

RITUALS ONLINE

TRANSFERRING AND DESIGNING RITUALS¹

KERSTIN RADDE-ANTWEILER

Introduction

- “(1) We acquire knowledge today from the Internet.
(2) Searching and finding information in the Internet is an independent element of our culture – in the future, children will learn how to count, read, write, and google at school.
(3) The ability to acquire information and integrate it into our personal corpus of knowledge is more important than the knowledge itself.
(4) Search engines like Google always provide a surplus of information: Users find answers to questions that they haven’t even asked (yet). Google generates an entire universe of questions and in the process ultimately changes the basic operation of knowledge acquisition.”²

My paper will discuss different ritual prescripts that are presented on ‘personal homepages’ in the cluster ‘Hexe’ (in English, ‘witch’). But what is meant by ‘cluster’ and what are the limitations of ‘personal homepages’? In the beginning of my research I wanted to analyze Internet presences and particularly individual rituals of the Wicca movement on German-language websites. In the course of the research, however, it has become clear that the majority of the websites analyzed make no reference to any Wiccan or solitary tradition – in contrast to the members of discussion forums – but nevertheless define themselves ‘Hexe’ (‘witch’).³ I therefore decided to take this emical point of perspective seriously and not to use

¹ Sincere thanks are given to Carol Grurgeon for her translation.

² See Schetsche 2005, 31: „(1) Wissen erlangt man heute aus dem Internet. (2) Beim Suchen und Finden von Informationen im Internet handelt es sich um eine eigenständige Kulturtechnik – in der Schule lernen die Kinder in Zukunft Rechnen, Schreiben, Lesen und Googeln. (3) Wichtiger als das Wissen selbst ist die Fähigkeit Informationen zu erlangen und in den persönlichen Wissenskorpus zu integrieren. (4) Suchmaschinen wie Google liefern immer ein Informations-Surplus: Der Nutzer findet Antworten auf Fragen, die er (noch) gar nicht gestellt hat. Google erzeugt ein ganzes Universum von Fragen und verändert damit letztlich auch den grundlegenden Operationsmodus der menschlichen Wissenskultur.“ Translation by Carol Grurgeon.

³ See also the chapter “Transfer of Rituals on the Internet” in this paper.

any fixed religious system as a criteria for analyzing websites. The term ‘cluster’ or agglomeration thereby signifies the inability to determine fixed borders in this research area.⁴

I have adopted the definition of ‘personal homepages’ from Nicola Döring:

“Personal homepages are websites that are maintained independently by individual persons. (...) In the process, configuration and programming can be taken on by the persons themselves or delegated to a third party. (...) The *ownership* can almost always be gleaned from personalized page names and titles. (...) We speak about ‘personal homepages’ regardless of how private or personal their contents are. If a person’s website is restricted to business activities or contains an unreferenced software or story archive, it still counts as a personal (*person-related*) homepage in line with the definition suggested here. (...) The opposite of ‘personal homepage’ is often given as ‘commercial homepage.’ However this contrast is misleading. (...) Personal homepages (defined by the individual ownership) should be differentiated from non-personal homepages, which are websites operated by organizations, institutions, or formal groups (...) and thus do not have an individual as the sender.”⁵

The focus of my research was on magical rituals (known in German as ‘magische Rituale’), such as love or healing rituals, limited to German-language homepages. These magical rituals, described as such by the websites themselves, are designed to deal with situations in everyday life. In contrast to the typical liminal rituals, like celebration (for example Samhain), initiation, birth etc., magical rituals provide rules for managing your personal life and constitute the majority of rituals presented on these websites.

In addition to the potential of the Internet to offer interaction and processes of communication in the context of religions – “online religions” with their own “online rituals” – you can find a lot of information about rituals and instructions on how to perform a ritual.⁶

⁴ See further Meier 2006.

⁵ See Döring 2001, 326f: „Persönliche Homepages (personal homepages) sind Webangebote, die von einzelnen *Personen* eigenverantwortlich betrieben werden. (...) Dabei können Gestaltung und Programmierung selbst übernommen oder auch als Auftragsarbeit an Dritte delegiert werden. (...) Der *Besitzstatus* ist bei persönlichen Homepages fast durchgehend an personalisierten Seitentiteln und Überschriften abzulesen. (...) Wir sprechen von ‚persönlichen‘ Homepages unabhängig davon, wie privat oder intim ihre *Inhalte* sind. Wenn das Web-Angebot einer Person auf berufliche Aktivitäten beschränkt ist oder ein unkommentiertes Software- oder Geschichten-Archiv enthält, so handelt es sich gemäß der hier vorgeschlagenen Definition dennoch um eine persönlich (also *personenbezogene*) Homepage. (...) Als Gegenbegriff zur ‚persönlichen Homepage‘ wird oft die ‚kommerzielle Homepage‘ genannt. Diese Kontrastierung ist jedoch irreführend. (...) Von persönlichen (definiert über den individuellen Besitzstatus) sind als nicht-persönliche Homepages solche Web-Angebote abzugrenzen, die von Organisationen, Institutionen oder formellen Gruppen betrieben werden (...) und somit nicht das Individuum als Sender agieren lassen.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

See also Döring 2001, 328: „Obwohl von der persönlichen *Home-Page* die Rede ist, meint man nicht nur die Startseite eines Webangebots, sondern die gesamte *Web-,Site*‘, also alle inhaltlich zusammengehörenden Web-Seiten, die eine Person(engruppe) als ihre persönliche Homepage anbietet.“

“Although the discussion is about the personal *home ‘page*‘, it covers the entire *Web site* and not just the initial page – all the websites that belong together, that a person (or group of persons) provides as a personal home page.” Translation by Carol Grugeon.

