

A DAILY PERFORMANCE/ LITURGY OF HOLY ANOINTING

The liturgy that employs the now-consecrated anointing oil for my daily majesty-imbuing performance-devotional, is based on a mash-up of H.M. King Charles III's coronation service and Buddhist bodhisattva* vows. The short rite is to be performed daily, as a renewed commitment to be just and an example to others.

Liturgy of the daily rite of anointing

The celebrant anoints their head, breast and hands with the consecrated oil as the say:

I now anoint my head with this holy oil.
I anoint my breast with holy oil.
I anoint my hands with holy oil,
as kings, priests, and prophets were anointed.
And as Solomon was anointed king by the
priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan, so do I
now anoint myself with this oil, as a sign of
my vow to follow the princely calling, now
and forever:

To be a protector for those without protection,
a guide for those who have gone astray,
a ship for those who seek to cross the seas,
a bridge for those who seek to cross rivers and

chasms,
a refuge for those in danger,
a lamp for those without light,
a shelter for those without a home,
medicine for the sick,
water and bread for those who thirst and
hunger, and a servant to all in need.

And in the fullness of time, I shall receive the
anointing from the Holy Spirit and the crown
from the hands of the people, as a sign of the
covenant entrusted to my care. In the name of
the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy
Spirit. Amen.

After the anointing with oil, the celebrant prays for the pouring out of the holy spirit:

Our Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of God, who
by his Father was anointed with the Oil of
gladness above his fellows, by his holy
Anointing pour down upon my Head and
Heart the blessing of the Holy Spirit, and
prosper the works of these Hands: that by the
assistance of his heavenly grace I may lead

and preserve the People committed to my
charge in wealth, peace, and godliness; and
after a long and glorious course of exercising
the princely office with wisdom, justice, and
mercy, I may at last partake of an eternal
kingdom, through the same Jesus Christ our
Lord. Amen

TRANSGRESSION AND HOLINESS

In this section, I document a performance devotional intended to affirm and strengthen—through performative repetition—an inner calling to be an agent at the intersection of performance art and royal work. With regard to performativity, the artist and scholar Barbara Bolt cites the American gender theorist Judith Butler in a 2016 article:

“In her claim that performativity is an iterative and citational practice, Butler is very clear that performativity involves repetition rather than singularity. Performativity is: “not a singular ‘act’, for it is always a reiteration of a norm or set of norms, and to the extent that it acquires an act-like status in the present, it conceals or dissimulates the conventions of which it is a repetition. While there might be “too perfect performances”, “bad performances”, “distorted performances”,

* A Buddhist helper-saint that aspires to help all sentient beings reach enlightenment.

“excessive performances”, “playful performances” and “inverted performances”, Butler, like Austin, argues that performativity is conventional and iterative.”¹

Performativity here thus concerns the way an act has been repeated so many times that it becomes inscribed in a collective consciousness, until it is clearly legible and reflexively understood. In the book cited by Bolt, Butler speaks specifically of gender roles that have been repeated across generations and therefore come to be perceived as “natural,” as well as of the heterosexual imperative of repetition.² Butler argues that erroneous, failed, or heretical attempts to reproduce an act, role, or gesture also count: they contribute to reinforcing the act’s canon—that is, its acquired status as “natural” and socially accepted.

For my part, I appropriate an ancient ceremony that has been repeated throughout history but which must, today, be regarded as nearly obsolete. In modern times, a person may at most witness the ceremony once or twice—specifically when a new British monarch is crowned. As an artist and aspiring royal—who cites an act for which I have no social mandate to perform—I here commit what social anthropology terms a *transgression*: a deliberate act that crosses social, cultural, or ritual boundaries. At the same time, transgression renders those boundaries visible and, to some extent, affirms their significance. Within anthropology, transgression may be understood both as a threat to order and as a creative, perhaps necessary, challenge capable of expanding collective norms to include previously marginalized groups or cultural expressions.

Understood through the lens of anthropologist Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966), what is impure or forbidden is often associated with something being out of place, assigned to the wrong category, or so ambiguous that it fits no category at all, or mixes categories in a “monstrous” and dangerous way:

“Dirt is matter out of place.”³

A hairbrush on a dinner table, or a sandwich on a silver platter in a lavatory, are both examples of the “dirtiness” of being in the wrong place. Similar norms apply to persons: someone perceived as a man but dressed in “women’s” clothing is likewise an example of what a given culture may deem unacceptable. Here one may situate LGBTQI+ persons in relation to a hetero-norm, as well as class migrants who find themselves in contexts to which they are not expected to have access. In Douglas’s theory, the “impure” and the “sacred” belong to the same category; that is, both are surrounded by social prohibitions and may be considered dangerous if not handled through proper procedures by appropriate expertise. Transgressions may mark the transgressor as a social pariah, worthy of censure, ostracism, or worse.

