulated to be used for purposes that go beyond identity management, something they have in common with the political religions.

Soccer (in a form mostly outside of the USA) is an extremely interesting example from the present point of view. It has nothing to do with religion in the usual sense and yet it shows practically all known elements of ritual, which makes it the strongest counterexample to date to the idea that ritual is something religious.<sup>25</sup> Like all elaborate rituals, soccer has a designated venue, the field, comparable to similar designated sacred areas in religions: open spots in the woods, spaces set off by big stones, temples, churches, etc. Just as there are minor churches and cathedrals, the soccer ritual is carried out at modest venues or at a major temple, the stadium. The game itself is the main ritual and it meets Staal's definition of ritual in that it involves absorbing, largely arbitrary, rule-governed behavior with practically no meaning beyond the game itself. The game is carried out by a "spiritual" elite, the players, with a supervisor (the coach) in the background. This is not unlike the Turkish ritual of the whirling dervishes, which also has a semi-participating supervisor in the background.<sup>26</sup> This "general" at the background is in agreement with the fact that the game originated in societies used to rituals with an authoritarian, elitist structure. There is a clear distinction between the spiritual elite (players and coach) and the spectators, who are secondary participants nevertheless (not like an audience but like a congregation). As in the case of most theist religion, the collective experience is mediated by identification with anthropomorphic figures, in this case the demi-gods of the team. During his years at FC Barcelona, its star player Johan Crujff was often referred to as "El Salvador."

The purpose of the ritual of soccer is not surprising at all and in complete agreement with the purpose standardly found in elaborate ritual: to create intense experiences of collective identification, also known as *communitas*, with respect to a symbolic territory ("the field" in this case).<sup>27</sup> The typical spectator is temporarily liberated from his sense of individual identity and gets completely immersed into the warm bath of collective identity. This determines the secondary rituals carried out by the public. These rituals are less structured but involve all the elements familiar from religious ritual. The technical means to intensify collective experience are very much the same. Thus, supporter groups not only distinguish themselves by common dress (as the orange shirt of the supporters of the Dutch team) but even paint their face in the colors of their team or country nowadays. This is not unlike what native Americans used to do when they went to war or what participants in rituals do in New Guinea. The more fanatic supporters also shave off their hair, like Buddhist monks (often following what the players of the team do in this respect). Also the linguistic means are familiar from traditional religions: the singing of hymns, the yelling of slogans, speaking choruses, etc.<sup>28</sup> Synchronous body movement is popular as well. A popular form nowadays is the "wave," in which consecutive segments of the stadium population stand up all together, all around the stadium, creating the illusion of a human wave. Many other examples can be given but I leave it at this. A fairly recent innovation is the use of fires, star showers and elements generating smoke in stadiums, corresponding to the use of candles, fires, incense and sacrificial smoke in the more traditional rituals.

It is the use of traditional ritual techniques that makes the collective experience of soccer so effective, but perhaps the most important factor of all is the idea of a common enemy: the other team and its supporters. In principle, the struggle with the enemy is completely ritualized, but once in a while the "spiritual vanguards" of the opposing supporter groups, the hooligans, engage into real battle, with real victims (up to full military conflict, as the soccer war between Honduras and El Salvador in 1969). More often than not, hooligans are intoxicated by a drug, alcohol – which is another element familiar from the world's religions.

As briefly discussed in Section 1, a ritual demarcates a territory, thereby creating a distinction between "us" and "them." Furthermore, since ritual is a technique of escapism from

individual identity, it is something defensive right from the beginning. Paranoia and fear for the other – known from practically all religions – are never too far away in such defensive activities and the ritual switch from individual to collective identity can make a group (and therefore its members) stronger against the outside world. It seems to me that the desire-to-belong, to exchange individual identity for collective identity, is a defense mechanism deeply ingrained in human nature, with corresponding strong emotions. These emotions are at their most passionate in relation to a common enemy.

From this perspective it is perhaps not too surprising that many rituals, including those of religion, are embedded in a mythological context of struggle with “the enemy.” Christian mythology, for instance, is crucially based on the ancient Indo-European combat myth, which is about a decisive, apocalyptic battle between Good and Evil.<sup>29</sup> In the Christian version of this myth, the Sons of Light are led by Christ, while the forces of Evil follow the Prince of Darkness. Christ’s death and resurrection form a decisive victory in this cosmic drama, although the battle still goes on. Satan and his agents gradually disappeared from the more liberal forms of Christianity, but the original combat myth is still very much alive, for instance in how the Muslim world and Saddam Hussein are perceived these days and in the idea that the enemy is part of the “Axis of Evil,” as George W. Bush put it. Even if all of this is cynical propaganda to the benefit of oil interests, the propaganda works because of the belief systems of the public. For thousands of years, the combat myth has been at the core of the worldview of the West (and not only there).

