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In most Western countries, particularly northern ones, recent decades have brought significant changes in dying and mourning. In contrast to what was standard practice in the 1950s, the dying are today informed about their condition, and they discuss it openly with intimates – a form of anticipatory mourning (Armstrong, 1987). Funeral ceremonies have ceased to be rather fixed and uniform events from which children are barred. Only a few of those attending a funeral still wear black clothes; dress has become much less formal, music and speeches much more personal. Undertakers report these changes as being widespread.<sup>1</sup>

In the second half of the 1960s, the mourning ritual of wearing black mourning attire and black bands fell into abeyance, first in big cities, to disappear completely by the early 1970s. Thus, the principal symptoms of mourning vanished from public life. More and more obituary notices stated ‘no visiting’, ‘the cremation has taken place privately’, or words to this effect. Some ten years later, for over fifteen years now, a quest for new rituals – new rites of passage and sacrosanct acts – has emerged. These changes over decades indicate a significant change in the process of mourning, which is not as homogeneous as the word may suggest. It is poised between a highly institutionalized social obligation and a highly individual and personal feeling, respectively a public and a private process. In the 1960s and 1970s, mourning came to be increasingly privatized and individualized; it became less of a formalized social obligation. The traditional pattern of ritual was increasingly experienced as an external constraint, no longer compatible with rising demands for individual authenticity and personal identity in expressing the right feeling with the right words and gestures (Elias, 1985: 26). Thus, at the same time as the feelings connected to ‘big moments of life and death’ became more personal, more private and less ritualized, both the need and the opportunity to find public recognition of these feelings diminished. Development in this direction stalled and came to an end in the early 1980s, when a quest for new ritual emerged. It was not, however, a return to the tradition of

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formalized social obligations. In comparison, the new rituals are not only more varied and informal, they are also more individualized and personal. It seems likely, therefore, that these public expressions signal a rising need to find more public recognition of personal mourning and that, via these rituals, participants are seeking to assert membership of a larger symbolic or 'imagined' community.

These mourning rituals aim at what Victor Turner (1969) has called *symbolic communitas*, the feeling of connectedness to a larger symbolic community. They aim at evoking the kind of solidarity that surpasses hierarchical differences. In this way, they provide social recognition of the (future) loss of one's own life or that of an intimate, while at the same time offering ways to regulate intense feelings like fear, despair, powerlessness and sorrow. In other words, these rituals have a social and a psychic aspect: they have the twin function of – on the one hand – diminishing the danger of succumbing to these intense emotions by raising a feeling of solidarity, and – on the other – of enhancing the sense of being connected to a larger community, on which basis these emotions are acknowledged as well as dimmed and kept under control. As the changes in mourning ritual of the last half of the twentieth century demonstrate, the relation or balance between these social and psychic functions of mourning rituals has been changing.

In the two decades before the 1980s, as mourning processes changed in the direction of becoming more private and individualized, this was in keeping with a more general shift in social habitus, particularly in what Norbert Elias (1991) has called the We–I balance of individuals: their I–identity took on a stronger emotive charge as compared to their we–identity (the groups people refer to as we). In this trend towards individualization, as the We–I balance was tilted towards the I, the need for the twin function of ritual declined. Some socially prescribed formal mourning rituals disappeared and others were included in the general spurt of informalization. In the early 1980s, the emerging quest for new mourning rituals was part of a whole range of changes towards 'reformalization' (Wouters, 1986). Again, this was in keeping with a more general shift in social habitus and a more general change in the We–I balance of individuals: their we-identity and we-ideals came to be emphasized more strongly as their longing for the sense of belonging intensified. In this article I will elaborate these connections, using many examples from the Netherlands, in an attempt to understand and interpret the changes in mourning rituals, first their decline and then the quest for new rituals. To what extent can they be interpreted as

expressions of changes in the 1960s and 1970s in the We–I balance of individuals, towards individualization and later towards ‘solidarization’?

As there is no self- or I-identity without we-identity; the question is how they relate. Obviously, they do not relate according to a *zero-sum* principle: the individuals involved in the quest for new rituals came to attach rising importance to their we-ideals and we-identities, but this scarcely if at all affected the importance attached to their I-identities. They take full responsibility for their performance; it is not – and certainly not unquestioningly – delegated to authorities like priests. This has made the quest for new, expressive rituals far from easy: how to create a form that feels authentic, knowing that you are closely observed? The problem has often been discussed, for instance by the Dutch novelist and doctor in a nursing home, Bert Keizer. Writing about the urge some people nowadays feel to invent something like a rite, particularly at moments of intense loss, he comments: ‘the problem is that you can’t simply invent such a thing. If people set their minds to inventing something, the result is a gadget like a tripple-blade razor, not a rite’ (Keizer, 1994: 78). Indeed, many people fail in their attempts to invent a rite rather than a gadget, and thereby provoke embarrassment. In this context, the word embarrassment is mentioned quite often, for instance in the following words of a director of a large and well-known (Dutch) firm of undertakers:

To make new ritual ... is not easy at all... But they are decidedly searching for new forms. There are people who, for example, want to honour the deceased by reciting their own poems in the chapel at the cemetery. That can be very moving. But also very awkward... Sometimes highly embarrassing. (Hove, 1989)

One more example:

If nobody says or does anything in the chapel, an enormous tension may mount, but the opposite may create embarrassment. Someone wanted to hear songs from Bette Midler, for example, sung *a cappella*, by a black person... At the end of the ceremony, white balloons were launched, it was almost burlesque. (Schaepman, 1992)

If only from this insecurity of form, one may conclude that the trend towards creating new rites is fairly recent and restricted to a – growing – minority. Obviously, to face death and death anxiety via new rituals that have the power to convince as authentic is still more an ideal than a practice.<sup>2</sup> However, it is undisputed that more and more people have been

drawn toward this ideal since the early 1980s, when a quest for new rituals spread and a variety were designed and tried. This problem of authenticity in particular demonstrates the unrelenting importance individuals attach to their I-identity.

The next section first tries to describe these changes as developments in emotion management. After all, when the old rituals faded or disappeared, the danger of succumbing to the intense emotions involved in dying and mourning – one may become desperate and experience a sense of meaninglessness – was to be controlled in more individual and personal ways. In addition, as individuals tended to form more intimate bonds in smaller circles (Lofland, 1978), feelings of bereavement and grief will have intensified. People had to cope with these feelings with less of the public support or the social recognition of individual loss and grief than the old mourning rituals used to provide. Therefore, demands on individual emotion management were raised considerably.

## 2. From a 'regime of silence and sacred lies' to an 'emancipation of emotions'

In Harper Lee's best-seller *To Kill A Mocking Bird*, a woman dying of cancer discovers she has become addicted to morphine as a painkiller. Although she knows she is dying, she wants to overcome this addiction, so she stops taking morphine, and she succeeds: 'according to her views, she died beholden to nothing and nobody. She was the bravest person I ever knew.' Indeed, this story is told to show 'what real courage is' (Lee, 1960: 118). It exemplifies a conviction that prevailed until the second half of the twentieth century: courage was mainly defined as the capacity to suppress fear and pain, and to endure what cannot be suppressed without making a sound. Except for a few rituals, one was expected to maintain a regime of silence and denial. According to Ariès (1981), this regime spread from about 1850 and it remained dominant until the end of the 1950s.

