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Production of Body Knowledge in Mimetic Processes

CHRISTOPH WULF

(Freie Universität Berlin)
chrwulf@zedat.fu-berlin.de

Abstract. To a great extent, cultural learning is mimetic learning, which is at the center of many processes of education, self-education, and human development. It is directed towards other people, social communities and cultural heritages and ensures that they are kept alive. Mimetic learning is a sensory, body-based form of learning in which images, schemas and movements needed to perform actions are learned. This embodiment is responsible for the lasting effects that play an important role in all social and cultural fields. A mimetic process creates both similarities and differences to the situations or persons to which or whom they relate. By participating in the living practices of other people, humans expand their own life-worlds and create for themselves new ways of experiencing and acting. Receptivity and activity overlap. In all areas of human existence rituals and gestures are important for the mimetic development of body knowledge. Embodied knowledge is indispensable in religion, politics, economy, science, families, and education. It helps us to deal with difference and alterity and to create a sense of community and social relationships (Wulf 2016). It also enables us to assign meaning and structure to human relations. Ritual knowledge facilitates both continuity and change, as well as experiences of transition and transcendence.

Key words. Body knowledge, mimesis, violence, mimetic learning, practical knowledge.

1. CULTURAL LEARNING AS MIMETIC LEARNING

Infants and small children relate to the people with whom they live: parents, elder siblings, other relatives and acquaintances. They try to be like them, by, for example answering a smile with a smile. However, they also initiate responses in adults by using skills they have already acquired (Dornes [1993]; Stern [2003]). These exchanges also enable small children to learn feelings. They learn to evoke their own feelings towards other people and to elicit them in others. The brain develops in the course of its exchanges with the environment, i.e. certain capacities are trained, others, on the other hand, fade (Rizzolatti, Sinigaglia [2008]; Fuchs [2008]). The cultural conditions

of early life are imprinted in the brains and bodies of small children. Anyone who has not learned to see, hear or speak at an early age has tremendous difficulties to acquire these skills at a later age. Initially, the mimetic actions of infants and children do not allow for a separation of subject and object; this occurs only at a later stage of development. At first, the world is perceived as magical, i.e. not only humans, but also objects are experienced as being alive. As rationality becomes more developed the capacity to experience the world in this way gradually becomes less central. However it is this capacity upon which children draw to transform the external world into images in mimetic processes and to incorporate them into their internal image worlds (Gebauer, Wulf [1995]).

In his autobiography, “Berlin Childhood around 1900”, Walter Benjamin (2006) illustrated how children incorporate their cultural environments in processes of assimilation. In the course of these processes, children assimilate aspects of the parental home, such as the rooms, particular corners, objects and atmospheres. They are incorporated as “imprints” of the images and stored in the child’s imaginary world, where they are subsequently transformed into new images and memories that help the child gain access to other cultural worlds. Culture is handed on by means of these processes of incorporating and making sense of cultural products. The mimetic ability to transform the external material world into images, transferring them into our internal worlds of images and making them accessible to others enables individuals to actively shape cultural realities (Gebauer, Wulf [1995], [1998]; Wulf [1997]).

These processes encompass not only our modes of dealing with the material products of culture; but also social relationships and forms of activity and the way social life is staged and performed. In particular it involves forms of practical knowledge that are learned mimetically in body-oriented, sensory processes and enable us to act competently in institutions and organizations (Wulf 2006b). Ritual knowledge is an important area of this practical social knowledge, and this is the means by which institutions become rooted in the human body,

enabling us to orient ourselves in social situations. Images, schemas and movements are learned in mimetic processes, and these render the individual capable of action. Since mimetic processes involve products of history and culture, scenes, arrangements and performances, these processes are among the most important ways of handing down culture from one generation to the next (Wulf [2014]; Dornhof, Graeff, Keltin [2016]). Without our mimetic abilities, cultural learning and “double inheritance”, i.e. the handing down of cultural products along with biological inheritance, which enables culture to change and develop, would not be possible (Tomasello [1999]).