The combat myth or its residues has provided a matrix in which the West developed its myths and rituals, also in the secular forms of the last two centuries. Many of our rituals (like soccer) are combat rituals or have some version of the combat myth at their background. Apart from the historical context, combat and defensive rituals are so popular because the idea of an enemy proves to be so effective in the creation of collective identity. There is a remarkable dialectic between being on the defense (for instance when faced with persecution or repression) and the strength – supported by ritual – of a collective identity, as is most interestingly shown by the Jewish experience. But also the few surviving, very strong nationalisms of Europe have to do with repression and defense, as recently shown in the Balkans or with the Catalans and Basques in Spain.

The relationship between combat and ritual is further demonstrated by the way armies operate, as described by Barbara Ehrenreich (1997). Like soccer, military training and combat show practically all the known elements of ritual, once more demonstrating that there is no necessary relation between ritual and religion. On the other hand, the relationship between military exploits and spirituality was understood and explicitly developed in the various martial arts and in the Zen Buddhism of Japan. In a different form in our own tradition, where armies march, God is never too far away (cf. Ehrenreich 1997: Ch. 10 and pp. 219-222).

In principle, however, the military is completely secular in countries that respect the separation between Church and State. Practically the entire military training is aimed at reducing the individual’s personal identity in favor of the collective identity of the army and its combat units. Thus, military men are like monks in that they wear the same dress – the uniform – and even shave their head. Their individual identity is also reduced in that they often temporarily abstain from sex and private property. Their exercises and parades involve synchronous movement of several kinds and they sing songs, yell fixed slogans, and on certain occasions, speaking choruses are prescribed. Many events are highly ritualized, such as initiations and promotions. As far as human memory reaches, armies have used disproportionate quantities of drugs. In short, whoever wants to escape from selfhood should join the army!

Armies also follow the path of mediated identification with the collective in their heavy use of symbols (such as banners and flags) and leaders representing the groups. As in theistic religion, the soldier enters into a pattern of submission with respect to a distant hierarchy of

authority, thereby further reducing his individual identity. As for the idea of a common enemy, the military group is prototypical in that it thanks its very existence to the enemy. But as in other cases, the idea of the common enemy also strengthens the sense of collective identity (cf. Ehrenreich 1997: 94-95).

## 5. Ethics, manipulation and ritual overflow

The military example can be seen as a model of the potential dangers of ritual behaviors, particularly when identification by submission to a leader is involved. By giving up their individual identity, the soldiers also lose their sense of individual responsibility and get ready to follow the will of the group, as represented by the leader. This makes them ready to kill and also facilitates their acceptance of being killed themselves. The collective mode of human awareness is predominantly a combat mode and the ritual elements of military training aim at exactly that.

The natural “unit of ethics,” however, happens to be the individual. His or her sense of responsibility and accountability is considerably reduced when the primary mode of awareness is collective rather than individual. It can therefore be said that an individual stripped of the semantic layers of his individuality easily becomes a target for manipulation and is more likely to follow an anti-democratic path. Expanding one’s individual identity is life, while reducing it, like all forms of ego-loss, is a step towards death. In the medieval imagery of *Everyman*, death was seen as the great equalizer, the ultimate form of *communitas*.

All of this is somewhat ironical because religions often preach salvation, life, and ethical benefit, while at the same time they are the main frameworks of rituals of ego-loss and collective experience. This is a contradiction because, as we have seen, there is a natural tension between ethics and reduced individual identity. This is part of the background why religions sometimes fail to fulfill their promises. And yet it is too easy to say that religion, and collective ritual in general, is an ethical risk. It all depends on the circumstances. As long as collective rituals are limited to the designated venues – temples, churches, stadiums and even the exercise fields of military barracks – they are usually pretty harmless. Ritual behaviors become only dangerous when they break out the limits of the designated venues, which in our time means that they are brought to the street. Out in the open, the manifestations of collective identity are out of control. This is a phenomenon that I referred to as “ritual overflow.” Ritual overflow has always been one of the main sources of violence.<sup>30</sup> Consider soccer. Although violence in stadiums certainly occurs, the main battles between the hooligans are out in the streets. These are not just arbitrary fights but extensions of the experience of collective identity as created in the stadium. It always involves symbols of identity such as the colors of the club. During the high festivals of soccer, European and world championships, the winning of teams can lead to huge manifestations of overflow, filling the streets with honking cars and oceans of flags. Very often such events lead to violent riots and in any case, they are among the strongest experiences of collective identity that can be found these days.

