FORGING MANDALIC SPACE: BHAKTAPUR, NEPAL'S COW PROCESSION AND THE IMPROVISATION OF TRADITION

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Abstract:

In 1995, as part of Bhaktapur, Nepal's Cow Procession, the new suburban neighborhood of Suryavinayak celebrated a "forged" goat sacrifice. Forged religious practices seem enigmatic if one assumes that traditional practice consists only of the blind imitation of timeless structure. Yet, the sacrifice was not mechanical repetition; it could not be, because it was the first and only time it was celebrated. Rather, the religious performance was a conscious manipulation of available "traditional" cultural logics that were strategically utilized during the Cow Procession's loose carnivalesque atmosphere to solve a contemporary problem—what can one do when one lives beyond the borders of religiously organized cities such as Bhaktapur? This paper argues that the "forged" sacrifice was a means for this new neighborhood to operate together and improvise new mandalic space beyond the city's traditional cultic territory.

Article:

[E]very field anthropologist knows that no performance of a rite, however rigidly prescribed, is exactly the same as another performance.... Variable components make flexible the basic core of most rituals.
~Tambiah 1979:115

In Bhaktapur, Nepal around 5.30 P.M. on August 19, 1995, a castrated male goat was sacrificed to Suryavinayak, the local form of the god Ganesha.[1] As part of the city's Cow Procession (nb. Sāyā,

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[1] [1] The Kathmandu Valley is a multilingual landscape, with the Newar language (Nepal Bhasa), Nepali, English and a multitude of other tongues intermingling. For instance, the city itself is referred to under three main names: in Sanskrit (hereafter np.) "Bhaktapur," in Newar (Nepal Bhasa [hereafter nb]) "Khwopa," and in Nepali "Bhadgāo(n)." For a balance between ease of utilization and accuracy to the material depicted, at first usage I will print the word in its np. form, followed by the nb. word in parentheses. Words in general circulation, and some proper nouns, are written in their anglicized form without diacritics. For instance, for nepāl I write Nepal.

Figure 1. Forged goat sacrifice in front of the god-image of Suryavinayak.
(Photograph by Sanjeev Gongah, 1995)

np. Gāi Rātra), this "cutting of the animal" was performed by the Suryavinayak neighborhood and was sponsored by Tejeswar Babu Gongah (Figure 1). Goat sacrifices are not unique in the Kathmandu Valley. In fact, they are an everyday occurrence, especially during the festival season with many thousands being sacrificed during the holiday of Dasai(n) (nb. Mohanī) alone. What made this particular holiday of Dasai(n) (nb. Mohanī) alone. What made this particular event stand out, however, was that it was *nakali*. *Nakali* is a Nepali word, often borrowed by Newars (the largest ethnic group in Bhaktapur), that is usually translated as "imitated" or "fake." However, when asked for a definition of "*nakali*," people in Bhaktapur tend to give the example of a forged banknote. With this in mind, I use the English word "forgery" to translate *nakali* in order to theorize the act of creating an imitation, or of modifying an authentic object, so that it can be used as if it were the original. In short, I use "forgery," not to deny the authenticity[2] of the sacrifice, but to articulate the performers' creative[3] and improvisational[4] use of "religious[5] performance."[6]

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[2] On notions of authenticity and cultural change, see Underwood 2000.

[3] Such social creativity should not be theorized in the Romantic sense, as genius that imagines novelty out of thin air (cf. Murray 1989). Instead, "creativity" is collective contextualized and mediated action performed in relation to specific problem solving (Bauman 1977, 1992; Bauman and Briggs 1990; Briggs 1988; Goodwin and Duranti 1992).

[4] In the performing arts, improvisation is typically viewed as the "skill of using bodies, space, all human resources, to generate a coherent physical expression of an idea, a situation, a character, to do this spontaneously, and to do it *à l'improviste*: as through taken by surprise, without preconceptions" (Frost and Yarrow 1990:1). I use the model of musical and theater improvisation (cf. Berliner 1994; Sawyer 1996). Yet, what I am chiefly interested in is improvisational theater (Coleman 1990; Johnstone 1981; Spolin 1963). I build upon the written work of a number of three major sources—Keith Johnstone, Del Close, and Viola Spolin (cf. Johnstone 1981; Halpern, Close and Johnson 1991; Spolin 1963; Sweet 1978).

[5] My use of the category of *religious* does a double labor. First, following Dipesh Chakrabarty's handling of the word "peasant," I employ the term as a cipher for those life practices that, from within *Enlightenment discourse*, are posited as other than *Enlightenment discourse* (2000:11). Second, while social scientists, and especially historians of religion, seem tongue-tied in defining religion, people in Bhaktapur tend to have no problem whatsoever. Religion deals with the gods (np. *deva*, nb. *dya*). The difficultly arises, however, over the contextualized translation of "god." Gods in Bhaktapur tend not to be the abstract beliefs that most elite scholarship implies. For most people in

Yet, what made this sacrifice forged? Although the sacrifice was *nakali*, the goat was still killed. Its throat was cut, and its blood was splattered on the image of Ganesh. In fact, once under way, there was little apparent difference between this "forged" celebration and an "authentic" festival: it had a procession, a sacrifice, and even a ritual feast — all key elements of "authentic" worship. Therefore, in what is key for the entire argument, I describe the sacrifice as forged not because *I* thought it was forged, but because the Nepalis participating in the sacrifice described it as such. Still, why celebrate a forged sacrifice? The time and expense of the forged sacrifice indicates that such religious performances are, as John MacAloon writes, "more than entertainment, more than didactic or persuasive formulations, and more than cathartic indulgences" (1984:1). Instead, as recent social scientific scholarship on performance theory, festivals and ritual have demonstrated, such religious practices can be theorized as a technique for constructing and structuring "lived worlds."[7]

Often, however (and especially in religious studies), such world generating cultural logics are misunderstood because they are posed simultaneously as both a timeless static structure, and as a slowly decaying ancient order.[8] For example, as Robert Levy writes in *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Newar City in Nepal*, Bhaktapur is a "mesocosm out of time," which in the face of modernity has run "on in very much the old way, like a clockwork mechanism assembled long ago that no one had bothered to disassemble" (1990:28,15). There is no doubt a difference between cities such as New York and Tokyo (as well as Kathmandu for that matter) and Bhaktapur. Yet, because Levy poses an unrecognizable gap between "modernity" and "tradition," he essentializes Bhaktapur as "ancient," "archaic," "axial," "conservative," "premodern," and "traditional" (1990).[9]

Bhaktapur, there is no question of believing in gods. They are concrete presences that can be seen, heard, touched, and even tasted. However, one should be aware that in all actuality "religion" is an abstraction that is logically untranslatable, and I employ it here to gloss a constellation of locally used terms. First among these is *dharma*, and for the most part that I spoke with people, this is the term that I used. But as is well known, *dharma* can also mean "one's duty," etc. Other words that fit closely with *dharma*, and were used often in its stead, were *paramparā*, tradition or lineage. People also spoke of *sanskriti* (culture), *chalan* and *riti-tithi* (custom), as well as the English loan *kalchar* (I would like to thank Brent Bianchi for helping me think through these terms).

[6] Following Goffman, I define "performance" broadly as "all the activity of an individual which occurs during a period marked by his continuous presence before a particular set of observers and which has some effect on the observers" (1959:22). Milton Singer argues that the phrase "cultural performance" accurately maps a category recognized by and salient to people in South Asia (1955).

[7] For example see: MacAloon 1984; Bell 1992; Kapferer 1986; Sullivan 1986; Schechner 1985, 1988, 1993; Tambiah 1979. By using the notion of a lived world, I mean to model the processes by which countless and many-faceted but coherent and dependent variables contribute to a particular shared world. Accordingly, a lived world is not a permanent fixed structure, but a constantly changing social reality, which emerges from a particular socio-historical and geographic situation. Following the work of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann (1966), by "world" I am concerned not with a "reality's" ultimate ontological status but rather with socially constructed existence.

[8] On how "tradition" as a discourse and practice operates in Bhaktapur, see Grieve 2003b. On the relation between social constructivist and perennial theories of religion, see J.Z. Smith's classic article, "The Wobbling Pivot" (1978:88–103).

[9] For Levy, *modernity* is "education; agriculture; health programs; increasing travel in and out of the country; burgeoning communications of all kinds, books, movies, radio and internal transportations," while *tradition* is the "static social order of Hinduism" which is characterized by caste (1990:15, 23). Levy's adherence to the "Great divide" (1990:23–27) comes about because he attempts to force Bhaktapur into a "traditional" interpretation of the city as seen as in Fustel de Coulanges 1956 and Wheatley 1971.