⁶ See the classification from Helland 2005 in information and interactivity zone.

“People act in line with their knowledge about reality. They create their (personal and collective) reality based on the information that they acquire from their environment. In the Google community, this construction of reality is based primarily on the information that citizens acquire through the digital media (with the Internet as the leading medium).”⁷

This varies from the publication of – at first glance – fixed ritual prescripts, to texts about how to design a ritual by yourself. Such texts on the homepages in the cluster ‘Hexe’ constitute the research field of my project. An analysis of specific discussions in guestbooks and discussion groups completed this. In contrast to most Internet studies that primarily consider the aspect of communication, I have analyzed the websites by means of the method of reception.⁸

‘Patchwork Religion’ and ‘Patchwork Ritual’

At the beginning of our research project in 2002, as a part of the Collaborative Research Centre on the *Dynamics of Rituals* in Heidelberg⁹, the very general thesis with which we started was that the Internet medium – for the first time – reveals what Luckmann called “invisible religion”¹⁰ for religious studies. In contrast to traditional secularization theories¹¹ we presupposed that the phenomenon of religion was not declining in the Western world, but changing into a more individualized form. Because of its ability to display the numerous statements of individual believers, the Internet medium represents a new and incomparable source for religious studies.

⁷ See Schetsche 2005, 21: “Menschen handeln gemäß ihres Wissens über die Realität. Ihre (persönliche wie kollektive) Wirklichkeit erschaffen sie auf Basis der Informationen, die sie aus der Umwelt erhalten. In der Google-Gesellschaft beruht diese Konstruktion von Realität vorrangig auf den Informationen, die die Bürger über die digitalen Medien (mit dem Leitmedium Internet) aufnehmen.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

⁸ For further information, see Jauss 1987. It seems to me that after the so called linguistic turn a wide definition of communication is used in the dominant academic discourse but a restricted spectrum of method is used that is still influenced by the old narrow definition of communication. It is a pity that, especially in the field of Internet research, there have been no multi-methodological attempts to analyze the characteristics of the Internet medium itself. Anthropological perspectives, like the paper from Michael Rudolph 2005, could be regarded as a necessary example.

⁹ See <http://www.ritualdynamik.uni-heidelberg.de>.

¹⁰ See Luhmann 1967.

¹¹ See, for example, Weber (1904), Wilson (1966) or Berger 1967. Berger, however, later reversed his earlier theory. See Berger 1997, 974: “I think what I and most other sociologists of religion wrote in the 1960s about secularization was a mistake. Our underlying argument was that secularization and modernity go hand in hand. With more modernization comes more secularization. Most of the world today is certainly not secular. It’s very religious.” For further discussion and his critics on the abandonment of the secular theory, see Pollack (2003).

Our analysis verified the initial thesis, which of course needs further modifications. But it also emphasized another phenomenon, that of individual belief (in German: “Individualreligiosität”). Next to representations of the institutionalized religions such as the Catholic Church or different Islamic groups etc., the Internet reveals religious discussions and self understanding not only from religious experts, but also from the individual believer – in the emic perspective, ‘the amateur.’ In contrast to the predominant theologies that describe what a believer of a specific religion has to believe, the analysis showed that there is a large range of variations in the religious self understanding of individuals. The options for different combinations of religious traditions become apparent on the homepages we analyzed. This is what one could termed ‘Patchwork Religion’: The Internet offers a great treasure trove or pool of religious traditions, where individuals can select separate pieces, combine them, and form their own personal religious beliefs.¹²

As an element of religion, rituals play a central part, especially on the analyzed websites. My paper seeks to show that we can see the same processes in rituals that we see in patchwork religions, such selection, transfer, combination, and recontextualisation. I therefore regard in this respective ‘Patchwork Rituals’ as a microcosm of ‘Patchwork Religion.’ Thereby the focus lays on two elements of these patchwork processes: ‘Ritual Design’ and, as a part of it, ‘Ritual Transfer.’

The Concept of ‘Transfer of Ritual’

Most designers of homepages in the cluster ‘Hexe’ saw themselves – in the emical perspective – in the continuity of pre-Christian, matriarchal, Celtic, and Germanic cults and mythologies. For the same reasons, the ritual prescripts presented are often defined by the homepage owner as old traditional scripts, although analysis showed explicit or implicit transfer processes and the reception of various religious traditions. To analyze these processes of reception and transfer of rituals, I used the concept of ‘Transfer of Ritual’ developed in the context of the collaborative research center 619 “Ritualdynamik.”¹³

¹² For detailed analyse, see Radde-Antweiler forthc.