My study of twentieth-century changes in the Dutch nursing journal (*Tijdschrift voor ziekenverpleging*), in nursing handbooks and books on medical ethics shows that until the mid-1950s, as a rule doctors did not inform the dying of their terminal situation (Wouters, 1990). The emotions of the dying and their intimates could only be expressed to a limited extent in a few rituals – administering the last sacraments and reading the Bible. All other attention to emotions was blocked by the social command to be brave and courageous – that is, to keep silent, possibly assisted by *opium et mentiri*, by *pia fraus* or 'sacred lies'. This practice was based on the common assumption that destroying the hope

of recovery would be too great a burden on any person; it would make the remaining part of life unbearable.

The regime of silence also applied to mourning. The division into full, half and light mourning already demonstrated that mourning was a highly institutionalized social obligation. Wearing visible signs of mourning was an established custom, and one finds extensive regulations about them in etiquette books. For example: ‘During the first six weeks of full mourning, one does not leave the house to go anywhere, except to church’ (Groskamp-ten Have, n.d. [1940s and 1950s]: 254). Public mourning ritual required a long and frequent confrontation with the loss of a relative, thus demanding a strong but tight and polished kind of emotion management. Emotions of mourning could only find limited and symbolic public expression in the mourning rituals.<sup>3</sup> Other public expressions were soon interpreted as symptoms of weakness and would damage the person's reputation. Thus, these social obligations were also permeated by fears of losing face and status.

Today, old mourning rituals are sometimes believed to have been public expressions of individual grief. However, the prevailing code of that time prevented exactly such an expression. The rituals were quite fixed and uniform. Yet, they did offer a we–feeling, a feeling of connectedness to a larger we–group, the we–group of the faithful and that of society at large. Thus, they bestowed social recognition of loss and grief. They helped people in gaining and keeping control over their emotions, and also in demonstrating how courageously their loss was carried. In addition, they also functioned to mark social differences: the more important the deceased, the more elaborate and exuberant the mourning ceremony. Thus, these ceremonies also served to cover feelings of despair and powerlessness under a public display of respectable chic. But such display should not be confused with a public expression of individual grief. The differentiation was according to class, that is, to group identity, not to personal identity. In terms of the We–I balance, the I–identity of individuals was highly subordinated to their we–identity.

In the private domain, similar demands applied; here too, tight norms of courage were operative. Even among intimates, showing grief, anxiety or anger was soon interpreted as weakness. To share these feelings, as is normal and expected today, was hardly accepted; it soon counted as ‘letting oneself go’ or ‘exposing oneself’. One had to bear one’s grief in a dignified way, which boiled down to showing as little of it as possible. Although in some communities this old code is preserved to some extent, many people

today consider that attitude to be almost barbaric and certainly unhealthy. Much of what once counted as 'exposure' has turned into 'showing who you are'. According to dominant contemporary standards, defence mechanisms such as denial and repression were rampant.

Since the 1960s, many of these old rituals have been attacked, changed or abandoned. Soon, they came to be seen as stiff social obligations, rather empty of feeling and meaning. Public mourning rituals like wearing mourning bands and black mourning attire have become almost obsolete, particularly in cities. Allowing for differences in pace, this trend is also reflected in the German, English and American, as well as the Dutch manners books I studied. Here is a typical example from the most popular Dutch etiquette book from the 1940s to the 1970s. After an exact copy of the text on mourning of the twelfth edition, the following sentences were added in the thirteenth edition (1965): 'These rules relate to formal mourning. Censure of those who ignore these rules for whatever reasons becomes no one. A person may show his grief in quite a different way from another. Nobody has the right to pass judgement going by superficialities' (Groskamp-ten Have). These lines straightforwardly admit that the old rules are or have become 'formal' and 'superficial', while the individualist's creed – 'everybody is different' – is also expressed. They mirror the drastic change from mourning rituals carried out within the community to grief processes borne by individual people in private (Walter, 1994); they signify a change in the We–I balance towards the I. At the same time, the interest in mourning processes was increasing considerably: 'Mourning seems to be a topic of wide-scale discovery in the 1960s, first as the subject of research and theorising, subsequently as a field for developing special therapies...' (Opzeeland-de Tempe, 1980: 14/17).

Simultaneously, paying elaborate attention to the emotions triggered by dying and mourning grew up as the new ideal, soon to be dominant. As a rule, every lethal diagnosis and, therefore, approaching death was to be announced in 'bad-news-conversations'; and 'hiding behind religious or other set phrases', as it was called in the Dutch journal of nursing (*TvZ* 1960: 247), was increasingly branded as denial and repression. In the early 1970s, judging from the enormous number of books and articles, dying and mourning had become popular topics. This amounted to a decline in the rigid collective defence of the intense emotions involved in dying and mourning, forcing all concerned to face them while at the same time keeping them under control. Where once there used to be fixed rituals for everyone – and for the rest a regime of silence – there is now a multitude of ways of

sharing anxieties and other emotions with intimates in private, while these emotions and their management are open for discussion in all kinds of public situations. This ‘emancipation of emotions’ – their appearance in the centre of personality, consciousness – was the reverse of denying and repressing them. The old ideal of courage referred to the strength needed to express these emotions only via fixed rituals; the new ideal of courage refers to the strength needed to face the approaching end of life, to empathise with the dying and to control the (death) anxieties which present themselves. ‘Emancipation of emotions’ thus refers to the capacity to face and cope with these anxieties and other emotions. Growing attention to both the finality and the ‘finale’ of people implied an intensified sense of mortality, greater awareness of temporality and more urgent and encompassing why-questions, changing the whole feeling for life and death.

*3. The trend from fixed rules in closed networks towards flexible rules in open networks.*

These changes can be illuminated by viewing them within the framework of large-scale processes of differentiation and integration within welfare states. In succeeding waves of emancipation, increasing numbers of people were absorbed and assimilated within increasingly dense networks of interdependency. As old social dividing lines opened up and competition for social status and a more personal identity intensified, old possibilities of keeping a social and psychic distance from each other diminished (Wouters, 1992,1999). In these processes, the meaning of many ‘fixed rules’ turned negative. Rules in general lost rigidity and absoluteness; they came to depend more upon the kind of situation and relation, demanding a more flexible and reflexive application, if possible through mutual consent. This implied that rules and norms of a rather fixed kind became too predictable and too rigid. The same goes for many of the old rituals, which came to be experienced as formal, impersonal and aloof, while their hierarchical and enveloping traits provoked protest and even disgust. In other words, traditional ways of regulating emotions, as via rituals, lost part of their ‘defence’ or ‘protective’ function. As the demands for a more personal identity and individual authenticity rose, they increasingly came to be experienced as ‘stiff’, and their performance as too obvious, as ‘insincere’, even as a ‘fraud’ or as ‘deceit’. In this development, to the extent that the old mourning rituals were attacked and abandoned, the shelter they used to provide by evoking the sense of being connected to traditional ‘symbolic *communitas*’ was demolished.

