ETC

"ETC - 20th Anniversary. Rituals : Feature articles translated to English"

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ETC 20th Anniversary

ETC, revue de l'art actuel
Twenty years young!

Anniversaries, it is said, mark the phases of life. In Japan, for example, birthdays are celebrated with quasi-sacred rituals. But for the art world, an anniversary is a moment of self-reflection, a time to assess what has been accomplished and what lies ahead. ETC, the magazine devoted to contemporary art, recently celebrated its 20th anniversary, a moment to reflect on its past, consider its present, and envision its future.

ETC was founded in 1988 by a group of artists and writers who were interested in exploring the boundaries of art and culture. Over the years, ETC has become a leading voice in the world of contemporary art, known for its innovative and challenging approach to the art of its time.

For example, when geopolitical change opened doors to new possibilities, ETC was there, devoting pages to Central Asian art, exploring previously concealed art forms. ETC's thematic features of the past 20 years are a testament to its commitment to exploring the unknown and offering fresh perspectives. ETC's thematic features are also a reflection of the changing landscape of contemporary art, which is constantly evolving and challenging traditional notions of what art is and can be.

ETC has also been a platform for artists who have been marginalized or excluded from the mainstream art world. ETC's unwavering support for these voices has helped to broaden the conversation about art and culture, making ETC a vital voice in the world of contemporary art.

Isabelle Lelarge, the editor-in-chief of ETC, has been a driving force behind the magazine's success. She has been involved in every aspect of the magazine, from selecting artists and writers to overseeing the magazine's design and distribution. Lelarge points out that ETC has always aimed to operate outside of the traditional art world, preferring to infiltrate and pervert museums to further its fight against indifference.

Lelarge has always been a champion of the idea that art is about more than just the objects themselves. She believes that art has the power to challenge the way we think about the world and to offer new perspectives on the human condition. For example, Lelarge has been a vocal advocate for bioart, a movement that seeks to bring together science, art, and technology to explore the boundaries of what is possible.

But Lelarge is also a modest and humble person. She has said that she is not afraid to make mistakes, and she is always willing to learn from others. In this sense, ETC is a true reflection of its name, which means "etching" in French, a process of etching away the unnecessary to reveal the essential.

As ETC celebrates its 20th anniversary, it is clear that the magazine has become an important voice in the world of contemporary art. But what does the future hold for ETC? Lelarge hopes that the magazine will continue to be a platform for voices that are marginalized or excluded from the mainstream art world. She also hopes that ETC will continue to explore new forms of expression and new ways of thinking about art.

In conclusion, ETC is a magazine that has become a player of indisputable status. But exactly what it has become is open to interpretation. Is it an art magazine, or is it something else entirely? Perhaps it is a reflection of the human condition, a tool for understanding the world around us. Whatever it may be, ETC has become a voice that we cannot afford to ignore.
The critical discourse on art must constantly reassess and recast itself. Ideas pass, values change and art critics, like artists and their audiences, engage with the world around them and often resemble an ongoing dialogue. To any observer of current ideological fluctuations and theoretical waves, it is evident that interest in the question of ritual has grown considerably in recent decades, both in the human and social sciences and in various artistic practices. To help elucidate the conceptual fervour for and heuristic scope of this line of inquiry, we have chosen to make it the subject of a feature.

There is no one definition of ritual. The viewpoints vary with the theoretical horizons. In the twentieth century, ritual was first examined in the context of religion and myth. Making connections between ritual and theatre, the sociologist Erving Goffman provided penetrating insight into this point of view, rituals are among the most effective forms of expression and representation in human communication and constitute an intrinsic component of all social interaction. The work of the anthropologist Richard Schechner, Performance Studies: An Introduction (London: Routledge, 2002), 50 in this book has the structuralist wave demonstrated how rituals enable us to analyze and understand the structures and values of past and present societies. The research on rites of passage by the ethnologist Arnold Van Gennep of course served to elucidate the conceptual fervour for and heuristic scope of this line of inquiry, we have chosen to make it the subject of a feature.

