# Where the Magic is

## Ceremonial Magic as a Design Perspective for Mixed Reality Immersive Experiences

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**Keywords:** *ceremonial magic; design framework; design methods; experience design; extended reality; interaction design; occult; mixed reality; rituals*

## Introduction

Ceremonial magic and technology have been flirting since the dawn of the new millennium. 'Technowitches' like Patricia Telesco and Sirona Knight promoted the wide range of domestic appliances such as mobile phones and microwaves that can act as magical media (Telesco/Knight 2002). Neopagan authors have encouraged city-dwellers to form a psychic bond with electrical and mechanical objects, pushing for an acknowledgement of our techno-centric reality. In recent years, when video call media, such as Zoom, and social media are being extensively used for ceremonial magic, ceremony masters who also go by the name 'occult technologists' combine art, magic, and technology to innovate experiments in theoretical and applied sorcery. It was no surprise that one of the memes making rounds during the pandemic was a parallel between zoom meetings and seances, 'George are you with us – can you hear us – is there someone else with us – we can't hear you'. The occult, the mystical, the magical, have been inspirations or even central metaphors people use to understand technology and designers to explain it.

> "From installing wizards to voice commands and background daemons, the cultural tropes of magic permeate user interface design. Understanding the traditions and vocabularies behind these tropes can help us produce interfaces that use magic to empower users rather than merely obscuring their function" (Borenstein/Nov 2015: n.p.).

In the technology design field, interaction, experience, and game designers have explored the psychology behind magician showmanship to understand how these can be used to build an immersive technology experience. Kumari et al (2018) and Tognazzini (1993) have discussed magicians' techniques such as illusion, misdirection, spectacle,

dissimilation, and aesthetics, and how these can be used to steer the audience experience in a game. Agnes Bakk (2020) draws parallels between immersion in Virtual Reality (VR) and the concept of illusion created by magicians. There is significant information in these works about how to create the illusion for the audience and how to work with it as a magician. With this shared goal, there is indeed a direct parallel between the work of magicians and that of immersive technology designers. However, our exploration goes far beyond magicians' shows, and the nevertheless important aesthetics of showmanship and science of psychology that subsumes the created illusions. We turn to occult experiences, specifically ceremonial magic, and try to understand their phenomenological layers so that we can draw parallels between them and immersive technology experiences. In our exploration we are not preoccupied with the illusionary nature of the 'unreal' or 'virtual' world but with the fact that the virtual, or augmented real in our case, offers a different perception of the world, and the opportunity to reach a different stage of being/understanding/perceiving. How one, practitioner or participant transits to this stage, what Lycourinos calls **changing the worldview** (2017: 62), is at the heart of our exploration. In this initial exploration, we use both scholarly and practical ceremonial magic resources, along with insights from experts, specifically industrial and game designers, occultists, and academics that we had the opportunity to interview for this paper. We are interested in what we can learn from these practices to create transformative immersive experiences.

In the design of our framework, it is important to define the technological tool, since, even if some aspects of the framework can be abstracted for other immersive technologies, the degree to which the tool shapes the design is a fundamental part of drawing the parallels. In this work we choose to focus on Mixed Reality (MR) technologies such as Virtual Reality (VR) and Augmented Reality (AR), and having particularly in mind AR glasses such as Microsoft Hololens[1]. AR glasses are a pair of glasses with the ability to superimpose digital material in the physical environment, in the same way mobile augmented reality does but in a more realistic way, using holographic visuals, and by using whole-body interaction. With AR glasses users can still see the physical environment while wearing them. In VR, since the user cannot directly see the physical space, some VR headsets such as Oculus Quest 2 have the option for passthrough AR, where the real world is displayed to the user via a video feed by means of a stereo camera on the headset that has depth-perception. The advantages of wearing a pair of glasses is that it does not create a digital divide where everything is experienced through a screen the viewer holds at all times, as is the case with mobile augmented reality (MAR). MAR also quickly brings fatigue and does not allow for full body interaction as the hands are engaged. We are not interested in the use of AR glasses for practical work cases such as assisting with manufacturing, driving or cycling. Our proposed framework could work in the design of MR workspaces but in order to draw parallels between ceremonial magic and immersive technology design we need to align their goals. The goal of an MR workspace is increased efficiency and productivity, whereas we are interested in meaningful experiences that seek to ignite some change to the viewer, e.g. experiences with the goal to educate, cre-

1 https://www.microsoft.com/en-gb/hololens. Accessed 3 May 2022.

ate awareness, elicit an emotional response, invite reflection (such as immersive art) and so on.

It is important to note here that drawing parallels between these two disciplines was not an easy task. The topic is extremely complex and wonderfully rich. It contains concepts that have been discussed and dissected from multiple perspectives in literature, notions which are defined as much theoretically as they do empirically, and a great body of work that could lead to many papers. For this reason, we consider this work to be a superficial first step in connecting the two disciplines, and for this reason we chose to speak to practitioners beyond our theoretical research to ensure we have some orientation and guidance in the beginning of this journey. Our intent is to create discourse in this area, inspire academics and practitioners, and offer the framework as a base for future iterations, especially informed by practice.

The rest of the chapter is structured as follows: In Section 2, we briefly describe ceremonial magic as a communal or solo practice, and in Section 3 we introduce the reader to the meaning and characteristics of rituals in ceremonial occult practices. In Section 4 we describe our methodology while in Section 5 we introduce the design pillars of an MR experience and describe how we synthesised them looking at aspects of occult ceremonies. The chapter ends with some concluding remarks about next steps.