But also in the history of Christianity much violence was a matter of overflow. The victory under emperor Constantine in the 4<sup>th</sup> century brought the Church’s symbols more out in the open, eventually leading to much violence of Christian mobs against whatever was left of paganism (cf. MacMullen 1997). During the Crusades the Christian symbols of identity were also brought to the streets, where they inspired the mobs to numerous acts of violence. Another example is the medieval harassment of Jews after the church service on Good Friday, the Christian commemoration of the death of Christ, for which the Jews were held responsible. Eventually, the Jews were recommended to stay in their houses on Good Fridays, since the authorities could not guarantee their safety.<sup>31</sup> The ultimate form of overflow is war, when

soldiers leave their barracks and designated fields of ritual exercise, to bring their banners, flags and other symbols of identity into the fields. Rituals, then, as means to create collective experience are only harmless and perhaps even edifying or therapeutic as performances confined to the designated venues.

## 6. The politics of identity

One of the most urgent tasks of historical analysis is to explain the European catastrophes of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which more than 70 million people died from political violence. A prevailing pattern of explanation, not only in Marxist analyses, is in terms of economical factors and interests: the unequal distribution of economical power and the manipulations of elites to preserve their privileges. I will take such explanations for granted here.<sup>32</sup>

Historical analysis based on economy and power alone, however, is not satisfactory because it does not explain how things actually happen and how human passions are mobilized and shaped (whether that is done to the benefit of elites or not). It is my belief that the economic and power-based analyses should be supplemented with analyses based on the politics of identity, and the study of ritual is central to such an endeavor. Naturally, much human behavior is a reaction to hardship, fear, alienation and other forms of distress. The sources of distress vary over time, but the human responses are similar. Thus, assuming that much alienation during the previous two centuries was caused by the Industrial Revolution and its disruptive, capitalist policies, we still have to account for the fact that there is much evidence that in pre-capitalistic times, including even prehistory, we find much the same patterns of response.

It is one of the central theses of this article that the creation and maintenance of frameworks for ritual behavior is the most universal and most important response pattern. The most common human reaction to hardship is not rational analysis and meaningful political action but the seeking of emotional shelter and escape into activities that manipulate the full awareness of individuality. This is exactly what ritual provides: a set of stereotypical actions that either reduce or destroy the semantic layers of full individuality or that bring about a switch from individual awareness to strong collective awareness. Usually, the deconstructive and constructive approaches are combined in ritual contexts, reducing individual identity with the former and building the new, collective identity with the latter.

Understanding the ritualization of politics as part of the transformation of the national territory (a mythological entity often defined in the process), is one of the keys to understanding what happened in Europe between the French Revolution and the collapse of Hitler's Germany. Thus, the historian Fritz Stern is right on target in his insightful analysis of the Germanic ideology that led to Hitler (Stern 1974: 293):

The various attempts to understand the triumph of national socialism have consistently underestimated the deeply rooted spiritual longings which inspired so many of Hitler's followers, and which also restrained members of the German elite from recognizing or resisting the approaching catastrophe. This aspect of the rise of Hitler has been overlooked by Marxist or psychoanalytical explanations of national socialism.

One reason why this perspective – the most explanatory to date in my opinion – is not all that common is that general theories about the nature of “spiritual longing” are highly underdeveloped, partially due to the fact that many historians themselves have their roots in some belief system involving some expression of “spiritual longing” (Christianity, Marxism, etc.). In the same vein, many people seem to associate “spiritual longing” with something noble and lofty rather than with the brutality and violence of the Hitler regime. For the skeptic about “spiritual



longing”, however, it is nothing other than the defensive, strong desire to be redeemed from the burdensome semantic layers constituting one’s individual identity. National Socialism was no doubt an extreme response to extreme circumstances. But too much emphasis on the exceptional situation tends to obscure the fact that it was the culmination of a universal tradition of ritual and religious response, particularly in the form that it was given by the Christian and dynastic traditions and their main European successors, the redeeming nationalisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The problem was brilliantly analyzed by the late George Mosse in a number of books, particularly Mosse (1975) and (1964). Analyzing the European nationalisms of the 19<sup>th</sup> century exclusively in terms of the interests of power elites or in the related ideological demands of the unification of countries like Germany is not satisfactory. The nationalisms flourished everywhere, also in countries that had been united for centuries. The nationalisms copied so much from the Christian tradition, were so religious in style and so rich in the development and cultivation of ritual that a different approach seems in order. Mosse insightfully described how 19<sup>th</sup>-century nationalisms developed as “secular religions,” going back to Rousseau’s notion of the general will, which was turned into a form of self-worshipping of the people and the nation. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century developed rational forms of democratic politics, with ideas about participatory or representative government, but it also produced these very powerful counter-movements in the form of secular religions. In Mosse’s words (1975: 2):

The new politics attempted to draw the people into active participation in the national mystique through rites and festivals, myths and symbols which gave a concrete expression to the general will. (...) Parliamentary, representative government seemed to many men to contradict the concept of the general will, atomizing men and politics rather than creating unity.