In this perspective, the ritual is conceived as an action performed in a manner that affects and changes us. The question of the lived experience in ritual was a key consideration for the anthropologist Victor Turner (Schechner 2002: 62), who, expounded on the meaning of community, the sense of community that leads viewers to briefly live the feeling that all statuses, all inequalities, all differences can be temporarily abolished. Turner explains how corporeality induces performers of ritual to invest themselves in the context and sentient reality of the actions are taken into consideration. In other words, the ritual is not viewed as a mere carrying out of intentions; rather, "the manner in which the performer of a ritual device pursues his objectives adds to the ritual action." (Wulf 2005: 9). This way of approaching ritual practice as an act of performativity is academically grounded in postmodernity and the field of performance studies. Scholars and theorists addressing these conceptual shifts are somewhat less interested in the structures and functions of the practices and in grasping the effectiveness of the communication in play. One of the main objectives consists of explaining how such social and aesthetic actions affect and change us. The question of the lived experience in ritual was a key consideration for the anthropologist Victor Turner (Schechner 2002: 62), who expounded on the meaning of community, the sense of community that leads viewers to briefly live the feeling that all statuses, all inequalities, all differences can be temporarily abolished. Turner explains how corporeality induces performers of ritual to invest themselves in the social situation more than they would through language-based communication. These few examples of the many approaches taken to the relationship of ritual and performativity are offered by way of introduction to the following essays, which bring a variety of viewpoints to bear on the question of ritual and show how it sheds informative light on the very diverse manifestations of present-day and contemporary art.

The contributors include the sociologist David Le Breton, who has authored many important theoretical articles on this theme and joins us for the first time with a reading of the work of Gina Pane. Looking at the question of rite, he explains how the anchoring of suffering in the performances of Gina Pane as an act of representation of social tensions and, in so doing, reveal our prohibitions in cultural symbolization. The critic Ludovic Fouquet situates the close and often ancient ties between ritual and theatre through an examination of the recent creations of several stage directors, among them Lepage, Castellucci and Traub. He discusses the principles by which the use of ritual serves as a factor of deconstruction or results in the mise en abyme of theatrical conventions. Tackling ritual in the new media environment, the writer Pauline Walker defines the effects of presence mediated by the virtual and fictitious character Mouchette and explains how interactive mechanisms help to raise this hypermedia figure to mythical status as we connect with her. In an anthropological perspective, the art historian Maxime Coulombe revisits Arnold Van Gennep's theory on the rite of passage and develops an analysis of Orlan's surgery-performances in which she spells out the functions of sacralization and how this symbolic process enables the artist to break free of normative frameworks to go beyond the boundaries of the art world and founds her own contribution concerns LiveLifeLab, a recent project by the Montreal collective Bioteknica shown in March at Concordia University's FOFA Gallery. In it, I examine how with biotech, and more particularly this project by Jennifer Miller and Shaw Thalby, we are reexamining the process of ritualization of science that, by means of oscillating references to different settings - in this case, gallery vs. laboratory - sets off a self-referential process in the viewer.

Christine Desrochers Translation by Marcia Coulle

Endnotes

1 Derived from the verb "perform"; performativity implies that to issue the utterance (say) to perform an action (do). Hence, pronounce, announce, promise and swear are constitutive forms of speech-act utterance. This is the pragmatic trail blazed by the philosopher John Langshaw Austin in lectures delivered at Harvard in 1955, which, for the first time, revealed the importance of the performative dimension of speech in everyday life. The concept was reworked some years later by the philosopher Jacques Derrida, whose poststructuralist reading brought it widespread critical favour. Since then, this pragmatic conception of language has been closely tied to the issues of postmodernity.

Bibliography


THE WOUND AS CREATION

For humans, the body is the first place of amazement at being self. The human condition is corporeal, but the relationship to incarnation is never entirely resolved. From the skin outward, our own being is inscribed. Everyone's relationship to the world is a matter of skin, in that skin signals the border between self and other, interior and exterior, inside and outside. Some artists push the envelope in a form of questioning now adopted by more and more people in our age: the body. "The boys," who resort to scarification to express their suffering, in this discussion, my focus will be on a striking example of the deliberate use of the wound as cry: the performances of Gina Pane (1939-1990).