Writings – an assemblage of non-sensory similarities – elicits mimetic processes that help to bring to life what is read (Benjamin [1980a], [1980b]). It is the same with other products of culture that also require a mimetic relationship for them to come alive. Without such a relationship, they represent simply a cultural possibility that can only realize its full potential through processes of education and self-education. Such processes are particularly important in the transfer of culture from one generation to the next, since these processes require a metamorphosis to keep forms of living, knowledge, art or technology alive. As mimetic processes are not simply methods of copying worlds that have already been symbolically interpreted but also consist in our taking and then incorporating “impressions” of these worlds, these mimetic relationships always contain creative aspects which alter the original worlds. This creates a cultural dynamism between generations and cultures which constantly gives rise to new things.

To a great extent, cultural learning is mimetic learning, which is at the center of many processes of education and self-education. It is directed towards other people, social communities and cultural heritages and ensures that they are kept alive. Mimetic learning is a sensory, body-based form of learning in which images, schemas and movements needed to perform actions are learned. This embodiment is this that is responsible for the lasting effects that play an important role in all areas of cultural development. “Becoming similar” to

the world in mimetic actions becomes an opportunity to leave *egocentrism*, *logocentrism* and *ethnocentrism* behind and to open oneself to experiences of otherness (Wulf [2006a], [2016]).

However, mimetic processes are also linked to aspirations to forms and experiences of higher levels of life, in which vital experiences can be sought and found. As the experience of love, mimetic movements invoke “the power to see similarity in the dissimilar” (Adorno [1978]: 191). No knowledge is possible without the production of similarities, without mimesis. It is certainly taken as true for scientific knowledge that mimesis is indispensable in the process of knowing. “Cognition itself cannot be conceived without the supplement of mimesis, however that may be sublimated. Without mimesis, the break between subject and object would be absolute and cognition impossible” (Adorno [1982]: 143). If a mimetic element is indispensable in scientific knowledge, it is at the heart of aesthetic experience. Mimesis makes it possible to comprehend the self-equivalency of the artwork and occasion a knowledge from within, which exists independently of theories and concepts. Aesthetic experience arouses “a sense of being overwhelmed in the presence of a phenomenon that is nonconceptual while at the same time being determinate” (Adorno [1984]: 236), and this sense is largely beyond the reach of planning and resists precise localization. In the sudden density of a moment there occurs an aesthetic shock, which can rock the foundation of the I. The mimetic impulse leads to momentary contact with what is nondeterminate in the similar-to-itself artwork. The work’s similarity is not referred to something outside itself, which is why mimesis in this context cannot denote the imitation of something that preexisted the work; rather, mimesis is similar to the self-referential creative force of the *natura naturans*, the nonobjective aspect of nature. Aesthetic experience arises in the “fine distance” between recipient and artwork and represents a nonscientific form of knowledge. “The continued existence of mimesis, understood as the non-conceptual affinity of subjective creation with its objective and unposited other, defines art as a

form of cognition and to that extent as ‘rational’... Art expands cognition into an area where it was said to be non-existent” (Adorno [1984]: 80). Art is a refuge for mimetic behavior” (Adorno [1984]: 79), “the organ of mimesis” (Adorno [1984]:162). Aesthetic experience refers mimetic movement beyond works of art and beyond the subject to possibilities of historical development. It can thereby become the carrier of hopes, expectations, and promises. Its central concern is a nonfunctionalized, improved relation between rationality and sensuousness.

In contrast to their role in aesthetic experience mimetic processes can also be connected with the processes whereby we are infected by experiences in which our subjectivity dissolves into chaos and uncontrolled violence. These processes also involve confrontations with power, domination, violence and oppression, which are part of every culture and into which the mimetic processes are repeatedly immersed. The vicious circle of violence is an example of the mimetic structure of many forms of violence (Girard [1977], [1987]). The starting point of this theory of violence is the insight that there lies in mimesis a necessity inextricably connected with being human, a reason for the emergence of violence among humans. Mimetic appropriation of attitudes and behaviors creates competition and rivalry, which then become the starting of acts of violence. Violent behavior especially is imitated. In most societies every act of violence is followed by a retaliatory act of violence, an occurrence which threatened the cohesion of the society. Two strategies present themselves as methods of mastering the potential for violence emerging from mimesis: prohibition and ritual. By means of prohibitions everything which threatens the sense of community is supposed to be excluded. This includes conflicts of competition, rivalry and violence, to all of which mimesis gives rise. Mimetic behavior which aims at eliminating differences which are essential to the structural maintenance of the internal order of a society, such as those behaviors necessitated by hierarchies and the division of functions, is forbidden. These essential types of behavior must be preserved because they fulfill an integrative function