Although some of the old rituals disappeared completely and the whole 'regime of silence' ceased to be dominant from the 1960s onwards, of course it did not disappear immediately. Many people still demand stillness and solemnity around the dead and their graves, although a growing minority sees no need for that, and even rejects this attitude as a fear-ridden form of distancing the dead from the living (Elias, 1985: 31/2). And the old regime still manifests itself every time the bereaved unthinkingly leave practically all direction to an undertaker. In the Netherlands, an emotion management similar to that of the 'regime of silence' was still found to prevail in the first half of the 1980s among people living in traditional, rather closed family networks. From their study of the main differences in ways of coping with divorce between people in these networks and people living more individually in more open networks of friends, two Dutch sociologists concluded that for those living in traditional networks it was impossible to open up and release their feelings, not even in their most intimate circle:

One prefers to forget, the sooner the better. Life just goes on. ... Talking is perceived as "just moaning", as "making it hard on oneself" and turned out to be an equivalent to gossiping, complaining and accusing. It is perceived as the sort of behaviour that brings one down. (Oosterbaan and Zeldenrust, 1988: 942-44)

Perceptions like these functioned to subordinate the interests and feelings of each single individual to those of the group, in this case the family. The people in these rather closed networks were lagging behind in the general shift of the We-I balance in the direction of the I. They had no other means of defence than the family and its honour; they were, and had to be, dedicated to that end. Their tradition, these sociologists report,

embodies an attempt to withdraw from being confronted with one's feelings and motives [related to the divorce]: a defence mechanism... Getting over difficulties is achieved predominantly by getting away from them, almost by 'expelling' them. These people often make a radical break with old situations and people. The banning of emotions seems to go hand in hand with banning people. (Oosterbaan & Zeldenrust, 1985: 214, 217)

In these groups of people living in traditional, rather closed networks, the 'regime of silence' and its traditional ideal of courage seems to have been 'preserved'. The We-I balance of these individuals had remained more traditional, emphasising their (traditional) we-identity more strongly.



The same goes for many non-western countries, where the interests and feelings of each single individual are strongly subordinated to those of the group. Hence, they have ‘mourning rituals in which the behaviour of those who live on, including their expression of certain emotions, is prescribed so rigorously by the social rules, that any personal experience almost seems to be ruled out’ (Opzeeland-de Tempe, 1980: 14). This observation goes against the tendency to romanticize non-Western mourning rituals, not just for being more elaborate and expressive, as they usually are, but also for a more personal expression of individual feelings. The latter is not in accordance with the extent and pattern of individualization, which does not allow such personal freedom: tight organization and regulation of ritual go hand in hand with intense expression of emotion (Huntington and Metcalf, 1979). The tendency to romanticize non-Western mourning rituals seems to have spread together with the rising interest in dying and mourning – that is, with increasing awareness of old and new difficulties connected to the experience and expression of these processes in the West.

#### *4. Rituals and feelings of despair and powerlessness*

With regard to dying and mourning, the process of an ‘emancipation of emotions’ coincided with an ‘emancipation of the dying’: an increasing number of them came to demand a voice in decision-making at the end of life. Today, ‘delegators’, that is, those who prefer to delegate the decision-making to their physicians, to God, or to fate, have become a minority (Kelner, 1995). For many, the new power to decide includes the choice whether or not to prolong life, that is, to prolong dying. ‘This power entails a dilemma,’ writes Peter Filene (1999: 220), ‘for with choice comes the dreadful necessity to choose – the shadow side of self-determination’. Confrontation with this kind of choice has triggered a variety of experiments and exercises in enduring and coping with feelings of despair and powerlessness. Many are still being continued. For example, more and more people have come to realise that doctors who continue to treat their patients after the chance of curing them has vanished, do so because they fear the despair of their patients and because they are unable to endure their own powerlessness. Yet, the questions of where to draw the line and of how doctors and patients should learn to master these choking emotions, are still quite controversial. One discussion, for instance, centres on ‘the “magical power” of treatment’ (The, 1999) – that is, the significance of a glimmer of hope

at the moment when one is no longer poised between hope and fear because the prognosis is clearly fatal; how to avoid being driven to despair? Here are some illustrations:

‘Physicians should dig in their heels more when confronted with patients wanting to continue pointless treatments,’ says [oncologist] Cleton. While stating this, he is startled by the word pointless. All of a sudden, Cleton’s study seems to be filled with reproachful patients, shouting that these cures they take are perfectly sensible to them: they represent a last gleam of hope.

[When asked whether chemotherapy is a form of terminal care, someone from a cancer centre in Amsterdam answers]: ‘I’m not sure whether you can put it that way ... the preservation of hope is, I think, a legitimate reason for cures with doubtful benefits. It gives people the time they need to become more fully aware of the fact that they are dying. Alternative therapies also fulfil that function ...

Extensive research showed that patients who had entered an ‘alternative therapy’ knew bloody well that it wouldn’t cure them. One does something, which is the point.’ (Braams, 1994)

Yet, the fact one is ‘doing something’, whether a ‘pointless cure’ or an ‘alternative therapy’, may nevertheless create a secret expectation, often against one’s better judgement. When this flicker of hope evaporates too, the feelings of despair and powerlessness, particularly the inherent urgency ‘to do something’, may (particularly in the Dutch context) pressure patients towards asking for euthanasia and doctors towards practising it. Rites and rituals could function to prevent this, writes Bert Keizer: ‘A rite could offer protection against unexpected fits of despair or panic’. The same, he continues, goes for when the suffering has become unbearable to the extent that the decision to practice euthanasia nevertheless is taken:

What helps me through this riteless area is to memorize a sequential list of actions, so I won’t come to the dying person like someone who has roamed into a supermarket and will now decide in a leisurely way what to select from all the possible options before getting to the counter. I have taught myself to make the sequence of actions also known to the other participants, for instance by announcing in advance: ‘I arrive at seven thirty and then we will first shake hands. Then I will call your son in and fetch the nurse’ and so on. That way I hope to knot a rope bridge over the abyss. (Keizer, 1994: 78,9)

Keizer is aware that by sharing his sequence of actions with the other participants, he is creating a new rite, which clearly is not directed at bringing any hope, nor does it have any other sense than to create this feeling of doing something together.

To do something pointless, to do it without any belief it would help, and yet doing it together: this is a characteristic of many rituals (Staal, 1978). In contrast to modern rituals, traditional rituals often promise some wholesome effect. This is also a leftover from an era in which rituals were still incorporated as a fully-fledged force within a whole field of forces and counter-forces impinging upon situations and people conceived of as dangerous and threatening. Most new rituals do not claim such power. In recent decades, as medical prognoses have improved to the point where it became possible to exclude any hope, there has been a proliferation of moments in which people come to realise that (approaching) disaster can no longer be countered. The spread of this kind of prognosis also helps to understand why the call for rites and rituals has expanded and intensified. When confronted with such a prognosis, many will be inclined to seek protection against despair in some rite or ritual. Therefore, the new rituals are directed less at gaining hope than at creating the feeling of being together. Doing something together helps to stave off despair and to withstand feelings of powerlessness. The quest for this kind of ritual signifies an attempt at finding a balance between hope and despair that is viable to the end. Such a balance demands control of inclinations towards hope or despair, and to endure the remaining – and possibly intensified – feelings of powerlessness. The ideal is (to learn) to be courageously powerless ('acceptance'). In attempts at finding this balance and in developing this courage, people not only build upon their intimate bonds, they also reach out for the feeling of being connected to a larger community, to a 'symbolic *communitas*'. To what extent one's society can serve as such will depend – among other things – upon the sense of belonging to it. This sense will in turn depend upon the prevalent we-image and group charisma in relation to the nation-state, particularly its perceived degree of social integration and cohesion. In other words, the strength derived from this (or any) 'symbolic *communitas*' will vary with the strength of collective we-identities and we-ideals.

