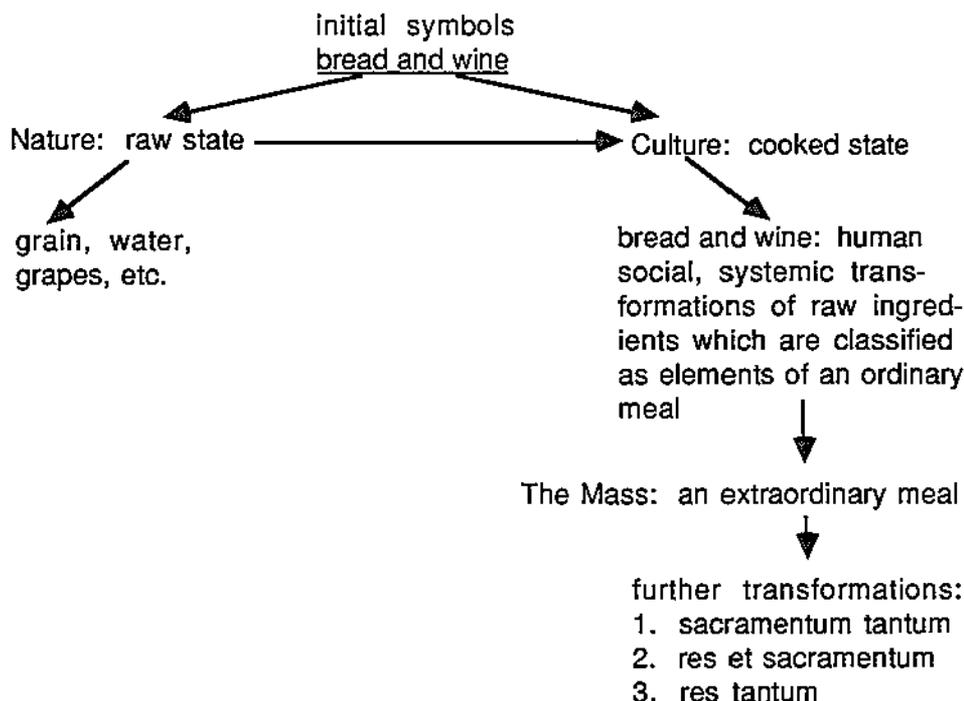


THE MISSA MAJOR

Section II Semantic Transformations in the Mass

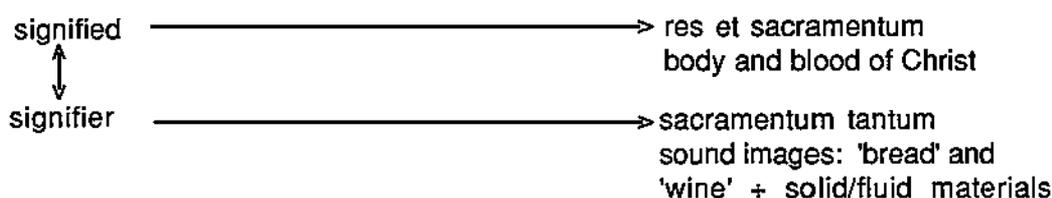
As the primary symbols of transformation in the Missa Major are those of bread and wine, it is useful to approach the matter in the following way:



The technical theological terms, listed under the heading 'further transformations' bear the following meanings: *sacramentum tantum* is, literally, 'the sacrament only', i.e. just the sign. In our terminology, the 'signans' (or, in Saussurian terms, the 'signifier'); the sensible elements. *Res et sacramentum* means the sign plus the reality, and *res tantum* is the ultimate reality which combined, numbers one and two signify.

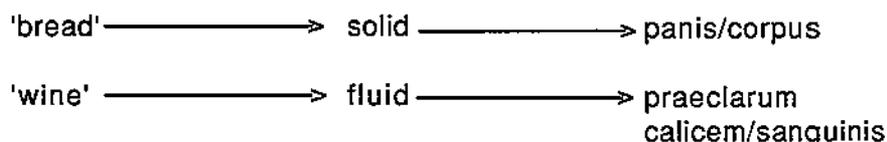
Clearly, bread and wine are already human, sociocultural transformations from natural raw materials on an ordinary everyday level in many human civilizations. Bread and wine have, and still do, represent staple foods for many (although not all), peoples throughout the world, ancient or modern. At this level, their presence signifies an ordinary meal. They also represent an obvious contrast between solid and liquid foods. As they appear, simply as signs of a meal, bread and wine are regarded by priests as *sacramentum tantum*, the *signans* (i.e. the 'signifier'). The *signatum* (i.e. the signified) to which the sensible signs refer is *res et sacramentum*, an

intermediate term in the liturgical scale of semantic transformations which is 'the body and blood of Christ', thus the following is the case:



In the Missa Major, the solid (bread) is associated with the body, and the fluid (wine) is associated with the blood of Jesus Christ.

The violence of the death, i.e. the 'breaking' of the physical body of Jesus and the 'pouring' out of the blood of the man are remembered with the semantic acts of *breaking* the bread and *pouring* out of the fluids, wine and water. That is to say that

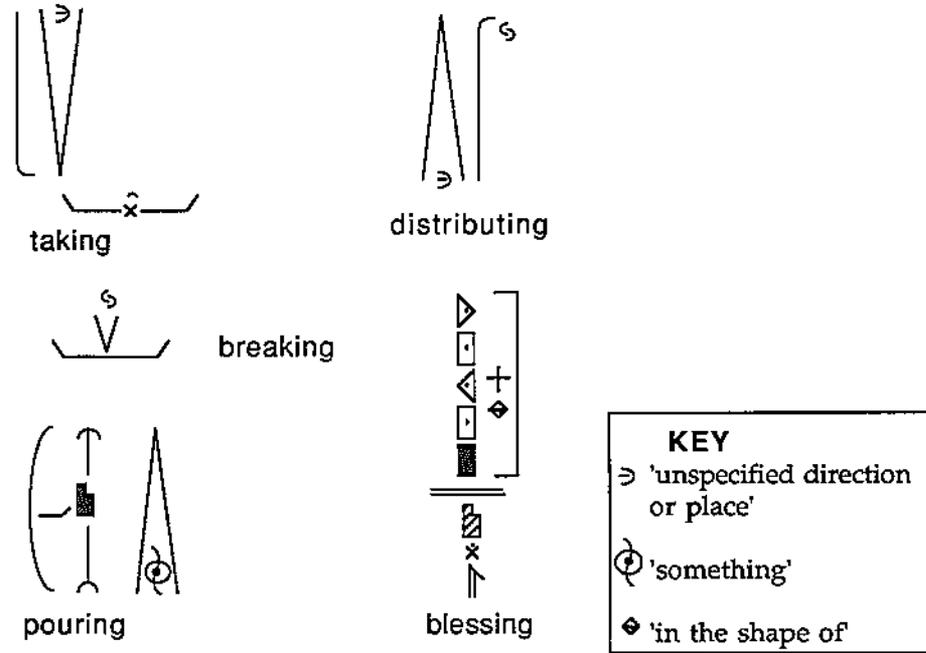


The Mass owes its essential non-vocalized structure to four acts of Jesus, i.e. *taking*, *blessing*, *breaking*, and *distributing*. The pouring is associated with breaking and classified with it. Distributing is sometimes called giving. Following the beginning of the Offertory (the *taking* of the elements), these *acts* have primacy.