## Magic(k), Solo Practice and Communal Paths

Magic or Magick, there have been different paths of western esoteric traditions that differ in scope, ethics, philosophy and vows of secrecy. In this section we briefly explain some of the terms that have been important to our approach. According to Crowley, magick should be spelled with this extra k and one of the central reason was that he considered it to be anything that moves a person close to fulfilling their ultimate destiny, which he called one's True Will (Payne 2018: iii).

In order to include her scientific experience as a psychologist into her occult research and practices, Dion Fortune paraphrased the famous Crowley statement, defining magic as "the art of causing changes to take place *in consciousness* in accordance with will" (Fortune 1934: 175). Ceremonial magic is generally defined as magic in which the practitioner uses specific rituals to achieve specific results. Also called high magic, ceremonial magic uses as its base a blend of older occult teachings – Thelema, Enochian magic, Kabbalah, and other various occult philosophies are typically incorporated. Heinrich Cornelius Agrippa's *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiarum* described ceremonial magic as containing two parts, 'Geocie and Theurgie,' or goetia and theurgy (1530). He distinguished magic between natural magic, mathematical magic, enchanting magic, juggling or legerdemain (closer to what most people today associate with the term 'magic'), and ceremonial magic (van der Poel 1997). Although this was the first documented use of the term ceremonial magic, the practices involved had been around for at least a century or two, as the rituals have been noted in the grimoires of early Renaissance and medieval-era magical practitioners. In Frazer's famous book, *The Golden Bough* (2003), the efforts to control nature for day-to-day survival lead the early man to resort to magical practices.

Ceremonial or ritual magic is not preoccupied with illusion or giving the participant a sense of autonomy when there is none, like magicians do. Magic, through its rituals, might be said to "comprise, or at least describe, a system for comprehending the entire world. It provides a means for navigating among the varied forces that comprise and shape material creation and promises its practitioners methods of controlling or at least affecting those forces […] allowing them to perceive occult aspects of nature" (Bailey 2006: 1). In order to differentiate occult practices from showmanship, Crowley added an extra letter to Magic(k), however, in order to include all schools and paths of ceremonial practice and for the remainder of this paper we will use the term 'magic' to describe western esoteric practices. Once more we wish to clarify though that in this paper, we do not refer to illusionary showmanship practices. The occult is a constructed world where magic turns in to search its contingencies, as Gell writes, however, as he continues using a metaphor to Plato's cave, "this world is a reflection of the real world" (Gell 1974: 26). Therefore, as in the real world, is it a social event or a secretive practice for the solo or few practitioners?

Occult derives from the Latin *occultus*, meaning 'hidden' or 'secret'. The hidden and secretive can frame the entire practice or just part of it. The anthropologist Malinowski (1974 [1925]) had also regarded magic as directly and essentially concerned with the psychological needs of the individual, as Fortune did later in her own definition. She included in it that, 'Will' point towards the personalised well thought, designed and constructed experience. In the work of Lycourinos (2017) we read that "private and clandestine rituals as opposed to public and communal ceremonies, magical beliefs and practices comprise a shadowy and tenuous, but still often carefully constructed, realm" (2017: 61). However, other definitions of magic, and especially the ones that derive from working with shamanistic practices, take it a step further including, apart from the Will and needs of the practitioner, the social aspect. In our work, we seek to include both single user and multi-user MR experiences since each one poses different questions with respect to the design of MR experiences. We look then into both the solo esoteric practitioner and the communal and shared part of ceremonial practice, such as the one by Radcliffe-Brown who argued that a magic ritual elevated the social importance of an event (1964). Another line of theorists, including sociologists Durkheim and Mauss, also defined magic in terms of its social function. In his seminal work with primitive occult practices, Marcel Mauss[2] (2008) goes far enough as to state that only social occurrences can be considered magical. Individual actions are not magic because if the whole community does not believe in the efficacy of a group of actions, it is not social and, therefore, cannot be magical. It is understandable that this sentence could seem to exclude the postmodern solo occult practitioner, however their online presence and need for networking, sharing and connecting, in esoteric societies, social networks and fora, brings forward the social as much as the embodied aspect of magical practices (Lycourinos 2017). In The Element ary Forms of the Religious Life (1912), Durkheim argued that magical rites involved the manipulation of sacred objects by the magician on behalf of individual clients not of the community, referring to one practitioner on behalf of a client. Even Mauss maintains an

2 First written by Marcel Mauss and Henri Humbert in 1902, *A General Theory of Magic* gained a wide new readership when republished by Mauss in 1950.

essentially Durkheimian view that "magic is private while religion is public and communal, and he also advances the notion that magic seeks immediate and practical results". (Mauss 2008: 174–78).

## Rituals in Ceremonial Magic

We use rituals all the time, as ways to frame, concentrate, meditate, focus, express gratitude or pain, or as a way to let go and escape the world around us. A ritual doesn't have to be magical or mystical or ceremonial. And even when it is perceived as such, there are fierce debates conducted over the meaning and relevance of the words 'magic' and 'ritual' (Hutton 2018). In our research we will refer to rituals of ceremonial magic. Magical rituals, rituals within ceremonial magic practices, can offer insight into specific ways in which objects and human bodies become inscribed with meaning and power and they are "a shadowy and tenuous, but still often carefully constructed, realm that helps shape a society's basic conceptions about both spiritual and natural forces that imbue the world with meaning" (Bailey 2006: 9). According to Turner "rituals are 'a stereotyped sequence of activities involving gestures, words, and objects, performed in a sequestered place, and designed to influence preternatural entities or forces on behalf of the actors' goals and interests.'" (Turner 1972: 1100).