¹³ For detailed information, see Langer & Lüddeckens & Radde & Snoek 2006.

‘Transfer of Ritual’¹⁴ always implies a change in the cultural surrounding of the ritual concerned. Rituals are not be considered as isolated phenomena, but are performed within a specific cultural context.

The context of each ritual contains some aspects that are related to each other, but also interact with the ritual itself. These ‘context aspects’ include, for example: media, the geographical, cultural, religious, political, economical, social, or gender context.¹⁶ A changed context, with the inherent interactions of different context aspects, causes modifications of the ritual dimensions. As ‘internal dimensions’, we define the specific structure and – depending on the prevailing perspective – the mode of action, such as script, form, performance, aesthetics, innovation, intention reflexivity, interaction, communication, function, meaning, and so on.

The theory states that “when a ritual is transferred, i.e. when one or more of its context aspects changes, changes in one or more of its internal dimensions can be expected.”¹⁷ Based on the visible modifications at the context level, we can analyze the different dimensional aspects of the ritual. If there are modifications to the dimension aspects, it is possible to trace and determine the triggering factors through an analysis of the context fields. Transfer processes consist of such changes and modifications. They also comprise the interdependency of context aspects and internal dimensions and – as a third level – the actors themselves. Serious consideration must be given to the active and passive role of ritual actors, participants, observers, the chorus, and the part of group that is not present but still influences the group – especially its function as a link between ‘context aspects’ and ‘internal dimensions.’ One classic example for ‘Transfer of Ritual’ is the examination of processes in the context of migration.

With regard to the problem of defining ritual and the implicit specification of the object of investigation, the question arises as to what would be transferred in the process of ‘Transfer of Rituals’?¹⁸ The German historian of religions Burkhard Gladigow, in the succession of Edmund Leach, divides rituals into specific sequences of rites.

¹⁴ The ‘Transfer of Ritual’ should not be identified with the dynamic of ritual. See Langer & Lüddeckens & Radde & Snoek forthc.: “Whereas ‘Transfer of Ritual’ is always a form of ‘Ritual Dynamics’, not all ‘Ritual Dynamics’ are also ‘Transfer of Ritual.’ When rituals are changed, following their transfer, then there are two kinds of changes involved: change(s) in the context (as a result of the transfer), and change(s) in the rituals themselves (as a response to the change(s) in the context). But changes in rituals are not always a response to changes in their context; they may also result from the internal dynamics of the rituals themselves.”

¹⁶ See Langer & Lüddeckens & Radde & Snoek forthc.

¹⁷ See Langer & Lüddeckens & Radde & Snoek forthc.

¹⁸ See Michael 2003, 6: “*Das Ritual*, losgelöst von allen historischen, regionalen oder sprachlichen Kontexten, gibt es ohnehin ebenso wenig wie ein Wesen des Rituals.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon: “*The Ritual*, independent of all historical, regional, or linguistic contexts, exists as little as the essence of ritual.”

“Ritual *elements* are defined as those that can either be repeated within the same rituals or are also ‘recognisable’ in other rituals. (...) Typical ritual sequences are defined by the fact that they link a ‘clear’ number of separate ritual elements with another and that this constellation can appear in different complex rituals, and that they must also be ‘recognisable’ and ‘identifiable.’”¹⁹

If ritual sequences are only abbreviated or suggested he characterizes them as “rituelle Abkürzungen” (“ritual abbreviations”).²⁰ They could also be transferred from one context into another. Furthermore “other features of rituals, such as symbols, clothes, or objects can be transferred as well.”²¹ On the analyzed websites, we could see processes of ‘Transfer of Ritual’ at different levels.

Transfer of Ritual between Online and Offline Forms of Media

The change of media, and therefore the ‘Ritual Transfer’, usually causes specific modification: in the first instance, a new constitution of the participants is possible because of the potential to meet, communicate, and perform rituals in cyberspace, independent from geographical conditions – the ‘online rituals.’²² The Internet also seems to particularly compensate for the deficits in situations where the traditional way of teaching ritual knowledge is at risk, for example in the case of migration or in pagan or esoteric groups.²³ Furthermore, the communicative structure of the Internet apparently changes the mediacy processes of ritual knowledge, in contrast to the traditional teaching of ritual competence. Without the conventional requirements to gain ritual knowledge like age, sex, personal qualification, or financial potential, each user – with the right education and the money – has the chance to gain a more or less sophisticated/competent knowledge of specific, but not of all rituals. The authority could sometimes be vested from a ritual elite to the individual actor or the webmaster who is responsible for controlling the communication.²⁴ Such a shift of power

¹⁹ Gladigow 2004, 59f.: „Rituelle *Elemente* seien dadurch definiert, daß sie entweder innerhalb desselben Rituals wiederholt werden können, oder daß sie ‚erkennbar‘ auch in anderen Ritualen vorkommen. (...) Typische Ritualsequenzen seien dadurch definiert, daß sie eine ‚überschaubare‘ Zahl diskreter ritueller Elemente miteinander verbinden und daß diese Konstellationen in unterschiedlichen komplexen Ritualen vorkommen können, daß sie also ‚erkennbar‘ und ‚identifizierbar‘ sein müssen.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

²⁰ Gladigow 2004, 63.