Anthropologist Victor Turner developed a related line of thought in his studies of ritual. He demonstrated that many societies employ temporary transgressions—such as in carnivals, masquerades, or initiation rites (rites of passage, ceremonies marking the transition from one social role to another)—to create what he terms liminal states, threshold conditions. In these zones, order is temporarily suspended, allowing individuals to move between categories or to mix them in unexpected ways:

“Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such; their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols in the many societies that ritualize social and cultural transitions.”⁴

When I enact this performative devotional, it is not merely “theatre”—it is *liturgical* theatre. I act as what anthropology terms a ritual specialist. In our culture, the position of liturgical or ceremonial

officiant—as ritual specialist—is surrounded by conventions and specialized training. To engage in ceremonies or rituals in the “wrong” place (for example, outside church spaces or civic ceremonial rooms) is suspect. Likewise, it is suspect when the “wrong” person engages in ritual work, that is, someone who is not a priest or otherwise sanctioned by society to assume such a role. When I perform this daily rite, I am the “wrong” person in the “wrong” place and at the “wrong” time. Moreover, I perform an “incorrect” liturgy: a ritual historically reserved for society’s highest coryphaei—emperors, popes, and kings. I thus enact a transgression on multiple levels in relation to prevailing norms.

As I have noted in a previous article, sociologist Stephen Lyng refers to this as *edgework*—approaching the boundary.⁵ Edgework describes activities in which individuals deliberately approach the limits of danger, control, and social order, for example through extreme sports, illegal acts, or radical art. In the work of embodying royalty, I approach the boundary of what is permissible. In my work as a ritual practitioner—outside the “proper” place and the “proper” time—I become suspect and, arguably, heretical.

It is important to stress, however, that my aim is not provocation. Rather, I seek to bring about a *genuine* inner effect, a *genuine* shift in social position. The method for this is the performance of a cumulative rite of passage. Instead of a single coronation ceremony offering a one-time initiatory breakthrough—a *peak experience*, as defined by Abraham Maslow—

*“This paper is an attempt to generalize, in a single description, some of these fundamental cognitive processes in the experience of B-love (my comment: ‘B-love,’ or Being-love, refers to a selfless, unconditional love characterized by genuine concern for the other’s well-being, diminished dependency and jealousy, as theorized by Abraham Maslow), the parental experience, the mystical or oceanic, or nature experience, aesthetic perception, the creative moment, therapeutic or intellectual insight, the orgasmic experience, and certain forms of athletic fulfillment. These and other moments of the highest happiness and fulfillment I shall call peak-experiences.”*⁶

—I instead seek to effect a gentle transition over time, through a daily repetition of an affirmation of an inwardly arising identity and calling. Here repetition itself—the ritual inculcation—functions as a method for establishing a “natural” identity and social persona. I thus seek a method for staging a daily sacred moment that, over time, operates from the outside in. For this to function, I must also, to some extent, experience the gesture as “sacred” myself. Consequently, it would undermine my aims were I to intend to “blaspheme,” “criticize,” or “appropriate” the performative gesture merely in order to provoke.

VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL INTIMACY IN THEOLOGY, RITUAL, AND ARTISTIC PRACTICE

In the performative devotional documented above, which constitutes the culmination of these articles on the royal sacrament, I seek to expand both vertically and horizontally. The liturgy consists largely of direct translations of elements from the coronation rite of King Charles III from English into Latin (my own translation). I choose to perform the rite in Latin, as this lends the performance a more archaic and “glossolalic” quality—word-sounds that do not necessarily convey semantic meaning, yet possess all the characteristics of language—as well as a pronounced rhythmic tone. Without an intended and desired audience for these actions, the gesture ceases to function as “art” and instead falls under the category of private devotional.

The paired concepts of *vertical intimacy* and *horizontal intimacy* are employed here to describe two complementary dimensions of close connection: on the one hand, a “vertical” intimacy directed upward or inward toward something higher or greater, sacred or transcendent; on the other hand, a

“horizontal” intimacy directed outward toward the interpersonal and everyday sphere. These concepts have appeared across a range of fields— theology, ritual studies, the study of magic, and artistic research— as analytical tools for elucidating how relationships along these two axes interact. I propose that they are also productive concepts for the analysis of performance art.

Within theology, particularly Christian theology, it is often asserted that spiritual life has both a vertical and a horizontal dimension. Vertical intimacy refers to the individual’s intimate relationship with God—the personal, upward-oriented relation to the sacred. At the same time, this relationship with God is understood to manifest itself in horizontal intimacy, that is, in close, loving relationships between human beings. The claim is that when the individual stands in intimate communion with the vertical (“love God”), the capacity for communion, love, and unity with others in a horizontal community (“love thy neighbour”) is likewise strengthened.⁷ The Eucharist within the Christian Mass may be understood as a paradigmatic example: it possesses a vertical dimension, in which the faithful seek intimate communion with the divine through bread and wine, while the horizontal dimension is expressed in the communal act of sharing a meal.

A royal coronation ceremony may be analysed in similar terms. The monarch assumes a sacral role through anointing before God (vertical intimacy), while the ceremony simultaneously binds the monarch to the people through a shared, nation-forming experience (horizontal intimacy). As royal examples, one may cite the coronations of Elizabeth II in 1953 and Charles III in 2023. Through their broadcast on television, both occasions became instances of privately oriented, vertically focused rites of passage that simultaneously fulfilled a horizontal ritual function: publicly and collectively affirming a new social position for the incoming monarch.