According to the work of Mauss regarding ancient and shamanistic ceremonies, a magician's acts are rituals. Psaltou (2008) writes that

> "although these rituals may often appear simplistic and trite, generally they are neither simple acts nor devoid of formality. Mauss insists that the contrary, every magical act entails a set of prerequisites, deemed absolutely essential for the achievement of the ceremony's goal, and similar to the rules and prerequisites of religious rites." (171)

The scope, timing, setting, certain procedures, the artefacts, even the specific day of the performance are essential facts to its very existence as rite and ritual. A ritual more specifically, must be constructed in a way that is able to include, initiate and turn the audience into participants. For Sala,

> ritual is intended to influence the spiritual (otherworld, magical) realm. It uses magical links or correspondences which are processes and tools supposed to affect the extra-dimensional realm. This then reflects back into the tangible reality. So ritual is a way to achieve results which don't follow the normal rationality and causality, but have their own. (2014: 20)

Scholars who have studied ethnographically and ritual magic in detail discuss a few aspects of this process; the change in the state of consciousness – subjective alterations of ordinary mental functioning (Ward 1984), ritual objects to assist the altered state of mind, a narrative that subsumes the transition and helps maintain meaning across the different states, and a subtle body which is "the necessary embodied cognitive condition for producing the exploration of cosmological narrative as a participatory worldview" (Ly-

courinos 2017: 67). Ritual externalises belief through physical embodiment and codified performance that allows it to be shared through a community (Mohyuddin 2015: 2). In many rituals, and especially in much more current practices such as Chaos Magic, there may be no audience at all but the solo practitioner, however, we choose to see even this solo practice as one of high embodied and communicational value. More specifically in Chaos Magic, the post-modern path that has at its core personal experience, deconditioning and gnosis (Hine 1995: 15), its rituals can start from the personal to end up to the universal. For example, in Hine we read that Magic

> is about change. Changing your circumstances so that you strive to live according to a developing sense of personal responsibility; that you can effect change around you if you choose; that we are not helpless cogs in some clockwork universe; All acts of personal/collective liberation are magical acts. (1995: 11)

## Myth as Narrative

The mythologist Joseph Campbell (2005), in an interview he gave he said that "a ritual is the enactment of a myth. And, by participating in the ritual, you are participating in the myth" (Campbell/Moyers 2005: n.p.). Other scholars and practitioners believe that myths and folklore are derived from rituals, for "ritual is not, originally, a cognitive thing. It was there before myth, language, self-consciousness" (Sala 2014: 154). Mircea Eliade (1975) believed that one important function of myth is to provide an explanation for ritual and that "recital of myths and enactment of rituals serve a common purpose: they are two different means to remain in sacred time" (Chimininge 2019: 53). However, not all scholars of rituals and/or mythology believe ritual emerged from myth or myth emerged from ritual. Some scholars and practitioners, allow myths and rituals a greater degree of freedom from one another.

## Embodiment

Even though we have no purpose in diminishing the power of storytelling and fiction, especially since we are following a dramaturgical perspective, we would like to highlight the importance of embodiment and enaction in meaning-making and change. "A ritual cannot be without doing, without body, without praxis. There needs to be an embodied participatory experience and repetition. This is how we create meaning", was mentioned to us during our experts' interviews, by enactive design scholar Andreas Grzesiek. Barbara Myerhoff (1977) writes that:

> the most salient characteristic of ritual is its function as a frame, a bit of behavior or interaction, an aspect of social life, a moment in time is selected, stopped, remarked upon. But this framing is fiction. Artificial, its very artifice is denied and the claim is made that its meanings 'are as they seem,' as presented. We should not forget that 'rituals are acts, bodily expressions and even as modern rituals are loaded with cognitive meaning, myth and language, this is not the origin of ritual.' (199–200)

Then Sala continues with bringing forward another extremely important part of the magical ritual, the one of rhythm, timing. He suggests that "the word ritual is more related to timekeeping, the Sanskrit word *rita*, translated as 'order or truth', which is again related to the word *rhythm*" (2014: 51). Therefore, again we should pay attention to the embodied experience, the timing and rhythm of the ritualistic practice.

## Performative

Looking at contemporary ritual designers such as the Ritual Design Club, they focus on the performative nature of the ritual, the enactments participants go through to reach transformation, suggesting actions that resemble a dramatic staging, with roles, symbols, props and enactments (Ozenc/Hagan 2017). In ancient, contemporary and postmodern rites and ritual design, we were able to identify the common importance of preparation, setting, timing as well as the importance of using specific artifacts that include, transit and support symbolically and practically the occultist, allowing proper entrance, inclusion and change. Trying to further understand and frame a ceremonial magic ritual, we choose to work with Van Gennep's tripartite model of ritual (Abeliovich 2018; Butler 2004). Van Gennep found a tripartite sequence in ritual observance: separation, transition, and incorporation. This model is based mainly in rites of passage and is highly influenced by Joseph Cambell's Monomyth model (Campbell 1956), as he divides the journey of the hero into three parts, **Departure**, **Initiation**, and **Return**. We chose this model, as it supports different types of occult rituals and due to Cambell's influence in modern fiction, is also being chosen by modern occultists in their ritual designs. Van Gennep's work strengthens the importance of a myth/narrative structure within the ritual. Social events, religious rituals, festivals, games, theater productions, and art installations, were framed under the unifying rubric of performance. The ritual, as a durational process of becoming, binds and constructs the individuals as a group, its dynamics, and Arnold Van Gennep's three phases (Abeliovich 2018).