These fundamental action signs of the celebrants can be written as generalized moves. That is, the five acts written at the top of the next page have the combined referential value in the context of the Mass of bringing about the unity of the ecclesial body of Christ in his grace, which is the ultimate reality which the sacrament of the Mass is meant to bring about, i.e. *res tantum*.

Words (i.e. the conventional linguistic signs), have primacy in everything which occurs in the Mass up to the Offertory. After that, the Mass is based on what Jesus *did*. It is these acts that form the principles upon which the continuity of the Mass rests.

The property that spoken language shares with all sign systems is its *indexical* nature (see Urciuoli 1994: 189), and the Mass is an excellent example of a *performative index* that reveals a universe peculiar to the Dominican Roman Catholic system.



The five essential acts of the Mass.

The first two terms (*sacramentum tantum* and *res et sacramentum*) mapped onto the action sign structures of the ministers combine to produce *res tantum* i.e. the whole church, or in the terms used today, the mystical body of Christ. The rite of the Mass as a totality is a signifier for *res tantum*. Clearly, there can be no separation of words from actions here (unless spurious), or, a separation of these elements used for purely analytical and teaching purposes.

The old Catholic rite was not adequately defined or understood solely by its empirically perceivable situations, but by its semantic permutations and transformations. It would not be going too far to say that rites of equal depth and complexity of structure, wherever they are found in the world, are only definable on comparable *multi-dimensional* levels. Thus, the nature/culture distinction is of primary importance: wheat is nothing but wheat until a human being contemplates it bearing the image of bread in mind.

A man or woman distributing bread around a table, seeing that it is shared out among a family, is already sharing out the notion of human community, for while the seeds of wheat drained the soil of energy and the wheat appears 'naturally', people must cut the wheat, thrash it, grind it, then make it into flour out of which they can make dough and bake it before *bread* appears. There are numerous transformations of energy involved. In so far as ordinary bread requires those processes and acts entailing those kinds of transformations, it can and has been assigned the symbolic values of human life, human community and love.

The Eucharistic Feast, the extraordinary meal under examination (regardless of whether it is believed in or not), involves further symbolic transformations, not to be confused with cooking transformations or chemical transformations. Cooking and some chemical transformations define the boundaries between nature and culture. The transformations in the Missa Major pertain to *inner* transformations through which the participants themselves become "new" creations. There is a sense in which understanding these transformations means understanding through individual experience, but the important point is that the Mass involves *three further levels of signification*. The formal exteriorization of the religion begins with these.

Wheat seeds can only become wheat. The seeds of thorns or grapes can only become thorn bushes or grape vines. Bread, crowns of thorns or wine indicate human semantic transformations which symbolize love, grief and compassion. These are surely not "mystical" ideas which are not open to interpretation and understanding. A pile of rocks is nothing but a pile of rocks until a human being contemplates it with an image of a house, a shop, shrine or mosque; a school, synagogue, cairn or a cathedral in mind. The ways in which these transformations are justified are the measures of the civilizations of human beings and they are the measure of the real ritual or spiritual life of a people. Perhaps there are peoples in the world who have no religion or who make no attempts to justify their existence as individuals or as a people, but social anthropological evidence tends to cast doubt on this.¹[see p. 51]

To have meals, paper, mosques, cathedrals, aircraft, plastics, electricity and soap powder -- all the material trappings of civilization -- fields are denuded, animals killed, the energies of people utilized and on occasion, one people kills another so that the system can survive. To create, people annihilate heat, animals, piles of rock and stands of forest. To create society they drain the energy of metals, oil, water and people, yet it is in these transformations that the humanity and the spirit of humanity lies.²

To draw attention to the distinction between nature and culture is not merely to point to the difference between a rock pile and a cathedral. The distinction also points towards mathematics, geometry, architecture, philosophy, theology, art, language -- and bread and wine, or their equivalents in terms of religious symbols among other communities of human beings. And these are beings who, unlike animals, are symbolically inclined. They do not in ordinary circumstances consume food in the way animals do or live in unstructured, natural spaces. They have insisted upon having more or less elaborate rituals which celebrate the continuous processes of passage and of transformations of which their lives consist.

Important Aspects of the Use of Spoken Language in the Mass

It will be noticed that the names for the central symbols of the Mass, i.e. bread and wine, are nouns, whereas the names for the central symbolic actions of the rite are present participles and they also partake of the nature of gerunds. Often, the priest speaks of Jesus during the Mass in the *third person, simultaneously* performing gestures "*in persona Christi*" in the *first person*. For example, a priest will say (addressing God) "Jesus *took* bread", and at the same time, he *takes* bread, there and then. Or, a priest reads a Collect and reads it *in persona Christi*, but then refers to Jesus at the end of it in the *third person*. The personification never reaches a stage where there is complete identification.³ In older Latin "low" Masses, priests were *in persona Christi* during the entire span of the Mass because in those Masses, they did everything. In the Missa Major, it will be noticed from the movement text that the priest does everything in the sense that he sanctions or blesses everything, but this is because the paradigm for the high Mass was the low Mass.⁴

There is an important sense in which priests can be said to play the role of Jesus, thus there is an important area of internally motivated action where a liturgical model and a dramaturgical model overlap, *but not completely*. It is not a case of 'mapping' one model onto another. The relation would be best expressed by a Venn diagram. Many of my informants tended to use theatrical terms genuinely and as a matter of choice when they attempted to give accounts of what they were doing in the rite, however, there is a point where the languages of the two models *are not reversible or interchangeable* which turns around the various significances of the word 'represent' (i.e. re-present, the hyphenated term).