According to Mosse, this 19<sup>th</sup>-century development of the secular religion of the nation with its mass rituals paved the way for the fascisms of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. By adopting the religious style and development of public ritual, the new politics offered much more than just improvement of one’s material fate: it promised spiritual fulfilment by strong experiences of collective identity. It was the standard ego-transcending religious response to threatening realities, in this case those due to the contingencies of modernity, that we have encountered in various forms by now. As Mosse put it (1975: 6):

This religion relied upon a variety of myths and symbols which were based on the longing to escape from the consequences of industrialization. The atomization of traditional world views and the destruction of traditional and personal bonds were penetrating into the consciousness of a large element of the population.

The myths and rituals in question “were meant to make the world whole again and to restore a sense of community to the fragmented nation.” It was, as Stern (1974: xx) rightly pointed out, a pan-European phenomenon (also exported to imperial Japan), encompassing not only the German Romantic intelligentsia, but also the later Action Française and anti-Dreyfusards in France, the Christian socialists of Karl Lueger in Vienna and the Italians influenced by writers such as D’Annunzio, and many others.<sup>33</sup> But as Stern (1974: xxiii) also points out – for reasons that do not concern us here –, “only in Germany did it become a decisive intellectual and political force.”

All of these movements developed more and more exclusivist forms of redemptive national identity, always an identity seen as antithetical to the enemy at home or abroad. From Christianity these movements inherited the traditional internal enemy, the Jew (now seen especially in association with liberalism and socialism), as the icon of the much hated modernity. Like practically all other religions, then, the secular religion of nationalism thrived on a

distinction between “us” and “them,” on the paranoid fear for the other, the enemy that makes the flight into collective identity so intense and redeeming. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the politics of identity escalated by the rise of ever more exclusivist and inalienable forms of collective belonging, this time based on the pseudo-scientific biology of Social Darwinism and race with its bizarre mystique. According to Mosse (1975), the politics of identity in Germany had its ups and downs, but it can be seen as a continuous development from the reaction to the Napoleonic occupation to its complete victory in Hitler’s Germany. Based on nationalistic myths of the *Volk* and its homogeneous identity, it exploited the traditional ritual means of religion and developed them further, even to a morbid kind of perfection among the Nazis.

From the point of view of my definition of ritual, we can say that the essence of the politics of identity was to demarcate tribal territory in space and time. National rituals and festivals were developed, sometimes in close cooperation with Lutheran church leaders like Schleiermacher (Mosse 1975: 76). Typical ritual techniques were the singing of hymns, marches and parades with torches and other symbols, and the mass display of flags. The very nationalistic gymnastics clubs developed several kinds of synchronous movement for the masses, later supplemented with dance. The Nazis improved these means and added lighting effects and, partially under the influence of the communists, speaking choruses and other means to replace a sense of individuality by an intense experience of collective identity. Particularly interesting is the development of marches, torch processions and parades, because they are a more assertive, provocative form of ritual than what is performed in designated “sacred spaces.” Marches and parades, with their origin in medieval processions and in the military, often end in such fixed spaces for further ritual events, but they also take ritual to the streets and to the fields and are therefore a step towards what I have called ritual overflow.

Usually, nationalistic festivals were held in designated “sacred spaces,” near a site of alleged historical importance or near a nationalistic monument. German history from the Napoleonic wars to Hitler can be seen as an attempt to transform the entire national territory – and eventually much beyond that – into “sacred space” by filling it with its symbols and rituals, with the aim to create an intense form of territory-based *communitas*. It is a massive form of overflow, and marches and parades can be seen as a transitional stage. In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, ritual walking took mass proportions in the country-wide roaming of the *Wandervogel*. The various socialist and communist movements often developed a similar religious and ritual style, but with much more discussion and internal resistance, thanks to the rationalistic component of socialism. As a secular religion, socialism was handicapped by its internationalism and roots in Enlightenment universalism, until these “handicaps” were overcome in the Soviet Union of Lenin and Stalin. Ritual and religious styles are always territory-based and it was a bitter deception for many socialists that at the outbreak of the Great War (WW I), the religion of nationalism happened to offer a more seductive experience of *communitas* among large segments of the labor forces than the international solidarity of class.

The fascisms between the world wars not only developed the national rituals to perfection, they also brought their structure more in tune with the residual Christian tradition – a much-overlooked fact. Whereas the enemy image of late 19<sup>th</sup> century was mainly based on Social Darwinism, the Nazi movement maintained an aggressive form of Social Darwinism but also derived from Christianity a full-fledged, partially secularized version of the old apocalyptic combat myth with its paranoid Manichean style. This greatly appealed to the resentful, alienated and often frightened masses. Another element that nazism borrowed from the Christian tradition is a particular form of what I called “mediated identification.” Recall that I distinguished Christian-style ritual from Vedic-style ritual by the former’s intensive use of mediating symbols and “human” idols of authority as means to establish a strong experience of collective identity (Section 3). The shared identification with the Savior has always been the

hallmark of the Christian tradition and it is the essence of its ritual par excellence, the Eucharist. Fascism exploited the residual Christian authoritarian tradition by replacing its Savior with the most effective idol of identification that human societies have been able to produce, the charismatic cult leader. As pointed out by Norman Cohn and others, history is full of charismatic Saviors and records of the ruins they left behind.<sup>34</sup> But never in history could they take advantage of the means of mass communication and transportation to take over a whole nation. This is what happened in the 1920s and 1930s, leading to the greatest human catastrophe in recorded history.