For Levy, instead of people, Bhaktapur is inhabited by a "dance of symbols" (1990:16–18, 401–616). This would be academic, except that by essentializing Bhaktapur as a "traditional city," and having the nature of tradition be determined by a timeless symbol system, Levy robs the city's citizens of agency and the possibility of creatively using traditional cultural logics.[10] The reification of an abstract symbol system creates two pitfalls. First, because Levy's theory cannot incorporate the creative, generative and improvisational aspects of tradition, there is an epistemological reduction of the material. For instance, Levy is forced to dismiss the Cow Festival, the city's third most important festival and the one that is most recognizably Bhaktapurian, as little more than "anti-structure" (1990:451; cf. Anderson 1971). In short, because of his theoretical assumptions, Levy must turn a blind- eye to rituals such as the fake goat sacrifice.[11]

Second, by esseentializing an abstracted symbol system Levy inscribes a pair of interwined asymmetrical power relations. [12] On one hand, he makes normative the "ideal view" of the Rājopādhyāyā Brahmins.[13] As he writes: "Whatever the untouchable, for example, thinks about it all, it is these [brahminic] conceptions that form the matrix of his life. Against the ordering interpretation of the elite, popular interpretations where they differ are ... simply 'wrong'" (1990:9).[14] On the other hand, while the Rājopādhyāyā Brahmins may be penultimate, he inscribes his own "modern" voice as the ultimate authority. This occurs because, while Levy understands the city's inhabitants as "sophisticated" and relies on them for collaboration, they cannot be "critical intellectuals" because they are essentially "traditional" (1990:31–32).[15]

What is provocative about the fake sacrifice, especially in light of interpretation such as Levy's, is that the creative and improvisational nature of the performance shows that traditional practices cannot be reduced to blind imitation of timeless rules.[16] The ceremony was not an eternal repetition of the same. It was not a "dance of symbols" performed out of the unconscious replication of an existing cultural structure. Instead, it was a conscious manipulation of available "traditional" cultural logics that were strategically utilized to solve a contemporary problem. As we will see in greater detail below, the problem that faced the people of Suryavinayak was how to forge a new lived reality beyond the traditional cultic borders of Bhaktapur. The cultural logic manipulated for this task was "maṇḍalization," one of the most important forms of world building cultural logics in Nepal's Kathmandu Valley. To articulate how people use religious

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[10] I am using "robs" in a technical Barthian sense (1984).

[11] For instance in *Mesocosm*'s 823 pages, Levy lingers for 119 pages on Mohan! (the Dev! Cycle), while only 10 pages on Sāyā (1990). He ignores the carnival processions except for one sentence (1990:451). One could argue that the Cow Procession was not the subject matter for *Mesocosm*. However, Levy claims to be representing the entire "symbolic ordering of Bhaktapur" (1990:8).

[12] One senses that Levy at least has an inkling of this problem. As he qualifies his argument, "Our emphasis on the order of Bhaktapur is very liable to appear regressive, ideological, Orientalist, and various other unpleasant things in the contemporary climate of criticism of essays presenting 'other' times and 'other' peoples" (1990:9).

[13] For alternative views of Bhaktapur's "order," see Parish 1994 & 1996.

[14] Compare to Parish (1994). As Parish writes: "Thus, Bhaktapur is many cities —a plurality of imagined cities within a single space.... It would be wrong to privilege one vision, one version of Newar culture, making it canonical, thereby denying reality to others" (1994:69–70).

[15] Compare for instance to Liechty 2003:232–46.

[16] I would like to thank Rick Wiess (Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand) and his theories on tradition for this insight.

agency to forge new traditional lived worlds, I coin the term "generative cultural matrixes."[17] All people make the worlds they live in. A generative cultural matrix theorizes how lived worlds are improvised from the "tug-of-war" between peoples' desires and restraints of a particular social field.[18]

The Cow Procession

Celebrated in the waning fortnight of Gu(n)lāgā (August), Bhaktapur's Cow Procession (np. Gāi Jātrā, nb. Sāyā) is an intimate mix of death and carnival that commemorates those who have died in Bhaktapur during the previous year with a procession of "cow floats" and a series of satirical performances (nb. khyāla:).[19] There is no official report on the Cow Procession's meaning. No published account or completely codified oral account exists.[20] Yet, the various versions all point to the procession of real and symbolic cows that give the festival its name, and to the "cow goddess" who leads the spirits of those who died in Bhaktapur during the proceeding year across the Vaitaran.i river to the realm of the dead .[21] For instance, the farmer and drumming instructor Hari Govinda Ranjitkar and his daughter reiterated the following story. Having heard that Cow Procession (nb. Sāyā) means (sā) cow and (yā) procession, I asked why we were celebrating the festival. Mr Ranjitkar said:

> The Cow Procession makes the Cow Goddess happy, and if she is happy she will lead the dead person to heaven. The soul grasps onto the cow's tail. If a family does not do this, the dead person won't find his way and he will become a *bhut* [a mischievous wandering spirit who will cause harm to both the family and the community]. (Personal communication, 20 August 1997)

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[17] The word "matrix" has two meanings: (1) a hollow device for shaping a fluid or plastic substance; (2) a rectangular array of elements (e.g., numbers) considered as a single entity. Both of these understandings define a matrix as a device for shaping a chaotic flow into structure. It is this generative quality that I am attempting to capture by using the term. In a sense, my goal in using the notion of a generative cultural matrix is to tease out the agental, improvisational and world construction nature of Erving Goffman's concepts frame, and Bourdieu's theory of the social field. Goffman coined the term "frame" to describe the way experiences are organized by the contextual boundaries of a social encounter. People use frames to identify what is taking place. For example, a speech act may be a joke, a warning, a lesson, an invitation and so on. My understanding of "frame" is influenced by Alfred Gell's notion of "Index"; these are material entities that motivate inferences, responses and interpretations (1998). In a moment of ironic precision, Bourdieu defines field as "[(habitus) ({ symbolic } capital)] + field = practice" (Bourdieu 1984:101 "{ }" brackets added by author). For Bourdieu, "habitus" is an agent's residue or sediment of their past that functions within their present, shaping their perception, thought and action and thereby molding social practice in a regular way. It consists in dispositions, schemas, forms of know-how and competence. As he writes: "the schemes of the habitus, the primary forms of classification, owe their specific efficacy to the fact that they function below the level of consciousness and language, beyond the reach of introspective scrutiny or control by the will (Bourdieu 1984:466).

[18] Also, following Peter Berger (1966, 1967) I use the term generative cultural matrix to describe the generative affect between society and people (cf. 1967:3).

[19] The Cow (np. Gāi, nb. Sā) Procession (np. Jatra, nb. Yā [derived from the Sanskrit *yātrā*]) has been recorded as being called Sāpāru. This may derive from *parewā*—the name given to the first day of the lunar fortnight. Levy (1990:442) suggests that it derives from *sāpā*, or cow mask.

[20] See Levy 1990:442–542. For non-Bhaktapurian versions, see Anderson 1971, and Nepali 1965.

[21] Vaitaran.i is both the name of the river that separates the land of the living from the land of the dead, and also the term used for the cow presented to a priest during funeral rites (Stutley and Stutley 1977:318). Other ceremonies such as Mā(n)yā Khwa: Swāegu and Gokarna Au(n)si are performed for those who have been dead for longer than a year. The Cow Procession is only for those who have passed away in the preceding year.

Beyond helping the spirits find their way, the festival is also understood to suspend or at least suppress the karmic judgment that Yama, the god of death, traditionally levies on those entering his realm (Levy 1990:442–44).

The procession's vanquishing of death, if only temporarily, is a common carnival theme (Bakhtin 1984; Metcalf 1979).[22] Uttam Jhā, a practicing Brahmin and head of the local chamber of commerce, narrated a myth that explained how the cow and the death motif intertwined with the carnivalesque aspects of the festival: the Cow Procession originated during the reign of King Jagat Prakash Malla (1644–1673).[23] The king started the festival when, after the death of his son, he was desperately searching for a means to comfort his grieving queen. To lift his wife's grief, Jagat Malla first sent out a procession of sacred cows to parade in the boy's memory. Yet the queen remained despondent. After the cow parade failed, Jagat had another idea. He ordered all his citizens who had lost a family member during the preceding year to parade below the queen's window so that she could see that she was not the only one who suffered the death of a family member. King Jagat Malla was about to order all of the costumed people punished when the queen began to laugh at all the carnival activities.[24] In gratitude, King Jagat Malla proclaimed that every year on the day of the Cow Procession people would have complete freedom to do whatever they wanted.

Like the crowd proceeding below the queen's window, the festival takes the form of a procession that circumambulates the city along the city's procession route (sk. Pradaksinapatha).[25] Along this route (often simply called the "Cow Road" [np. Gāiko Bāto, nb. Sālā]), all families who have suffered the death of a member in the preceding year decorate either a cow float or a real cow and, together with a troupe of musicians and a convivial crowd of costumed revelers, dance and drink their way around the city (Figure 2). The procession route is filled with many hundreds of these troupes, each of which represents a particular deceased person.[26] Because each group

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[22] The most obvious example for North American is Halloween and the Day of the Dead (Dia de Los Muertos) (cf. Beezley 1994; Carmichael and Sayer 1992). The Dominican carnival in Santo Domingo has a figure who wears the classical skeleton and skull attire, always seeking to frighten others. Holding a scythe, this Death grabs children by their feet so that they can be hit by the Diablos with their air-filled bladders. This figure is popularly known as "La Muerte en Yipe" (Death Driving a Jeep) (cf. Aching 2002). In Russia funeral ceremonies like those of "Burying the Carnival" and "Carrying out Death" are celebrated under the names, not of Death or The Carnival, but of certain mythic figures, Kostrubonko, Kostroma, Kupalo, Lada, and Yarilo (Bueno-Román 1990). It can also be seen in the English "Dance of Death" (Boughton 1913). On the creation of a less carnivalesque "protestant" form of dying, see Koslofsky 2000.