During a Mass, the celebrant represents Christ in the sense of *standing in for* the person of Jesus. That is, he is there as a representation of a person who

is absent. He is *commissioned* to act in the manner of an ambassador, or to *act on behalf of* Jesus in virtue of his novitiate and ordination. A dancer dancing the role of Christ⁵ is not representing the person of Jesus in the same sense -- nor is an actor who plays the part in a passion play. Although the dancer or actor may represent the figure of Christ in a dance or in a drama, he is in no sense a *steward* or an *apostle* to use the New Testament images. [N.B. The relevant Hebrew word is 'shaliach' or 'shaliah']. There are no overtones of an *ambassadorial* office. To put the matter in rather crude terms: if Jesus returned to earth in the manner in which primitive Christians thought he would do, or in terms of eschatological language of today, then priests would be out of a job, where actors and dancers who represent the figure of Christ in the theatre would not. Doubtless priests would be marked in some important way having performed their stewardship in the manner in which they do, but in the hypothetical case above, their offices would be ended, much in the same way that a steward's responsibilities come to an end when the master of the house returns.

There is one theatrical term which fits the case rather better than most: 'understudy'. If a principal actor, actress or dancer falls ill, or has to be absent for some reason, the understudy can be said to act in a given number of performances "in persona X" in somewhat the same manner as the priest acts *in persona Christi*, but even this is a limited analogy, as the understudy in the theatre might eventually replace the original actor; something which could never happen in the case of any priest or any other member of the ecclesiastical hierarchy, including the Pope. In fact, an important instantiation of "distancing" is that which occurs in a Papal Mass, where the Pope is celebrating the rite. *He does not give himself communion*. He is given it by one of the other Ministers.

Intention and the Importance of Intentions in the Missa Major

During their novitiate, monastic priests are encouraged to define their intentions very carefully regarding the bread and wine. That is, they consider the bread and the wine which is on the altar before them with special care. The reason for this is that it is only the bread and wine which is on the corporal⁶ which is consecrated.⁷ Often during a Mass there will be cruets of wine placed on one side of the altar, or there will be hosts stored in the tabernacle, but these are not consecrated simply because they happen to be in the celebrant's immediate vicinity. The priest's intention is, in fact, central. It is intention directed by *understanding* and is, therefore, regarded as *a model act of will*.

The notion of intention with regard to the Mass is far-reaching.

1. There was, for example, the intention to celebrate a Mass at all, which is what distinguished a *real* Mass from an enactment of a Mass for the purposes of teaching novices; enactments which priests referred to as *dry Masses*.
2. There was the notion of intention as it bears upon the matter being consecrated, as mentioned above, i.e. *this* bread and *this* wine, defined by their presence within the confines of the corporal,⁸ and
3. there was the matter of intention with reference to any given application of the Mass. Here, intention was defined for the whole rite by the purpose of the person giving a Mass stipend,⁹ where the priest directed his intention towards the purpose of the person who has asked for the Mass.

Intention as Spatialized, Acoustic Zones of Prayer¹⁰

To some extent, the priests intention is reflected in the three levels of prayer used in the Mass. There are three distinct acoustic levels of prayer: 1. Public prayer, which is chanted or sung aloud, written in the movement text as $\text{---}\overset{\text{C}}{\cup}$ [C= congregation, enclosed in a sign meaning 'address']. 2. Prayer which is entirely private, written in the movement text as $\text{---}\overset{\text{S}}{\cup}$ [S=self] and 3. Prayer which is spoken, but heard only by other ministers, if they are nearby, is written thus: $\text{---}\overset{\text{M}}{\cup}$ [M=ministers].

Silent prayers, i.e. those of the Canon, but including others such as those said while the priest washes his hands or incenses the altar, probably come from an old Gallican tradition of Masses which were based on a kind of *horror vacui*,¹¹ a horror of an empty space, whether acoustic or visual. In the Gallican tradition, it was not enough for the priest simply to wash his hands, he was required to "tell God", as it were, what he was doing at the same time.

It is thought by some informants that one of the possible sources of breakdown in body awareness or body consciousness (which seems to have taken place in European and English societies over the centuries and which is reflected in popular consciousness in the ways in which the body¹² is talked about and the general debasement of body language) is connected with *horror vacui* in several ways. With reference to the Mass, the silent prayers, excepting those in the Canon, such as those said while washing hands or incensing the altar, imply a split between 'self' and body, for it was not enough simply to *do* something; *to perform the action*

sign, the priest had as well to *say* what he was doing to himself at the same time

The Priestly Space

Here the notion of *commissioning* or *representation* is of primary importance and one of the chief features of a priest's commission includes transmission of the office via the laying on of hands (see Acts 6: 6 and 43: 3).

According to legend,¹³ there is a direct line of commissioning by the laying on of hands process which begins with Jesus himself. Whether or not hands actually were laid on by the apostles to the next group whom they commissioned is neither here nor there. Evidences are much stronger than is commonly thought that there was, right from the beginning, a laying on of hands in succession. There is no doubt that this method of commissioning of public office was in evidence in the society in other contexts and it had always been an element of transmission of office in Judaism before New Testament times.

The truth of this form of commissioning does not depend upon the historical reliability of the legend. There has been a continuous commissioning involving this kind of gesture in the Catholic tradition which is still maintained in ordinations of priests to this day, i.e. a priest is consecrated by a Bishop, who is one of a number of at least three Bishops who are taken to stand for the wider Church. It is in this way that a priest always comes to the congregation as one who is *commissioned* to the priestly role and not as *a man elected by* or produced from the congregation itself.¹⁴

This is independent of whether or not the congregation chooses whom it will have (of those commissioned) to minister to it, but even if the man were to come from the congregation itself, he only enters the priestly space by commission from outside. A priest is *never a self-creation* nor an *elected* creation in a secular sense. Thus we can see that an important element of the priest's role identity and of the diachronic continuity of the role is, in fact, a gesture, which in this context signifies transmission of priestly office. Co-valent with and paradigmatic to the empirically perceivable gesture or the chain of successive gestures is the divinity of Jesus, the incarnation of the *logos*.¹⁵

Another example of this with regard to the old rite of the Mass concerns the identity of the rite itself, or how the identity of the rite was maintained during a certain period in Church history, where legitimate rites were identifiable in a given village or town in virtue of the celebrant's initial

possession of a small piece of a host which had been consecrated by the Bishop of the diocese. This bit was dropped into the chalice of wine which was consecrated at the priest's first Mass in the area. Thereafter, a tiny bit was broken off and kept from one day to the next, dropped into the chalice each time and thus legitimate succession was maintained, plus the fact that people could identify a legitimate priest and rite because servers, deacons, etc. were effective monitors of the priest, and the act itself, as, for example, during the sixth and seventh centuries.

The custom was, however, discontinued long before the Dominican rite began. Although the *gesture* of mixing bread with the wine continued, the *meaning* of the gesture altered entirely from the eleventh century onwards and probably earlier. The case is relevant here as further illustration of the kinds of co-valency and continuity referred to earlier.