It is Mosse's merit that he did not analyze Hitler's Germany entirely as an unique accident of a very exceptional and short time, but as the culmination of a 130-year-long attempt to replace rational politics by secular religion, to ritualize political discourse and to turn the entire national territory into "sacred space." This politics of identity no doubt won due to the extreme fears and alienation of the period between the wars, exploited by economic powers and elite interests at the background.<sup>35</sup> But, ultimately, it is a pattern going back to the christianization of the Roman Empire with its authoritarian rituals and religious style. In turn, this christianization was a specific form of the general human impulse to project tribal identity into space and time. But then it should be realized that the creation of "sacred space" by ritual, symbol and idol-mediated identification with the tribe was a defensive response all along, invented to overcome the fears and alienations of the individual by giving him or her an escape into the collective unity felt necessary to defend a symbolic territory representing the tribe.

## 7. Conclusion

Even more so than the examples of soccer and the military, Europe's secular religions highlight the aggressive, totalitarian potential of ritual frameworks, both in their fascistic form and in their Stalinist form. In principle, ritual demarcates only a *symbolic* "sacred space," a territorial *model* in relation to an emotionally experienced collective identity. Such a model creates the distinction between "us" and "them," alleviates the ritual actors from the burdens of their individuality and mobilizes the defensive and offensive readiness of *communitas*. It is potentially totalitarian because the big enemy of ritual discourse is otherness and it does not tolerate dissent. Ritual space excludes both individual differentiation and the symbolic presence of other tribes. Instead, it stands for the visceral emotions of ego-loss and *communitas*, which are alien to critical thinking and democracy. Whatever merit the ritual impulse had in relatively small, homogenous communities, at the scale of modern national states with their heterogeneous and often multi-ethnic populations, it leads to exclusion, stigmatization, conformity and the marginalization of dissent, discrimination of "the other" and, in its most extreme case, to his elimination. Ethnic cleansing always involves the politics of identity.

The world of ritual is particularly dangerous under conditions of overflow, when, as in the case of the political religions, the symbolic model of collective identity is used as a blueprint for the world at large, with its natural individual and collective differences. What is alarming about the world since September 11, 2001, is that the politics of identity is entirely back in its more intense forms. Economic interests in the Middle East have led to the exploitation of a propaganda model in which Christian and Islamic identities are felt by many as being on a collision course, all of this connected with and intensified by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, which itself is also heavily burdened by religiously inspired symbols of identity and forms of political religion.<sup>36</sup> As a reaction to the fears created by September 11, symbols of American identity, like flags, have left the "sacred space" of their normal ritual contexts, thereby bringing massive ritual overflow to the streets and creating the intense, but potentially totalitarian

*communitas* of “united we stand.” In Europe, the identity issue made a comeback as a response to immigration from the Muslim world. Here, too, the vague emotions of fear were intensified by September 11, leading to the emergence of political cults based on charismatic leaders like the slain Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn. This latter cult once again followed the “Christian” pattern of collective identification mediated by a Savior, which was also typical of fascism.<sup>37</sup>

In the face of these new challenges and threats, I would like to end with a modest, admittedly optimistic proposal. Very often the Enlightenment was hostile towards religion and ritual, which in many countries led to a formal and beneficial separation of Church and State. However, mass popular support for Enlightenment rationalism and universalism was undermined in this way by the fact that many people continued to seek the consolation and empowerment of *communitas* and its rituals, particularly under conditions of alienation and distress and even as emotional support in justified social revolt. The emotional longing for *communitas*, created by ritual, is perhaps an inalienable part of human nature. From this, it follows that the “project of the Enlightenment” would do better to relax its attitudes towards religion and ritual, generously recognizing the benefits for those who seek it, and directing its energy against what is really harmful, namely situations of overflow. Ritual should be limited to the symbolic territories of real communities of freely associated individuals and never determine the nature of the entire public space with its rich human diversity. States and national communities form dubious pseudo-communities that, ideally, should disappear altogether in the long run. As long as states exist, their politics should be based on reason, acceptance of individual and collective diversity, and shun the passionate emotions of *communitas* at all cost.<sup>38</sup> We therefore need a long overdue separation between Ritual and State.

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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Part of the title of this article is inspired by Boyarin (1997), a thought-provoking plea for “deterritorialized” Jewish identity (see particularly Ch. 10).