In the ceremony described above, both the vertical and horizontal dimensions are explicitly invoked through an initial short ritual known as *The Kabbalistic Cross*. This ritual is used within the modern Western magical tradition, particularly in the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn. It consists of a visualization in which the practitioner imagines a light traversing the body vertically and horizontally, while sacred Hebrew words are pronounced: *Ateh* אַתָּה (“Thine is” or “Thou art”); *Malkuth* מַלְכוּת (“the Kingdom”); *Ve-Geburah* וְגִבּוּרָה (“the Power”); *Ve-Gedulah* וְגִדּוּלָה (“the Glory”); *Le-Olam* לְעוֹלָם (“for ever”); *Amen* אָמֵן. The ritual is intended to centre consciousness, to anchor the practitioner in the divine, and to establish a symbolic axis between heaven and earth.

ARTISTIC RESEARCH: INTIMACY IN PERFORMANCE AND CEREMONY

Theatre director Jerzy Grotowski described verticality as a process in which the performer, in the course of a performance, “moves from the everyday plane to a higher state of consciousness” and then returns with a transformed energy that is refracted prismatically through the body and transmitted horizontally to the audience. In this way, the theatrical act becomes a vehicle for both personal transcendence and shared intimacy:

*“With verticality the point is not to renounce part of our nature — all should retain its natural place: the body, the heart, the head, something that is “under our feet” and something that is “over the head.” All like a vertical line, and this verticality should be held taut between organicity and the aware- ness. Awareness means the consciousness which is not linked to language (the machine for thinking), but to Presence.”*⁸

and:

*“What can one transmit? How and to whom to transmit? These are ques- tions that every person who has inherited from the tradition asks himself, be- cause he inherits at the same time a kind of duty: to transmit that which he has himself received. (my comment: a horizontal relationship).”*⁹

When I enact the performative devotional described above, I establish a vertical (inward/upward) line toward an altered state of consciousness, and a horizontal (from within and outward) line, or a radial emission, of relationality. This is especially evident in the portion of the liturgy that draws upon Buddhist sources. A bodhisattva (a kind of heroic saint) known as *Bhaisajyaguru* (Sanskrit, “Medicine Buddha”) is traditionally said to have made twelve vows, including the following:

- That his body shall radiate a brilliant light, illuminating innumerable worlds.
- To provide sentient beings with their material needs.
- To guide those who follow erroneous paths toward the way of enlightenment.
- To heal physical ailments, so that all beings may possess a capable body.
- To ensure that the sick and those without family have their illnesses cured and are granted a caring family.
- To liberate those who are imprisoned or under threat of execution from fear and suffering.
- To ensure that those desperate for food and drink are satisfied.
- To ensure that those who are poor, without clothing, or afflicted by heat, cold, or insects are granted fine garments and favourable conditions.¹⁰

I borrow some of these “bodhisattva vows” for my liturgy as a daily aspiration:

“As Solomon was anointed king by the priest Zadok and the prophet Nathan, so I now anoint myself with this oil, as a sign of my vow to follow the calling now and for ever: To be a protector for those without protection, a guide for those who have lost their way, a ship for those who seek to cross the seas, a bridge for those who seek to cross rivers and chasms, a refuge for those in danger, a lamp for those without light, medicine for the sick, water and bread for those who thirst and hunger, and a servant to all in need.”

In this way, I hope that this private, vertically oriented, *solips-opsic* (a neologism constructed from the Latin *solus*, “alone,” and the Greek *opsis*, “spectacle”) artistic gesture may simultaneously function as a horizontal, ethical aspiration to do good in the world. Yet one might ask whether this is truly art at all, I hope to address this in the concluding section.

¹ Barbara Bolt (2016) Artistic Research: A Performative Paradigm? i Parse Journal Issue #3 Repetitions and Reneges

² Butler. Bodies that Matter, p. 12.

³ Douglas, M. (2002 [1966]) Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo. London: Routledge, p. 44.

⁴ Turner, V. (1969) The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure. Chicago: Aldine.

⁵ Lyng, S. (1990). Edgework: A social psychological analysis of voluntary risk taking. The American Journal of Sociology, 95(4), 851–886.

⁶ Maslow, A.H., (1959). Cognition of being in the peak experiences. The Journal of Genetic Psychology: Research and Theory on Human Development, 94(1), pp.43–66.

⁷ Goodenough, U. (2001). Vertical and Horizontal Transcendence. Zygon, 36(1), 21–31.

⁸ Grotowski, J. (1999). Untitled text. The Drama Review, 43(2), pp.11–12. Translated from French by Mario Biagini.

⁹ *ibid*

¹⁰ O'Brien, Barbara. (2024). Bhaisajyaguru: The Medicine Buddha. Retrieved from <https://www.learnreligions.com/bhaisajyaguru-the-medicine-buddha-449982>