In body art, performances constitute a discourse on the world, a questioning in the form of a personal commitment; they may vary in value, but in no case are they pornography, cruelty, masochism, exhibitionism or complaisance. The artist invests his/her entire
freedom and well-being conveyed by the media and the contemporary world of images and merchandise. The body is a frozen thought. The body is a symbolic material; it is steeped in social symbolism, a noble vehicle for querying the foundations of society and the cultural limitations of gender, sex, perception, emotion, etc. The artist aims to disrupt routine thinking and inflict disorientation. The artist's distress is a sensory protest to make viewers arouse amazement and thaw frozen thoughts. A critical mirror of our behaviours and intellectual blindness, body art is an insurrection of reason against the sanitized representations of the body in the contemporary world of images and merchandise. It expresses rejection of the hypocritical discourse of freedom and well-being conveyed by the media and advertising but contradicted by real-life conditions. It resonates like a fist slammed on the table of so-called culture: the emergence of a moment of childhood and its innocence in the symbolic perspective of diminishing it to mere a form of writing: it symbolically serves to soothe another sore. "With this opening of the body, I do not mean to give the public blood, or to be a gladiator, or even a primitive of ancient society. . . . The wound locates, identifies and inscribes a certain malaise. It is central to my practice: it is the cry and the white of my discourse. The affirmation of the individual's vital, elemental need to move forward and be expressed through the body."

The critical power of her work, she said, was aimed at "denouncing servomechanisms wherever they are: in art, science, politics, everyday life. That is my purpose." Her intention was to forge a new creative path: "The wound: by relating it to the other as the receptacle of the other's sociopolitical and cultural environment, but never in an illustrative or narrative way, which would merely have a ricochet effect; but with the intention of opening onto a new language; for me, modernism had to move forward and be expressed through the body."

Gina Pane went to great lengths in investigating the symbolic resistance expressed against the injustice of the world, not in a Christly dimension but in an intuition of her belonging to the cosmos. She was determined to lessen social suffering (war, oppression of women, etc.) by taking it upon herself in a secret, intimate ceremony conceived to somehow change the world, even subtly. There was no brutality, no violence in this slow, peaceful liturgy, where the flow of blood contrasted with the tranquility of the performance, no disorder in a ritual progression thought out in great detail. Each action was meticulously prepared, marked out with charts, diagrams, notes, texts, objects fashioned for the occasion or recovered from previous interventions. A photographer or a videographer recorded the memory. But Pane's work was not a ritual of demand; it was a ritual of offering. Entering the performance space, she would lose herself "in the flesh of others," submerge herself in the audience as if she were its sounding box. She remained self-possessed during performances, in a hieratic attitude that nonlinear the audience, but she did not escape unscathed. Her personal life, her sleep and her dreams were affected. Like a healer giving every ounce of energy to the sick, she felt "totally emptied," she had the impression of flying, of having no body. Her work could be seen as the work of shamans, healers for their communities, about the inner pain they used to live with. "The healers of a people who are suffering, who are incarnated, they were affected by the patient's moral problem. It was the opposite of medical practice today. So, if I have a problem and I want to share it with others, I incarnate what I say," Pane frequently cut her lips as
well, prolonging in blood the cry that speech too quickly reabsorbs. The failure of language calls for bodily means to overcome helplessness.

She aimed to expand the knowledge of her viewers by freeing herself from the major prohibitions of pain and death, the only things with a power subversive enough to distress an audience. If Gina Pane hurt herself by burning, lacerating, cutting and adopting painful poses, it was to denote the moral locks and keys that weighed on her woman's body and the violence that prevails in our societies. She reminded us of the precariously of the human condition, of its exposure to wounds, pain and death. In so doing, she transgressed social proscriptions, provoking fright and rejection. Audiences find the spectacle of pain intolerable because the screen is abruptly rent by the gash that shatters untroubled identification. All distance is eliminated by the surging of emotion.