[23] With the help of others sitting around the table, he supplied the following historical legend. In what I would call a classic example of collective agency, the story here was fleshed out not only by Mr Jhā, but by all those at the table. It would be hard to pin it down to a specific person, and it would be better in effect to cite it at the level of conversation.

[24] This tale is related to the Buddhist story of the mustard seed and Hindu folk tales of the laughing queen, except that the populace, outraged at this indignity, dressed up instead in garish costumes to taunt the king (personal communication, Wendy Doniger, June 2002).

[25] Bhaktapur's procession route moves within the city as a meandering oval. Dutt (1977:33) shows that in an ideal Hindu city, the Pradaksinapatha should circumambulate the outside wall. Slusser (1982, 1:93) argues that this was the case of Kathmandu. Barré et al. (1981:40–41) argues that for places such as the Newar village of Panauti, the processional route acts as a boundary of purity. It runs through all the city's neighborhoods (nb. twa: s, np. toles) but one, and proceeds past all the most important temples and public spaces (Gutschow 1982).

[26] It was said during the Malla period, that officials would count the cows so as to tell the number and type of people who died during the proceeding year. More recently, five hundred were counted in 1988 (personal communication, Gert Wagner, August 1997).

enters the procession route at the point nearest their home and at convenient times for themselves, the social order of the procession is more or less random.[27] Each float is constructed by the individual's extended family and friends and is personalized with photographs and other household articles to

Figure 2. Large Cow Float in Bhaktapur's 1995 Gāi Jātra Festival. (Photograph by Greg Grieve, 1995)

indicate gender, age and personal tastes. Before each troupe enters the procession, the cow floats are worshiped as the Cow Goddess, and, in a process called "crossing the river" (nb. *tarae yagu*), she is asked to lead the deceased to heaven (Levy 1990:445).

An ideal "cow float" can be broken down into five sections. First, each float is led by a group of young children arranged in pairs doing the Stick Dance (nb. Sāpāru Pyākhā). Behind the stick dancers comes the second part of the troupe, which consists of costumed pairs of young men whom often perform the sexually explicit gestures. This dance is often called Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) Mhetegu; a name that refers onomatopoeically to the special Cow Procession beat described below. During the dance, some men dress up as demons or as monsters and animals under mangy hides, some wear ludicrous masks or cover their faces with white cloth, while others paint their cheeks and foreheads in colored streaks and designs. Moreover, men cross-dress or dress out of their caste. Third comes a group of musicians and other people directly involved in the

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[27] There is an exception to this with the Lākulāche(n) (sub)twa: As a climax to the festival, they enter themselves as group as well as anyone else who wants to join in the festivities. They carry a tall image of a cow float dressed as the god Bhairava (Levy 1990:445–46).

procession. Next comes the cow float itself, and, finally, come the family members, consisting of the chief mourner, his brothers, and the extended family, as well as friends and neighbors. This group also includes a fringe of women and girls following at the end of some of the larger processions.

Most of the troupes' members are higher caste men, but there is no concrete rule on who will participate, and a flexible strategy guides their actions. Recent festivals have witnessed the participation of more women, members of lower castes, and even foreigners. In addition, the cow floats vary depending on the age, caste, and gender of the deceased. The cows may either be long (for adults) or short (for children). The long cows consist of a cow mask mounted toward the top end of an elaborately decorated long pole and require four men to carry them. For upper castes, the cow float is carried by people who farm portions of the family's land, whereas for middle and lower castes, the float is carried by members of the extended family. The short cows, on the other hand, are baskets with a mask attached to them and are usually worn by a male child of the family; however, if a male child is not available, other male family members will wear it. Other features of the float's decorations indicate whether the deceased was male or female, what caste they came from, and what activities or foods they preferred. These decorations may include photographs, pieces of clothing, prepared food, personal items, and, for children, toys or schoolbooks displaying their favorite subject.

Crucial to these processions is the practice of "Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) *twa*," that indicates a special cymbal "Cow Procession beat." In fact, this beat (np. *mata*) —seven beats followed by a rest-defined the festival for most people. When I asked people to describe the Cow Procession, not only did I usually get a verbal explanation, I was taught how to beat out this rhythm and do the accompanying dance. According to various Bhaktapurians, "Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) twa" not only refers to the special musical beat that is played only during the Cow Procession, but also has several sexual connotations as well, the main one referring to the insertion of the penis into the vagina during coitus. As an "everyday tantric practice," public expression of such a "vulgar" utterance occurs only under circumstances that differ radically from people's usual discourse.[28] To publicly speak of coitus outside of the carnival would lead not to the creation of distinction, but to social chastisement. This beat centers all the procession's carnivalesque occurrences. For instance, in the Stick Dance, as the twa of Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) twa is chanted during the rest at the end of the rhythm, the boys hit their sticks together in unison. Similarly, the young men whom perform the sexually explicit gestures momentarily pause on the quarter rest to emphasize a particular gesture. In the weeks leading up to the Gāi Jātra, this rhythm can be heard more and

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[28] On a philosophical level, tantra may be that Asian body of beliefs and practices that, working from the principle that the universe we experience is nothing other than the concrete manifestation of the divine energy of the godhead that creates and maintains the universe, seeks to ritually appropriate and channel that energy, within the human microcosm, in creative and emancipatory ways (David White, personal communication 1999; cf. Alper 1989; Bharati 1975; Brooks 1990; Goudriaan 1992; Svoboda 1986). Yet, as Hugh Urban has shown, there is no essential quality that is Tantra. Rather the term gains meaning in a discourse that has grown through circulation (Urban 2003). In Bhaktapur tantra is much more mundane. Krishna Pradhana(n)ga said: "Tantra is *śakti* which you can get from spiritual study.... It is different than visible physical power. Like the motor of a car. To move a car you need an engine, but tantra is different because it is run by god-*śakti*" (personal communication 1999). And as Ram Lochan Jhā said: "If we follow the tantra as it is described, it is a weapon which provides *śakti*. For example, I have a small home in Kathmandu. It is not my ancestral property. I bought it myself. A conflict started because of a piece of land behind it. The other person was a tantric, who treated people with his tantra-mantra and by being possessed by a spirit. And people felt that if he got angry, he could do black magic against them" (personal communication 1999).

more often throughout the city, until, on the day of the actual event, the entire city is filled with its rhythmicity.

There is a final element of the procession that is key for understanding the "fake" goat sacrifice: these are the *khyāla:,* comic performances, which satirize dominant figures or voice political views that would be unutterable in other situations (Anderson 1971:103). For instance, on August 19, 1995, a man dressed as Yama (the god of death) rode backwards on a water buffalo. Surrounding the buffalo was a swarm of demon-costumed men menacingly waving long spears while simultaneously rubber-stamping piles of bureaucratic paperwork. The Yama procession probably was meant to represent the then current Communist government (UMLP), which had recently suspended parliament. And these "traditional" figures were probably led by members of the local Progressive Nepal Workers and Peasant Party (NeMaKiPa). In 1997, these parodic performances also included cartoons satirizing the parliament's submission of an anti-terrorism bill. People also acted out skits lampooning members and leaders of parliament who were involved in misusing medical allowances. Besides these entertainments, the Cow Procession's skits have opposed the American support of Israel, the infighting of the big Nepali political parties, corruption, lack of sanitation, and financial irregularities. Brahmins are also parodied; people engage in absurd and overly complex rituals or tell obscene versions of traditional stories. Tourists and other Westerners are also made fun of; revelers carry absurdly large replicas of cameras and hand out meaningless "funny money" to the crowd.

Beyond the actual day of the procession, the carnivalesque air continues during Gunhipunhi, which denotes the full moon day of the month of Gunla, but is often referred to in Bhaktapur as "nine full days" ("*gun*" meaning nine). Gunhipunhi is a time of jokes, satire, and social commentary. It starts the day before the Cow Procession on Kwati Purni, when a troop of musicians plays in Bhaktapur's Durbar Square to announce to the public the opening of the Cow Procession, and lasts nine days, until the god Krishna's birthday. It comes to a head the evening before Krishna's birthday, when the city again engages in another long night of carnival. During this time, like in the *khyāla:,* people wear costumes and engage in political and social commentary. Like the fake goat sacrifice, much of this satire takes the form of forged ceremonies and processions.