## Metamorphosis

In his extensive research on rituals, Sala (2014) has stated that the human mind needs help in concentration: "one needs to align body, mind and heart to get into that state of altered state of consciousness. The tools help to get there as well as repetition and a familiar and safe environment" (Sala 2014: 77). As Polito et al (2010) observe, trying to define an altered state of consciousness (ASC) is notoriously difficult. They gave examples of ASCs that include (but are not limited to) sleep, daydreams, meditation, hypnosis, trance, sensory deprivation, dissociative states, hallucinations and states induced by psychoactive substances (Polito et al 2010: 919). They also cite Tart's (1972) definition that "the traditional approach has been to describe an ASC as a change in an individuals' pattern of mental functioning which they recognise as being qualitatively different to normal waking consciousness" (Polito et al 2010: 919), and cite research that has found this definition inadequate. For their research, they conceptualise ASCs as "subjective changes to these patterns of mental functioning as operationalised by an empirically validated measure of altered state experience" (ibid). In a magic ritual, this altered state of con-

sciousness, or any desirable change, can vary from the expected results to utterly unexpected synchronicities. By synchronicities, we refer to meaningful coincidences or more specifically, coincidence of events that appear meaningfully related but do not seem to be causally connected or as Jungian psychoanalytic theory defines them "meaningful coincidence of two or more events where something other than the probability of chance is involved." (Jung 1960: 44). According to practitioners "energy follows intention, thought manifests itself in matter. Not on the crude level of making objects appear from nowhere, but things just happen. Synchronicity is no longer accidental, but the result of the magical focus" (Sala 2014: 140), altering space, perception, experience, consciousness and even the way the participants perceive their reality with short or long-lasting effects, a metamorphosis, "of 'being-in-the-world' as a 'magician'" (Lycourinos 2017: 74).

### Liminality

Liminality is the realm between two positions or conditions, where the rules and boundaries of the social order are nonexistent. The term liminality comes from limen, meaning 'threshold', and refers to the 'betwixt-and-between' state in the process of spiritual or psychological progress (ibid: 113). This threshold is of paramount importance to the practitioner both in the start and end of the experience, as the practitioner transitions from and back again to the 'real world', as well as in transitions during the ritual itself.

The liminal experience is characterized as being removed from time and space (ibid: 112). This liminality brings out the importance of space, setting and transition from one threshold to the other, towards a ritualistic process. For the purpose of this paper we define liminal space as "one that exists at the interface of two others" (Sonnex et al 2020: 3) and as a concept "is clearly an important aspect of the separation element of ritual" (ibid).

We have briefly analysed some aspects of ceremonial magic, and in the next sections we explore how these can be a source of inspiration and drive the creation of our proposed design framework.

## Drawing Parallels

In the creation process of the design framework, it is necessary to adopt an appropriate methodology through which we view the design. The discussed aspects of an occult ceremony draw a picture of a performative space that has a beginning, middle and end (e.g. initiation, staging…), transitions through different states (e.g. liminality), participatory enactive interactions (e.g. embodiment, artefacts, ecstasy, senses), and a goal of creating change for the participant via constructed meaning (e.g. metamorphosis and magical thinking through synchronicity). Through the rituals, we also evidenced how fundamental narrative is to ceremonial magic. Combining the performative nature of rituals, and the significance of a narrative structure led us to view the design of an MR experience from the perspective of **dramaturgy**. In Performance, Adam Versenyi defines dramaturgy as "the architecture of the theatrical event, involved in the confluence of components in a work and how they are constructed to generate meaning for the audience"

(Versenyi 2010: 176). In other words, dramaturgy is the orchestration of the different parts of theatre making in a way that achieves its aims – to create a performance that will enable audiences to create meaning in what they experience. This can be true as much for occult as for MR experiences, particularly if the latter seek to incite change, which is the kind of experiences we focus on. For example, Dima (2022) has drawn on dramaturgy to create a design framework for MR heritage experiences in historic sites that seek to educate. Looking through a pair of dramaturgical lenses allows us to work with the two areas, ceremonial magic and MR, from a common base and draw parallels easier.

In order to synthesise a set of design guidelines we will take many of the aspects that we discussed in the previous sections and integrate them as building blocks of an MR experience which we name Design Pillars. Borrowed from the discipline of Games Design, Design Pillars are building rules of a game that work as filters and serve the game's goals. They are rules that support the design goal and the vision of the designer (Metcalf 2018). In ceremonial magic, the goal translates as the will or intent of the occultist. Similarly, in an MR experience, design pillars are the rules that need to be attended to with respect to the goals of the designer. The specific MR experience goal and the will/intent can be widely different. In order to abstract them in a way that helps us draw parallels, we look beneath the specific goals and into what is a fundamental goal for all MR experiences (that seeks to create some change) and an occult ceremony. We argue that both share in common the aim **to engage the participant**. For MR experiences that seek to evoke change, engaging the practitioner is a prerequisite, for example Bower (1992) proved that when people are engaged, they learn. Equally, an occult practitioner has to be engaged in the ritual in order to concentrate, meditate, and observe the changes in the state of consciousness needed to achieve the transition from the **ordinary** to a **magical** worldview, to magical thinking (Rosengren/French 2013).