Accessible and Inaccessible Spaces

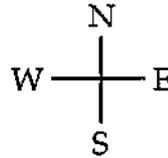
The notion of priestly space leads quite naturally into considerations of other kinds of spaces connected with the Missa Major and their relative accessibility or inaccessibility:

1. The *architectural space* (the physical space) of the church has always been open to everyone as far as the Nave is concerned. Varying conditions of accessibility to that space have prevailed over the centuries and will not detain us here.
2. Our concern is with the primary distinction in the Missa Major between *the liturgical space* (the 'L' space) of the Mass and *the geographical space* (the 'G' space) in which it is embedded.
3. Internal to the L space (i.e. $L = \{e,w,n,s\}$) there are sets of more recondite elements of spatial deixis and semantic content. There is, for example, what I have called the 'R' (or 'reserved/ritual') space of the Mass, all of which we will define by example below.

How do we *know*, that is, how can we *identify* the liturgical, semantic space of the Missa Major?¹⁶ What elements or features of space as we know it permit identification of the Mass in contrast to any other rite in the world?

The structural elements of the geographical space within which any Roman rite occurs are the familiar (so-called "cardinal") directions of North, South, East and West. We therefore can say that the 'G' (or geographical) set of elements is: $G = [N,S,E,W]$.¹⁷ The G set of elements consists of a metric space, usually represented as shown below and defined

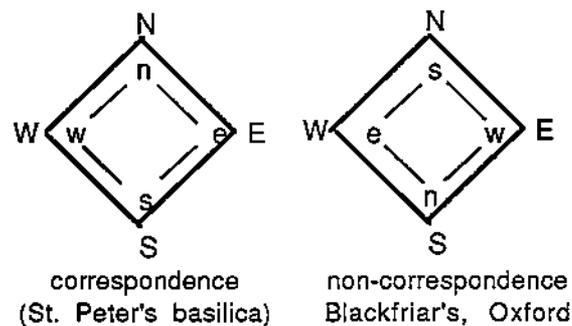
by virtue of distance, lines of latitude and longitude, and the magnetic poles of the earth, which is why 'N' and 'S' are written first.



This is a representation of a two-dimensional space.

The 'L' space for the Dominican rite (and in these broad terms, for any Roman Mass) consists of a set of the same elements, but put in a different order, that is, liturgical east, west, north and south. We may therefore say $L = \{e, w, n, s\}$. The L set of terms provides us with the conceptual and semantic 'map of the territory' so to speak. It is this space that identifies the rite as itself, and no other, because the $\{e, w, n, s\}$ possess these deictic properties: the element $\{e\}$ = the high altar, which is written in the movement text as $\{e\} = \bullet$ or the *focal point* of the semantic space of the Mass. The L set is *embedded in* the G set, but, because of its semantic properties and its indexical characteristics, it is *not the same as* the G set.¹⁸

In any Catholic church, sometimes the L set of terms corresponds with the G set and sometimes it does not. It is the L set of terms, of course, which defines the Mass in socio-linguistic terms because it is the set that defines the ritual space in terms of human meanings. Cases of correspondence and non-correspondence are diagrammed below:



For many years, it was said that a human, semantic space such as the rite of the Mass (ballets, exercise techniques, political or religious rituals and signing systems), could not be sufficiently defined and identified so that one could talk about them with the same confidence as ordinary *metric* spaces, for these could be defined and identified in ways that established their existence. Set theory changed all that, as I have illustrated in detail in Section III. There are specific properties of the L set of elements:

1. {e,w,n,s} refers to a bounded, canonical co-ordinate space. That is, all Masses take place in this kind of conceptual space, which is identifiable by the fact that {e} = the altar.
2. the set refers to 'a piece of ground', that is, the set is locatable in *real* geographical space/time, but any rite is 4-dimensional, i.e. possessing three dimensions of space and at least one of time.
3. the direction {e} is determined by where the high altar is, and by the celebrant's right and left hands (sides of body) in relation to that, because in the Missa Major, his *right* hand corresponded to the Epistle side of the altar, i.e. {s} and his *left* hand to the Gospel side of the altar, i.e. {n}. Liturgical west, i.e. {w}, was at the priest's back, and it was opposite to {e}.

We can say that {e} is the high altar, and that the high altar determines where liturgical east is. Notice, too, that the L set of elements is dominated syntactically by the east-west axis, while the G set is dominated by the North-South axis; another "nature/culture" distinction relevant to our understanding of rituals in general.

We need go no farther into the technicalities of this, although students of semasiology¹⁹ do. The purpose of this exposition is merely to indicate to the reader that this work is based on rigorous methods, and does not consist of "aesthetic criteria", "hearsay" and the like. Enough has been specified here to give a reader a clear idea of how a liturgical space is derived from a geographical space and how, in the case of the Roman rite, it does or does not correspond with the G set of elements.²⁰ Having specified the G and L sets of spatial elements, we shall now talk about the 'R' space of the Missa Major, the "sets of more recondite elements" mentioned above.

The Inaccessible Space of the Mass

During any given time when the Missa Major was being celebrated, someone could be in the church building while the Mass was taking place but could not enter into the rite in its fullness *if they were in a state of ritual impurity*. That's to say there were prohibitions about receiving communion if fasts had not been observed and if absolution had not been previously granted. In technical theological language, *if an individual wasn't in a state of grace the 'R' space (the 'ritual' space) could not be penetrated*. It made no difference whether the person was a lay person or a "religious". An interesting, if slightly tangential point is that frequent receiving of communion is a comparatively novel phenomenon in the history of the Church and has only been encouraged for roughly ninety or

one hundred years. Before that, if someone from the laity received communion more than once a month (it was more usual for people to receive communion, say, once or twice a year), it was thought to be excessive.²¹

With regard to the Missa Major, penetration of the 'R' space had to be done by doing something extra: by making additional effort. Prior effort and abstentions resulted in *a positive act* of going forward to take communion on the part of congregations. One of the most obvious shifts in emphasis that occurred since the paradigmatic changes of spaces and languages in Masses since Vatican II is that *the positive act* with regard to communion in the new rites has come to be that of *abstention*.

In contemporary Catholic Masses, everybody who is in the church is automatically there as a full participant. In some way, everyone is now a 'performer'. There is no longer any need to penetrate the 'R' space of the Mass, *because everybody is assumed to be already in it*, thus when the invitation is given to communicate, there is a sense in which *withdrawal* becomes the positive act of *private* communion.