²¹ See Langer & Lüddeckens & Radde & Snoek forthc.

²² The differentiation between ‘Online Ritual’ and ‘Ritual Online’ based on the concept of ‘Online Religion’ – Religion Online’ from Helland. See Helland 2000. For critical discussion, see Helland 2005.

²³ See the analysis of an Internet ritual in the pagan context in Fernback 2002.

²⁴ For detailed analyses of communication forms, see Krüger 2005 or Helland 2005.

structure in the actor dimension could evoke modifications in the performance and the function of rituals.

Most processes of transfer can be seen in quotations from traditional books: in the field of ritual prescripts in the cluster ‘Hexe’, the analysis shows that rituals are often quoted from the ‘printed’ media – like books from the famous German witches Thea²⁵, or Starhawk²⁶, or RavenWolf²⁷. Most of the time these are not marked as quotations. These texts can be discussed: the internal dimension ‘form’ has therefore changed. The analyzed homepages also show that interactivity and market orientation in the field of rituals on the Internet could cause processes of selection – in contrast to the ritual presentation in “traditional” media – that change the economical context aspect.

The ‘Transfer of Ritual’ on the Internet

We can see processes of ‘Ritual Transfer’ in the choice of the owner names. The name of the owner or the domain address reflects religious connotations and models of reception processes. The majority of the analyzed homepage domain names have a connection with the German word ‘Hexe’ (witch).²⁸ This had a very bad connotation in the past because of the history of witch trials but it has now been reevaluated. The lack of a connection with the terms Wicca or Solitaire – often used on websites from England or America – is remarkable. The analysis of these websites confirm the initial impression of self characterization: in contrast, the history of witch persecutions is often referred to on the homepages of Anglo-American Wiccans and Solitaires and German Wiccans, organized in covens, and there are no connections to the different traditions of Wicca (like the Gardnerian Wicca, the Alexandrian Wicca, and so on). In this example, these transfer processes indicate the shift of the historical perspective and a change of the internal dimension ‘meaning.’

Another example is the commonly used name ‘Morrigan,’ the name of an Irish Celtic deity. An example is the website <http://www.magieheim.at/morrigan>, which represents ‘Celtic traditions’ as a part of his/her ‘witch belief system.’

²⁵ See, for example, Thea 2000 and 2003.

²⁶ See, for example, Starhawk 1991.

²⁷ See, for example, Silver RavenWolf 2004.

²⁸ See, for example, <http://www.hexe.de>, <http://www.hexenburg.de>, <http://www.hexenschule.de>, et al.

The website of a witch named ‘Endoria’ illustrates one methodological problem.²⁹ The term or name ‘Endoria’ could be derived from 1. Sam 28, the woman at En-Dor. In the story about King Saul, the woman, who is a medium, is generally referred to in German as ‘Die Hexe von Endor’ (in English: ‘the witch of Endor’) although the correct translation in the regular bible translations is “Die Totenbeschwörerin von Endor”³⁰ (in English: ‘the necromancer from Endor’). However, the name ‘Endoria’ could also be taken from the Atari PC game “Magic of Endoria” from 1994. The impossibility to trace the origin of the reception shows the border of the method of reception history.

On most websites it is possible to find different combinations of transferred ritual sequences. Single transferred ritual elements or ‘building blocks’ from different cultures could be combined in one single ritual in this context.

The healing ritual on the website from a witch who calls herself ‘Jenny’ represents one example of such a process.³¹ On his/her starting page we found presentations of different religious traditions, like aliens and ufos, ghosts, and the ‘Egypt religion,’ but no references to any Wiccan tradition. Nevertheless, he or she understands herself as a witch. Furthermore, in the category “rituals of witches” we find a healing ritual next to love rituals and blessings.

This ritual serves as an example of a combination of Christian and cabbalistic traditions that has changed in the process of reception.

“Light a white or golden altar candle that you have blessed for the divine will and for the world.
Begin with the cabbalistic cross:
Extend your forefinger and imagine, that it becomes a brightly burning and vibrating light stick
Turn to the east, touch your forehead und say:
“You are (in Hebrew: Ateh)”
Touch your breast and say:
“The kingdom (Malkuth).”
Touch your right shoulder and say:
“and the power (ve-Geburah)”
Touch your left shoulder and say:
“and the glory (ve-Gedulah)”
Cross your hands on your chest and say:
“For ever” (le Olahm)
Keep your hands crossed and say:
“SO be it (Amen)”³²

²⁹ See <http://www.endoria.de>.