During the process of sketching a draft of the design pillars, we were confronted with a lot of questions about what each pillar should be and include, as well as questions about aspects of rituals, such as meaning-making and the role of immersion, the complex concept of transcendence, and its connection to the equally challenging concept of immersion, which has been dissected from multiple perspectives in literature. To enrich our understanding, given the limited resources available, we sought to interview a group of experts in technology, religion studies, and design, who, in different ways, combine their work with the occult. These scholars and practitioners were (expertise in their own words): Antonios Diamantopoulos – game designer, Andreas Grzesiek – enactive design scholar, Julia Huisken – industrial designer, Dr Jordan Brady Loewen – a scholar of religion and digital media, Joshua Madara – techno-occultist and occult technologist, and Dr Ralph Moseley – computer scientist, yoga teacher and ritual facilitator. The interviews were conducted in writing by email. We sent them five questions to respond to, one of which included the design pillars and requested their feedback on them (Appendix). The respondents were unlimited in how they would answer the questions and were free to not respond to any of them without explanation.

## Design Pillars of an MR Experience

Our first step in drawing parallels between ceremonial magic and design was to identify, analyse, and understand what makes an esoteric ceremony. The works of Dion Fortune, which provides the theoretical basis of ritual magic, Israel Regardie, W. E. Butler and Aleister Crowley among others were used, to help us understand how ceremonial practices are constructed. We also studied contemporary aspects of occult ceremonial practices that blend different aspects of more traditional techniques into a postmodern school of magical thinking, such as Chaos Magic and the works of Peter J. Carroll (Carroll 1987) and Phil Hine amongst others (Hine 1995) that we briefly referred to earlier. It became clear that due to the nature of the subject and the different esoteric schools of practice, identifying the structural blocks of a ritual into a unified form, was a work that far exceeded the scopes of this paper. Trying to examine, understand and also simplify the building blocks of an esoteric ceremony proved to be an arduous job because of the different ceremonies, paths, practices, and schools of esoteric thought. Instead, we turned our focus towards common aspects and qualities instead of the actual specific steps and building blocks. Derived from our research, synthesis, and interviews we ended up with four specific qualities of a ceremonial magic ritual, (1) orientation in which we added the preparation, magical thinking, initiatory and staging part of the ritual process, (2) transitions in which we included the elements of liminality and transition in space and time, (3) enaction to include the embodied participation and use of senses in the process and last, but certainly not least, the (4) meaning-making pillar. The last pillar could be an umbrella pillar as it includes the crucial part of the change, through narrative and synchronicity. However, we decided to add it as another pillar, at least in this initial framework. Recognising the dramaturgical nature of the different occult experiences, and considering some of their common aspects, we propose the following design pillars for MR design:

*Table 1: Design Pillars for MR experiences based on aspects of ceremonial magic*

| **Orientation** | **Transitions** |
|---|---|
| Staging<br>On-boarding/initiation<br>Off-boarding | Liminal spaces<br>Pace<br>Place |
| **Enaction** | **Meaning Making** |
| Embodied participation<br>Sensorialism | Metamorphosis<br>Synchronicity |

When talking about MR experiences, we have adopted the word 'participant' instead of the more commonly used **viewer**. The word **viewer** immediately puts vision as a pre-

dominant sense when wearing the glasses, something we do not intend to set as a design assumption since other senses are equally important. The use of the word also limits the properties the person who wears the glasses has as a participant and interactor, and embodied agent, notions that, as we will explain later, are important to the design from our perspective.

## Orientation

Orientation refers to the entry point of the experience, the initiation stage of a ritual where the participant prepares for the journey. In a ritual, participants prepare mentally, emotionally, and physically for their journey. The practice of ceremonial magic includes tools made specifically for this use. The preparation of the participant and the space is of paramount importance, if not the most important part of the experience according to more traditional practices and modern schools of magical thinking, such as Chaos Magic (Carroll 1987). In the interview, Huisken mentioned that "in some studies rituals were invented that worked against the assumption that the aspect of repetition is constitutive of rituals. This leads to the conclusion that rituals can be decoded and also be designed". In an MR experience, they would follow the same preparation and in addition they will be preparing to add the MR headset as another parameter of their journey that helps towards the goal. This initiation has to be carefully constructed so that context is established and the role of the headset is clearly defined and understood as a means to the journey rather than the goal. In design language, this is called the **user on-boarding**, with **off-boarding** being the end procedure. Diamantopoulos, talking about tabletop games, highlighted the importance of setting the context "to ensure the words used are interpreted as intended and so affect the players views and actions as desired". Imagine someone walking into an art gallery and being given a headset. How are they further introduced to the experience? What language is used? In what capacity does the participant participate?