##### *5. Tugs-of-War and Ambivalence towards Ritual*

The question how recent changes in collective we–ideals and we–identities are connected to changes in mourning rituals is, however, far from simple. Both kinds of changes are highly differentiated. Many or most mourning rituals are still to be found on the religious side of the ritual spectrum. Their performance reaches for a feeling of being connected not only to the worldly communities of fellow-believers and fellow-citizens but also to a kind of reality that is represented as ‘higher’ or ‘deeper’. In the first half of the twentieth century, this hierarchy was still pretty much taken for granted, allowing people to make direct and plain references to it. Today, these references are much more indirect: non-religious people as well as those with doubts about religion had to be taken into account with the increase both in their numbers and in the intensity of these doubts. This secularization ran in tandem with democratization: in more equal relationships and under the influence of strong ideals of equality, authoritarian claims and constraints provoked critical reactions, an attitude that extended over representations of supernatural authorities.<sup>4</sup> Thus, even for most religious people, the community of fellow-believers lost much of its strength and cohesion.<sup>5</sup> At another side of the ritual spectrum, purely secular or ‘earthly’ dying and mourning rituals reach for a feeling of being connected to a symbolic community of human beings, not to the kind of reality depicted as ‘higher’ or ‘deeper’. Of course, many compromises and transitional forms have emerged, rituals that reach for both kinds of connectedness.<sup>6</sup> They represent an attempt to combine old and new ideals and practices. Further differentiation of the ritual spectrum according to the pattern of their We–I balance seems scarcely possible: how to determine to what extent they appeal to traditional and to individualized ideals of social cohesion and continuity? The overall trend and pattern, however, is clear enough to conclude that – as in any other domain – here too, the co-existence of contrasting ideals, practices and types of emotion management is accompanied by ambivalent feelings from which hardly anyone is able to escape. This is characteristic of a period of transition. In such a period, people usually feel torn and ambivalent. But also between people and between groups of people, usually there is a tug-of-war going on. For example, in an interview, a philosopher and advocate of rituals said: ‘If you cannot find rituals that back up social cohesion and societal continuity, you are left bloody unprotected. That would demand way too much emancipated maturity of people.’ The interviewer, a sociologist and journalist, confronted him with the question: ‘But how much space for collective ritual can there possibly be, if the highest creed is “I am the one

who decides what is best for me”?’ (Vuijsje, 1988). Here, old and new were in confrontation: the social protection of a we–group as against the self-protection of the individual. In the sentence quoted first, the philosopher emphasises the need for protection by a we–group, the ‘symbolic *communitas*’ invoked by ‘doing something together’, but in the next sentence he implicitly acknowledges the ideal of a strong personality, mature and emancipated enough to provide sufficient self-protection.

The whole quest for new ritual is saturated with these tugs-of-war and ambivalent feelings: we–ideals exert pressure towards actions that reach for a feeling of connectedness, I–ideals pressure towards attempts at controlling the feelings of despair and powerlessness under one’s own steam. For many people emphasising their I– or Ego-ideals, the quest for new ritual has the odium of deploying a bunch of affected phrases and actions, of compulsive behaviour, of conjuring, of a ‘defence mechanism’. For them, someone claiming a mature or emancipated personality should never be guilty of so much ‘self-deception’ and/or inauthenticity. They soon experience the form of new ritual as an all-too-obvious, thin and therefore embarrassing demonstration of courageous powerlessness, an experience which strengthens their aversion to such performances as well as their motivation never to indulge in them.

Aversion to new ritual may also arise out of the longing to maintain more traditional we–feelings and thus social continuity. An example is found in attacks on the new ritual of personal obituary notices, often directly addressed to the deceased and the circle of intimates. Here is an example of such an attack:

The most striking development in the wording of a part of contemporary obituary notices is the apparent assumption that the deceased in the hereafter will continue to read newspapers. ‘Dear ANN, I will always be connected to you - PETRA’. No family name, no address, no date. And one has to strain oneself in order to suppress the question whether there was no opportunity to pledge this allegiance before death. Another development is that the messenger’s main objective seems to have his own feelings written on the wall of publicity, rather than announcing who has died. ‘Tom, together on our bicycles, turning all sorts of corners, through various valleys, cycling to the top. Gee, what perfect cyclists we were - your pal CHARLES’ ... Yes, but who has died? ... no data according to registry office, only personal expression of emotions. Why is all this printed in the newspaper? ... In my

opinion, telling indistinct intimacies to everyone in obituary notices has to be viewed in connection with the general trend towards pouring one's innermost feelings out on the street. Apparently feelings have no significance unless they have been shouted out of the window or pushed onto the public marketplace. (van Run, 1994)

This author ends his attack by instigating, also on behalf of 'the newspaper reader', 'that the text is restricted to what is justified for publication, that it be kept within the bounds of good taste – which will be best secured by sticking closely to tradition.' In this attack, these personal obituary notices are not perceived as a form of new ritual, only as an expression of bad taste. However, the public acknowledgement and endorsement of strong personal feelings, as expressed in these notices, designates them as modern ritual. It is an attempt to connect with a 'symbolic *communitas*'. And that these texts are pointless, on which basis their publication is considered 'not justified', is also a characteristic shared with many other rituals.

A few years after these personal notices started to be published in Dutch newspapers, memorial notices commemorating the first, second or fifth anniversary of the loss of a deceased beloved began to appear. Usually, these notices are written in the style of a *report*, not in that of *rapport*. Their function, however, is quite similar to the obituary notices attacked for being pointless: they publicly express the grief of bereaved individuals.

Another example of the quest for new mourning ritual is from July 1995, when all over the city of Amsterdam A4 posters were glued to walls, etc., stating:

*JIPPERT / TRUE / ANGELS / LEAVE / EARLY / your friends*

By this large-scale action, shortly after the death of a teenager in a traffic accident, these young people confronted themselves again and again with the early death of their friend. For them, this probably had a function similar to that involved in the confrontation inherent in the traditional wearing of visible signs of mourning; they will have experienced it as a form of public acknowledgement of their loss.<sup>7</sup> At a moment like this, when they strongly felt themselves to be thrown back upon their own small circle, this kind of public demonstration of mourning fulfils a deep need. Just like the obituary notices, these posters demonstrate that precisely in these moments of grief there is an urge to shout one's

feelings to the world, a strong need for the feeling of being connected to that world, to a large we-group, to society at large.

Only one new ritual has succeeded in becoming established in many countries: International AIDS Memorial Day. The first one was held in San Francisco, USA, in 1983, when the cause of AIDS was still unknown. By the end of the 1980s, this Memorial Day and the AIDS Memorial Quilt had come to create a sense of global solidarity, partly because it attracts world-wide attention. The shock caused by the death of young people was strong and widespread; it triggered many other attempts at creating new ritual.

