

Managing transitions – an anthropological perspective on student rites of passages

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In this workshop we will briefly outline ways in which anthropological perspectives on social rites of passage might inform our understanding of how students experience different forms of transition within HE.

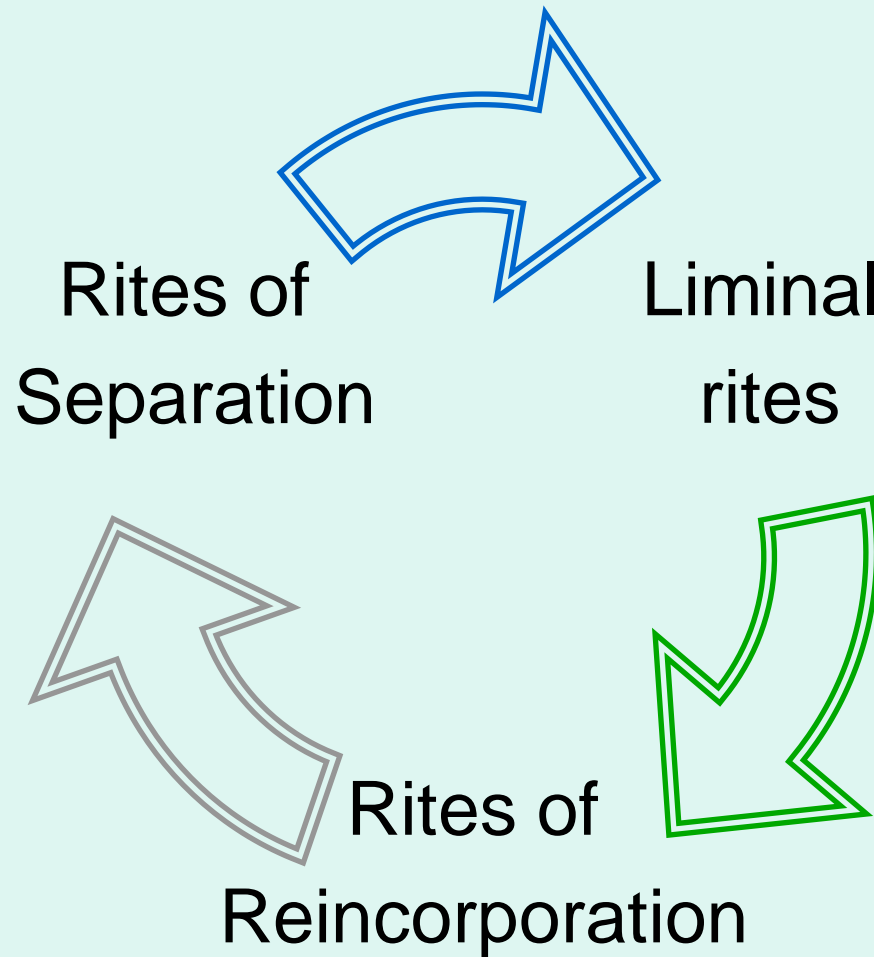
You will be encouraged to draw parallels with your own working environment in order to explore in more detail what happens when the specific internalised worlds of our students meet the peculiar demands our institutions place upon them.

Human life-cycle and attendant rituals

– stages in the creation of different social personae

- Conception
- Birth
- Infant/toddler
- Puberty
- Adulthood
- Courtin'
- Coupling
- Mid-life
- Old-age
- Death
- Marital bed, pilgrimage
- “Confinement”, baby shower etc.
- “Baptism”, nursery school
- “Confirmation”, menstruation, birds & bees
- Initiation rites (18th/21st)
- Chaperones & engagements
- Marriages, honeymoons & marital beds
- Anniversaries, birthdays, menopause, crises ... and respect for your “Elders”?
- Mourning, burial, prayers etc.