The radical nature of such an approach is disturbing, especially for a supposedly fragile woman. The temptation to ascribe this to madness or masochism in order to neutralize the interrogatory power of the cut is a common exorcism, both for cutting by teenage girls and for cutting involved in artists' actions. Pane knew that corporeal integrity is a sacred value in our societies, especially in the case of women. By altering her cutaneous envelope, by letting the blood flow, she unsettled the collective imagination and achieved her goal of making people think, of prompting self-reflection. The traces of her wounds faded, since the cuts or burns were superficial, but the questioning continues still today, after her death.

Scarification, at the heart of the suffering, is now all too common among teenage girls. Their cuts are a bodily criticism of life's conditions, a personal way of dissembling and attacking social representations. The tyranny of appearance causes them to obsess about not measuring up. They feel the need to exist through seduction. That being so, turning against the skin serves to combat the surging of emotion. They feel the need to exist through seduction. This process becomes a ritual for users familiar with the corporeal wound is an attack on the body of the species; it deranges human forms and death. In so doing, she transgressed social proscriptions, provoking fright and rejection. Scarification, at the heart of the suffering, is now all too common among teenage girls. Their cuts are a bodily criticism of life's conditions, a personal way of dissembling and attacking social representations. The tyranny of appearance causes them to obsess about not measuring up. They feel the need to exist through seduction. This process becomes a ritual for users familiar with the corporeal wound serves to combat the surging of emotion. They feel the need to exist through seduction.

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Endnotes
1 On scarification in everyday life and in the history of body art, see David Le Breton, Le peau et la trace. Sur les blessures de son (Paris: Métailié, 2003).
2 Gina Pane, Lettre à un(e) incarna(e) (Paris: École supérieure des Beaux-Arts, 2003), p. 15.
3 Ibid., p. 102.
5 See Le Breton.

Interactivity as Act of Faith
As with all works of fiction, Mouchette's visitors are asked to suspend disbelief. In hypermedia art, this is made possible not by an introductory text of the "once upon a time" sort but, rather, by an interactive process, an act of faith that translates to "I act, I commit to believing." This process becomes a ritual for users familiar with the navigation codes. Having integrated the language, they venture into a work that presents itself with a certain semiotic transparency. The rituals of use allow them to enter in representative mode, indeed, to become part of the world of the fiction. For them, their act of belief moves forward, going back, and manipulating the order of the contents is what allows them to believe in the Mouchette character, who repeatedly foretells her death along the way. The interactivity enables the construction and maintenance of the fictional edifice by rendering users impervious to contradictions, whereas the action that animates the content of the modules lies more in the connections that users make to piece the scattered figure together. This is how they tell themselves Mouchette's story and inevitably become part of it, as main actants. They can send her e-mail and they receive a reply. Since the action-processing-reaction sequence results in reactive interactivity, the illusion of dialogue comes into play. In exchanging with the character, the users eventually identify with the fiction. And in doing so, they strengthen their "pledge" of willing belief in Mouchette's existence. If the character's effect of presence persists beyond the aesthetic experience, it is because the fictional edifice is built not only on real events but also

The Mythical Figure of Mouchette: Effect of Presence and Ritual

Since the advent and proliferation of microcomputers in the 1980s, the digital universe of the World Wide Web has penetrated our daily routines and pervaded realms as private as the home. This has led to the observation that online viewers are increasingly "subject to a schi­

Effect of Corporeal Presence
The first enabling factor towards a ritualized personification of Mouchette is the impression of the character's existence. This illusion derives in part from her reference to a real person, aCertified film critic, in the real world. Here, the body as concept is differentiated from the body as incarnation: "embodiment is contextual, enmeshed within the specifics of place, time, physi­ology and culture, which together compose enactment." Viewing what the text, images and sound present as being Mouchette produces several different effects of corporeal presence. Photographs with hyperlink captions that anchor the character in particular locations serve to create a contextual presence. Mouchette's sen­sorial presence is generated by close-ups of parts of her face that evoke physical sensation, through the senses of taste, touch, hearing, smell and sight. The vocal re­presentation of the body - Mouchette's sensual moans and whimpers - plunges users deep into their imagi­nation, evoking corporeal presence. This type of close-up second-person view achieves a suggestive tone. An 'eventual presence' is rendered in images and text indicating Mouchette's participation in social events, such as her birthday or a Triple X festival, or in legal proceedings attested by the SACD's cease and desist notice (personally addressed to Mouchette for having illegally used images from the Robert Bresson film). These events shatter the reality/fiction boundaries all the more in that they go beyond the virtual framework to involve the tangible world. This leads to seeking who is behind the camera or behind the monitor. For some, the other side of the screen, perhaps forgetting the possi­bility of a fictitious construction and the fact that the being presented on screen does not exist 'behind the screen.' Her existence is confined to the digital world and an artist's imagination. If that becomes confusing, it is because the user is placed not before a fiction but with it.