Formerly, accessibility to the heart of the Missa Major could only be gained by positive *additional* acts because *accessibility was not given as a pre-condition*. Presence in the architectural space meant just that and nothing more, thus taking communion was *a self-posed act* in that context. Now, the laity is committed to take communion simply by being in the church, therefore, the self-posed act -- any additional effort involved -- is *not* to communicate.

Communication is not in any case something which *came out of* the priestly space (or the segment of the physical space of the church called the sanctuary) *to* the congregation. Communication occurs for members of the congregation by being taken up into the whole story (if they so wish) which is being thankfully told: a feature of the situation which is derived from the general notion of blessing, explained on p.13 of this essay.

The Significance of the 180° Turn of the Celebrant

In the Missa Major, priests, ministers, brethren and congregation all faced liturgical east. We may well ask, "why *east*, not some other directional unit? The following texts from Psalm 67 (Douay) reveal the answer. [N.B. These texts do not appear in the King James version of the Bible]:

verse 5: Sing ye to God; sing a psalm to his name; make a way for *him*
who ascendeth upon the west . . .

7: God who maketh man of one manner *to dwell in a house . . .*

34: . . . who mounteth above the heaven of heavens, *to the east . . .*
 (all italics supplied).

'Ascending upon the west' in the first text has the meaning of the oppositions east/light/dawn in contrast to west/dark/sunset. This is, of course, a theological metaphor by which the Divinity is associated with light, illumination, understanding in contrast to the darkness of ignorance, confusion and absence of understanding. The 'manner of dwelling in a house' can be taken to mean a structured space -- a 'lived space'²² -- and verse 34 is a positive statement of the negative formulation in verse 5.

It is important to note that in the third and fourth centuries before people knew that the earth was round, there was a much more literal association between liturgical east and geographical east. There is evidence that people expected that the *literal* 'Lord' would appear from the geographical direction of east. In the Missa Major, however, liturgical east is established by the fact that at the consecration the priest is *in persona Christi*, and that the Lord therefore "comes" via the consecrations and subsequent communion *from the altar*, which is why the high altar was liturgical east in the semantic space of the High Mass. It is thus that the priest, the altar, and the actions of taking, breaking, blessing, pouring and distributing are irreducible elements of the rite regardless of its formal exteriorizations.

The point is that *in the rite under consideration, everybody, including the celebrant, faced liturgical east*. The priest acted *on behalf of* the brethren in the Choir and the laity. He acted, in that rite, instead of Jesus, *in persona Christi*. The liturgy of the Missa Major (defined, we remember, as an act of public worship on the part of the congregation) was simply one aspect of the public work (in the priestly definition of *leitourgia*) which the priest performed in virtue of his novitiate, his vows and his ordination.

As we are now moving towards an analysis of the rite based on an examination of the movement text of the Mass, we can begin to move away from common language and towards a more precise technical language in which matters can be expressed which are outside the realm of common experience. The powers and capacities of the priestly role can be summarized in the following proposition: *If $c_1, c_2, c_3, \dots, c_n$, then x will y in virtue of z .*

That is to say that if the conditions ($c_1, c_2, c_3, \dots, c_n$) of postulancy, vows, celibacy, and such are fulfilled, then 'x' (the priest) will 'y' (celebrate Mass, perform baptisms, and the rest of his duties) in virtue of 'z', which begins with his ordination, whence comes his commission which in turn will continue throughout his life as a priest. In the Catholic tradition, the ordination was supported by daily efforts, secular and divine offices and much else which is outside the scope of this ethnographic account of the rite itself.

The priestly space in the Missa Major was located precisely *between* that of the people and the Divinity. The priest had functions both *vis-à-vis* the congregation and the Divinity, as we have shown, through the person of Jesus. In earlier times and in many cases now, this relation was reflected in deictic elements of funeral rites, specifically those of direction. Lay Catholics were buried with their feet pointing towards the east, but priests were buried with their heads pointing towards the east, their deaths identifying them completely with the Divinity.²³

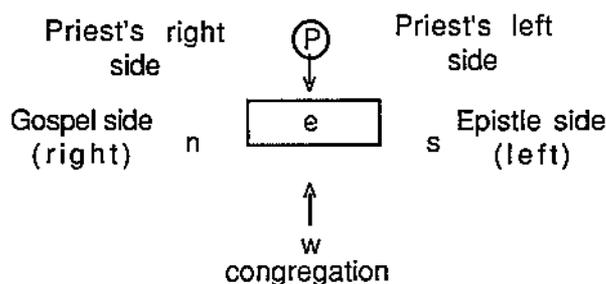
In the Missa Major, it was the priest's *mortality* which identified him directionally, i.e. facing east, *with* the congregation. The point one would want to make here is that the priest's facing the same direction as the congregation came somehow to be interpreted as having his back to the congregation in the sense of *not* being identified with them. It was evidently thought that what was needed was to encourage (or establish) a greater sense of participation and social community in the rite. As we proceed, the matter of the public/private distinction will doubtless become clearer. Keep in mind that it has so far been used with reference to prayer, to the definition of liturgy in two senses, and in relation to the act of communion.

In the Catholic tradition of worship, and indeed, of living, it was assumed (pre-Vatican II and for some years following) that there is a wide range of personal involvement and emotional commitment to Christianity on the part of everyone concerned -- clergy and congregation alike. Personal or individual, basically emotional commitments to worship, meditation, prayer, pious acts of various kinds and such were assigned to private, not to public aspects of religious practice. This is part of the reason for the contemplative orders, of course (see Williams, 1975a for more thorough discussion). Rites comparable to the Missa Major really belong, in the end, to the notion of a Christian society or group.²⁴

The 180° turn of the priest, in our terminology, amounts to a paradigmatic-structural change in the rite because it involved a change along the

The equation, " $L = \{e,w,n,s\}$ " at the bottom of the diagram means that the liturgical space of the rite is comprised by the set of elements, east, west, north, south. The elements of this set were, so to speak, *invisible*. That is, they were unobservable because they were conceptual. They were the "p-structural" concepts upon which the observable actions of the celebrants depended. Ardener called these the *programmatically* elements of the rite.