Tri-partite structure of “Rites of Passage” (Van Gennep, 1908)

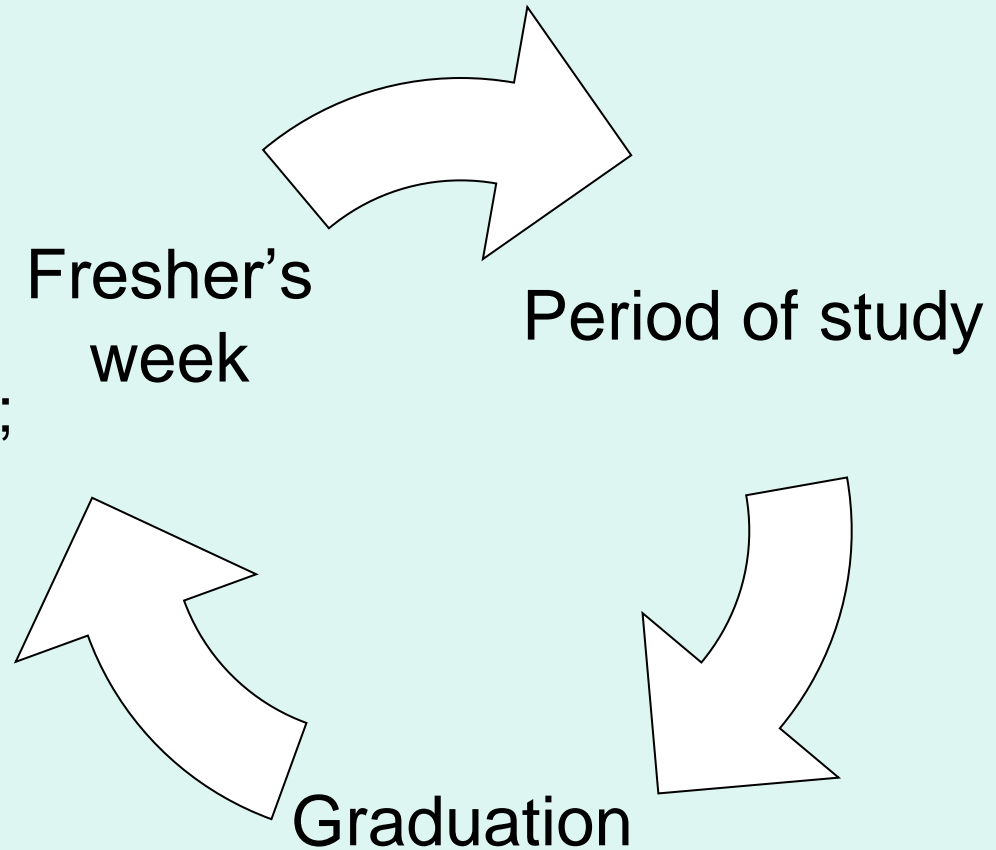


Some recurring themes:

- Wilderness experiences;
- Threshold experiences;
- Disequilibrium (world turned upside down);
- Food/drink/ceremony/dress/procession/words;
- Wives become mothers, fathers become authoritarian/sleepless/grandparents, husbands become widowers, children become orphans, grandchildren become middle-class;
- Educating Rita and “first generation” HE;
- Rituals are often (invariably?) politically charged ...

- Leaving home, school/college, home town, partners, family, social networks;
- Gap years;
- Fresher's week;
- Exam periods;
- Leaving halls/moving levels;
- Year out/work experience;
- Year abroad/Erasmus;
- Leave of absence
- Finishing a thesis;
- Graduation/withdrawal;
- Employment (or not);
- Post-graduate study

Student journey ("life-cycle")