News/Analysis

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on interactions that serve to concretize her being. For the user, this engenders an empathy that crosses the virtual boundary.

The Establishing Ritual: A Symbolic Outlet

The work offers the opportunity to become Mouchette. While the character may already have penetrated the user's private world through simulated interaction, the actual experience of incarnating Mouchette is utterly immersive. This ritual is a quest for one's own emotional limits. Representation is used as it is given, in Mouchette's work, with its attendant emotional charge. Mouchette deals with profound, existential issues related to the problems of childhood, sexuality and suicide, and its capacities carry the risk of an irreparable loss of self-control. In this way, the work operates as an "establishing ritual," a symbolic structure affording the experience of unfolding time, of becoming Mouchette in a quest for one's own identity, now as an immanent effect, by returning to his or her past event. In the mirror of virtual reality, the self-representation is experienced in a space-time that suspends reality and permits symbolic actions and reflections to be perceived in a different, more expansive, and more representational framework. The ritual allows users to relive the assumption of the figure's identity, to act and reflect on present-day phenomena. And it is through this form of embodiment that Mouchette becomes a mythical figure, since "a figure that is not inhabited, that is not integrated into a process of appropriation, loses its characteristic symbolic dimension and re-becomes a simple figure." Mouchette has always been the same age; she transcends temporality and, like any mythical form, she is open to updating through ritual.

Paule Makrous

Endnotes

4. Ibid., p.17.
7. Paquin, p.207

THE THEATRICAL EXPERIENCE, OR AN EXPLORATION OF RITUAL

For this feature on the ties between art and ritual, I will not expound on the correlation of ritual and production, since the subject would be too vast. After all, much of theatre is simply a series of rituals produced right up until seconds before the curtain rises. Actors invent their preparation rituals as moments of self-gathering, de-compression, conditioning and communion (the famous energy circle done by cast and crew just before a show). I will not dwell either on the theatrical superstitiousness that carries into the younger generation—which, in the French tradition, forbids uttering the word "rote" or "string" on stage (a superstition imported by the sailors who worked the scenery rigging in Italian-style theatres) and the wearing of green. The most evident and, no doubt, most poetic ritual gesture is the one involving the ghost light (called la servante in France). In the eighteenth century, it became a habit to leave a light burning on the stage to provide minimal illumination in the darkness preceding the ritualist, imbued with nostalgia and poetry. And poetry is precisely what Ariane Mnouchkine sees in the ritualized gestures that she borrows from societies of all sorts to create her plays. "Another reason why I regret the derision of 'folk life,' she says, 'is that it robbs life of everything aesthetic and especially everything positive, because, ultimately, all of these things are positive.' At the heart of stage performance, dramatic composition reinvents rituals that can be as much rites of communion as means of creation, steps and signposts that serve in constructing a work, just as actors compose an inner score to provide cues in constructing a performance and maintaining its quality, even when emotion lacks, fatigue intrudes, etc.
Many stage directors speak of what anthropologists define as one of the initial phases of ritual: its separation from life and its conventions. Mounchikine has an original take on this subject, you remember that there are people who are coming to the theatre for the first time, and others who are coming for the last time. When that crosses your mind, you realize that what you are about to see is a ritual, as a banal Beauty and the Beast assuming people's emotions, thoughts, silence and vulnerability for three hours, five hours.

What I will look at, therefore, is how the theatre reinvents itself from the sacred, from theatricality, questioning it, mistreating it, pushing it to the extreme (Castellucci or Maxwell).