³⁰ See, for example, Luther-Bibel revidierte Fassung, Elberfelder Bibel revidierte Fassung, Die Bibel Einheitsübersetzung, the Holy Bible or King James Version, etc.

³¹ See <http://mitglied.lycos.de/Centaura2/>.

³² See <http://mitglied.lycos.de/Centaura2/id45.htm>.

The text is recognizable as a mixture of different elements and comprises parts of the Christian Sermon on the Mount, from an appendix to “Our father in Heaven,” Matthew 6: 9-13b to be precise, but without marking this transfer. Processes of change and recontextualisation take place at different levels:

- a) The spoken sentence in the ritual is no longer interpreted as a part of “Our Father in Heaven,” but is placed into a new context.
- b) The origin and the relation to the Christian tradition is not mentioned and it is classified as a part of witch rituals.
- c) The sign of the cross from the Catholic tradition, which has to be performed during the ritual, becomes inverted.
- d) Relations to the cabbala tradition are indicated (like mentioning the cabbalistic cross), but without transferring the connected religious system.
- e) Hebrew translations are given, although the original text was written in Greek. Furthermore, these translations are wrongly transcribed and translated. Interestingly, the Hebrew words are taken from the book of Psalms.
- f) The function of this ritual could be only recognized in the title and nowhere else. Questions on the type of illness the ritual counteracts or which part of the body carries out this ritual remain unanswered.

We can see another short example of selecting and combining different religious and ritual traditions on the website of Keltica,³³ who defines herself as a witch.³⁴ As the chosen domain

“Heilritual

-entzünde [sic!] eine weiße oder goldene Altarkerze, die du dem göttlichen Willen und der Welt gesegnet hast!

- Beginn mit dem kabbalitischen Kreuz:

Strecke deinen Zeigefinger aus, und stelle dir vor, daß er

Zu einem hell flammenden und vibrierenden Lichtstab

wird. Drehe dich nach Osten.

Berühre deine Stirn und spreche: Du bist (hebräisch: Ateh)

Berühre die Brust und spreche: das Reich (Malkuth).

Berühre deine rechte Schulter und spreche: und die Kraft (ve-Geburah).

Berühre deine linke Schulter und spreche: und die Herrlichkeit (VE-Gedulah)

Lege die Hände über die Brust zusammen und spreche:

In Ewigkeit (le Olahm)

Halte die Hände weiterhin gefaltet und spreche: SO sei es (Amen).⁴ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

³³ See <http://www.kelticas-hexenwelt.de>.

³⁴ See <http://www.kelticas-hexenwelt.de/html/person.htm>.

name indicates, she refers to ‘the old traditional Celtic religion’.³⁵ We can see a combination of different religious traditions in the example of the ritual of the third eye:

“Third Eye.

The function of this ritual is to strengthen supernatural powers of perception. The best time is three days before a full moon.

You have to begin the ritual by making a strong and magical tea with mugwort or yarrow to stimulate the supernatural perception.

Then light thirteen purple and blessed candles, drink the tea and look intently into a magic mirror or a crystal ball and sing the following words three times:

I call you, oh Asarial,

archangel of Neptune

and the king of supernatural powers.

I ask you to open my third eye

and show me the hidden light.

Let me see the future,

Let me see the past,

Let me discern the divine kingship of the unknown.

Let me understand the wisdom of the powerful universe.

So be it.”

Now relax, breathe calmly and concentrate on the opening of the third eye. The third eye is an invisible chakra in the middle of the forehead between the eyebrows and the strongest source of supernatural awareness and visions.”³⁶

Again we can recognize a combination of different religious traditions, like Neptune, the romanic deity, later identified with Poseidon. There are also elements like the chakra from tantric yoga, and the reference to the archangel Asarius.

³⁵ She thereby represents the Celtic belief system; ‘the Celtic women’, ‘the druids’ and King Arthur are mentioned with no reference to sources.

³⁶ See http://www.kelticas-hexenwelt.de/html/rituale_drittesauge.htm.

“Drittes Auge

Dieses Ritual soll die übersinnlichen Wahrnehmungskräfte stärken. Am besten [sic!] führt man es drei Tage vor Vollmond aus.

Man beginnt damit einen scharfen magischen Tee aus Beifuß oder Scharfgarbe zu brauen. Diese Kräuter stimulieren die übersinnliche Wahrnehmung. Dann entzündet man 13 purpurfarbende geweihte Kerzen. Nun trinkt man Tee und blickt starr in einen magischen Spiegel oder eine Kristallkugel und singt dreimal die folgende in einer Art Sprechgesang:

Ich rufe Dich an, oh Asariel;

Erzengel des Neptun

Und Herrscher der hellstichtigen Kräfte.

Ich bitte Dich nun, mein Drittes Auge zu öffnen

Und mir das verborgene Licht zu zeigen.

Laß mich die zukunft [sic!] sehen.

Laß mich die Vergangenheit sehen.