A Festive Juggernaut: The Cow Procession's Minimally Structured Generative Cultural Matrix
When asked why they celebrated a forged sacrifice, Mr Gongah's son Sanjeev shrugged and said, "It's fun, isn't it?" (personal communication, 19 August 1995). When Mr Gongah was asked the same question he answered, "it's a way for the neighborhood to celebrate together" (personal communication, 19 August 1995). What connects Mr Gongah and his son's seemingly unrelated responses is "religious agency." By *agency* I am referring to peoples' ability to act effectively upon their world, to act purposively and strategically, in more or less complex interrelationships (Inden 1990:23).[29] In Bhaktapur, religion (*dharma*) glosses two chief meanings. On one hand, it means living a certain type of ethically bounded life style; on the other, religious practice focuses on the

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[29] My use of the *everyday* stems from the work of Michel de Certeau (1984). The fundamental question of his oeuvre is how do people create themselves and lived worlds? His basic insight is that most social scientists have failed to describe accurately the everyday because they have assumed that the public is shaped by the products imposed on it from above.

worship of god-images (*pūjā*) (Grieve 2003a).[30] Accordingly, everyday religious agency theorizes how people in Bhaktapur not only imagine gods but use them in tangible practices that structure daily existence.

In Bhaktapur, festivals play a crucial role in the construction of lived worlds.[31] As the college teacher Yogesh Raj told me, "Because Bhaktapur is my [abstract] world (np. *loka*), when I participate in festivals I feel part of that [created] world (np. *saṃsāra*). Otherwise, I feel lonely" (personal communication, 6 February 1999). Such world construction can be theorized through the notion of generative matrixes, which are cultural "forges" that play a part in the construction of society. Generative matrixes emerge out of, and simultaneously generate, a group's goals, strategies, and the resources available to a given social field. As such, generative matrixes are not neutral playing fields, but are defined by people's access to what is at stake — cultural goods, housing, intellectual distinction, employment, land, power, social status, and prestige —and people's ability to muster "social capital" (Bourdieu 1977, 1984, 1996).[32] In short, not everyone feels the same entitlement to participate in festivals' generative matrixes. For instance, while Mr Raj was a male Brahmin, women and lower caste individuals often felt alienated from participating. As the female college student Sangeeta Chitrakar said, "Which festivals do I participate in? Which festivals may women be part of? Can we participate in the Cow Procession? Can we not pull the chariot during Biskā:? [laughter and the hand gesture for 'what is to be done?']" (personal communication, 11 May 1999 [cf. Parish 1994, 1996]).

Yet, while no religious agency is completely free of asymmetrical power relations, some are more flexible than others. In Bhaktapur, because the Cow Procession is the most minimally structured public celebration, marginalized social groups have the greatest access to its generative cultural matrix. During the Cow Procession there is a noticeable difference in the city: strict hierarchical boundaries and the city's normally reserved nature soften under the weight of Carnival. Transvestitism, the grotesque, the obscene, and the nonsensical are celebrated. Those in power are derided.[33] Peoples' laughter overcomes fear and allows the city to face up to its

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[30] Although religion itself is a contested category, especially in relation to South Asia, it still offers the most productive means for articulating the geographic logics. Religion (np. *dharma*) glosses two chief meanings in Bhaktapur. On one hand, it means living a certain type of ethically bounded life style. As the high caste teacher Yogesh Raj stated: "The word *dharma* in Sanskrit means to do *dhāram*. In other words, Dharma is 'life style'" (personal communication, 5 May 1999). And as Uttam Jha replied to the same question, such life styles are concerned with ethics: "*Dharma* teaches moral responsibility and for people who are ethical, they don't need any *dharma*" (personal communication, 4 August 1999). Damodar Gautam replied: "People need to have boundaries, principles, rules and regulations. That is religion" (personal communication, 21 June 1999). On the other hand, religious practice focuses on the worship of god-images (np. *pūjā*) (Grieve 2003a). As Hari Govinda Ranjit said, *dharma* means, "you have to do good worship of god-images" (personal communication, 14 June 1999). And as Ma(n)gāl Laxmi Sāhi said, religion is done with "purified uncooked husked rice (nb. *kjiga:*), a mixture of foods, including meat and fish (nb. *samhae*), flowers and fruit" (personal communication, 16 July 1999).
[31] See for example: Anderson 1971; Grieve 2002; Gutschow 1982; Levy 1990; and Vergati 1995.
[32] "Symbolic capital" amounts to status or recognition and refers to the connections and networks which an agent can call upon in their effort to achieve a specified goal. Social fields are distinct social spaces, such as the field of higher education, or science, or religious studies, which are so many games in which players pursue specific goals and ends. Each field, like a distinct game, has its own norms and logic; a specific "point" and stakes which players must incorporate within their corporeal schema if they are to play.
[33] Such derision is not merely symbolic—the cow procession is seen as a time of intensified political strife. The most obvious example is the Hyo(n)ju incident, in which Mr Hyo(n)ju—who was seen as a "turncoat" by many

biggest fears — "death" being just the most evident. Hence, more than the mere cessation of productive labor, more than a ludic undermining of all norms, more than just "anti-structure," the Cow Procession allows for the creation of new and the transformation of traditional social structures so as to forge innovative social worlds (Bakhtin 1984; Stam 1989).[34]

To comprehend *how* the Cow Procession creates the possibilities for new realities different from conventional rules and restrictions, let me turn to the participants. As I stated above, when asked why they celebrated a forged sacrifice, Mr Gongah's son Sanjeev shrugged and said, "It's fun, isn't it?" (personal communication, 19 August 1995). Yet, why is the Cow Procession fun? The obvious answer is that carnivals are entertaining because one can dance and drink, and "wear" personalities that one cannot at other times. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes in *Rabelais and His World*, during carnival there is a "temporary suspension of all hierarchic distinctions and barriers," and there is an inversion of the standard themes of societal makeup (1984:15). As numerous Bhaktapurians told me, during the Cow Procession people can be whatever they want: anyone can be king for a day. This of course is not true in the strictest sense. In the past, both women and the lowest castes have been denied access to the festival's merriments. A farmer who dresses as a king may feel himself empowered (and probably will enjoy himself), but he does not actually get to rule the city.

What makes the festival enjoyable then, is not an overthrow of the normative system, but its temporary loosening. Not only is this loosening enjoyable, it is key for understanding religious agency.[35] For, if maximally structured religious agency can be seen as ritualized, then the forged carnivalesque sacrifice can be understood as minimally structured.[36] Such minimally structured social practices allow for greater change and improvisation. Accordingly, carnivals are fun for the very reason they are useful for understanding agency. As Mikhail Bakhtin writes, they "extend the narrow frame of life" so that people can experiment with social configurations that "lie beyond the existing social forms" (1984:17, 280).

Yet, how is it that the Cow Procession became, in Bakhtin's words, "the place for working out a new mode of interrelationship between individuals" (1984:123)? As is shown by the forged sacrifice, rather than re-enacting a symbolic structure, people are manipulating cultural logics to improvise a new social structure. Yet, all social practice — even that which is enjoyable and minimally structured—is socially mediated action. During the carnival one *cannot* do whatever one wants. Instead, the carnival emerges in a tug-of-war between needs, desires and goals, and

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locals—was beaten into unconsciousness and later died in the hospital after been dragged around the procession route close to the time of the Cow Procession (cf. Grieve 2002:51–52; Cãlise 1994).

[34] Aaron Gurevich (1985) problematizes Bakhtin's understanding of medieval carnival. Gurevich argues that we need to be grounded in the "world picture" of the Middle Ages to understand their festivals. As such, we need to adjust our interpretive efforts—rather than arguing for the structural reversal and proceeding absurdity of festivals, we need to rethink such basic categories as time and space *in lieu* of Medieval reality. While I agree that Gurevich is correct, his observations do not necessarily affect my use of Bakhtin's notion of carnival as a heuristic interpretative category.

[35] One needs to theoretically differentiate between such concepts as Victor Turner's "anti-structure," and the minimally structured generative matrixes that are being analyzed here (cf. Turner 1967, 1969, 1972, 1985; also see Levy 1990:451). The fake sacrifice is more than just a liminal creation of communitas —it is the generation of a new social world. Moreover, while the Cow Procession may call into questions certain economic and political structures, it is not "liminoid" in the sense of existing outside of them (cf. Turner 1974).

[36] For instance, Levy defines it as an "anti-structural focal festival" (1990:451).

the social logic of the festival. As such, the new realities are forged in the generative cultural matrix that stems from the interaction between the festival's social field and emergent collective action.

To concretize the Cow Procession's generative matrix, let me turn for a moment to the tug-of-war that occurs during Bhaktapur's Biskā: Festival (Levy 1990:468–98). Biskā: is one of Bhaktapur's three main festivals. It marks the start of the new solar year and is celebrated for the god Bhairava. During Biskā:, the upper and lower sections of the city attempt to pull Bhairava's forty-foot-tall festival chariot into their section of the city through tug-of-war and rock throwing (Figure 3). The tug-of-war and rock throwing demonstrate that there are two main elements to Bhaktapur's festival matrixes. On the one hand, festivals depend on religious agency. As the head of Bhaktapur's Chamber of Commerce said, "festivals are human-made things in which people participate according to their family religious duty (*dharma*)" (personal communication, 4 August 1999). Yet, while generated by people for a variety of reasons, festival matrixes are also social juggernauts. Festivals, while constituted by individual people's actions, often get out of hand and take on a life of their own.