On an s-structural level, confusion arises with regard to the priest's identity and orientation because turning him around literally raised the question of *who* it is celebrating the Mass. Is the priest now *behind* the altar, in which case his right side corresponds with liturgical north and his left with liturgical south? In that case, the new rites are oriented from the priest's standpoint in the following way:

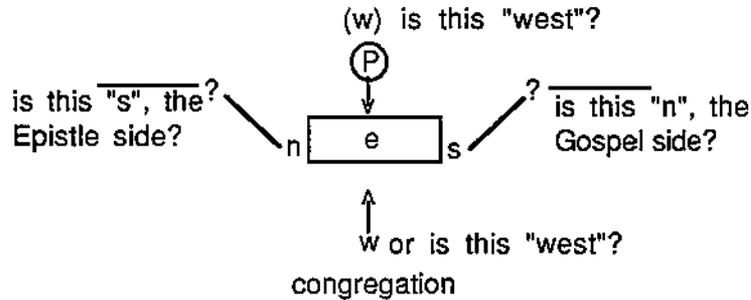


Theologically, the Divinity is now *immanent*, not transcendent. That is, the Divinity seems to be placed *between* the priest and the congregation. The priest is now located (as if in da Vinci's painting, in the visual position of *being* Jesus, and in some odd sense he is being a host, as at a dinner table.²⁶

Some Dominican informants told me they simply celebrated 'new' Masses as if they were in the same relation to the *altar* as they had been in the old rite (as if liturgical west were still *behind* them), so that the congregation "just happened" to be in front of them. They maintained their concepts of the transcendence of the Divinity, and proceeded as if nothing had happened. They had less personal problems with the changes, but they were aware that their congregations didn't have the same luxury of choice, nor did some of their colleagues, who couldn't make this kind of conceptual and practical shift.

While in theory (or in the notional 'program' -- the p-structural level), the priest is still a steward and a mediator, the spatial change has in fact clouded (or even removed) him from these roles (which involved full cognizance of his mortality and humanity), to the role of representing

Jesus in a quite different sense. Many floating anxieties and frustrations; the general uneasiness with the situation in the 'sixties and early 'seventies (and even now) could be attributed to this, I think. Turning the priest around *closed the space and generated a confrontation*. The spatial relationships in the old rite did not do this.



During the 15 year period following Vatican II, some priests didn't visualize their relation to the new spatial structures of the liturgy in terms of the adjustment described earlier and it is here (for them) the difficulty appeared, as the diagram immediately above indicates. In this situation, some rather strange deictic and categorical distortions resulted. Confusion was generated, but *the basis of the confusion was never identified*. Spatial disorientation may affect different individuals to different degrees, but it is undoubtedly an important factor in knowing *who* we are and *where* we are, and in a Mass, *what* we are doing.

The crises were expressed in terms of "individuality", and in constant appeals to "emotions" or "charisms". One could elaborate on this problem from informants' accounts, but it would contribute little to do so.

In the old Mass, it was possible for a priest to celebrate the rite decently, even though his emotional commitment or personal involvement in any given celebration of the rite might vary. Because the space in the old rite was *open*, (and based on the notion of transcendence), it gave all who were concerned "somewhere to go" psychologically and mentally. In the old rite, God could be thought of as "out there" or "up there" for those who preferred to think in such literalistic spatial terms. In those same terms, in many of the new rites, the Divinity was suddenly projected "down here" or "in between" the celebrant and the congregation. The Divinity was now *in the midst* of the situation and there was (and I think, still is) an uneasy suspicion that neither the clergy, nor the congregation -- far less the vernacular languages -- could cope with it. It represented a shift from transcendence to immanence, although the shift was never made explicit.

In the *Missa Major*, the priest had the security of knowing that the *sacramentum convivium* was unable to fall below a certain level of dignity of expression. In the present rite, priests either seem to fall short of an adequate performance of the Mass and the whole thing is rather haphazard and untidy, or it tends to become theatrical in a wholly non-professional and pejorative sense of that term. Dominican friars are not actors -- or at least, they never had been. While they were not in general unacquainted with the discipline of the theatre, intellectually they were unacquainted with it experientially. Nor were they familiar with the techniques and disciplines of theatrical role-playing. In particular, they weren't trained as dancers (and to a lesser extent, actors) were trained from the outset in the usages of symbolic gesture.

On the whole, priests were (and are) extremely self-conscious about gesture in the present proliferation of rites, and for that matter, so are most European, British and many American congregations. Perhaps it is asking too much of priests, and of a committed laity, even to attempt *wholly* (and publicly) to be absolutely involved with every celebration. Apart from this, the emphasis on 'personal', 'individual' expressions that Vatican II changes didn't demand, to be sure, but certainly implied, has led to all manner of improvisations and choreographies of Masses, such that people expressed their dismay in editorial columns of newspapers, where they alluded to "liturgical bingo" and similar sarcasms. It seems both trivial and superficial to interpret all these complaints as the results of "hide-bound conservatism", "reactionary attitudes", "unwillingness to change" and such. In basically materialistic and pragmatically orientated societies (specifically, I speak of English-speaking worlds), it may be that a rite demanding public commitment to an immanent, not to a transcendent, Divinity is stretching things a bit too far. Perhaps immanence doesn't belong to public rites that are repeated over and over.

It is just here, of course, that the values of formalized gesture and structured ritual spaces with regard to human communities can be seen. Public ritual exteriorizes certain concepts, ideas and beliefs that have reference to spiritual, psychological and intellectual survival among some (or perhaps many) of a people. In this regard, we can usefully recall the formality of the structured spaces of western academic situations and the ritualized aspects of lecture and tutorial situations, for, although not homologous spaces, there are significant areas of overlap similar to those found in political ceremonies and ritual.

The *invisibility* of a structured space, of course, pertains not only to the invisible nature of the defining character of the spaces (as, e.g. the value dis-

tinctions between the liturgical directions), but also consists of the self-evidence of ritual forms to those who are familiar with them (see Farnell 1994 for further elaboration of the visible and invisible nature of action signs). Inevitably, the implications of changes of the magnitude that took place in the Mass have both the invisibility -- and the respectability -- of the *unexamined*. It is at this point, too, that we encounter distinct differences between physical distances, physical spaces, and social (or role) distances or 'spaces'. We can now usefully make just contrasts and comparisons between professional dancers and priests in order better to comprehend what is meant.

Dancers depend wholly on sets of gestures to convey the meanings of the dance they are performing, and, in the theater, the action signs and gestures they use have nearly always been composed by someone else, especially in cases of ballets. Dancers perform the same ballets over and over again, just as priests repeatedly perform Masses. It is a long-standing misapprehension (a form of mythologizing, perhaps) on the part of lay audiences to imagine that *every* performance of, e.g. Swan Lake, Checkmate or some other ballet is danced with the same degree of personal commitment, interest, and level of emotional involvement as every other performance. Members of congregations who expect priests always to celebrate Mass at high levels of personal intensity and fervour are in my estimation equally mistaken.

The Significance of Representation and Role-Playing

While it is true that dancers strive to achieve very high levels of perfection and intensity of emotional involvement at every performance, (partially because in one way of looking at things, the audience will only believe what the dancers themselves believe), it is equally true to say that they also know perfectly well that they *do not* attain their highest individual goals of perfection every time. On the one hand, their discipline (to use their term for that complex of training and knowledge which they acquire through long years of work) saves them from falling below a certain level of performance no matter how they may feel personally. On the other, it also rescues them from injuring other performers in fighting or murder scenes such as those in the ballet Checkmate.