and the society would be threatened if unlimited mimesis were allowed. It is necessary to restrain mimesis with prohibitions in order to strike a balance between its powers of social cohesion and social dissolution. While prohibitions strive to suppress violence that threatens the cohesion of a society by excluding the mimetic rivalry which contains the potential for such violence, rituals represent the attempt so channel manifest mimetic crises in such a manner that integration within the society is not endangered. When prohibitions are violated, a mimetic crisis that jeopardizes the social consensus as a result of a vicious circle of reciprocal violence arises. It is the task of rituals to master the danger to the cohesion of a society in mimetic conflict by involving its members in a cooperative act. While prohibitions aim to prevent mimetic crises from arising in the first place, rituals pursue the goal of overcoming such crises by the repetition of certain acts intended to foster integration and the maintenance of the society (Dieckmann, Wulf, Wimmer [1996]; Wulf, Zirfas [2011]; Gil, Wulf [2015]).

2. SOCIAL ACTION AND MIMETICALLY ACQUIRED PRACTICAL KNOWLEDGE

The capacity for social action is acquired mimetically in cultural learning processes. This has been shown in numerous studies in recent years. In mimetic processes people develop skills that differ from one culture to another, in games, the exchange of gifts and ritual behavior. For people to be able to act “correctly” in each situation, practical knowledge is necessary. This is acquired in sensory, body-orientated mimetic learning processes in each different field of activity. The corresponding cultural characteristics of social behavior can also only be learned using mimetic approximations. Practical knowledge and social activity are shaped largely by historical and cultural factors.

In a first approximation social acts can be regarded as mimetic,

- if as movements they relate to other movements;

- if they can be understood as performances or enactments of the body;
- if they are independent actions that can be understood in their own terms and which relate to other actions or worlds (cf. Gebauer, Wulf [1998]).

Thus non-mimetic actions would be, for example, mental calculation, decisions, reflex actions or routine behavior as well as one-off acts or rule-breaking.

The relationship between social action, practical knowledge and mimetic acquisition of knowledge is demonstrated by the following example taken from everyday contemporary culture:

On the morning of her birthday he prepares a glass dish decorated with ivy leaves and fills it with water, he makes little boats from walnut shells and places a candle in each one. Next to the dish there is a birthday cake, a large bunch of roses, a bottle of champagne and the ring, which is packed in a large box, to make it more of a surprise. Breakfast is waiting on the table that has been elaborately set; his wife waits outside the room until he has lit all of the candles and opened the champagne. He takes her in his arms, they exchange a few words of affection. A woman is about to celebrate her birthday and her partner wants to give her a present. He wonders what she might like. Initially he does not have many ideas. It should not be something useful that she would buy herself. He rejects the idea of the fondue set she has shown him in a catalogue. This would be more a present for them both than a birthday present and he finds this a little too impersonal for his partner. His thoughts focus on what she would like and what would really give her pleasure. He looks through the art books in a bookshop and then through the latest novels that have just come out, when he remembers that last year she gave him an album of photographs from the early days of photography, so he decides that a book would not be the correct choice. In an antique shop he looks for a candlestick or an old lamp. He likes what he finds but is still not satisfied. Then he sees a garnet ring. He remembers that she once told him that her grandmother had such a ring which she had loved to try on when she was a little girl. Now he is certain that he has found the right present; and she

is delighted with the preparations and the present he selected so lovingly. They both sit down; they eat and have breakfast – taking slightly longer than usual. The day begins.