<sup>2</sup> My proposal about ritual is crucially based on the notion of marking a *territorial model*, which is not commonly found in exactly this form. Van Gennep’s conception starts from a notion of territory (1960: Ch. 2), which is extended to the demarcation of “territories” in time. For Eliade (1987 [1957]) the notion “sacred space” is crucial, but in terms of the sacred-profane distinction that I do not consider a universal element of ritual. See also Smith (1987) for much emphasis on the role of “place” in ritual. For the sake of tradition and convenience, I will often – somewhat metaphorically – refer to a territorial model as “sacred space,” without accepting the underlying dualism of sacred and profane.

<sup>3</sup> Ritual consists of a set of techniques to achieve a certain kind of experience. Meaningful elements derived from myths can contribute to that experience but are otherwise rather arbitrary and culture-dependent. The same ritual techniques can be combined with many different meanings. Staal (1989: 140) refers to Kristofer Schipper, who showed that Taoist ritual was constantly associated with new meanings in a succession of historical contexts. The same can be said about the Christian rite of baptism which “is subject to widely varying theological interpretations” according to Driver (1998: 92). Since rituals rarely have fixed meanings, an approach in terms of “communication” does not make much sense either. Like almost anything else people do, rituals sometimes reflect elements of the community to which the ritual belongs. Naturally, such elements are communicated as a side-effect. Thus, the fact that rituals communicate “order” (Driver 1998: Ch. 6) is not as essential as the fact that rituals lead to an experience of *communitas* (in the sense of Turner 1969).

<sup>4</sup> See Newberg et al. (2001: 114) for a possible neurobiological explanation of these effects.

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<sup>5</sup> The notion “political religion” is supposed to go back to Tocqueville and was introduced in systematic political theory by Voegelin (1938). See the introduction of Burleigh (2000) for discussion and rich bibliographical documentation. For political settings as ritual frameworks, see Kertzer (1988).

<sup>6</sup> See Csikszentmihalyi (1990: 106) for an account of the Asian martial arts in terms of his concept of “flow,” relating it to spirituality and absorbing activities.

<sup>7</sup> The benefits of self-absorbing activities generating “flow” can of course also be found in productive work. Paradoxically, the beneficial nature of “flow” partially undermines the traditional Marxist critique of the division of labor. Labor can be non-productive (in the intended sense) and as meaningless as climbing mountains but nevertheless contribute to a sense of well-being by generating “flow.” The more serious problems with jobs are about self-esteem and social status. In full freedom, many more people seek absorbing but meaningless activity in their leisure time than productive work.

<sup>8</sup> Fauteux (1994: 102). Quite a bit is known nowadays about the neurobiological basis of techniques to reduce the sense of self, thanks to the pioneering work of the late Eugene d’Aquili and others. Special attention to ritual is given in d’Aquili & Newberg (1999: Ch. 5) and Newberg et al. (2001: Ch 5) (with further interpretations that I will not adopt). They also explain why ritual is usually not sufficient to achieve a full mystical experience. Ritual leaves meaning intact to various degrees, while the ultimate mystical experience breaks down all meaning, particularly the sense of space and time (see also Forman 1999: Ch. 1). The “Kantian” self sees the world in terms of space and time and includes a brain representation of the body and other meaningful aspects of the sense of self. These self-representations can be broken down to various degrees, ranging from softening self-awareness by focusing sensory input (e.g. with music and candles) to a further reduction of the self by the repetitive motor behaviors involved in ritual and, ultimately, to the complete meaning-free void of mysticism by techniques more powerful than ritual (e.g. meditation). Unlike mysticism, ritual crucially involves meaning by replacing the sense of self by a sense of *communitas*.

<sup>9</sup> Apart from Baumeister (1991), a very helpful exposition of his theories is Baumeister (1989), highlighting the historical emergence and functioning of masochism in our culture. The role of pain in spiritual techniques is also discussed in Glucklich (2001).

<sup>10</sup> For mysticism and so-called near-death experiences, see d’Aquili & Newberg (1999: Ch. 7).

<sup>11</sup> The desire to be dead and be with Christ is explicitly mentioned in the New Testament (Philippians 1: 23). It was a major theme, not only in Calvinism but also in the Lutheran Pietist tradition, witness several of Bach’s cantata texts, the most famous being BWV 161, *Komm, du suesse Todesstunde* ‘Come, thou sweet hour of death.’

<sup>12</sup> For the role of martyrdom in Christianity and Judaism, see Boyarin (1999). For the emergence of martyrdom in connection with the concept of Holy War in both Christianity and Islam, see Partner (1997).

<sup>13</sup> A related identity-denial is anorexia, which pathologically seeks to reduce the body as a bearer of individual identity. According to Bell (1987), many descriptions of medieval saints meet the definitions of anorexia.