#### *6. Nostalgic Longing for Old We-Identities*

It is quite common to explain the (cautious) revival of mourning ritual by referring only or predominantly to the process of secularization, for example: 'Secularization has brought bareness and cold – the people have lost their sense of direction' (Schaeppman, 1992). And an article entitled 'Rituals Against Present Aridity' proclaims propositions like: 'The decline of the church and the informalization of society robbed us of a large variety of symbols and customs that, although outdated, enriched life and gave it colour'; and 'the vague feeling of discomfort that a disenchanted world merely is a very meagre world. However, it is this very discomfort, which motivates the quest for new enchantment' (Dings, 1994: 34, 36). These sentences are written from a perspective in which the people who appreciate the new rituals appear to be imbued with nostalgia and bitter regret. The Dutch essayist and chess master Hans Ree has ridiculed this kind of nostalgia:

For at least a century, enlightened minds have rationalized and disenchanted the world. Now that the result seems to disappoint many, they would like to pretend it was all just a mistake, which may be cancelled by some pious recontemplation of old values... If the next ten years will actually bring continued philosophical consolation and recontemplation of old values, I expect a new wave of obligatory self-criticism, this time by those people who always have reported that Santa Claus does not exist, but in the meantime have come to realise they do not want to miss him. (Ree, 1994)

This ridicule hits the mark, I think. In addition, it points to the insufficiency of 'disenchantment' as an explanation. This longing for Santa Claus not only points to a lack

of religious we-groups, but also to the fading of old we-groups like nation, class, race and sex as providers of stable and secure we-feelings. In this sense, it largely arises from the same source as the longing for new rituals: the earthly ‘symbolic community’, the feeling of connectedness to the larger society has become unstable and insecure. The nation-state as provider of large-scale we-group feelings, has in particular become increasingly problematic. The many negative connotations of the word nationalism already show that national we-feelings and national identities have lost some of their direct charismatic quality, that they are filled with ambivalence. Accordingly, a national identity crisis is frequently observed, as in the following editorial of a leading Dutch newspaper, a day after Ajax had won a soccer match against AC Milan<sup>8</sup>:

Call it joy or euphoria or hysteria – regardless of how it is described, over these days a society almost desperately in search of identity has manifested itself. We want to belong to some group or other, although generally we do not know which group, or how. Ever since the traditional vertical bonds in the Netherlands were dismantled, and since the globalization of culture, politics and economics has subsequently stimulated more and more converging representations on an horizontal level, citizens can easily get lost in the rationality that is now required in judging the meaning of human activity. At regular intervals, therefore, each citizen needs a safety valve for his longing for a sense of collective belonging, for solidarity. Apart from the Queen ... in fact, only sports and music offer that possibility. (*NRC Handelsblad*, 26 May, 1995)

All this suggests that, apart from secularization, there is another source of discomfort: the lack of a stable, reliable, large-scale we-feeling; there is a societal identity crisis or a solidarity crisis. In relation to mourning rituals, however, many people almost automatically think of the lack of old religious solidarity. And if in this context the concept ‘disenchantment’ is used, the discussion usually tends towards a nostalgic longing for this type of solidarity. Most nostalgic longing, however, is directed at least as strongly at other old feelings of solidarity. It is a romanticization of the time in which a powerful and almost blind – that is, more or less automatic – identification with one’s own group, one’s own nation, religion, race, class, family and sex prevailed: everyone still knew his or her place, and with a few happy exceptions, all ‘foreigners’ were still living abroad. Nostalgic complaints of this type can therefore be understood as a symptom of a more general



regularity: every time some collective optimism turns into a feeling of insecurity, a wailing arises about the decline of 'genuine cultural heritage' and about the 'shallowness' and 'decay' in modern society (Waldhoff, 1995: 58).

#### *7. Phases in Individual and Social Processes: Changes in the We–I Balance*

In the 1960s and 1970s, not many voices expressed this kind of nostalgic regret, and those who did were far from loud. In these decades of collective emancipation and of informalization, most people still had a sense of belonging to an expanding social universe. They shared an optimistic view of the future, an expectation of a widening range of behavioural and emotional alternatives. This came to an end in the 1980s and 1990s, together with collective emancipation. From the early 1980s onward, as feelings of discontent and insecurity spread, the longing for a more stable and secure we-group intensified. In the meantime, however, most of the old we-groups – not just religious we-groups, but also groups like family, city, class or nation – seemed to have crumbled or lost cohesion. They merely seemed to provide a rather limited and insecure sense of belonging, and the same goes for we-groups on a transnational plane, only more so. I-ideals and we-ideals seemed to have lost their harmony. This collective experience appears to have been a principal source from which the recent quest for new rituals has sprung. It is a hypothesis deserving closer examination. The following attempt leans on Norbert Elias's essay on changes in the We–I balance (1991).

Particularly from the second half of the nineteenth century onwards, Western states have gained strength, resulting in increasingly large military and police forces and a vigorous and unquestioned monopoly of state power. This development involved many processes, on a national as well as on an international plane. And in practically all these processes, the differences between people based on nationality gained importance in relation to other differences between them, such as those on a basis of class, region or religion. Up to and during the Second World War, the rising power of states ran in tandem with a strengthening of national group identity, until the nation-state became the highest-ranking reference group for the we–identity of individuals. On the international or global plane, international competition between states contained strong incentives in that direction – particularly the forms involving violence. On the national plane, in processes such as internal pacification and integration of previous groups of outsiders into the state structure,

individuals increasingly directed themselves to a unified national code of behaviour and feeling. In this process, their we-identity in relation to the state strengthened and their scope of identification widened. These changes implied that their We–I balance was tilted towards the we. However, it was tilted towards the I as well, because these more highly integrated multi-party states offered greater personal freedom of choice and wider scope for self-control. Many relationships such as those between family members or between workers and employers became less of an obligatory, lifelong external constraint. Within limits, but to a growing extent, these we-relationships became voluntary and interchangeable, putting all the more emphasis on the I, on the decision of individuals about the form and continuity of their relationships. Thus, as chances for individualization grew and demands on the capacity for self-regulation rose, the We–I–Balance was tilted towards the I. In sum, the We–I balance of most individuals changed in both directions; their we-identity as well as their I-identity were strengthened.

During and shortly after the Second World War states of a new order of magnitude, the ‘superpowers’ USA and the USSR, moved to the top of the hierarchy of states, pushing the smaller European states with more limited military and economic resources into a second-rank position. Accordingly, their inhabitants’ old we-identity in relation to the state came under pressure, a pressure that was increased when these states lost their colonies. Under this pressure, more and more individuals and countries in the world took sides with one of the superpowers, which implied a widening of perspective, if not of identification. It was a spurt in the globalization process. To a large extent, the implications of the weakened position of the European states for the we-identity of their individuals were warded off, mainly by concentrating on post-war reconstruction, on the expansion of industries and commerce as well as on further national integration via welfare state institutions. All over the West, in increasingly dense networks of interdependency, relationships of co-operation and competition expanded and intensified. These processes offered increasing chances for individualization.

Particularly from the early and mid-1960s onward, entire groups were rising socially; there was a collective emancipation or, to put it differently, the most striking social pressure came from below. The 1960s and 1970s were decades of emancipation and resistance, in which a strong shift of the We–I balance towards the I took place. Relationships between political, administrative and commercial authorities and their

subordinates became less hierarchical and formal. As practically all relationships became less unequal, more open and flowing, even more of the we-relationships which it was once taken for granted would last a lifetime, became voluntary and interchangeable. The traditional submission of the interests of the individual to those of one's group and its honour diminished further; most people were expected to have more individual means of defence at their disposal. They developed many different part-identities, as well as the flexibility to switch swiftly between various situations and relations. Accordingly, the kind of identification with we-groups that is complete, blind and automatic was substituted increasingly by more varied, more differentiated and, to some extent, also wider circles of identification (De Swaan, 1995).