The festival's social momentum becomes literalized when ropes are attached to both ends of Bhairava's chariot, and an immense tug-of-war ensues. As an individual agent in Biskā:'s tug-of-war— and in other ways in other festivals —one's individual agency is subsumed and transformed by the conjoining of the social forces involved. As Keshab Hada said about the Biskā: festival, "The main reason for the excitement is that many people ... both sides ... are pulling the chariot. When you see the people pulling, something emerges from inside yourself that makes you want to pull it" (personal communication, 5 May 1999). The "trick" for actors in a generative

Figure 3. A tug-of-war over the God Bhairava's Chariot during Bhaktapur's 1997 Biskā: celebration. (Photograph by Greg Grieve, 1997)

matrix is to strategically maneuver its practices so as to achieve one's own goals; that is, to get the juggernaut to go where you want it to go (without getting run over). Yet, what must be stressed is that these goals are generated in a circle of mutual dependency within the festival's

cultural matrix. That is, the dialectic relationship between matrix and actor objectifies a social reality. As Peter Berger writes: "Society is a dialectic phenomenon in that it is a human product, and nothing but a human product, that yet continuously acts back upon its producer" (1967:3).

From Abstract Symbols to Strategically Maximizing the Cow Procession's Generative Matrix
Each different type of generative matrix, by virtue of its defining content, has a different logic and assumed structure of necessity and relevance, which is both the product and producer of the practices that are appropriate to it. In Bhaktapur's Cow Procession three resources are at stake: honoring gods through ceremony, enjoying oneself, and gaining prestige. First and foremost, festivals are understood as a way of honoring gods through ceremony (np. *pujā*). As Mr Hada put it, festivals are "huge ceremonies for gods and goddesses ... they create religious power (np. *śakti*)" (personal communication, 5 May 1999). Second, festivals are simply fun. As thirty-year-old Krishna Pradhānā(n)ga said, "Festivals refill the gods' religious power (*śakti*), and also they are fun for people" (personal communication, 6 June 1999). In the elementary school principal Himalayaswar Mool's words, "People work hard and they need a way to enjoy themselves. After fourteen hours of hard work, everyone gets tired. So that's why we need festivals" (personal communication, 15 August 1999). Finally, festivals are a way to gain prestige (*ijjat*). As Uttam Jhā said, "The reasons for having festivals could be to respect gods, or it could be to show off in front of others" (personal communication, 4 August 1999).

How does a festival generate distinction, enjoyment and religious power? While the Cow Procession may not have codified "rules," it does have definite "strategies" (Bourdieu 1986). This ability to strategically manipulate the festival is a ritual mastery that does not follow a codified set of rules, but is a flexible social sense for what is possible and effective; it is "the 'art' of *necessary improvisation*" (Bourdieu 1990:141 [italics in the original], cf. 106, 109). This necessary improvisation can be seen in the choice of cow floats. For instance, recently real living cows, which go undecorated except for a garland around their neck and a red *tika* on their forehead, have been introduced. These real cows are used more by lower classes (as money-saving devices, to save the expense of making an image) and are usually led around the procession route by a senior male, while a small boy holds onto their tails. Other family members follow close behind, collecting material offerings as they dance around the procession route. Besides the modest substitution of real cows, other changes have been introduced; for instance, a group of low caste participants manipulating the Cow Procession's social field. Various people indicated that this was the first time that *dalits* (nb. *pore*) had directly participated in the festival, and that religion dictated that they should not. Although the higher castes seemed aghast, because of the carnival nature of the day and the democratic atmosphere created by the recent revolution, they seemed unable to counter the untouchables' deft strategic move.

The strategic manipulation of the festival field can also be seen in the Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) Mhetegu. Through the logic of inversion, participants used their costumes to display the particular concerns of their peer group. Younger men, roughly 18–35 years old, used symbolic gestures to mock dominant social positions (the government, tourists, and religious authorities), as well as to reverse the direction down (women and members of lower castes). They also took on pop- culture roles of Western rock stars and Hindi movie actors. In various sorts of sexual display, men dressed as heterosexual couples would embrace and move their hips as if engaging in coitus. Other pairs rhythmically banged together large models of penises and vaginas,

whacking them together at the *twa* beat. Still other men simply added mock genitalia, such as bananas or cucumbers, to their normal clothes. A group of cross-dressers danced gracefully by themselves.

Yet, while there is "play" in the festival field's limits —not anything goes. For instance, the symbolic gesture displayed depends on the costume of the dancer. A young man dressed as a woman may repeatedly bring a baby doll to his breast, a man dressed as a bureaucrat may endlessly rubber stamp a pile of papers as another man repeatedly hands him a bribe, and, in the most prevalent example, a man dressed as a farmer's wife repeatedly serves her "husband" alcohol (see Figure 4). The revelers' dress can be divided into seven types: *(1)* people of all ages costumed as various deities; (2) young boys dressed as *sadhu*s and other ascetics; (3) numerous other small boys costumed as Moghul Maharaja in orange cloth and turbans, a mustache penned above their upper lips; (4) dancers dressed as either photo-snapping tourists or American rock stars and Hindi movie actors; (5) people dressed as farmers who repeatedly hoe at the ground in time to the music; (6) people dressed as animals and demons; and (7) various obscene costumes (cf. Levy 1990:446–47).

The strategic manipulation of the festival's generative matrix is clear in the Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) *twa* beat described above. There are different songs involved (Widdess 1999). A quick *ghe(n)tān ghesi(n) twa*, a long
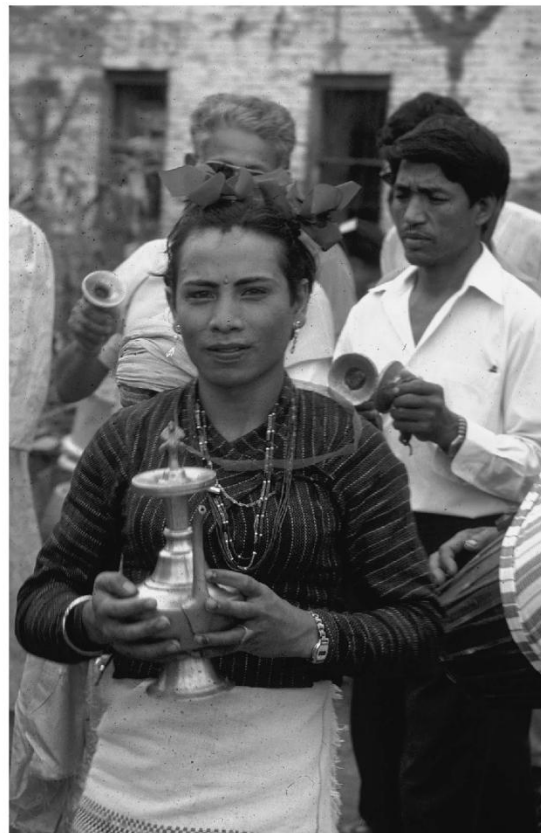

Figure 4. Cross-dressed celebrant in Bhaktapur's Cow Procession repeatedly serves her "husband" alcohol. (Photograph by Greg Grieve, 1995)

ghe(n)tān ghesi(n) twa, and *Dhalhāegu* (a song that invokes the gods). The drum instructor Ranjitkar described *Dhalhāegu* as a telephone's bell, a way of getting a god's attention so you could talk with him or her. The slow version is used most of the time, but when the dancers want to be especially impressive, such as when passing in front of a major temple, through one of the large open squares, or past the Nepali television film crew, the fast version is played, and the troupe concentrates on the rhythm, complexity, and style of its dance moves. *Dhalhāegu* generally was saved for the most important temples, though during the procession, the drummers held an ongoing discussion over which temples were important enough to deserve this song.

To illustrate a concrete Cow Procession troupe, let us turn to an example from the 1997 celebration that memorialized the Bhaktapur resident Bal Ram. As stated above, an ideal float can be broken down into five elements. Bal Ram's troupe, while based on the ideal form, varied from it considerably. In the troupe there were 150 people or more, making it the largest troupe of the day, as it stretched about 200 meters. At the front was a huge picture of Bal Ram, towering above Bhaktapur and with the mountain peak Langtang at his back. The picture had an umbrella over it. It was followed by a group of girls doing the stick dance. The girls were followed by people costumed as the ten incarnations of Vishnu. These were followed by the "international" Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) group — twenty American Peace Corps workers, twenty-five students from England, and some German volunteers from the homeopathic clinic. These were followed by the music instructors from the university, and finally five girls dressed in farmer's black saris sprinkling *baji*. Behind this was the cow or, in this case, a bull. Behind the bull was a musical group playing devotional songs. Taking up the rear came all the other mourners.