<sup>14</sup> Throughout the history of Christian Europe, spirituality was associated with giving up personal property, on the basis of New Testament texts such as Matthew 6: 19, 16: 16-26 and particularly Acts 4: 32-37, which takes a truly cruel turn in Acts 5, where the unreported retaining of private property is even leading to a curse and the death of the perpetrators. These texts inspired the poverty ideal of the medieval mendicant orders (Franciscans, etc.) and the primitive socialist movements of the early Reformation. Given the often violent nature of these movements, I believe it was not just a matter of so-

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cial justice, but also a manifestation of the anti-identity impulse at the core of all spiritual movements. In Buddhism, detachment is even more prominent than in Christianity.

<sup>15</sup> For possession and trance in relation to music, see Rouget (1985). A very common form of identity shift is the reversal of age, sex, and status roles, found in rituals all over the world (see Turner 1999: Ch. 5, which also discusses Halloween). A very vital reversal ritual in the (industrialized) Catholic world is Carnival. Transvestism is another example, not only a gender reversal but also often an identity-stripping immersion in the details of proper make-up, like the meaningless acts in Vedic ritual. I will further ignore identity shifts in the present article.

<sup>16</sup> See Paul's epistle to the Galatians 6:17 in the New Testament. For an intriguing account, see Ensminger (2001).

<sup>17</sup> Berger (1967: 57) speaks about "the self-denying submission to the power of the collective nomos." Submission to a god, then, can be seen as submission to a *representation* of this collective nomos.

<sup>18</sup> Freud (1989 [1922]) follows Le Bon (1982 [1895]) in describing patterns of identification with a group and via leaders, as in Christian communities (e.g. p. 86). Freud also follows Le Bon in the latter's observation that such groups have "a thirst for obedience." (p. 76).

<sup>19</sup> For the development of the various monotheisms, see Thompson (1999: Ch. 13).

<sup>20</sup> This tradition goes back to Origen's allegorical interpretation of the Song of Songs in the early 3<sup>rd</sup> century. The tradition was revitalized in the 12<sup>th</sup> century by Bernard of Clairvaux, Richard of St Victor and others, and became the dominant form of Western mysticism (see Colish 1997: Chs. 16 and 17). For possible Sufi influences from Islamic Spain, see Rougemont (1983 [1940]: 102-107).

<sup>21</sup> For an interesting comparison between the Eastern and Western traditions, see Siegel (1978).

<sup>22</sup> Eckhart is not in the Song of Songs tradition in that he avoids sexual imagery (Colish 1997: 240). According to Forman (1999: 4 ff.), real mysticism is not described with sensory language, which would make Eckhart a real mystic, akin to various Eastern traditions, as opposed to the Song of Songs tradition and the bhakti cults. Cross-culturally, there is a remarkably wide-spread association between religious themes and sexual themes (see for instance Goldberg 1931, Mann & Lyle 1995 and Daniélou 1984 [1979]). Curiously, there are very few attempts at explanation of this near-universal, apart from the obvious fact that both religion and sex seek to transcend the self. There is an interesting connection with ritual. Newberg et al. (2001: 84) observe that almost all animals perform some variation of a mating ritual. Animal courtship involves "repetitive rhythms" and synchronous movements, very much like what we see in human rituals. This animal behavior is supposed to suspend the self-protective instincts that normally prohibit very close interactions between organisms. Eventually (p. 125), Newberg et al. plausibly generalize this observation to the hypothesis "that the neurological machinery of transcendence may have arisen from the neural circuitry that evolved for mating and sexual experience." Another theme that is cross-culturally associated with both sexual experience and mysticism is death (cf. the common French description of orgasm as *la petite mort*). This connection was explored by Rougemont (1983 [1940]) and Dollimore (1998). If the neural circuitry for sexual experience is related to the neurological circuitry for mystical experience, the same is perhaps true for mysticism and the near-death experience (see d'Aquili & Newberg 1999: Ch. 7).

<sup>23</sup> The masochistic nature of the submission theme is insightfully analyzed by Peter Berger (1967: Ch.3) and also by Erich Fromm (1994 [1941]) in relation to both religion and the nazi regime. In all its forms, submission ("surrendering to a higher will") is another ego-loss theme in that the individual gives up personal responsibility (cf. also the Christian idea of becoming-as-a-child in the Gospels). Berger further discusses how the Reformation (like Islam) pushed the idea of a transcendent God to extremes by destroying the more visible mediating structures (images, saints, etc.). This reduced hu-

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mans to nothingness vis-à-vis an all-powerful God, contributing to cultures of fatalism in both Calvinism (predestination) and Islam.

<sup>24</sup> According to Anderson (1991: 12) nationalism derived its forms from the “religious community” and from the “dynastic realm.” Mosse (1975: 14) highlights the role of Pietism in the rise of German nationalism. For the invention of new ritual traditions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, see also Hobsbawm & Ranger (1983).