At the most recent Festival d'Avignon, Anatoli Vassiliev, champion of an – in my opinion – over-mediated dramatic liturgy, presented a version of Book XXIII of Homer's Iliad, as a typology of the collective invocation, the undertaking of mourning by a given society, the construction of a rite of remembrance. A group gathered to celebrate and overcome the death of one of their own (Patrocles), lamented by his friend Achilles. They conveyed pride in the tellend the need for words that can only be chanted or sung, forcefully resonating in every body. But communion with the audience failed to materialize, likely because the elements underlying these gestures and rites were too disparate, but mainly because there was no common language – not so much the language itself as its references and the unspoken codes that were used.

Quite the opposite is true in the case of directors Robert Lepage and Peter Sellars, who primarily address a video/ photographic material of the place from which we see (theatron) to the place where we listen to a fireside storyteller. While borrowing certain historical aspects of Greek theatre, emergent in religious rituals, Lepage takes the theatre from the "place from which we see" (theatron) to the place where we listen to a fireside storyteller. His theatre, emergent in religious rituals, Lepage takes the theatre from the "place from which we see" (theatron) to the place where we listen to a fireside storyteller. His theatre from the "place from which we see" (theatron) to the place where we listen to a fireside storyteller.

In such case, the ritual would be that which takes place in the audience's mental space, saturated with visual and audio presences, pierced by strident sounds, tableau vivants that disappear in a flash, built in steps. Ritual also owing to the need for words that can only be chanted or sung, tableaux vivants that disappear in a flash, built in steps... Ritual also owing to the need for words that can only be chanted or sung, tableaux vivants that disappear in a flash, built in steps... Ritual also owing to the need for words that can only be chanted or sung, tableaux vivants that disappear in a flash, built in steps... Ritual also owing to the need for words that can only be chanted or sung, tableaux vivants that disappear in a flash, built in steps... Ritual also owing to the need for words that can only be chanted or sung, tableaux vivants that disappear in a flash, built in steps... 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The interesting thing about the examples cited here is the way in which they suddenly introduce something of a ceremonial nature, not based solely on a religious undertoning but designed to propose a new manner, to establish a ceremony while potentially mocking or complicating it. There is purity and complexity, striking evidence of images and acts becoming icons, but also impurity and confounding, the theatrical ritual is crossed over, but it is always based on a founding communion, even if this communion invents syntax and semantics at the same time as it deploys them.

Ludovic Fouquet
Translation by Marcia Couëlle

**Endnotes**

2. Ibid.
5. Showcase and Good Samaritans, presented October 11-14, 2006, at Hôtel Citadines, Paris, as part of the Festival d'Automne.

**News/Analysis**

**THE FEAR, THE BRIDGE, THE PASSAGE**

As sentient beings, we are deviners of rituals. We are skilled at disrupting life's flow with moments of prodigiously existential density, upsetting the quotidian rhythm and interspersing it with sacred pauses. Naïve minds believe that postmodernity has smoothed out these ritualistic moments by destroying metaphors and sacralizing them with sacred pauses. But this stems from ignorance of humans and their inexhaustible desire to make sense of their surroundings. Faced with the so-called postmodern difficulty of placing ourselves under the auspices of a predetermined structure that imparts meaning and shape to our social relationships, overdetermining them, and enabling us to negotiate them with some degree of assurance, we deploy a wealth of ingenuity in fashioning new, more personal rituals. Founding a tradition of assurance, we attempt to propose a mystique in a new manner, to establish a ceremony while potentially transforming the ritual to put it to work as part of one's own references, one's symbolic framework.

**Face and Ritual**

Between 1990 and 1993, Orlan staged performances during which her face was altered by increasingly radical cosmetic surgeries that culminated, in the final operation, with the implantation of two bumbs above her eyes. These experiences vividly disrupted the proscribed aesthetic standards. These performances, titled *The Reincarnation of Saint Orlan*, were designed to challenge the Western canons of beauty and propose new, elective alternatives.