This scene shows us how a man looks for a birthday present and, after going to a good deal of trouble, finds it, and how he stages and performs the giving of the present and the small, early morning birthday party. His efforts are successful and bring great joy. Even when searching for the present, the man avoids decisions that would make the present less meaningful for his wife. He selects neither a useful nor a “joint” present; he also avoids giving her a similar present to the one she had given him recently. After a long search he finds something that is particularly suitable for his partner and which will appeal to her individually. His sensitive selection of a present is complemented by the loving preparations of the breakfast table with the candles floating amidst the leaves, the roses, the champagne, a birthday cake, the wrapped present, the elaborately set table, the tender words and the embrace.

How does the man celebrating his wife’s birthday know what he has to do to show her his affection and to turn his efforts into a confirmation of the emotional quality of their shared life? Nobody has given him a set of rules to follow when celebrating birthdays or giving presents. Nevertheless, the man still has a knowledge of what to do and what criteria are important when selecting the gift and setting the stage to give it. How does the recipient know what the chosen present and the early morning celebration arranged in such a manner mean and how she is supposed to react for the breakfast to become a celebration of their togetherness? No one has ever told her what the rules are either. However, they both know their roles, what they need to do and how they should respond to each other so that the morning becomes a celebration of their life together.

Such situations are only successful because all the participants have a practical knowledge of what they need to do, how they should respond to each other and how they should present themselves.

Their actions are derived from practical knowledge of how, when and which situations are to be performed and how their performance and staging can meet or contradict the expectations of others. They have learned this in the many opportunities provided by everyday life, where they perceived through their own senses the way their parents prepared birthday celebrations for them, their siblings or for each other. In these earlier situations there may well not have been candles floating amidst ivy leaves or thoughts that resulted in the purchase of a garnet ring. However, there will have been other scenes involving the search for presents to delight the recipients, the loving thoughtful attitude towards the birthday celebrant and the joy of a shared life. There will have been other birthday scenes where, for example, siblings expressed their affection in a teasingly aggressive manner, where “Happy Birthday” was sung and presents were given that had been expressly asked for. In spite of such differences, birthday parties resemble each other in a number of aspects. In mimetic processes inner pictures, feelings and performative sequences arise in the participants, which serve as material for them to fashion the scene of the giving or receiving of a present or of celebrating or being celebrated in similar situations.

Anywhere where someone acts in reference to an existing social practice and thereby creates a social practice, there is a mimetic relationship between the two. This occurs, for instance, when one performs a social practice in the example of the birthday present, or when one acts according to a social model or uses the body to express a social concept. As we have seen, this does not simply involve actions of imitation. Mimetic actions are not mere reproductions that follow a pre-existing image precisely. Social practices performed in a mimetic manner lead to the creation of something individual.

Unlike the processes of mimicry, which merely require an adaptation to given conditions, a mimetic process – as can be seen in the example of the birthday present – creates both similarities to and differences from the situations or persons to which or whom they relate. In adapting and

becoming similar to situations experienced earlier and to worlds that bear the mark of the culture of which they are part, subjects acquire the skills required to behave appropriately in a certain social situation. By participating in the living practices of other people, they expand their own life-worlds and create for themselves new ways of experiencing and acting. Receptivity and activity overlap. In this process, the given world becomes interwoven with the individual experience of those who form a mimetic relationship with it. We recreate the situations and external worlds experienced earlier, and by duplicating them, turn them into our own. It is only by confronting earlier situations or external worlds that these gain their individuality. It is not until this happens that our excess drive loses its indeterminate nature and is directed into individual wishes and needs. The confronting of the external world and the creation of the self occur as part of one and the same system. The external and internal worlds become increasingly similar and can only be experienced in their mutual dependency. Thus the internal and the external take on similarities and begin to correspond to each other. People make themselves similar to the outside world and change as they do so; this transformation involves the changing of their perception of the external world and of themselves.

Mimetic processes lead us to perceive similarities and create links to our social environment and it is through experiencing this that people make sense of the world. One of the earliest human skills was to create similarities, and these can be seen clearly in phenomena that correspond in a sensory way. Similarities can occur between two faces or in processes where one person imitates the actions of another. Forms of similarity can also be found between the living and the inanimate. One of the purposes of the human body is to create and express similarities. Dance and language illustrate this clearly (Brandstetter, and Wulf 2007), as here there is no difference between representation and expression on the one hand, and performance and behavior on the other. They form two aspects that are not separate in the act of mimesis, but inextricably linked.