<sup>25</sup> In general, it makes sense to distinguish games and theater performances from rituals in that the former have non-participating “audiences,” while the latter have participating “congregations.” Soccer, especially in stadiums, developed from a game (or a semi-ritual) to a ritual with full participation of those present in the stadium (I will give examples in what follows). Rappaport (1999: 45) cites Lévi-Strauss (1966: 32) who claimed that rituals differ from games in that the former only have “winners.” That strikes me as being too simplistic. The ritual re-enacting of struggle between various groups is not uncommon in ritual and even the Eucharist has implicit losers, namely Satan and his agents. Apart from that, it seems to me that there is a continuum in “rituality” from rituals to games, theater performances and other collective experiences. Concerts, for instance, are not rituals in the sense of this article but definitely show some ritual elements. See also Turner (1982).

<sup>26</sup> The referee is a secondary priest, whose modest role is to supervise that the rules are really followed.

<sup>27</sup> There are some indications that the real trophy of soccer matches is “the field.” At the end of a match, the players often take possession of the field by collectively crossing it several times. Unless it is forbidden due to the security risks involved, it is also common that the supporters of the winning team leave their seats *en masse* and “occupy” the field.

<sup>28</sup> Bax (2002) also stresses the ritual aspect of the collective verbal violence of football supporters. Looking at such ritual behaviors in the perspective of diachronic discourse analysis, he argues that “contemporary verbal football rowdiness is a manifest outburst of the ‘ethological substratum’ still lurking in modern humankind” (p. 87).

<sup>29</sup> See Cohn (1993) about the ancient origins and history of the combat myth. The combat myth is an important component of the New Testament, see Pagels (1995) and Macky (1998).

<sup>30</sup> Like hypnosis and other forms of altered consciousness, the ritual experience lowers the rationality of those involved, making them less accountable and, instead, prone to manipulation, for instance by some charismatic leader. Outside the designated “sacred place,” such lowered rationality is dangerous because the ritual community becomes indistinguishable from a *crowd*, showing the psychological weaknesses and vices described by Le Bon (1982 [1895]). Interestingly, Hitler and Mussolini were both influenced by Le Bon’s work (Mosse 1975: 12).

<sup>31</sup> Jansen (1999: 137-139) gives several examples of medieval pogroms in relation to so-called Passion Plays (as still existent in the Bavarian village of Oberammergau). Passion Plays required heavy police protection of ghettos in Paris, Frankfurt, Freiburg and Rome.

<sup>32</sup> One of the best recent examples is Chomsky (2002).

<sup>33</sup> See also Mosse (1999). Ehrenreich (1997: Ch. 13) expands this type of analysis to the political rituals of Japan’s State Shintoism and American patriotism.

<sup>34</sup> See Cohn (1970) and Katz & Popkin (1998). For an insightful study about prophetic charisma, further developing the classical theories of Max Weber and Heinz Kohut, see Oakes (1997). The apocalyptic myth of the end of time keeps coming back in cults because it is ideal for those who seek to

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reduce individual identity: at the end of time, sex, age and status differences lose their significance. The progression of time creates individual differences and identity, the end of time stops this process. It is another variation on the ego-loss theme. Turner (1969: 111-112) rightly observes that the millenarian idea creates *communitas* for the cult groups in question.

<sup>35</sup> Hitler would not have won without the collaboration of the traditional and industrial elites; see the breath-taking account of Turner (1996). This confirms the validity of the more traditional analyses in terms of economic elite interests.

<sup>36</sup> Cf. Huntington (1996). Both the Arab nations and the State of Israel are based on the connection criticized in this article, namely the one between national territory as “sacred space” and religious identity. As for Israel, this anti-Enlightenment conception of nationhood was criticized by Shahak (1994). See also Boyarin’s plea for a deterritorialized Jewish identity (Boyarin 1997).

<sup>37</sup> Oakes (1997) gives an incisive portrait of the kind of narcissistic charismatic leadership represented by Fortuyn, including the – in this case prophetic – observation that “the careers of the charismatic prophets are punctuated by conflicts with society that may result in their being jailed or assassinated” (p. 23). With lots of help from the media, Fortuyn created a mystique of “otherness” and a direct bond of affectionate mutual identification with his followers, based on common resentment about the socialists and immigration. The events after Fortuyn’s death took the form of a quasi-religious mass ritual reminding of what happened after the death of Princess Diana in England: oceans of flowers in the “sacred space” near his house, the burning of candles and small sacrifices of personal belongings with an affectionate meaning, like teddy bears.

<sup>38</sup> This proposal has been made before. Kertzer (1988: 181) quotes Cassirer (1946: 285), who identified “political rituals with the abdication of moral responsibility.” According to Kertzer himself, “[t]here can be no politics without symbols, nor without accompanying rites.” But then he seems to accept the idea of a national community, according to which somebody from, say, Florida is supposed to feel a different kind of solidarity with somebody from Buffalo than with somebody from Ottawa.

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