For various and diverse reasons, Kathmandu University's Music Department, Mr Gongah, a group of Peace Corps workers, and Bal Ram's family, all found it beneficial to cooperate on forming a very distinctive float. Distinction, in the simplest sense, is social status. Bourdieu shows how distinction involves cultural displays of dress, speech, and outlook (1984, 1988). Yet, during the procession there are no calcified rules for making distinction. For example, although not part of traditional practice, the Peace Corps workers were a hot commodity in the 1997 festival.

Maṇḍalization: World Generating Cultural Matrix

We have illustrated the elements of the Cow Procession, as well as sketched some of its resources and strategies by which people utilize the festival. Yet, we have neither traced the "core" logic that assembles its generative matrix nor mapped how it was manipulated by the fake sacrifice. This section of the paper briefly sketches *mandalization*, and the following section traces how this world generating logic was put into play by the people of Suryavinayak.

In Nepal, one of the most important types of geographic logics can be defined as *maṇḍalic*. As has long been recognized, Nepal's landscape is *mandalically* organized.[37] Music, hand symbols, people, festivals, ceremonies, temples, shrines, cities, and even the entire Kathmandu Valley are configured by *maṇḍalas*.[38] As Todd Lewis writes, "The internal order of Newar house, courtyard, neighborhood, city, and Valley — ideally integrated externally with excursions and

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[37] The major evidence for this is the recurrence of patterns of four representations of certain gods places in such a manner as that they circumscribe the Kathmandu Valley (Gutschow 1982:21).

[38] Cf. Dutt 1977; Gellner 1986, 1992; Levy 1990; Kramrisch 1946; Shepard 1985; Slusser 1982; Wheatley 1971.

internally through *dekhā* meditations —has a *mandala* structure that orders and centers Newar life in many domains" (1984:558). Although in Sanskrit usage the word *maṇḍala* simply denotes the quality of being round — as expressed in everything from leprosy spots to the ring of neighbor-states surrounding a kingdom — in contemporary Nepalese usage, a *maṇḍala* is conceptualized as an arrangement of deities conceived of in a set and laid in a tantric "magical" diagram (*yantra*).

As can be seen in the Newar *paubha* "*Maṇḍala* Map of Bhaktapur" (*Yantrākāra khwopa dhya*) painted by Madhu Krishna Chitrakar, "maṇḍalization" is most readily apparent in magical diagrams (*yantras*), which configure geographic space (Figure 5). The basic *maṇḍala* cultural logic generates (1) a recognition of the four directions, (2) which are located at the periphery, and (3) a focus on the center. This "core" logic is tied to Bhaktapur's lived world by places of worship. That is, the symbolic images on the "map" correspond to physical spaces in the cityscape. In the "Maṇḍala Map" the four directions are indicated by the Lokapālas or Dikpālas, a group of "hyper-real" deities that guard the four cardinal directions.[39] While they have no material places of worship in Bhaktapur, the Dikpālas are emplotted onto the landscape because their address is the imagined horizons.[40] The periphery of Bhaktapur is indicated on the *Maṇḍala* Map by the outer ring of mother goddesses (nb. *Piga(n) dya:*) whose open- air shrines surround the city.[41] Other boundaries are marked by the eight Ganeshas, ten Mahavidyas, and eight Bhairavas, which, while located in the map, have no clear location or representation in Bhaktapur's present religious life.[42] In the "*Maṇḍala* Map" the center zenith deity is the mother goddess Tripurasundari, who is signified as both the cosmological zenith, and as the ruling goddess of the city.[43]

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[39] 39 Lokapāla literally means "world-god." Etymologically, Dikpāla stems from the notion of "dik," which is a "spatial thing" derived from the root -*dis*-: "to point out, show exhibit." As is written in the *Vaisesikasutra, dik* also means "that which gives rise to such cognition as 'this is remote from that'" (cited in Grieve 2002). As a geographic logic, just as the indexicality of deictic pronouns tie speech to the world, the indexicality of the Dikpālas tie the "*maṇḍala* map" to a greater territory.

[40] On the "*Maṇḍala* Map," these gods are indicated by the horizons. As Mr Chitrakar described the guardians of the cardinal directions (starting to the east at the top of the painting and moving clockwise), they are Indra (saffron), Yama (dark blue), Varuṇa (gray), and Kubera (yellow). Most manuscripts on the Dikpālas list eight or 10 of the deities, as illustrated in a copy of the *Sacitrapatrāni* from the National Archives of Nepal (ms. No 1. 1314, reel no A 544/6).

[41] This is a pervasive South Asian representation of a boundary and its contained area within which ritual power and order are held and concentrated. Each of Bhaktapur's eight mother goddesses has a sanctuary (np. *pith*) outside the city limits where she resides —usually in an unimpressive structure completely hidden in a thick grove of trees. This ring of Piga(n) dya:s creates a circumference that separates different worlds—the inside (nb. *pine*) order and the outside (nb. *dune*) disorder—and operates as a membrane which filters the flows into the city. The location and function of the Piga(n) dya: is clear in relation to present practice; the rest of the deities' locations, however, are problematic. The goddesses are approximately at the eight points of the compass and the city center. For example, in the *maṇḍala* map the mother goddess' shrines are symbolized as follows: Brāhamani, Maheśvari, Kumārī, Vaisshrines are symbolized as follows: Brāhamani, Maheśvari, Kumārī, Vaiṣṇavi, Vārāhi, Indrāṇi, Mahākālī, and Mahālaksmi. In addition, each Goddess has a god-house inside the city where an iconic image of her is kept, which is brought down and displayed during festivals throughout the year. Cf. Auer and Gutschow n.d. (mentioned in Levy 1990); and Slusser 1982, vol. 1. For a detailed map, see Gutschow and Klöver 1975).

[42] However, they are reported to have esoteric functions in the ritual life of the city, and serve to mark out concentric circles from the center (Gutschow and Klöver 1975).

[43] The Goddess Tripurasundarī' s shrine, that is pictured at the center of the map, The Goddess Tripurasundarī' s shrine, that is pictured at the center of the map, however, has shifted slightly to the east. This probably occurred because there have been changes in the city's structure, both physically and politically, since it was first imagined

Maṇḍalization generates territorial boundaries that demarcate clear separate units, which hieratically emerge from the center. Moreover, verticality and elaboration of decoration also reproduce social hierarchy and decrease with the distance from the center (Gutschow 1982; Gutschow and Klöver 1975; Gutschow, Klöver, and Ishwaranand Shresthacarya 1987). In the past, such caste hierarchy was visually and materially manifest through sumptuary regulations which, while now not law, are still part of the cultural landscape (cf. Höfer 1979). Crudely sketched, the *maṇḍala* map demarcates concentric zones that are roughly identical with the hierarchy of the town's social topography. Closeness to the center indicates higher caste. For instance, on the *maṇḍala* map the central zone demarcated by the three Ganesh sanctuaries encloses the "ideal" residential quarters of the Brahmins. This quarter is also closely affiliated with the Malla palace, the center of political power. Other castes are plotted on the map according to prestige and statues in the Hindu caste system. Other artisans, butchers, scavengers and menial laborers are located outside the inner city, and some — like the Po(n) — even outside of the city proper.

Figure 5. The "*Maṇḍala* Map" (*Yantrākāra khwopa dhya*) emplots a religiously organized space onto the cityscape of Bhaktapur, Nepal. (Painted by Madhu Krishna Chitrakar in 1997, and based on older prototypes [cf. Klöver 1976; Levy 1990:153].)[44]

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through a *maṇḍala.* In the seventeenth century, the courts and its temple were moved to the present western site. At that time, Tripurasundari lost her importance, and the court along with the new goddess Taleju were moved to their present location. In addition, one finds that the Mahālakṣmi shrine is further displaced from where it is "supposed" to be (Slusser 1982, 1:345ff.). Instead of being outside the boundaries, it is inside the city proper. Mr Chitrakar described the central mark of other *maṇḍala* paintings as either forms of the god Bhairava or of Vishvakarmā (Grieve 2002, 2003a).

[44] Anne Vergati submitted a paper, titled "The Representation of Newar Towns in Paintings," on this subject in a conference, held 19–22 June 2003 at the Institute of Indology and Central Asian Studies, University of Leipzig.

The "symbolic meaning" of *maṇḍalas* has been well explored by Western scholarship (cf. Argüelles 1972; Jung 1972; Tucci 1961; to name only a few). Yet, if one attempted to understand such images as the "*Maṇḍala Map*" as "a circular diagram used for concentrating cosmic psychic energy," one would be mislead (Rawson 1973:211). Instead, as Alfred Gell argues for "non-western" art in general, to understand the efficacy of *maṇḍalas* for configuring space, one needs to analyze them as a form of religious technology (1992, 1993, 1998).[45] Gell's analysis correlates to the notion of the *maṇḍala* as a *yantra*, "a mystical diagram believed to posses magical or occult powers" (Stutley and Stutley 2003:347).[46] Simply, in the light of Gell's work, the "*Maṇḍala* Map" should not be reduced to either an aesthetically appreciated artwork, nor as a symbol that mimetically represents the city. Rather, it should be analyzed as a piece of religious technology by which Bhaktapur's traditional space is generated.