During the professional life of a dancer, he or she will enact *many* different roles, which in all cases partake of the concepts of role-playing, rule-following and general social mores of the wider society. The Dominican friar-preacher *only enacts one role* with regard to the rite of the Mass and that has always been mediated by the notion of his *stewardship*. It is pre-

cisely here that *dramaturgical* and *liturgical* models of role-playing *do not overlap*. Another way of stating the difference would be to say that dancing is a secular profession, the priesthood is a sacred vocation.

It seems necessary to emphasize the point further in more convincing terms. Actors and dancers *do not act in persona* the kings, queens, divinities, etc. they represent in the semantic spaces of dances and dramas. If they did, we should doubtless find them forming political alliances, declaring wars, or visiting disaster or benevolence upon the world in their spare time, or at least behaving in the manner of ambassadors of the personages whom they may represent on stage. An actor who has enacted the role of a priest will not be asked by members of the audience to preside over a funeral, a baptism, a christening or a marriage. If this seems to my readers as a trivial -- or even silly -- point, I would want to say we won't know of the existence (far less the extent) of alleged social, primarily moral, universals until we have examined the features of role-playing about which I now speak.

A current, topical area of concern in this regard can be seen in the political life of modern nations and how role-playing which is generated and controlled by media coverage, not face-to-face encounters, affects campaigns, relations between politicians and their constituents. Discussion of this would, however, lead us far from our aim, which is to talk about role-playing in the theatre (a dramaturgical model of events) and in liturgies (a liturgical model of events). Further to the point, however, we know very little about the so-called universality of gesture -- a notion which is defensible from a *structural*, but not from a *semantic* point of view.

If a naive notion of the universality of gesture is correct,²⁷ then customs, traditions and generic models of socially structured spaces can be ruthlessly collapsed. That is, churches can become theatres, theatres become mediums of prophecy and/or the sites of religious events; universities can become little more than arenas for political debate or vocational schools -- but it is needless to go on with this. The point is doubtless taken that change on a *syntagmatic* level is relatively superficial, but change on a *paradigmatic* level, such as that introduced into the Catholic rite of the Mass by the many interpretations of Vatican II was profound.

Ultimately, it was this aspect of change in the Catholic church as a world-structure which initially prompted my examination of the Dominican rite of the Mass. The 180° turn of the priest was a significant, p-structural change: it ". . . reset the mode of specification of the s-structures" (Ardener, 1973: 14). That there exists in new rites considerable discontinu-

ities of all the elements is obvious. The p-structural change in the Mass triggered all kinds and types of dispositions of events.

If it is true that "The major outstanding problem in the analysis of events is to spot the triggers moving - to catch the p-component in events" (Ardener 1973: 14), then I submit that the case I've described regarding spatial orientation and the Mass is such a 'spotting'. We shall now move on to analytical features of the ethnography of the Mass, and to the notion of the changed nature of the rite.

NOTES:

¹ It is perhaps tedious to comment upon the ubiquity of religion among peoples of the world, but anthropological evidence supports the view that most, if not all human societies, possess Divinities and systems of action which are in some sense spiritual or cosmological.

² To draw attention to these kinds of transformation is, of course, to point to our inhumanity, excesses, *hubris*, and unbridled arrogance, since we seem systematically to be wrecking the physical environment and ourselves along with it.

³ A significant boundary between sanity and insanity is defined by the degrees of identification present with regard to acting a role. An individual who thinks he is Napoleon or Jesus Christ has no awareness of role-playing. The long novitiate for those aspiring to priestly Orders is to ensure that mental aberrations of this kind aren't present. Built into the combined grammars of speech and actions in the Mass, there are dislocations that distance the *social persona* of the priest while he celebrates Mass.

⁴ The high Mass is an elaboration of the low Mass where the priest read the Epistles, the Gospels, read the sermon and all. In the Missa Major, the priest makes the sign of the cross on the Gospel, although the Deacon reads it; he blesses the host and the chalice of wine, although they are prepared initially on the altar by the subdeacon, etc.

⁵ Such as, e.g. Lucas Hoving, who danced the Christ figure opposite José Limon's Judas in a contemporary dance work entitled *The Traitor*. In the ballet *Miracle in the Gorbels* the Christ figure is represented too. There are many dances of this kind, in both contemporary and classical repertoires.

⁶ The corporal is a square of linen placed over the altar stone upon which the chalice and hosts to be consecrated are located. The word 'corporal' is an adjective, i.e. a body cloth. It is a *visible* semantic boundary in the Mass which defines the usual extent of the priest's

invisible intention during the consecration. It is a little definitional field, but not in its own right.

⁷ During the period of research I was asked what happened to a bottle of wine and a loaf of bread which were seen by my questioner to be eaten by one or two old ladies sitting at the back of the nave of an Italian cathedral while a Mass was taking place in the sanctuary. The question was, "did their bread and wine get consecrated too?" Their bread and wine *were not* consecrated for the reasons regarding the priest's intention and because their bread and wine weren't on the corporal and were therefore *not included* in **THIS** bread and **THIS** wine, which the priest was consecrating.

⁸ An ethnographic case which is relevant is one that occurred in the south of Holland. A young priest was on his way to say Mass at a hospital and on his way, he was asked to attend a man who had been in a serious car accident, who was on the point of death, asking for communion. The dying man was the driver of a bread van and the contents of his lorry were scattered around him and all over the street.

The young priest had the presence of mind to spread his clean white handkerchief on the street beside the man, upon which he placed an unconsecrated host and some wine he was carrying for use in Mass at a nearby hospital. Observers of the incident questioned him afterwards because although they were Catholics, they didn't understand the significance of the handkerchief he had used in the manner of a *corporal*. They imagined he had consecrated the whole lot of bread in the immediate vicinity and that they would have to take it to the nearby seminary where the priests would then have to eat it, because no consecrated bread may remain uneaten.

⁹ In a Dominican community, stipends are given into a common fund or else the friars keep them. A friar-preacher cannot offer to say a Mass for a stipend. The request can only come from members of the congregation. The monetary value of stipends in the past was dictated by "keep for one day". While the amount of the stipend has not changed, the cost of living has, so it has obviously been a token thing for many years (it was something less than a pound in the 1970s, in 1994 it is £2). Moreover, a friar is only permitted to say one stipend Mass per day. Often, the Dominicans say Masses with intentions for the congregation and they never see the stipends, for there is a book kept in the sacristy and the amounts collected are all transferred into a common fund.