As before, this shift in the We-I balance towards the I implied increasing demands on self-regulation: people came under increasing pressure to calculate and to observe themselves and each other more sharply, while showing flexibility and a greater willingness to compromise. In the 1960s and 1970s, however, only a few people experienced the increased demands on self-regulation as such, because in phases of emancipation and resistance the gains in terms of we-feelings and I-feelings are usually emphasized. What prevails is the feeling of liberation from the straitjacket of old authoritarian relationships. This was expressed in a strong ideal of equality and solidarity with the oppressed, in an almost taken-for-granted identification with rising groups of outsiders, and in a sense of belonging to an expanding social universe. Although only partly and vaguely attached to national and trans-national organizations, these we-feelings and we-ideals had a wide scope. Some of them clearly crossed national borders and were shared across those borders, thus representing a shift in the We-I balance towards the we, that is, a widening in circles of identification. During these decades, it was on this basis that the fading and disappearing of old mourning rituals could be welcomed rather unproblematically: most people with feelings of grief did not experience great difficulty in finding a new symbolic community to connect to.

This basis faded in the following decades. In the 1980s, collective emancipation chances disappeared and a 'market ideology' spread: the phase of emancipation and resistance turned into a phase of accommodation and resignation (Wouters, 1986).<sup>9</sup> The latter phase gained dominance when the most striking social pressure came once again rather unequivocally from above. In the struggle for status and positions, people again

came to depend largely upon themselves and their own capacity to cope with the pressures from above, and from all other sides. In this change of phase, the interests of organizations and of society at large came to prevail more often over the interests of individuals. At the same time, there was a collective change in we-identification – from identification with rising groups of outsiders to identification with the established. The sense of belonging to an expanding social universe, this optimistic view on the future changed into a feeling of greater uncertainty and insecurity. It opened a perspective in which the disintegration of old we-groups and the loss of old we-feelings and I-feelings was emphasized. The voices expressing concern about the corrosion of social cohesion and solidarity became louder and more numerous. It was a concern about more encompassing we-ideals and we-identities, representing a shift in the We-I balance in favour of the we.<sup>10</sup> But what we? The groups people refer to as we both had expanded and differentiated, resulting in a multitude of multileveled we-groups, we-identities and we-ideals. The concern about social cohesion also revealed that many experienced difficulties in satisfying their longing to belong, particularly in the big way of belonging to a large and strong social unit. Identification with the nation-state was strengthened, but in quite ambivalent ways as this type of we-identity also had become constrained and threatened. It was constrained by the perception of nationalism as a major incentive to large-scale annihilation and humiliation, and it was threatened by the pressures of continued international competition (as will be discussed later). In Europe, we-identity in relation to the state had also become ambivalent because at this stage the weakened position of European states in the world came to be realized more fully.

In the sphere of the economy, lifetime jobs had largely become almost an anachronism. Identification with one's organization was restricted in accordance with the rising demands of flexibility. To some degree the longing to belong was satisfied by the formation of 'neo-tribes', as Maffesoli has called the rise of a multitude of small groups 'with splintered but exacting intentionalities', favouring 'the mechanism of belonging', yet fundamentally 'unstable, since the persons of which these tribes are constituted are free to move from one to the other' (1996: 83,140,6).<sup>11</sup> Yet although joining these groups, organized around the catchwords, brand-names and sound-bites of consumer culture, did give a sense of belonging, they merely provided another part-identity. Robbed of the feeling of belonging to an expanding social universe and stuck with this feeling of

insecurity, increasing numbers of people would appear to have come to experience their many part-identities, even the whole ‘postmodern orgy of community-chasing’ (Bauman, 1992: 199), as somewhat problematic. Particularly in ‘moments of life and death’, their longing for a more encompassing and secure sense of belonging was not satisfied, or only in part. In addition, the formation of part-identities that can be almost instantly and flexibly assembled and dismantled may well have increased the ‘freedom to move’, but in the 1980s this greater freedom was experienced increasingly as a pressure of having to comply with increased demands on self-regulation. Indeed, this greater freedom was at the same time a greater pressure to perform.<sup>12</sup> In this social context, many people with feelings of grief will have experienced difficulties in finding a satisfying symbolic community with which to connect. For some, this lack will have served as a motive for starting or getting involved in a quest for new ritual. Involvement in this quest did not imply any decline in the importance attached to mourning as a personal psychic process. It did imply, however, a rising tension in the We–I balance of individuals, between their we-ideals and I-ideals.

In the 1990s, the feeling that social cohesion and solidarity are lacking was intensified, and so was the feeling of insecurity. They intensified in reaction to the events that followed the fall of the Iron Curtain and other globalization processes. These events implied changes, tensions and conflicts – some violent such as in former Yugoslavia – from which perspective the period of the ‘Cold War’ and ‘Peaceful Coexistence’ suddenly seemed relatively stable. The existence of an ‘enemy’, a clear they-group, obviously had provided a we-group to hold on to. Now, that hold had vanished.<sup>13</sup> In addition, nation-states have become quite noticeably involved in continental and global integration processes, from which perspective most national countries are in fact little more than regions within global networks of interdependency. Particularly in Europe, it has increased the awareness that most nation-states, including one’s own, have but little control on the course of these processes. On the one hand this awareness has stimulated the formation of a we-identity in relation to humanity at large, to ‘human rights’ and international justice. It was a widening of circles of identification, exemplified in a growing interest in activities of global organizations like the United Nations, the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the World Health Organization and the World Trade Organization, as well as in the growing support of global organizations like Amnesty International, Greenpeace, Médecins sans Frontières and (particularly in the Netherlands) Foster Parents Plan. This growing

interest was in keeping with mounting pressures of international competition, which increasingly tended to curtail national sovereignty and to force nation-states in the direction of forming united states. On the other hand, however, the curtailing of national power and sovereignty, together with decreasing prospects and chances of having a say on the national as well as on the European and global level, became a source of intensified feelings of discontent, uncertainty, loss and threat. They also became a source for many people to experience an intensified longing for a larger and stronger we-group.<sup>14</sup> This was expressed in many ways, for instance by crying out for more powerful state rule – governments and politicians are inclined to feed on this demand (Garland, 1996). In the 1990s, concepts like ‘civil society’, ‘civic responsibility’ and ‘communitarianism’ also expressed this longing for a more encompassing and solid we-identity.