Laß mich das göttliche Königreich
des Unbekannten erkennen.

Laß mich die Weisheit des mächtigen universums [sic!] verstehen.

So soll es sein.

Nun entspannt man sich, atmet ruhig und konzentriert sich auf das Öffnen des Dritten Auges.

Das Dritte Auge ist unsichtbares Chakra in der Mitte der Stern zwischen den Augenbrauen und die stärkste Quelle für übernatürliches Sehen und hellstichtige Visionen des Menschen.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

Interestingly, and not a rare phenomena on my homepage analysis, is the fact that this ritual could be found on at least three other German homepages³⁷ sometimes with changes in the function, title, and so on. On most of the analyzed homepages, it was possible to identify processes of reception inside the Internet media itself: so one can conclude that the ‘Transfer of Rituals’ from other homepages is very common. The order of specific rituals is also mostly transferred without marking. Thereby the majority of the transferred ritual prescripts remain unchanged – apart from small modifications – but are put in a new context, like another ritual category with another function.

Another phenomenon can be found in rituals with place markers that can be fulfilled by the ritual actor himself. An example of such variable elements is the “handfassing” – a pagan wedding ritual that includes ritual magic witchcraft and shamanism – on the website of Sebastian and Michaela van Nagaroon, who define themselves as ‘neodruids.’³⁸

In the beginning of this ritual prescript, the wedding couple are advised to choose the ritual place according to their interests. A fixed set and decoration are described³⁹ followed by the ritual: After drawing the magic circle the priest has to ask different questions:⁴⁰

“The priest turns to the one of the engaged couple and asks:
‘Who comes to be united in the presence of the god/goddess? What is your name?’
The addressed Partner:
‘My name is ...’
Then the priest turns to the other partner and asks the question again:
‘Who comes to be united in the presence of the god/goddess? What is your name?’
The addressed partner also answers:
‘My name is ...’

³⁷ See for example <http://www.beepworld.de/members35/liliths-welt/index.htm>;
http://www.zauberschatlulle.de/esoterik/rituale/rituale_detail.html#Erweckung_uebersinnlicher_Wahrnehmung
(with the different title “Erweckung der übersinnlichen Wahrnehmung” transl.: The awakening of extrasensory perception”) or http://www.digischool.nl/du/intranet_dalton/klas2/duitsweb/ra/thema.htm.

³⁸ See <http://www.nagaroon.de>.

³⁹ See <http://www.nagaroon.de>:

“Aufbau des Ritualen platzten:

wo dies Zeremonie stattfinden ob in Freier natur oder in einem Raum das ist den Brautleuten selber überlassen es sollte nur ein Ort sein an den sich beide wohl fühlen und der für sie eine Bedeutung hat.

Ausschmückung:

ein aus Blumen gestreuter Kreis mit einen Durchgang im Westen

Altar im norden des Kreise auf ihm befinden sich eine schale mit Blume, die 4 Elementarwaffen, eine Altarkerze Räuchergefäß und Räucherwerk, Bänder, die Ringe davor liegt der Besen aus Reisig, das Schwert“ [sic!]. Translation by Carol Grugeon.

⁴⁰ See <http://www.nagaroon.de>.

“Der/ die Priester /in stehen im westen am gelassenen Kreiseingang und bitten die Brautleute und die Gesellschaft in den Kreis

so dann wir de kreis mit den restlichen Blüten verschlossen

Die Brautleute stehen nun in der Mitte es Kreises und blicken zum Norden auf den Altar die restliche Gesellschaft stellt sich entlang der Kreisliene auf. Der /Die Priester /in stehen vor dem Altar.“ [sic!]. Translation by Carol Grugeon.

Now the priest says:

‘We greet you joyfully in the name of....(name of the god)’

A song from old times can now be sung, with all the attendees stepping around the wedding couple in a round dance.

In the Wiccan tradition, the witch rune is sung.

Now the priest addresses the whole community and says:

‘We are standing on this holy ground, facing heaven (or also the deity) to perform the wedding ritual between this engaged couple. We come together as family and as friends and now ask the great powers to be with us in this circle. May this holy bond be fulfilled with their presence!’

Short break

With the power invested in me, I evoke the deity.....to appear in his/her name on this holy ground and to declare the love in his/her name

...⁴¹

In this part of the ritual prescript one can see that as well as the names of the wedding couple, the name of the god in whose name the whole ritual is held, also has to be fitted in. Each ritual actor can choose his own personal god/goddess. That also means the priest is an expert for all gods and therefore all religious systems. The religious system is therefore arbitrary and even unnecessary.

Another phenomenon is the use of variables to define a ritual as old and traditional. The following example shows “an Indian love spell” found on the homepage of a witch called Belhina:⁴²

“An Indian love spell

This magic spell also brings you a lover

⁴¹ See <http://www.nagaroon.de>. “Der Priester wendet sich nun einem der Brautleute zu und fragt:

,wer kommt um sich in Gegenwart des Gottes (in) zu vereinigen? wie ,ist dein Name?’

der Partner zu dem sich der Priester gewandt hat

,mein Name ist.....’

sodann wendet sich der Priester dem anderen Partner zu und stellt die Frage erneut

,wer kommt um sich in Gegenwart des Gottes (in) zu vereinigen? Wie ist dein Name?’

auch der nun gefragte Partner antwortet.....