¹⁰ The technical liturgical terms for these are 1. *clara voce*, the most audible; 2. *mediocri voce* audible only to ministers; 3. *secreto (submissa voce)*, audible only to the priest.

¹¹ *Horror vacui*, i.e. horror of a vacuum or an empty space. A term widely used in the field of aesthetics, as e.g. with reference to Victorian art and decoration where nothing was allowed to be visually empty, even if it had to be covered with floriation or other designs.

12 There is great difficulty in trying to recover the Hebraic sense and meaning of the words *body* and *blood* which is a source of perplexity to Catholics and Protestants alike. Ancient Hebrew-speaking peoples associated blood with the life of the creature. In fact, there is a text in Leviticus which is explicit, i.e. (17: 11), "*Because the life of the flesh is in the blood: and I have given it to you, that you may make atonement with it upon the altar for your souls, and the blood may be for [you] an expiation of the soul*" (italics supplied).

They used the word *body* as if it were synonymous with *self*; a usage alien to post-Cartesian, common English usage of the term *self*. Their usage possesses subtleties that contemporary English usage does not, although there may be similarities in folk or vernacular usages where a person is spoken of as a 'body' as in statements like, "a body would (or wouldn't) do this or that", or, equally, references to a person as a 'soul'. Where the body is referred to reflexively, as in the majority of ballet and contemporary dancers' usage, there is more similarity to the old Hebrew meaning of the word, but this is not common usage. It seems we cannot escape the fact that we divide up the experience of our bodies in different ways -- certainly different from the Jews of Christ's time.

Couched in terms of Saussurian associational (and semantic) fields, and subjected to a thorough linguistic examination complete with the construction of those fields surrounding such terms as *body*, *blood*, *sacrifice*, *logos*, *mediator* (all key concepts with regard to the Missa Major), we would advance our knowledge in the anthropology of religion some way. In 1973-76, such analysis was beyond the scope of the research and my linguistic competence. Maybe I've provided useful pointers.

13 The word, 'legend' is here used in the sense of 'taken as though' or 'the theory is that . . .'; it does not carry the meaning of a legend in the sense of a written or an oral story.

14 There are cases of laymen ordained straight into the position of Bishop, as in the case of Ambrose, but the usual (and certainly later) practise was to *presuppose all intervening ministeries* between the office of Bishop and a lay person. It is important to note that sacramentally, nobody is over the Bishop in the Catholic Church. 'Bishop' means "over-seer", but according to my informants, it is "the fullness of ministry". Jurisdictionally, the Pope is over the Bishops, but even his jurisdiction is limited and it varies with regard to eastern and western churches. In fact, the Pope is the Bishop of Rome and Cardinals are nominally the parish priests of Rome.

15 For students of *semasiology*, this sentence would read, "Co-valent with and paradigmatic to the s-structural, empirically perceivable gesture or the chain of successive gestures is the p-structural concept of the divinity of Jesus, the incarnation of the *logos*. In our terminology, this is an example of a co-valency of t_3 and t_4 ; two levels of time associated with the rite".

16 The *identity of behaviour* is very important both in the sciences and in linguistics, which is why this exercise is necessary.

¹⁷ Square brackets, i.e. [] are used to denote a metric, physically locatable space. High case letters are used to distinguish the geographical set from the embedded (liturgical) sets of elements, which use curly brackets, i.e. { } and lower case letters.

¹⁸ In set theoretical terms, *these directions cannot be substituted for any other elements*. They are not interchangeable. Liturgical {e} is {e}, and cannot be changed or substituted in the L space, for any other direction.

¹⁹ There may be readers who do not know what semasiology means with reference to human movement study. It is a neologism in social anthropology. The word and its derivatives is from a Greek source and is defined as 'signification', i.e. 'meaning + logy'. In the late 19th c., the word was used to refer to a branch of philology dealing with the meanings of words. Recorded usages began in 1877. In 1889 Haverfield used it to raise doubts about the phonetic connections of words, i.e. where two words seemed to be phonetically linked, semasiologically their connection was improbable. In 1880, a 'semasiological solecism' was apparently known and understood. Usage of the term consistently points to the semantic aspects of linguistic signification and the term is used in that sense throughout my work (Williams, 1975, 1975a, 1982, 1982a, 1991) as it applies to human action sign signification. We also use the term to distinguish between our work which *applies to human action sign systems only* and other work which does not. This is because in recent broad definitions of the term, 'semiology' was expanded to include the sign functions of machines and the movements of animals (see Williams 1987 for full discussion).

²⁰ One line of discussion at this point could include an examination of predictivity and the Mass, but that would lead us too far away from the main ethnographic themes established in this essay from the beginning.

²¹ Extended argumentation has taken place with regard to looking at communion as a commonplace or a weekly obligation (the usual idea and the one which has been in force during most of this century), or as a privilege; a high point and a special occasion - not something to be taken casually or as a matter of routine. I am also fully aware of recent comments on the host as "food" in Bynum's excellent work (1987) under the developments of the "new historicism" and studies in "cultural poetics", however, the comments about communion, congregations and the Missa Major still stand in this context. I would recommend Bynum's work, however, for important general insights into mediæval religion and women.

²² A "lived space" simply means a humanly constructed space. Such a space could be someone's lounge or the whole house, a classroom or a university, a warehouse, a train station, a stage in a theatre, an Aboriginal camp in the Australian outback, or what-you-

will, including imaginary spaces, such as those of Tolkein's 'Shire'. The notion bears connotations of a space which has had a human construct imposed upon it.

²³ It does not seem to be known exactly when this custom began historically but it was certainly practised in mediaeval times and is still in practice now with regard to the clergy. The directional significance, of course, applies to the rising again of people at the end of the world.

²⁴ Apart from this, the emphasis on *the personal*, individual expression has led to all manner of improvisations and choreographies of Masses, such that, as we have noted previously, people expressed their dismay (and still do) when they allude to "liturgical bingo" and similar sarcasms. In some parishes, there has been open rebellion and a move towards returning to the Tridentine or the post-Tridentine Mass, because the paradigmatic changes initiated by Vatican II had far wider ramifications than anyone might have believed at the time. There are many syntagmatic changes which could have been made in the rite, without introducing paradigmatic changes, which always affect the *identity* of rites.

²⁵ Sometimes, technical terminology is unavoidable, however, for the general reader, these sentences need not be disturbing, as they can be omitted without any change of general meaning.

²⁶The intricacies of linguistic shifts surrounding the term 'host' will not be discussed here.

²⁷By which I mean the notion of universality constructed by a logic that informs "pure semanticity" and "the perfect timeless fact" (see Urciuoli 1994: 211, Note 4).