The collective rise in popularity of these concepts practically all over the Western world may also be taken as an indication that the shift towards continental and global integration has been relatively rapid in comparison to the pace of a corresponding change in the we-image, the we-identity of most people. For them, states have remained the highest-ranking reference group for their we-identity. Their ‘we-image, the whole social habitus of individuals, is immovably tied by a strong affective charge to traditional group identity on the plane of the nation state’ (Elias, 1991: 220). By virtue of its continuous tradition, this we-group grants individual persons a past stretching far beyond their personal past, as well as a chance of survival beyond actual physical existence. Therefore, many people still experience the trend towards greater interdependency and integration as a threat to their we-image, their identity. They fear that absorption into a larger unit will lead to the fading of cultural traditions and collective memory. As Elias observed, their defence against integration arises from the fear for a kind of collective dying. He concludes:

As long as no feelings of personal identity, no we-feelings are associated with the higher-order unit, the fading or disappearance of the lower-order we-group appears in reality as a kind of death threat, a collective destruction and certainly a loss of meaning to the highest degree. (1991: 225)

The relatively slow change of the social personality structure, including I- and we-images, not only stands in the way of further continental and global integration, but also of the chances for developing a more harmonious We-I balance, and for finding a more

satisfying ‘symbolic *communitas*’. Particularly for the intense emotions evoked at ‘moments of life and death’, when there is an urge to share them with as large a we-group as possible, no such large we-group seems to be available. This feeling of lack, of an insecure and even a threatened we-feeling in ‘a society obsessed with health [which] is ultimately a society obsessed with death’ (Walter, 1996: 81), may have stimulated the rise of many large, instantly formed ‘communities of mourning’. The growing number of large mourning processions and demonstrations in recent years may indicate a growing reservoir of people inclined to join such a ‘community of mourning’. The interest in Princess Diana’s funeral and enormous queues (in many countries) to sign books of condolence are well-known examples. The ‘White March’ in Brussels, after the killing of young girls, is another one. In the Netherlands, after the killing of young people in street violence, now called ‘pointless violence’, there have been several large memorial services and mourning processions and demonstrations. These events triggered mass expressions of grief, and lots of interpretations. Many observers took it for granted that most participants had covert grief about a personal loss. Here was an opportunity to express grief in the big way they had longed for, a mass expression. Many saw them as manifestations of the need for a communal experience of grief in an individualized society: ‘in such a society, people immediately seize every opportunity to mourn collectively’ (Leclaire, 1999). A more critical notice, entitled ‘pointless procession’, said: ‘by participating one obtains the feeling “I was part of it”. These gatherings provide the security of the masses... The demonstrators want their safe, old society back’ (Huygen, 1999). And a sceptical critique, entitled ‘pointless compassion’, in which these demonstrations were interpreted as offering ‘instant commitment’ or the ‘fake fraternity of a mass gathering’, nevertheless acknowledged them as ritual expressions of a new sense of community (Ritsema, 1999). In sum, despite this tug-of-war around the new mass mourning ritual (reminiscent of the one around modern obituary notices), all seem to agree that these demonstrations provide the large ‘symbolic *communitas*’ that is felt to be lacking.

#### *Epilogue: A Modern ‘Memento Mori’*

In a conversation with Collin Parkes, the well-known expert in mourning processes, a widow described the way she had to redirect her life after the death of her husband by

using the metaphor of placing new tracks next to the existing ones. As time passed, she increasingly succeeded in following the new tracks, but small incidents could immediately set her back in the old ones (Bergsma, 1994). This image of two co-existing tracks is also helpful in understanding the tug-of-war and ambivalence in the quest for new rituals.

Children are quite fond of rituals; they function as the old tracks, as points of recognition in the big and still largely unfamiliar world. They like to be put to bed in the familiar, ritual way and then listen to the same familiar story. In a similar way, they learn the language and other rules of social intercourse: continually falling back on the routine of the old tracks. For a while, children live up to the newly learned rules in a rather rigid way. Only from the age of 11 or 12 onwards do they learn to apply the rules in more flexible and playful ways. This possibility opens up because, by then, they are also better able to take the feelings and experiences of others into account. On that basis, in dealing with this situation and that relation, they dare to improvise and thus, they develop the playful earnestness of a 'homo ludens' (Huizinga, 1938) – a 'controlled decontrolling'.

A similar sequence of 'learning to control' preceding the possibility of 'controlled decontrolling' can be discerned in the broad social processes of these last decades. The transformation from rather formal manners to more informal, flexible and playful ones depended upon a relatively high level of integration of all social classes in welfare states. In these integration processes, people have increasingly pressured each other into more reflexive and flexible relationships, and at the same time towards a more reflexive and flexible self-regulation, changing the social code in the direction of the 'homo ludens' art of living. This implies a godless and illusionless art of maintaining a very light and subdued cheerfulness, no matter what circumstances, which can only flourish to the extent that the sense of mortality has sunk in and the ability to endure feelings of powerlessness has been acquired.

The quest for rituals that are attuned to this attitude to life, and enforce it, proceeds with difficulty. To religious people, the old rituals brought a feeling of belonging to a symbolic community in which all were connected via an imagined superhuman being under an extraterrestrial dome. Some modern rituals do without such an image: we only have one life, and in it we have nothing but each other. To express this in modern ritual does not demand an extraterrestrial dome, but a societal one of simple social recognition. However, contemporary state-societies hardly provide possibilities of finding this



recognition. If people want to take care of a dying person they have to report sick, as in most countries these circumstances do not provide the legal right to leave for this purpose. Usually, only after the beloved person has died, does one have the legal right to a few days leave. Also with regard to mourning, there are hardly any rules or customs, if any, which provide the appropriate societal dome. Today, nation-states offer mourners no framework for raising the ‘symbolic *communitas*’ that would meet their need to feel recognized in their loss.

Therefore, all these recent developments suggest policies and practices aimed at establishing such a framework. They should offer opportunities for expressing some of the emotions surrounding dying and mourning, in ways that raise the feeling of connectedness to a large symbolic community, one that goes beyond religion. Such a policy would demonstrate an understanding of the quest for social solidarity, but also help to create and reinforce it. It could be developed at institutional and governmental levels. There are already many examples at the level of institutions – examples of people who gather to participate in some secular ritual. In a nursing home in Rotterdam, for instance, nurses regularly organize memorial meetings to mourn the people who have died recently. The more formal part of this gathering has the form of a ritual. The full name of each deceased person is written on a tag, which is attached to a rose. The proceedings of this ritual are quite simple: each name is read out loud, one of the relatives present comes forward, receives the rose and puts it in a vase, placed in the centre. Afterwards, there is an opportunity to meet informally. Thus, they gather and share their common fate, a helpful exercise in enduring their feeling of powerlessness.

However, institutional rituals offer only limited opportunity to express personal grief publicly and to acknowledge publicly an ongoing relationship between the people who have died and those who have been bereaved. As their organization is restricted to nursing homes, hospices and hospitals, they can be interpreted as institutional expressions ‘of the modern desire to sequester death away from the public gaze’ (Mellor, 1993: 21).

Examples above the institutional level, at the level of the city or the state, are scarce. Therefore, why not consider creating the possibility for every dead person to have a paving stone or tile inscribed with a memorial text? Such a public marking of highly personal and intense emotions would serve a multitude of societal interests. After a few years, there would already be so many stones or tiles with an inscription that the memory

of the dead – and by implication also the reminder of being mortal – had become a daily experience that had spread from the isolation of cemeteries to the streets of the city. In this way, the old regime of silence about dying and mourning could be alleviated further. A new track, in addition to the old one, would be created. Those who are mourning would receive more societal recognition and support, death and dying would to a somewhat larger degree become integrated into everyday life, and the obvious need for a modern and non-religious *memento mori* would be accommodated.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> In the Netherlands, undertakers also perceive a trend among their public to keep the deceased at home until the funeral service and to withdraw part of the direction of these services from them, undertakers, into one's own hands (Sax et al, 1989; Enklaar, 1995). Most report these changes to be restricted to a minority of their clients, but all speak of growing numbers and of an expanding 'funerary market'. It even has become large enough to allow sculptors, photographers and others to form commercial bureau's selling sculptures as gravestones and photo reportages of funeral ceremonies (Paauw, 1998: 555), to establish 'funerary shops' and a 'ritual bureau' (in Belgium), which sells ideas and services for 'big moments' (*De Morgen*, 3 April 1999). Another indication of this expanding market is the large numbers of books on topics related to dying and mourning (for the USA, see Filene, 1999).