We have mentioned the importance of artifacts and specific magical tools in the ritual. Durkheim (1912) argued that magical rites involved the manipulation of sacred objects by the occultist. Participants of a magical reenactment in order to secure success for the future, would use props and crafted artefacts to anchor stories and myths (Sala 2014, 161). For the MR headset to be seamlessly integrated into the experience there has to be a narrative within which the presence and use of the headset is justified. For example, a very obvious role of the headset can be that it offers a different view of the world and can be enabled according to the emotional and mental state of the participant each time without losing the sense of space and the presence of others, if any. With Microsoft's HoloLens 2, one can bring up and down the glasses easily to switch between using them or not without losing sight of anything at any time.

How would then such an initiation take place? How do the glasses look? Are they provided as-is or are they decorated with ornaments related to the narrative of the experience? What is the narrative of the MR 'ritual' within which the headset materialises? What role does the participant play? Who is the participant? What are they doing there? Are they alone? Such questions set the stage for the rest of the experience and provide a base for the narrative structure, which runs through all pillars.

## Transitions

Transitions involve design questions with respect to how the participant proceeds to the next space, the next part, the next stage, what happens and how do they enter the next stage in the most seamless manner possible. There are many non-deliberate states in which we find ourselves in everyday life due to a variety of factors internal or external. When we are tired, for instance, we are predisposed toward sleep. However, there are cases when a specific state has to be deliberately reached. The transition from the real to the virtual, or augmented real, is such a transition. Alfred Gell (1974) writes that "Magical or Ritual thought has its origin in the reflection in the transcendental sphere of the constitutive activities of mind" (25), positioning the occult world in an imaginary space that reflects the real world. In parallel, MR experiences, as technology-mediated rituals, do the same exact thing. Moseley noted that "the virtual domain lends itself to mirror a kind of simulacra of the occult envisaged astral planes, where, of course, true magick is believed to occur". The on and off-boarding states are also part of these transitions. In all these cases, mechanisms are needed to guide the brain towards the specific state and it is imperative that the transition happens smoothly. A few works have explored the construction of the ritual world from different perspectives, most notably Moseley's (2019) exploration of the concept of **liminality** in ritual magic and how it can be applied for a deep VR experience. In anthropology, liminality is the ambiguous and difficult to define space in between the participants' pre-ritual state and before their transition to the post-ritual state starts (Turner 1979). Moseley, who is also one of our interviewees, explored the transition between mental states of consciousness and how aspects of liminality are important factors for a smooth transition between states focusing on using **anchors** and **portals** to create the liminal space and guide the transition. Portals are a successful choice of tool because they are a metaphor of transition, while anchors give a sense of safety net and guide through it. From a design perspective, it is useful to ask what type of transitions can be created and what happens in these liminal spaces. For example, Loewen asked if transitions are meant to be seamless and quick or if it is important for participants to spend time in the liminal space. Liminal spaces can be ephemeral but can also play a role in the story and allow for a longer engagement with them. They can be, for example, spaces of reflection, safety, experimentation (a space opposite visually, emotionally, and aesthetically to the rest of the **world**). Each one can also be different. For example, the on- and off-boarding liminal spaces have to be longer as initiation and ending spaces. Our interviewee Huisken wrote about on and off boarding that "the putting on and taking off of the glasses marks a time period, similar to chronological sequences within a ritual". In the interview, Moseley mentioned that allowing for a narrative is important to the transition of the ritual experience, the narrative being 'beginning – induction, middle – the main experience, ending – exiting, grounding, bringing back to the physical corporeal reality'.

Guidance is important in transitions, and it can be given via multiple sensory modalities, e.g. coming from a narrator or directional sounds (audio only), from the script of a virtual character or from interface elements on the glasses (audio/visual), from vibrations on a wearable connected to the glasses and so on. The absence of guidance can also be the absence of **external** guidance. Moseley notes that "as the individuals reach appro-

priate points in a rite or sequence, the guide senses and interacts with guiding comments – if there is a lack of biofeedback, or physical observation, then the guide must watch their own internal states to guide the process". When is it important to not have external guidance in an MR experience and what do we seek to achieve with this? How can design balance the use of anchors and giving some **space** to the participant so that the goal is achieved without breaking the experience? How do interaction/game designers help participants with wayfinding, i.e. where to go and what to do next?

## Enaction

Enaction is an important part of rituals and of experiences in general. Enaction is the view that knowledge comes from the coupling of perception and action during our interaction with the world orchestrated by our senses. Sensory and motor engagement and sensory-motor coordination are the main channels through which we constantly perceive the life-world (Merleau-Ponty 1962). As Larssen et al. (2007) expressed it, "sensing and motor skills are in constant dialogue, performing in concert. The organisation of our movement patterns depends upon our habits of perception" (2). The body is our interface to the world and, as such, it has a central role in this interplay. Enaction is an inherently phenomenological perspective whereby the participant is an **embodied** agent in the ceremony/experience. Since the audience is turned into a participant in magic rituals, enaction takes a central role and includes the body in more than one way. In occult studies, there is scarce literature on the role of the body in ritual magic from the phenomenological perspective. Lycourinos (2017) is one of the few who suggested "that the logic of modern magical ritual should be identified in terms of how it aspires to generate the subjectivity of 'being-in-the-world' as a 'magician' and focused on the 'ritual body' as a critical interface for the study of magic" (4). During a ritual the body is constantly in action, for example, positioning oneself in space, chanting, meditation, wearing a specific attire, and holding objects. The body is also a receptor and emitter of spiritual forces, and a means to embody a change of state of consciousness in the participant by sending and receiving spiritual energy.