,Mein Name ist.....’

der Priester spricht daraufhin:

wir grüßen euch freudig im Namen von.....(Götter Name)

Nun kann ein Lied aus alter Zeit gesungen werden wobei alle anwesenden in einen Reigen um die Brautleute schreiten.

in der Wicca Tradition singt man die Hexenrune

Nun wendet sich der Priester der gesamten Gesellschaft zu und spricht:

,Wir stehen auf dieser heiligen Erde und im Angesicht des Himmels (oder auch der Gottheit), um das Ritual der Hochzeit zwischen diesen Brautleuten zu begehen. Wir kommen zusammen als Familie und als Freunde und bitten die großen Kräfte, hier bei uns im Kreis zu sein. Möge dieser heilige Bund mit ihrer Gegenwart erfüllt sein!

short break [sic!]

,Durch die mir verleihende Kraft rufe ich der Gott(in).....an um in dessen Namen an diesen heiligen Ort zu erscheinen um in seinem /ihren Namen die Liebe zu erklären

...“ [sic!]. Translation by Carol Grugeon.

⁴² See <http://www.hexenkraut-und-zaubertrank.de>.

You need:

- a wooden box
- some drops of sandalwood oil
- one strand of your hair
- some pieces of your nails
- a mixture of cardamom, coriander, cumin, and (real) saffron
- a piece of a golden ribbon or string

When the moon is rising, drop some drops from the sandalwood oil in the box one evening. Then put the hair, the pieces of nail, and the mixture of herbs in it.

Take it into the garden or on the balcony and offer your treasure as a sacrifice to the night heaven. Then ask it for luck in love and for the partner of your dreams to come into your life. Tie up the box with the golden string. Stroke it every evening of the rising moon with respect and faith and you will soon meet the person of your dreams.”⁴³

The first question that arises is what is specifically Indian in this ritual? What kind of ritual tradition does the owner refer to? There is no reference to a religious system.

It seems that the classification “Indian Ritual” is only a symbol for something old and exotic – because Indian traditions are seen as very old. It therefore has a function of legitimization for this ritual. Analogical processes can be seen with “old English” and “old French” rituals or Celtic rituals that have no Celtic elements other than the title.

In the context of ‘Ritual Transfer,’ such transfer processes cause modifications in the internal dimensions of content and function. Separate elements of rituals are removed from their original context and in a new process – which I define as ‘Ritual Design’ – combined in different variations and moved into a new context.

However, in most cases, the homepage owner identified and declared these new combinations of other or invented ritual traditions as old traditional scripts. In my analysis, it was possible to observe the need to refer to old traditions to legitimate their power. This process of combining different selected and transferred ritual elements constitutes one aspect of what I called ‘Ritual Design.’

⁴³ See http://www.hexenkraut-und-zaubertrank.de/content_liebe.html.

“Indischer Liebeszauber

Auch dieser Liebeszauber bringt Dir einen Liebsten.

Du brauchst:

- ein hölzernes Kästchen
- einige Tropfen Sandelholzöl
- eine Strähne von Deinem Harr
- einige von Deinen Fingernagelschnitzen
- eine Mischung aus Kardamom, Koriander, Kreuzkümmel und (echten) Safran
- ein Stück Goldschnur oder –band

Wenn der Mond zunimmt, träufel an einem Abend ein paar Tropfen Sandelholzöl in das Kästchen. Gib dann die Haarsträhne, die Nagelspäne und die Gewürzmischung hinein.

Gehe dann damit in den Garten oder auf den Balkon und biete Deinen Schatz dem Nachthimmel als Opfer an. Bitte ihn um Glück in der Liebe und daß bald Dein Traumpartner in Dein Leben tritt. Binde dann das Kästchen mit dem goldenen Band zu. Streiche dann jeden Abend des zunehmenden Mondes voller Ehrfurcht und Glauben darüber. Schon bald wird Dir die Person Deiner Träume begegnen.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

'Ritual Design' as a New Perspective of a Ritual Theory

Another form of 'Ritual Design' can be seen on homepages with direct instructions for developing your own individual ritual.