The acquisition of practical knowledge in mimetic processes does not necessarily involve similarities. If mimetic knowledge is acquired by relating to social actions or performative behavior from the world of the past, then it is only possible to identify the perspective of the mimetic relationship by comparing the two worlds. Similarity is nevertheless the most frequent trigger for the mimetic impulse. However, creating a magical contact can also become the initial point of mimetic action. A mimetic relationship is even necessary to distinguish actions from existing social practices, and it is only this that gives us the option of accepting, changing or rejecting previous social actions.

Previous social actions are carried out for a second time in mimetic learning processes. The relationship is created not by theoretical thinking but aesthetically, through the senses (Michaels, Wulf [2014]). The second action differs from the first, not by challenging it or altering it but by re-performing it; thus the mimetic action has both a revelatory and a performative character and its performance creates its own aesthetic qualities. Mimetic processes relate to social worlds already created by humankind that are either real or imaginary.

The dynamic character of social activities is connected with the practical nature of the knowledge required for the enacting of such situations. As practical knowledge it is less subject to rational controls than is analytical knowledge. This is also because practical, ritual knowledge is not a reflexive, self-aware knowledge. It only becomes this in the context of conflicts and crises where the actions that result from it require justification. If social practice is not questioned, practical knowledge remains "semi-conscious". Like habitus knowledge it embraces images, schemas and forms of activity which are used for the staging and bodily performance of social acts without requiring any reflection on their appropriateness. They are simply known and called upon for the staging of social practices.

Human beings' residual instinct, the hiatus between stimulus and response and also their

“eccentricity” (Plessner [1982]) are prerequisites for the extraordinary plasticity of humankind and the opportunities this provides for acquiring practical knowledge in mimetic processes, thereby allowing social action to be conceptualized, staged and performed. This practical knowledge also includes the body movements that are used to stage scenes of social action. Discipline and control of body movements result in a disciplined and controlled practical knowledge which is stored in the body memory and enables human beings to enact the corresponding forms of symbolic and scenic actions. This practical knowledge is based on the social forms of action and performance established in a particular culture, and is therefore a pronounced but specific knowledge, limited in terms of its historical and cultural horizons.

Imitative change and adaptation of previous worlds take place in mimetic processes (Hüppauf, Wulf [2009]). This is the innovative factor of mimetic actions. Social practices are mimetic if they relate to other actions and can themselves be seen as social arrangements that constitute independent social practices and also relate to other practices. Social actions are made possible by the acquisition of practical knowledge in the course of mimetic processes. The practical knowledge necessary for social actions is not only historical and cultural but also body and ludic knowledge; it is formed in face-to-face situations and is not semantically unequivocal; it has aesthetic components and elements of the imaginary and cannot be reduced to intentionality, it incorporates an excess of meaning and can be seen in the social stagings and performances of religion, politics and everyday life (Kraus, Budde, Hietzge, Wulf [2017]).

3. MIMETIC EMBODIMENT IN RITUALS

In all areas of human existence rituals and gestures are important for the mimetic development of body knowledge. Embodied ritual knowledge is indispensable in religion, politics, economy, science, families, and education. It helps us to deal

with difference and alterity and to create a sense of community and social relationship. It also enables us to assign meaning and structure to human relations. Ritual knowledge facilitates both continuity and change, as well as experiences of transition and transcendence. Given the significance of rituals in so many areas of social life, it is no surprise that there is no generally accepted theory of rituals, since the positions of the individual academic disciplines differ too widely. Scholars now generally agree that it makes little sense to reduce the wealth and diversity of studies on rituals to individual theories and lines of research. What is needed is rather to be aware of a wide variety of aspects and to render the complexity of the field explicit (Wulf et al. [2001], [2004], [2007], [2010], [2011]).