In an MR experience, the body can be approached from the same phenomenological perspective since the goal is to engage the participant in an embodied experience that will help them acquire new meanings. In digital design, Paul Dourish (2001) introduced the theory of embodied interaction in his seminal work 'Where the Action Is' (Dourish 2001). Dourish views digital technology as part of our being-in-the-world and emphasises that it should be designed based on how we understand and appropriate it and act through it as embodied agents in the world. Enaction and embodiment are central to how we propose to approach the design of MR experiences and we can draw on the ways the ritual body is constructed to identify fruitful design methods. Wearing the MR headset changes the wearer's embodiment. Wearing the headset affects the whole body, and the way the participant moves in space and understands space and place. How do participants interact with the new embodied way of moving around, and how does it change their perception of the real world and of themselves? Going back to the guidance questions of the role of the headset in the Orientation section, what if the glasses are viewed as a ritual object? Can they be a meditative device? Is it an alternate view of the world and

how does the participant affect this world through their senses and movement? How is the hybrid world constructed to allow participants to navigate and change it as their state of consciousness changes? How is this justified and reinforced within the experience's narrative?

For example, the moment of invited mindfulness that we described in Transitions, when no guidance exists, is also a moment of the experience where one explores the liminal space within or just outside one's comfortable limits, thinking of how to move and sense next, a state that is intricately linked to the body. How does design support the participant at this moment? Loewen's question of pace of transitions reveals a direct link between pace and the participant's embodied understanding of the experience. The enactive engagement is different if one is allowed to have their own pace in the experience than when not, and the design should follow the desired goal each time. For example, the importance of pace and its interplay with embodied and situated learning was one of Dima's findings in her investigation on agency in a heritage MR experience, and was incorporated as one of the key components of her design framework (2022). Loewen in their interview also emphasised the importance of a 'less is more' approach, that

> some of the easiest ways to achieve an altered state of consciousness is actually via sensory deprivation or the overwhelming of one particular sense rather than 'multisensoriality'. In fact, sometimes rituals are used to heighten the attention and focus to a singular action as a form of askesis which can achieve the desired altered state.

The question for design then is how it can support moments of sensorial deprivation, and where/when are these needed in the experience? Notwithstanding, it is also important not to focus on what the participant sees but also what else they sense and how they move. Do they wear anything else or carry anything that can make the absorption of the headset a natural part of the experience? What is the connection between chanting and sounds, picked up objects, movement, and the audiovisual material present in the headset?

In addition, if participants are in the presence of others, going back to the practices of communal magic, how does the others' presence change the individual and collective embodiment? All the previous design questions can be asked having multiple participants in one place. Also, what do participants see/hear/touch/sense in common? How does each participant affect the others? How does the individual's state of consciousness affect the collective one?

## Meaning-Making

Meaning Making follows enaction towards an elevated state of comprehension of the surrounding world and beyond when combined with each one's own background experience. Dourish (2001) and Wright et al. (2006) suggest that human experience is constituted by continuous engagement with the world through acts of meaning-making at many levels. Although there is no clear consensus on the conceptualisation of meaning, four dimensions are predominant across various perspectives: coherence, purpose, significance, and self-transcendence (van de Goor et al. 2020, 1). The authors explain that coherence is the cognitive dimension of meaning, when events fit in with existing beliefs

and expectations, purpose is the future-oriented motivational dimension, significance is the evaluative component, and self-transcendence subsumes all three and is defined as reaching an ASC.

Accordingly, in rituals, meaning-making is a continuous process that may or may not lead towards ASC (and self-transcendence) but where meaning-making is always present. A ritual marks an event where the ordinary is suspended for a certain time, and a magic moment of transcendence may or may not occur, giving the person a perspective and a narrative about how their life is meaningful. The ritual itself transforms the participant's experience. Recent studies such as the ones by Magnani have stated that the "symbolic habits in rituals can function as memory mediators which are able to play significant roles in human cognition and action. They can maximise abducibility and so recoverability of knowledge contents, including at the unconscious level" (2017: 321). A ceremonial magic participant enters and experiences the same ritual with similar or completely different reasons each time or in comparison to other participants. They might enter in different mental and psychological situations, with different Will or different embodied situations similar to how an MR user would enter the MR experience. In a similar manner as with the previous pillars, the main design question here is how do we design for meaning-making? How do we design experiences that enable the participant each time to form meaning according to their own specific point of entry and reason of entry? Some rituals are rigid and very specific while others are much open, allowing room for surprise and personalisation. What are the design considerations for an MR experience which aims to be in some or full extend non-prescriptive? And what is involved in the design of an MR experience that allows the participant to become, to transform and change through embodiment and cognition, which is what usually separates a successful ritual, and in our opinion a successful MR experience, from a mundane one.