The assertion of perpetual continuity of the chosen ritual element that we have seen in the past examples, seems to contradict those texts that encourage the believers to develop their own individual ritual. We must therefore examine the element of novelty and invention in the processes of legitimating and authorization. We can see an example of the second type of 'Ritual Design' on the homepage of Solitaire Earthchild. She refuses to put concrete ritual texts on the Internet, because she believes rituals are a very personal thing. She writes on her homepage:

“I have noticed that most of you hold back from 'inventing' or, to put it better, from creating your own rituals. I find that a great pity because I think your will is the basis of your action. The way you express your will and your work lies purely and solely with you. Nobody knows you better than you know yourself. You know what appeals to you, how you work, and what you can do to create a place and an atmosphere where you can work. The more of yourself, your thoughts, your will, and your way you can bring to the ritual, the more satisfying the outcome is likely to be.”⁴⁴

According to her, every individual can and has to create his/her own ritual without any rules or basic structure. It is also possible to see a reflection of this special position of 'Ritual Design' and the implicit changed understanding of rituals at the same time:

“As I have mentioned, there are a lot of different forms of rituals:
On the one hand, there are traditional rituals that have passed on from generation to generation in every culture and remained unchanged.
On the other hand there are a lot of rituals that adapted their original form and content to newer customs and needs. Furthermore, there are NEW rituals that we can create ourselves – each in their own way and new and different every day.

⁴⁴ See <http://www.hexenburg.de/Bibliothek/Magie/Rituale/rituale.html>.

“Ich habe gemerkt, daß die Meisten davor zurückschrecken, eigene Rituale zu 'erfinden' oder besser: zu schaffen. Das finde ich persönlich sehr schade, denn ich denke folgendes. Dein Wille ist die Grundlage für dein Schaffen.

Die Art und Weise, wie du deinem Willen und damit auch deiner Arbeit Ausdruck verleihen willst liegt einzig und allein bei dir - keiner kennt dich so gut, wie du dich selbst. Du weißt am besten, was dich anspricht, wie du handeln und was du tun kannst, um einen Raum und eine Atmosphäre zu schaffen welchem/r du wirken kannst. Je intensiver du dich selbst, deine Gedanken, deinen Willen und deine Art einbringen kannst, desto befriedigender wird wahrscheinlich der Ausgang bzw. desto effektiver die Wirkung deines Rituals sein.“
Translation by Carol Grugeon.

There is a place and a reason for all these forms of rituals. None, whether old or new, is better or worse than the others...”⁴⁵

‘Ritual Design’ as a certain case of ‘Ritual Transfer’ therefore appears as the norm and not the exception. This is not consistent with some older theories of rituals that presuppose rituals as collective, invariant activities, with essential classic aspects, like repetition, iteration, continuity, and/or the reference to a specific founder or founding event.

Conclusion

The main focus of this paper was to show that ‘Patchwork Rituals’ have the same working processes, such as selection, transferring and combining, and therefore can be seen as a microcosm of ‘Patchwork Religion’. ‘Ritual Design’ and, as a part of it, ‘Ritual Transfer’ are two elements of such processes.

Open questions remain, for example, on the element of novelty and invention in their processes of legitimating and authorization, that require further examination. The interdependences between ‘Ritual Design’, invention/reinvention, and innovation also need more analysis.

I would like to finish my paper by asking: Are phenomena like ‘Ritual Design’, ‘Patchwork Religion’ and ‘Patchwork Ritual’ only modern or postmodern elements, or a characteristic of groups like the western esoteric? With the arrival and the proliferation of the Internet medium the research into personal homepages, chat rooms and blogs where individuals record and share their beliefs with other is now possible. As current analyses show, these individual religious statements differ often from religion's official – the so called theological – dogmas. Research of the media Internet has probably just opened our perspective to look at statements from individual believers and not just at the theologies of religious organizations. This new perspective may generate new concepts or theories of the religious scenery.⁴⁶

⁴⁵ See <http://www.hexenburg.de/Bibliothek/Magie/Rituale/rituale.html>.

“Es gibt wie gesagt viele verschiedene Arten von Ritualen: überlieferte Rituale, die in jeder Kultur durch die Zeit weitergegeben wurden und teilweise unverändert nachgelebt worden sind, aber auch sehr viele Rituale, deren ursprüngliche Form und Inhalt neueren Bedürfnissen und Bräuchen angepaßt wurden. Darüberhinaus gibt es Rituale, die wir selber NEU schaffen können - jeder auf seine Art und jeden Tag neu und anders.

All diese Arten von Ritualen haben ihre Berechtigung - und alle haben ihre Bewandtnis. Keins von diesen Ritualen (ob alt oder neu) muß 'besser' oder 'schlechter' wirken als das andere.“ Translation by Carol Grugeon.

⁴⁶ See further <http://rituals-online.uni-hd.de/en/>.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

KERSTIN RADDE-ANTWEILER is a junior researcher at the Institute for the Scientific Study of Religions at the Ruprecht-Karls-University, Heidelberg, Germany. She received her MA in theology and is currently working on her doctoral thesis *Ritual Design on the Internet: Reception and Invention of Magical Rituals of New Wicca Groups* as part of the project “Between Online-Religion and Religion-Online: Forms of ‘Transfer of Ritual’ on the Internet” within the Research Program “Ritual Dynamics” in Heidelberg.

Adress: Kerstin Radde-Antweiler
Institut für Religionswissenschaft
Universität Heidelberg
Akademiestr. 4-8
69117 Heidelberg
Germany

E-Mail: Kerstin.Radde@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de

Phone: +49 06221 547482