Using Gell's notion of cultural technology to understand the "*Maṇḍala* Map" is supported by the work of the French scholar of Asian religion Paul Mus (1975, 1998).[47] Mus argues that such objects as the "*Maṇḍala* Map" are not symbols that represent an ontological essence, but are rather a type of prototypical god whose ceremonies produce the lived territory of the city. He calls the geographic logic of the *maṇḍala* "cadastral," a term which refers to a public record, survey, or map of the value, extent, and ownership of land. According to Mus, what cadastral sign-objects have in common is that they are not merely symbols that represent the territory, but "blue-prints" on which the territory is based. As Mus repeatedly argues, the cadastral sign's "value was not conventional, but constructive" (Mus 1998:85). As such, the aforementioned *Maṇḍala* Map is perceived as a magical diagram (nb. *yantrākāra*) which produces the space of Bhaktapur (nb. Kwopa) as a god (nb. *dhya*).

What are the cultural logics by which such images configure the space of the city? Mus schematizes the cadastral cosmological generation in three interrelated positions: the divine, the sacred, and the human. The cadastral divine/sacred/human pattern involves a radical disjunction between the plane of the divine, which is constituted by the ineffable, and the plane of the sacred, which is constituted by the concrete sacrificial action that ceremonially produces it. On one hand is the ineffable divine; on the other is the human position. Between the two is the sacred, which, for the duration of the ritual, concretizes the divine by furnishing it with "eyes and ears" (Mus 1975:14; 1998:106).[48] The key to Mus's cadastral theory of how such *maṇḍalic* space is generated is the logic of projection. For instance, to create the cadastral cosmos, the "*maṇḍala* map" projects two vectors: (1) a connoted "vertical" (↑) *nirvāṇic* and (2) a denoted "horizontal"

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[45] Gell quite consciously uses "primitive art" rather than "non-western" (cf. 1992:41 n. 1). For obvious reasons I retain non-western. In his final posthumous work, Gell attempts to generalize his theories to include "western" art work (1998).

[46] As Gell's work suggests, to understand religious art objects one needs to divorce one's analysis not only from notions of theology, but more importantly from the "cult" of aesthetic appreciation (Gell 1992, 1998). Gell's argument rests on two linked assertions. The first is that most non-western art is not primarily geared for "aesthetic" appreciation. The second is the rejection of linguistic analogies that have driven so many semiotic and symbolic analogies of art—that is, the axiomatic assumption that art is a matter of *meaning* and *communication*. Instead, Gell theorizes art as forms of technology by which people affect their world.

[47] For Mus, cadastral sign objects consist of such things as Buddha statues, *lingums*, and temples. Yet, for Mus, the cadastral object par excellence is the stupa, which he understands as a three-dimensional *maṇḍala* (Mus 1998).

[48] In Mus's words, cadastral rituals, through a logic of rupture, "while opening up commerce with the beyond, did allow the problem of its ultimate nature to be avoided: [because] they were based on the refusal to mix the transcendent in our understanding" (Mus 1998:67).

(←→) *samṣāric* aspect. It is through these two simultaneous projections (←↑→) that *maṇḍalic* territories are made.[49] Utilizing these two projections, the human group not only interacts with the divine, but also through the sacred, it "collectively ... acquires its right to the land by means of this intermediary" (Mus 1975:44).

To map how the cadastral projections create territory, let me start with the divine signification. Through a connoted "vertical" element, the local cadastral deity is projected out of human intelligibility altogether. In such "*nirvānic*" semiotic acts, "understanding stops" in "unintelligibility" (Mus 1998).[50] In cadastral logic, the ultimately unknowable *divine* element is always just out of reach. It is a teleological point that can be pointed to, but never represented. Yet, this *nirvāṇic* "nothing" is key for producing religiously organized *maṇḍalic* space because this unknowable point is a zenith on which the cosmos is tethered.[51] In the Kathmandu Valley, such cadastral geographic logic has long been a way of organizing territory. For instance, a seventeenth- century manuscript, the *Dhyānasamuccaya,* lists the many-faced god Brahma, or Urdhva, as the guardian of the Zenith. A second god, Adha, is seen to rest in the nadir of the nether world (Nepal–German Manuscript Preservation Project, Reel no. E 916/20).

In the "*Maṇḍala* Map," the center image is Tripurasundarī, and she Map," the center image is Tripurasundarī, and she is signified as both the cosmological zenith, and as the ruling goddess of the city. Mr Chitrakar described the central mark of other *maṇḍala* paintings as either forms of the god Bhairava or of Vishvakarmā (Grieve 2002, 2003a). Such zenith deities are crucial for the generation of cadastral space because they emplot religiously organized space onto the territory through a two-step process. First, a polar deity — such as Bhairava, Vishvakarmā *and* Tripurasundarī — is "piggy-backed" on the divine indexical projection upwards toward a "zenith" point (Mus 1998:274–76). This sky point, at the horizon of discourse (the edge of unintelligibility), is the overlap between the divine and human worlds' aspects. From the zenith point, the cadastral geographic logic projects out a horizontal this-worldly (*samsāric*) element, which produces the lived world.[52] Second, as described above, the horizontal this-worldly projection is "pinned" to the landscape through both material and virtual referents.

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[49] As Mus writes: "One [vector] is the description of *saṃsāra*, the other is the orientation towards *nirvāṇa*" (1998:327).

[50] Mus also refers to this as the *nirvāṇic* element. According to Mus, this creates a "mystery" whose significance in Buddhism is glossed by the term "*nirvāṇa*" (Mus 1936). *Nirvāṇa* is not merely an empty space, but a nowhere, a not-yet, a non- created space (1998:316). As Mus writes: "The *nirvāṇa* is neither existence nor nonexistence, neither one and the other, nor the negation of the two" (1998:272). As Stephan Beyer has translated Nāgārjuna's definition of *nirvāṇa*: it "isn't is, (isn't isn't) isn't is, and isn't isn't isn't is and isn't" (1974:214).

[51] For example, Mus gives the following analogy: "one wins a young girl's love by acting on her footprints" (1998:67). In the same way as the young girl's footprints are understood to draw one towards the object of desire, lotuses, wheels, and thrones are so many magical material *traces* that have a projective value (1998:109–10). For instance, a symbolic representation of the act of projection can be seen in the common South Asian symbol of the eight-petalled lotus. The lotus is an apt symbol because the flower is projected out of the muck of the earth. On it, an enthroned god is pushed above space and time (1998:268). As Mus writes, "at the center of all things, whence all things have been issued, Brahmā-Prajāpati, seated on the lotus of the ākāśa (sky)" (1998:269).

[52] 52 Mus illustrates such *samṣāric* centers of significance again utilizing the symbol of the lotus, which he describes as not just suspended above time and space, but also the center polar point which generates a particular *saṃsāra*. As Mus writes: "The lotus by its petals, being equivalent to an explicit schema of the directions of space, which its central plateau dominates as does the cosmic peak up to which the Master ascends and commands the cardinal direction" (1998:270).

Using Festival to Forge a Maṇḍala

   Suryavinayak is a new neighborhood about a five-minute walk outside Bhaktapur proper. It is part of a second wave of urbanization that has sprung up in the past fifteen years near the terminus of a trolley bus line that connects Bhaktapur with Kathmandu. However, the neighborhood did not blossom until about 1990, when building restrictions were eased, and money from tourism and other sources started to pour into the city. In 1995 the neighborhood was populated almost exclusively by Bhaktapurians from the other twenty-four wards of the city. Accordingly, it posed a problem for the ritual structure of the city. Not only for peoples' identities, but also for their placement in the social hierarchy. The people who live in Suryavinayak are usually upper caste and tend to be better off economically (they have to be able to afford a new home). In a sense, they are Bhaktapur's *nouveau riche*. However, in the *maṇḍalic* cultic structure of the city, because they live outside the pale, they are literally outcasts.[53]

The festival's flexible minimal structure is so important to people from Suryavinayak because the religious strategy usually used by most people in the neighborhood to deal with this "out-caste" status is to celebrate the major festivals in their ancestral wards. For example, during most festivals, the Gongah family returns to Bhaktapur's Khauma ward. The reason for this is simple. Most of Bhaktapur's major festivals do not have any strategy for the Suryavinayak neighborhood to participate as a group. However, the Cow Procession, within a minimally structured generative matrix, created the perfect opportunity for the inhabitants of Suryavinayak to work together as a community. Accordingly, Suryavinayak entered one of the largest, best decorated, and most costly of the Ghunipuni festival processions. This procession marched loudly and triumphantly around Bhaktapur's circumambulatory route and asserted that Suryavinayak was part of the city, thus forcing itself into the city's cultic structure.