Modifying the face is not an innocuous act: the face is where identity and humanity reside (Le Breton 1992: 14). As Deleuze and Guattari correctly pointed out, "taking apart the face is no small matter. It can lead to madness" (Deleuze and Guattari 1980: 230). In this sense, Orlan's efforts to disrupt the beginning where the face becomes shapeless, the features waver, and the scalpel suspends identity by lifting the skin - are indeed object. They call into question not only the aesthetic system, as reflected in the face, but the artist's very identity. Theirs is the duty to neutralize the threatening aspect of the performances, Orlan transformed them into veritable rites of passage.

Although Van Gennep's theory was originally conceived to explain rituals performed in so-called traditional societies, contemporary anthropologists has convincingly demonstrated that it remains highly valuable in analyzing today's culture. The rituals may have changed from social impositions to personal creations, but to a striking degree they retain the structure revealed by the German ethnologist.

In reformulating Van Gennep's theory, Thierry Goguel d'Allondans distinguished four stages in the rite of passage seen in its anthropological structure: everyday life, sacralization, threshold and desacralization (Goguel d'Allondans 2002: 42-53). Sacralization, the preliminary stage, and threshold, the identity-transition stage, correspond to the time spent by Orlan in the operating room, to the artistic performance as such. These two stages will be the two moments I will examine in the following pages.

In comparing Goguel d'Allondans's description of the two stages with the *Reincarnation of Saint Orlan* performances, there emerges a tense, dialectical relationship between the artistic performances and the two moments of passage and the subjective appropriations that they involve. The analysis of this dialectic tension is fruitful in that it more generally concretizes the process of fashioning any personal rite.

**Sacralization and Threshold**

With sacralization, the preliminary stage, "one leaves a secular sphere to pass into a sacred sphere," says Goguel d'Allondans. "Sacralization represents a stop and a start, the beginning and the end of the process where image and body begin to separate" (Goguel d'Allondans 2002: 44). Sacralization thus marks the crossing to the realm of rite of passage. It breaks with the quotidian rhythm and frames the "sacred" moment, a sometimes dangerous moment of a moment of identity transformation in Orlan's art, the sacralization is co-extensive to its occurrence in a medical framework, a condition of cosmetic surgery and bodily modification. It authorizes the performance of acts that normally would be taboo, forbidden, abject: wounding and opening up the body.

While Orlan could not leave the performances' medical setting untouched without compromising the artistic aspect of her work, it is telling that she retained many of its elements in order to dispel the appearance of violence, abjection and physical risk involved in the iden-
Orlan's performance-operations, albeit original creations, are set to the rhythm of a ritual that sees her through the "identity darkness" that comes with abandoning one's biological identity in favour of an elective identity. However, the rite of passage is not a recurrent, unchanging content to be whipped out like a rabbit's foot for protection. Rather, it is a structural, anthropological form, enacted differently each time by each culture — and now by each individual — to get through some of life's most difficult situations.

In using ritual as a metaphor to expel the anguish of crossing the boundaries of identity, Orlan also makes it a means to propel herself beyond the reach of normative constraints. Ritual serves to integrate her identity changes into a framework that enables her to manage the abjection of such acts, but in doing so it also gives her the courage to rise above traditional, standardized aesthetic codes.

Such a possibility is fascinating. It would be simple — so simple, the sort of simplicity offered by apathy — to take comfort by pretending the normative structures and frameworks are inextirpable constraints that form the smooth marmoreal walls of a labyrinth imprisoning the individual and made bareable only by the illusion of freedom they exclude. But things are actually far more complex. The network of structures and norms determining individual behaviour lacks the perfection of a concentration camp: it is everywhere alive with movements, tensions, overdeterminations, paradoxes. The long life of a structure is like its very success. The norm; some monopolistic intent may well collide with a local rhythmicity. Certain constraints may cover only part of the social fabric; others may clash in the depths of a conflict that animates it.

The rite, as a structural form, knows how to ruffle the smooth surface of the normative frameworks operating on today's individual, and thus escape their weight for a brief while. Hence, the individual employing a rite of passage can take advantage of its phoric capacity to migrate, to occupy a separate "minority" space (Deleuze) within them, a space of freedom.