All approaches to classifying rituals are faced with the fact that rituals are always the product of multidimensional processes of symbolization and construction. The phenomena studied are also more complex than the concepts and theories used to describe them. This also applies to the attempt to organize the field of ritual studies by types of occasion and to distinguish, for instance, the following kinds of rituals:

- Rituals of transition (birth and childhood, initiation and adolescence, marriage, death)
- Rituals of institution or taking up office (taking on new tasks and positions)
- Seasonal rituals (Christmas, birthdays, days of remembrance, national holidays)
- Rituals of intensification (eating, celebrating, love, sexuality)
- Rituals of rebellion (peace and ecological movements, rituals of youth)
- Rituals of interaction (greetings, taking leave, conflicts) (Gebauer, Wulf [1998]: 130).

Other attempts at classification are also conceivable and can provide orientation in the complex field of ritual research. It is possible to differentiate between the following types of ritual activity: *ritualization*, *convention*, *ceremony*, *liturgy*, *celebration* (Grimes [1985]).

In all rituals mimetic processes contribute to the development of practical knowledge. When we look at the staging and performance of rituals, the bodies of the participants are implicitly involved. How do these appear in a ritual? How are they enacted? What does their arrangement in the ritual tell us about the community, the individuals, and their culture? The movements and practices of bodies need to be considered. How are they used to exploit the ritual space, and what rhythm do they follow? The distance between bodies and the manner in which they approach each other and distance themselves are significant. What positions do they take up? Do they stand or sit? What movements do they make when they dance? The configurations of the body are symbolically encoded and convey messages. In terms of gestures, which we can consider to be language without words, it is possible to distinguish between iconic and symbolic gestures. Iconic gestures are simple “pictorial” gestures with meanings that are largely independent of the knowledge of a historical time or a particular culture. Examples of such gestures are giving indications of dimensions with simple hand movements or expressing tiredness and the need for sleep by inclining the head and placing the hands together beside it. Symbolic gestures, on the other hand, have different meanings depending on the historical era or culture, and more precise historical and cultural knowledge is required to understand them (Wulf, Fischer-Lichte [2010]). In all cases, the “logic” of the body, that is, its presentation and expression, plays an important role in the performance of gestures and rituals. This is especially true of the preconscious perception of bodily expressions, which forms the basis upon which the atmosphere of ritual arrangements is felt. The bodies of other people look at us before we become consciously aware of them, and in this way they determine our perception of them. In order for the performance of rituals to result in embodiment-processes, people need to experience the flow of energies and forces between them as a physical and psychological process that takes place at the outer reaches of consciousness.

During the staging and performance of rituals, a new social reality is created and incorporated by the *pas* (Wulf, Zirfas [2007]). This reality is not completely new, since previous versions of it have existed before; however, it has not existed in this particular form at this particular location before this particular time. Drawing on earlier rituals, every staging and performance creates a new ritual reality and a new ritual community. This ritual community can develop for the first time among the people who carry out the ritual actions, but it can also be experienced as a repetition through which the community confirms its status as such. The performance of rituals is decisive for the forming of the members of communities. The community presents itself in the staging and style of the performance. In the ritual presentation it expresses something that cannot be portrayed in any other way. The ritual staging can therefore be seen as a “window” that provides a glimpse into the deep structure of the community and the culture that creates it. The staging and performing of rituals renders something visible that was previously invisible and embody it in the participants of the ritual. The staging of rituals always includes a reference to previous ritual performances. However, this can vary greatly. In some cases the connection between old and new ritual performances is very close; in others it is very loose. However, in both cases the performance and incorporation of the ritual establishes a form of continuity that is important for the effectiveness of the ritual. Often, the historical continuity is incorporated in the participants of the ritual and stabilizes the social order of the community and legitimizes it. This frequently serves to uphold the current distribution of power and maintain bodily based social hierarchies and requires a critical analysis of the power relations.

Rituals are tied to time and space, and their cultural and historical conditions are embodied in these terms. Different spaces have differing effects on the structure, quality, and style of the rituals that take place within them. Ritual spaces differ from physical spaces. On the one hand, they create ritual stagings and performances; on the

other hand, rituals create ritual spaces using body movements, settings, and symbolic and indexical frames. Rituals and space are not related in terms of subject/object or cause and effect, but interactively. Both rituals and spaces are performative (Wulf, Göhlich, Zirfas [2001]). On the one hand, a decorated gymnasium provides the space for a school dance, just as a church provides the space for a confirmation ceremony. On the other hand, the school dance transforms the gymnasium into a ballroom, and the confirmation ceremony transforms the church into a living, sacred space. The intermeshing of real, virtual, symbolic, and imaginary spaces with the bodily movements of those taking part plays an important role in the development of ritual activities.