Yet can a forged sacrifice still create a *maṇḍala*? If what is important is mechanical reproduction of structure, then no. Yet, if what is important is the strategic use of generative matrixes, then yes. While the 1995 "forged" goat sacrifice was an improvisation, it was patterned on "authentic" practices. For instance, before the actual forged sacrifice was done, a troupe of Cow Procession dancers first led the goat around Bhaktapur's festival route and then to the temple. The troupe then worshipped the victim and affixed colored pigments and flowers to its body and head. They then made gestures of respect and chanted a special beast mantra. People waited for the sign of assent — a shaking of the goat's body. At first, the goat seemed to be reluctant, so sacred water, uncooked rice, and flowers were thrown on its body. Still, it would not give its consent, so sacred water was splashed in its ears. Finally, the goat made the proper bodily shaking movement (the same head-to-tail movement that a dog will make to dry itself off). The actual "cutting" took place, and, after the obligatory photographs, there was a feast.

So how was the sacrifice forged? During the sacrifice, when I asked Mr Gongah what we were doing, I was told that we were performing a Dewāli feast for the Cow Procession. Hearing this, I was confused, as Dewāli feasts are usually performed in the spring as a way of cementing the relations of an extended family group through the worship of a lineage deity. Our "forged"

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[53] This has changed since 1995. Currently, because of the influx of carpet factories and other small scale industry, many lower income low-pay wage earners have come to live in the area. These people are usually not Newar and come from India and from the lowlands of Nepal.

Dewāli goat sacrifice was held neither in the spring nor for an extended family group by an extended family group, but rather in August, by the neighborhood of Suryavinayak, for the Cow Procession. At the time of the sacrifice, I asked Mr Gongah's son Sanjeev why the neighborhood was celebrating a Dewāli celebration when it wasn't spring and when we weren't an extended family group. He smiled and said, "Because we feel like it." Later that night, still confused, I brought up the question again with Mr Gongah. At that time, we were watching a program on professional wrestling. He wanted to know if the wrestling was real, and I told him that it was fake. The fake wrestling got us talking about the sacrifice. He said that the sacrifice at Suryavinayak was *real*, and that the feast was *real* but at the wrong time; therefore, they were forged. Moreover, he said that they had had the feast because it was the only time the neighborhood could come together. He added that the feast was held at his house as a kind of honor, since it should have been held somewhere else, such as a mother goddess shrine. He had become the *Nāyā:*, or head of this *ad hoc* forged religious organization (nb. *guthi*). The goat sacrifice was considered to be forged not because the victim was spared or because the ritual was faulty, but because it was the *right* festival at the *wrong* time.

But why was it important to celebrate the right festival at the wrong time? The Suryavinayak festival goat sacrifice was a ceremony that occurred during the Cow Procession's Gunhipunhi. During the last evening of these nine full days, people celebrate whatever they want: some create brand new festivals, others undergo fictive rites of passage (*samskāra*) and marriages, and still others celebrate festivals that should be conducted at other times of the year. In a giant cacophony, the many different festivals bump and intertwine their way around the procession route. The music and dance alternate between that which is proper for each forged procession and the ever-present beat of Ghe(n)tān Ghesi(n) *twa*. Again, men dress in costume, the satirical element being much more prevalent than during the Cow Procession proper. But, come midnight and the ringing of the bell that marks the start of Krishna's birthday, the period of carnival ends and the city returns to normal.

The expense and effort of the forged sacrifice was a way for the neighborhood to claim its right to Bhaktapur's *maṇḍalic* territory. Yet, for this claim to stick, other practices also had to be "forged." For instance, the neighborhood's *maṇḍalic* value was also heightened by the strategic use of the goat sacrifice and the Dewāli feast. Each of Bhaktapur's twenty-four wards has a Ganesha temple at its center where most ritual activity for the area takes place. The Suryavinayak neighborhood lacked such a temple and, instead, appropriated the Suryavinayak temple as its neighborhood center. (During 1996, a new Ganesh shrine was built in the center of the vicinity.) The Suryavinayak temple is traditionally not associated with any particular ward or even with Bhaktapur itself, but instead is one of four Ganesha shrines that circle the greater Kathmandu Valley. By doing the sacrifice at this temple, the members of the neighborhood strategically borrowed the deity and used it to give their own neighborhood a maṇḍalic center.

The Cow Procession's festival practices were also used to spread their version of reality throughout a larger territory. A clear expression of this is through the use of material offerings. During the Cow Procession people along the procession route hand out *kiga:* (uncooked rice) to the troupe. As the troupe proceeds around the city, its members are also offered material offerings of fruit, water, rice, sugar, and alcohol spirits (np. *raksi*, nb. *aelā*). Simple refreshments

are offered by many households, and more complicated offerings are given by people in mourning, as well as by the neighborhood and other charitable associations.

Beyond the creation of a center, material offerings were used in the forged Dewālī feast to impose a social structure modeled on the forged Dewālī feast to impose a social structure modeled on an extended family hierarchy. A Dewāli feast is usually a way of cementing the relations of an extended family group through the worship of a lineage deity. By appropriating the Ganesha image and contextualizing it in the ritual structure of a Dewāli ritual (a ritual normally undertaken for the extended family), the neighborhood in effect imposed this extended family structure onto the neighborhood. This contextualization included the creation of a hierarchy through the disruption of the *siu*, the eight parts of the goat's religious capital-filled head. As I described above, after the sacrifice, the goat's head was cut off and placed on a metal offering plate that also contained other food items. This plate was then set in front of the Ganesha image as food. After the mandatory photos, members of the troupe then took the head, flowers, and rice back as material offerings. These material offerings were then brought back to the Gongah home for the feast that followed. Toward the end of the feast, as everyone was sharing in the sacrificial meal of goat meat, the head was divided into eight parts, and these were distributed in a hierarchical fashion to the eight highest ranking social members of the group. These portions (*siu*) are hierarchically arranged in descending importance: right eye, left eye, right ear, left ear, nose, tongue, right mandible, and left mandible. Thus, the symbolic capital created by the forged goat sacrifice, and transmitted through the material offerings, was used to make an imagined world real.

Conclusion: Forging Maṇḍalic Realities
At first, the forged goat sacrifice may have seemed an enigma. Why would anyone go to the time and expense of partaking in forged religious practice? What could one hope to gain? Yet, as we have seen, Cow Procession troupes do not fall from the air fully formed. Rather, they are shaped by a loose cooperation among kith and kin, neighborhood groups, as well as other city-wide and national institutions. In short, the outcome of the festival's generative matrix is not mechanical reproduction of prior rules. Nor is it created whole cloth, the pure intentional fabrication of individuals. Instead, now that we have, at least in theory, dance and drunk our way around Bhaktapur's procession route, we find that tradition can also be improvisational and creative. That is, the Cow Procession is a highly politicized generative matrix in which various groups attempt to improvise with the traditional cultural logics to create a society most in conformity with their interests.

Or more to our current question, if we situate the forged sacrifice in the Cow Procession's generative matrix, we find that the people of Suryavinayak performed the sacrifice to "stretch" the traditional space of the city by "forging" a new *maṇḍala*. The forged sacrifice is significant, then, because it demonstrates that traditional religious cultural logics, like *maṇḍalization*, are not static essences that move unchanged across time and space. Moreover, while in Bhaktapur the roots of some of these religious practices, such as the Cow Procession, can be traced to pre-modern times, they are archaic neither in the Enlightenment sense of being outmoded nor in the Romantic sense of being static and timeless. They are adaptive and improvisational, being shaped and reshaped in response to changing circumstances and new situations. Such creative elements problematize theories that posit religion (and especially Hinduism) as blind repetition

and thus strips people of their agency, and thereby distorts the role gods play in South Asia. In such perennial understandings, at best people are posited as carriers of a reified religion as it is abstracted in a stable and immutable set of scriptures or as the reflection of a preexisting ideology. At worst, religion is dismissed as distorting superstition. Moreover, perennial theories of Hinduism create an epistemological reduction in the material by dictating what material is proper for study, and also limit the interpretation of this material to a reified brahmanic understanding. In short, what causes perplexion is not the goat sacrifice, but rather the available theories by which it can be interpreted. Yet, as soon as one interprets celebrations such as the Cow Procession with a theory of religious agency, any perplexity falls away. What is left are clear indications of peoples' creative and improvisational use of traditional culture.

Still, while not blind imitation, the sacrifice was patterned on past tradition. What the Cow Procession demonstrates then, in an oblique Marxist sense, is that, while people make their own reality, they do not make it just as they please. And they make it not under circumstances they themselves have chosen, but under circumstances found, given, and historically transmitted. As the goat sacrifice shows, people do have a choice in what they do and imagine. Yet, these choices are not completely random or unencumbered. In the tug-of-war between goals and possibilities, what the Cow Procession shows is that one of the most important uses of tradition is to forge new lived worlds. This implies neither a dichotomy with modernity, the holding of radically different views, nor even overt conflict and struggle. It does imply, however, that by cobbling together the divine, people can improvise so as to fashion new lived realities based upon traditional models.

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