<sup>2</sup> Journalists and social arbiters have written about this quest, but in the literature produced by social scientists I have found only scarce occasional references. Seale, for instance, mentions 'social movements for a (...) re-establishment of communal funeral rituals' (1998: 201). And in Tony Walter's *The Revival of Death* one finds 'examples that show the evolution of more personalised funeral ritual' (1994, 183). A general impression from reading this book is that both the 'revival of death' and the quest for new ritual have manifested themselves more strongly in the Netherlands than in Britain.

<sup>3</sup> A possible exception was the gathering after the funeral, depending on its degree of

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informality.

<sup>4</sup> Until the 1960s, the Netherlands belonged to the most ecclesiastic and churchgoing nations of Europe; today, with a nondenominational population of about 60 percent, it is one of the most secularized countries in the world. In the Netherlands, as in many other western countries, traditional religious doctrines have faded even among members of a church: only 70 percent still believe in a life after death, and among those, 90 percent do believe in heaven, but only 44 percent have kept their belief in hell. However, 7 out of 10 people still believe in a higher power or order (SCP, 1994: 536). For an account of the transformation of American religion from the 'dwelling' institutional religiosity of the fifties to the present, more personal, privatized and 'non-institutional inner life of everyday spirituality', see Wuthnow (1998). For a broader discussion of 'the eclipse of eternity', see Walter (1996) and Bauman (1992).

<sup>5</sup> In the course of these processes of democratization and secularization, the non-religious perspective on rituals has become quite common: many non-religious and not even sacrosanct habits and usages have come to be perceived as rituals. Since the 1960s, in colloquial language the term has come to be used for a multitude of habits and customs, for example, the 'ritual' of greeting (shaking hands, the 'social kiss' – once or twice?). Irving Goffman's *Interaction Ritual* (1967) and the reader *Secular Ritual* (Moore and Myerhoff, 1977) provide many other examples. Even sadomasochistic practices have been characterized as rituals, as is indicated in the subtitle of a German study of sadomasochism: *scenes and rituals* (Wetzstein, 1993). Today, many religious and religiously oriented people also use the term in this new way, although they sometimes make explicit qualifications: 'These everyday rituals will clearly not serve again and again to establish contact with the very deepest reality' (Lukken, 1984: 24/5). In this way, they claim a superior position in a hierarchy of rituals.

<sup>6</sup> Here is an example:

One of the women from a women's group in which they rubbed each other's hands with an odoriferous ointment, comments upon this practice: 'I felt intensely connected to the other women in this ritual. To me, this is its blessing.' Upon the question 'Does this ritual also lead you to God?', she answers: 'Oops, I am a little allergic to that word, I'd rather speak of the ineffable expressing itself in human solidarity.' (*Trouw*, 26 July 1994).

<sup>7</sup> This kind of demonstration of private emotions in public occurs more often in the domain of love: two names and a heart carved into a tree, love declarations on viaducts, etc. These are also attempts at connecting intense personal feelings to a larger 'symbolic *communitas*'.

<sup>8</sup> For the importance of sports in this context, see Eric Dunning's *Sport Matters* (1999).

<sup>9</sup> These phases can be connected to the twin processes of differentiation and integration of social bonds (Elias, 1978). In the phase of emancipation and resistance, differentiation has the upper hand, allowing for collective emancipation chances and a collective search for expanding behavioural and emotional alternatives. In the other phase, that of accommodation and resignation, the significance of co-ordinating and integrating social positions and institutions is in the centre of attention and interest, stimulating the longing for a more stable and secure sense of belonging and social codes. Thus, the changes in the We–I balance and the transition between the two phases are seen here as expressions of the underlying twin processes of differentiation and integration of social bonds, which together increase the length and the density of

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interdependency networks.

In his analysis of developments in sociology since 1945, Richard Kilminster (1998: 145-72) has distinguished the 'monopoly phase': circa 1945-65', the 'conflict phase: circa 1965-80' and the 'concentration phase: circa 1980 to the present (?). The latter two phases correspond to the phases of emancipation and resistance and accommodation and resignation mentioned in my text at this point.

For a theoretical discussion of phases in processes and a proposal to integrate chronology and 'phaseology', see Goudsblom (1996).

<sup>10</sup> An interesting example of this shift in identification comes from a study of changes in letters to an agony column in a Dutch weekly in between 1978 and 1998 (Post, 1999 and 2000). The study shows that from the early 1980s onward, we-feelings and 'collectivism' were expressed increasingly, both in the contents of the letters as well as in the causes mentioned for writing them. The study also shows that from the early 1980s onwards, more discontent was related to broad societal topics like the economy, employment and criminality. A similar shift towards the perspective of a we-group was discerned in the new sources of discomfort mentioned. They included such broad, general and abstract references as 'the future', 'an indefinable sense of doom', 'life' and 'the world'. At the same time, with regard to form, style and the way in which the problems are presented, these letters continued to be(come) more individual, more direct and personal. Taken together, these changes also illustrate that individuals increasingly turned to their we-identity and we-ideals, while they continued to attach unrelenting importance to their I-identity and I-ideals. It shows again that the We-I balance is a tension balance and does not operate as a *zero-sum* mechanism.

<sup>11</sup> Maffesoli's book *The Time of the Tribes* originally appeared in 1988. In contrast to my interpretation, he sees this rise of 'neo-tribes' as a decline of individualism in mass society: 'The autonomy (individualism) of the bourgeois model is being surpassed by the heteronomy of tribalism' (1996: 127).

<sup>12</sup> These are two sides of the same coin. Sometimes, particularly if postmodernism is celebrated, the side of greater freedom is emphasized: 'No authoritative solutions to go by, everything to be negotiated anew and ad hoc...' and ideally 'all structures ... light and mobile so they can be arranged at short notice...' (Bauman, 1999: 26-7). But who's ideal is this? Certainly not Michel Foucault's, for usually his eyes are fixed upon the other side of the coin, that of the constraint to perform. In what he describes as the 'new capitalism', Richard Sennett (1998) has taken a position close to that of Foucault. Against those who claim that the new flexibility gives people more freedom to shape their lives, Sennett argues that the new order and 'the new regime of time' threaten to rob people of their feeling of social continuity and community; they threaten to 'corrode his character, particularly those qualities of character which bind human beings to one another and furnishes each with a sense of sustainable self' (1998: 27).

<sup>13</sup> Ironically, but not unrelated, shortly afterwards, the only remaining 'super-power' engaged itself in an intense debate on the 'disuniting of America' (Schlesinger, Jr., 1992).

<sup>14</sup> This is also possible via the detour of indicating groups of scapegoats like 'foreigners' and criminals to be excluded respectively punished – creating new enemies as an attempt at creating the desired feeling of new communal solidarity. For this reason, Sennett claims that the 'we' has become 'the dangerous pronoun'. In a chapter with this title, he argues that 'today, in the new regime of time, that usage "we" has become an act of self-

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protection. The desire for community is defensive, often expressed as rejection of immigrants or other outsiders...' (Sennett, 1998: 138).