This intermeshing of real, virtual, symbolic, and imaginary spaces with bodily movements takes place in an environment shaped by historical and cultural factors (Wulf [2007], [2013a], [2013b]; Renger, Wulf [2016]). This results in an atmosphere that affects the mood of all the participants in the ritual. Actions that have already been carried out here before and for which the space is suitable are repeated as part of an attempt to adjust to the atmosphere, structure, and function of the space in which the ritual is being carried out. The participants change by mimetically recreating the conditions of the space around them. The performative effects and embodiment of ritual spaces such as the church, the family living room, and the virtual space of electronic media are very different from one another and have different socializing effects (Kontopodis, Vanvantakis, Wulf [2017]).

The other constituent condition of ritual activity apart from space is *time*. Two complementary views are important for the manner in which humans deal with time. First, rituals play a major role in introducing children to the time structure of society. Parents attempt to adjust their children's rhythms to the time rhythms of society and thus to accustom even infants to the manner of structuring time that is the social norm. Childhood rituals are used to ensure that time becomes the main structuring influence in children's lives. Second, in our ritualized handling of time, we

acquire practical knowledge that is indispensable for the staging and performance of rituals. Insofar as the management of time results from cultural learning processes, rituals play a very important part in this. Their repetitive character helps to inscribe the order of time into our bodies, which then become structured by time. Many rituals are repeated cyclically. Their purpose is to assure us of the presence of the community and to reaffirm its order and potential for transformation. The aim of rituals is to stage continuity, timelessness, and constancy. They are oriented toward processuality and the projectivity of communities and individuals. As we structure our time in a ritualized manner, we learn to manage it as a social skill. In today's societies the ritual organization of time lends a structure to every aspect of individual and communal life.

Between the beginning and the end of a ritual, different sequences of ritual activity occur in which different kinds of actions are expected and carried out. The rule-bound nature of ritual activity is closely linked to its sequentiality. The ritual actions follow an order that is also chronological and embodied. Periods of time are created in and by means of rituals that differ from the uniformity of everyday life and become moments of heightened intensity. This kind of intensification is due to the exceptional character of the events and is also achieved by highly condensing them and speeding them up. In many rituals, time becomes sacred time. Memory and reconnection with the past are therefore constitutive elements of religions, which, with the aid of rituals, transfer sacred content from communicative memory to cultural memory. They thereby render it accessible, so that it can be used to shape the future. In the experience of sacred time, it is not so much the length of time that counts as its intensity. On the one hand, rites of passage make it possible to experience different stages of life as phases with their own temporal dynamics; on the other, they create continuity and meaning in the process of life. In the time structures of rituals, different times often overlap, resulting in highly complex experiences of time.

Rituals are essential for worship and the embodiment of religion, regardless of whether one sees their importance in the creation and practicing of religious feelings in cult ceremonies or focuses on their capacity to create sacrality, in which society makes an image of itself. The magical character of ceremonies of promotion to a higher office also has many aspects in common with sacred ceremonies. Even a candlelit dinner for two, where the candles on the table emphasize the special atmosphere of sharing a meal, raises the question as to whether the scene has elements borrowed from the sphere of the sacred and transferred to everyday life. The upgrading of such customs by adding sacred symbols may be connected to the far-reaching changes in attitudes toward religion and sacred matters that we are currently experiencing.

During the performance of rituals, the participants refer simultaneously and directly to the actions of other participants. They do so largely by means of mimesis, using the senses, the movements of the body, and a joint orientation toward words, sounds, language, and music. A ritual can only take place as a structured whole if all actions are successfully coordinated, precisely orchestrated and adequately embodied. Here the staging is indispensable; however, the performance itself is the decisive factor, as the ritual actions need to be exactly coordinated. Otherwise the results are farcical, and the ritual breaks down. If the interaction is to be harmonious, the ritual activities must be mimetically coordinated with each other. If this is achieved, energies can “flow” between the ritual participants, and this is experienced as intense, pleasant, and bonding (Csikszentmihalyi [1990]). As in dance or courtship behavior, the rational control of actions also has limits in rituals. We only have the feeling that a ritual is successful if a mimetically created harmony that is beyond rational control develops between one body and another, one movement and another, and one gesture and another. These mimetic processes form the basis of the feeling of belonging to a community as well as the experience of the sacred.