In addition, one of the main components for meaning-making, and indeed for the other three pillars, though it may not be as paramount in these as it is here, is narrative. By narrative, we mean the structure of the experience that gives the participant the tools to engage in meaning-making, the space to create coherence, find purpose and significance and, potentially, self-transcend. If we accept that rituals are enactments of a myth, MR experiences can be enactments of a narrative. In contrast to storytelling, narrative refers to the way a story is told. This allows for a plethora of ways to engage a participant, telling them a story being the most explicit of them. A narrative abstracts the story's information and how it is structured, which is a dramaturgical decision, does not matter – it only has to have the power to enable meaning-making. Orientation, Transitions and Enaction play a role in its structure, for example a transition can be purely narrative-enabled, a narrator pointing the participant towards something, and at the orientation stage the context has to be set. Liminal spaces of reflection provide a pause that may help meaning making, and these spaces can be enriched with sensual and aesthetic content according to the goal to further enable meaning making. Eventually, under this pillar, the design questions related to narrative look at it holistically, ensuring coherence with the previous pillars, and ways to prioritise purpose and significance with respect to the change the designer wishes to bring to the participant.

Loewen posed an interesting question on change in their response to us: "If a player/user leaves the experience unchanged, is it a failure?" It is possible of course for

the designer to work with a framework for engagement and the participants not to experience change. However, the goal of this framework is to engage. Meaning-making is necessary for engagement, and when there is enaction there is always a meaning-making process no matter how unrelated to the experience's goal the meaning is. So, if these two pillars are met, the experience will be engaging. Our fundamental thesis for this framework is that we design for engagement, and for meaning making, and from there change may come. In addition, this remark strengthens the two last pillars, enaction and meaning making, and we argue that the presence of both is fundamental to engagement.

## A Note on Immersion

We have so far avoided to apply and analyse the notion of immersion not because it does not exist in both rituals and MR experiences but because in our endeavour to scaffold a framework for design, the question of how does one design **for** immersion is a multi-dimensional and complex task to analyse, and one difficult to measure. From the many definitions of immersion one that is useful for our perspective is the state of being so fully absorbed and engaged in an activity that one loses self-consciousness, and is considered a passive state. However, in both rituals and MR experiences enaction and embodied interaction are at play so Csikzentmihalyi's Flow experience, "the holistic experience that people feel when they act with total involvement" (1975: 36), is more apt to cases where people act, such as ours. Sonnex et al (2020) describes how researchers who explore ritual practices equate ASC in rituals with Csikzentmihalyi's Flow experience, which is described as "the holistic experience that people feel when they act with total involvement" (1975, 36), and ASC is also considered a liminal experience (Turner 1974). When one is in flow they are engaged, and any interruption of flow, Madara discussed in the interview, "can take the person out of, well, flow, which may be a breakdown more generally than of transcendence per se". Flow is a concept that is much more clearly defined than immersion, and can be easier measured, while its connection with engagement makes it an easier concept to design guidelines for. Its connection with immersion is still under scrutiny. In games literature, flow has been used synonymously with immersion while Michaelidis et al (2018) showed that immersion and flow do not appear as conceptually distinct, and their proposed differences are not compelling enough to set immersion apart as a different mental state (2018: 5). Since the conceptual differences, if any, between immersion, flow, and engagement (subsequently ASC, liminality and metamorphosis) is still a topic under scrutiny, and due to the challenge that creating design guidelines for immersion poses, we choose to not use immersion in our framework and use engagement as our central goal. However, we believe that this is a rich area for further research to be explored in future expansions of the framework.

## Concluding Remarks

This chapter drew parallels between ceremonial magic rituals and MR experiences and explored how aspects of the first can be viewed from a design perspective. Our aim was to then transfer these aspects into MR experience design and construct a framework to

guide the design process. In doing so, we followed a dramaturgical perspective exemplifying how the design space for both rituals and MR is inherently performative and invites embodied and enactive interactions from the participants. In our journey, we consulted a vast body of literature and practitioners and scholars who work between design, technology and the occult to better understand a very complex and rich topic.

This design framework is by no means complete. There is much more detail in the aspects we have explored, concepts that are under ongoing debate in the scholarly world, while the topic requires a lot of empirical input, much of which remains hidden. In addition, there are many more aspects of ceremonial magic that can come into play and further enrich the framework. We open it to other researchers and designers who wish to experiment with it, amend, and debate it. It is in our imminent plans to evaluate it within a practical project.

## Acknowledgments

This work would not have been possible without the precious input of Dr Jordan Brady Loewen –scholar of religion and digital media, Sophia Bulgakova – art scientist and interdisciplinary artist, Antonios Diamantopoulos – games designer, Andreas Grzesiek – enactive design scholar, Julia Huisken –industrial designer, Joshua Madara –techno-occultist and occult technologist, and Dr Ralph Moseley –computer scientist, yoga teacher and ritual facilitator. We would also like to thank all the designers, theorists, artists and occultists that shared their input, experience, feedback and valuable time and energy with us. Your work, passion, and kindness, motivate and inspire us.

## Appendix

Interview Questions

(1) Have you ever tried an immersive technology experience?/Have you been part of a magical ceremonial/occult experience?
(2) Do you see any type of connection between a ritual ceremony and immersive tech experience? If so, what is the nature of this connection?
(3) Would you describe any experiences you have participated in using immersive technology (AR or VR) as 'transcendent'? If so, what made you feel like this?
(4) If you felt transcended, would you say you were definitely immersed or do you think there is no relation between the two states?
(5) This is our draft framework for designing immersive tech experiences inspired by ceremonial magick design (the building blocks which we call design pillars). We invite you to share your thoughts.

- Orientation (Staging, on-boarding/initiation)
- Transitions (liminality)

- Enaction (embodied participation, multi-sensoriality)
- Meaning Making (metamorphosis, synchronicity)

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