Whereas the synchronous dimension of mimetic processes relates to the importance of

mimetic processes in the actual conduct of rituals, the diachronous dimension relates to the historical aspects of rituals. Rituals always relate to others that have taken place before - either ones in which one has participated or ones of which one has heard. Thus the historical dimension is essential for the creation and the incorporation of rituals. Ritual actions include mimetic references to earlier rituals. As these references are made by mimesis, they create an “impression” of earlier performances of the ritual, which is then adapted to suit the current context. Depending on the requirements, some aspects of the ritual may be transformed in this process. Creating a mimetic link between the current world and a previous world ensures historical continuity, which legitimizes the current ritual activity, even if it differs from its predecessor. This use of mimesis to refer to or reconnect with previous performances of a ritual does not mean that it is recreated in exactly the same way every time. To make a reference by mimesis is to “adjust oneself to become similar”, that is, to repeat a similar action that would not be possible if the previous ritual activity had not taken place. In some cases the result of this mimetic referencing also leads to a critical distancing from the reference point of the ritual, although this point of reference does not become superfluous. In mimetic referencing processes, the configurations and arrangements of the ritual action are updated and modified to match the context of our own activities. Mimetic constellations, staging styles, and types of movement are acquired and modified according to necessity or what the person thinks fit. The “repetition” of earlier rituals does not result in a copy of a ritual in the sense of a copy as made by a photocopier. Rather, through the inclusion of mimetically transferred and assimilated elements, something new is created in the repetition for everyone involved. The older version is merged into the new in a dialectical fashion. The ritual that has been updated by this mimetic process contains the old ritual, which has been given a new face and new clothing (Wulf [2005]; Michaels, Wulf [2013]).

Mimetic processes play an important role in the staging, performing and incorporation of ritual events: they produce the practical knowledge necessary for the ritual actions in question. This ritual knowledge, which enables us to act competently in rituals, evolves from real or imaginary participation in ritual activities. In mimetic processes people take part in ritual actions that are corporeal and are both independent and related to other ritual acts or arrangements. In so doing, they undergo an expansion in order to accommodate the ritual practice. Thus, through mimetic referencing, they undergo a process of adjusting to the ritual activities in which corporeality and performativity play an important role. These processes incorporate ritual configurations, scenes, sequences of events, images, and behavior patterns, all of which, in other contexts, contribute to the competent execution of a ritual practice.

4. OUTLOOK

Mimetic processes are principally but not exclusively orientated towards other people. In mimetic processes they also incorporate their cultural environments. In the course of these processes, children assimilate aspects of their home, such as rooms, particular corners, objects and atmospheres. People and objects of the environment are incorporated as “imprints” and stored in the body and in the imaginary world, where they are subsequently transformed into new images and memories that help gain access to people and culture. Culture is handed on by means of these processes of incorporating and making sense of people and cultural products. The mimetic ability to transform people and the external material world into images, transferring them into the internal worlds of images and making them accessible to others enables individuals to actively handle the relationship with other people and shape cultural realities. These processes encompass our modes of dealing with the material products of culture and with the social relationships and forms of activity and the way social life is staged and performed. In

particular this involves forms of practical knowledge that are learned mimetically in body-oriented, sensory processes and enable us to act competently in institutions and organizations. Ritual knowledge, for example, is an important area of this practical social knowledge, and this is the means by which “imprints” of people and institutions become rooted in the human body, enabling us to orient ourselves and act in social situations. Images, schemas and movements are learned and embodied in mimetic processes, and these render the individual capable of action. Since mimetic processes involve other human beings and products of history and culture, scenes, arrangements and performances, these processes are among the most important ways of handing down culture from one generation to the next.

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