The Living and the Dead

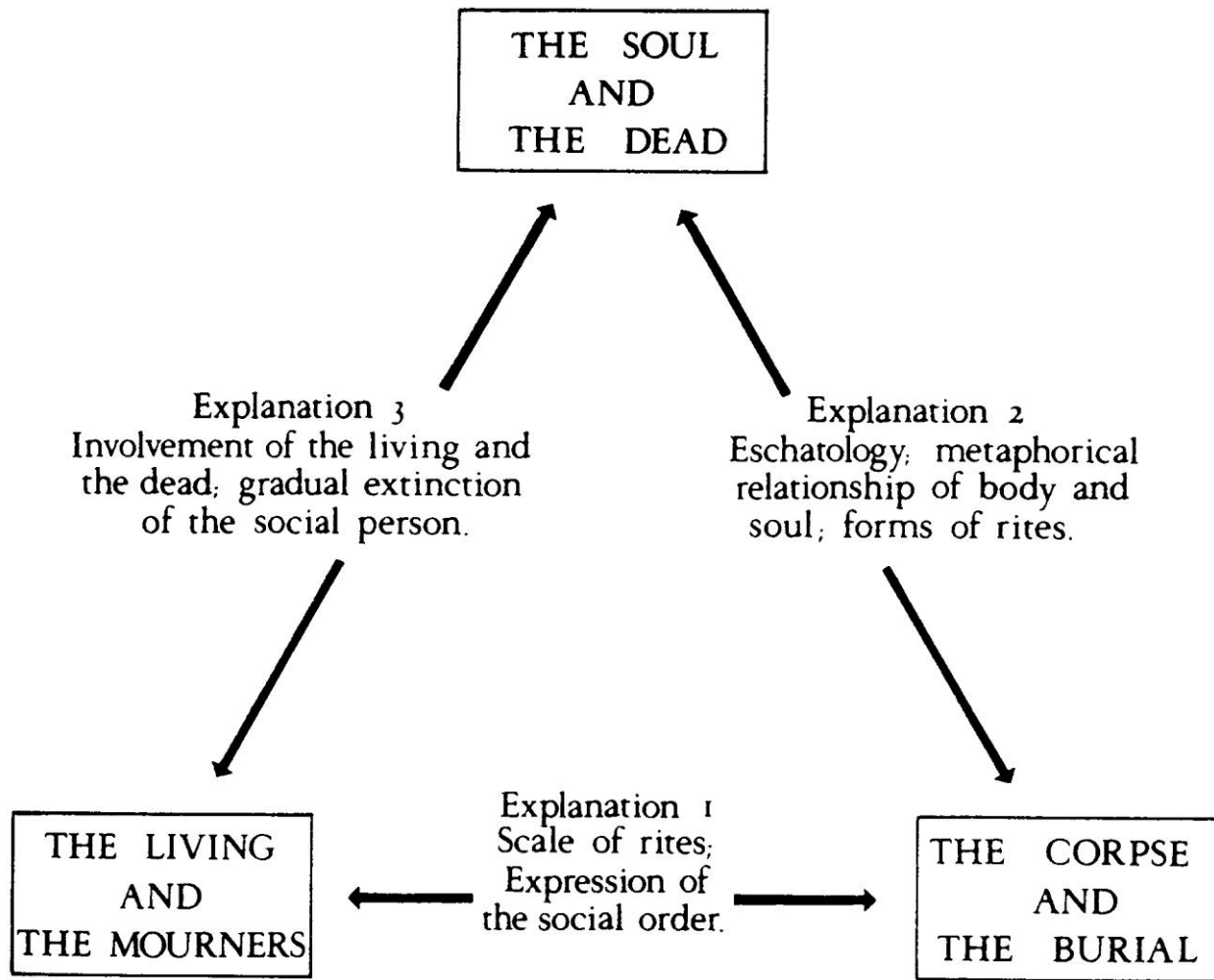
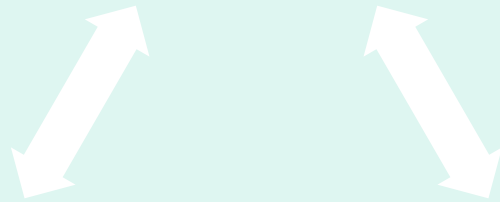


Figure 3. Schematic diagram of Hertz's arguments.

Metcalf, P. and
Huntington, R. 1991.
*Celebrations of
Death: the
anthropology of
mortuary ritual.*
Second edition.
Cambridge:
Cambridge
University Press

Graduates
(alumni) and
Society



The
Academy and
family



Graduands
and
graduation

The Living and the Dead

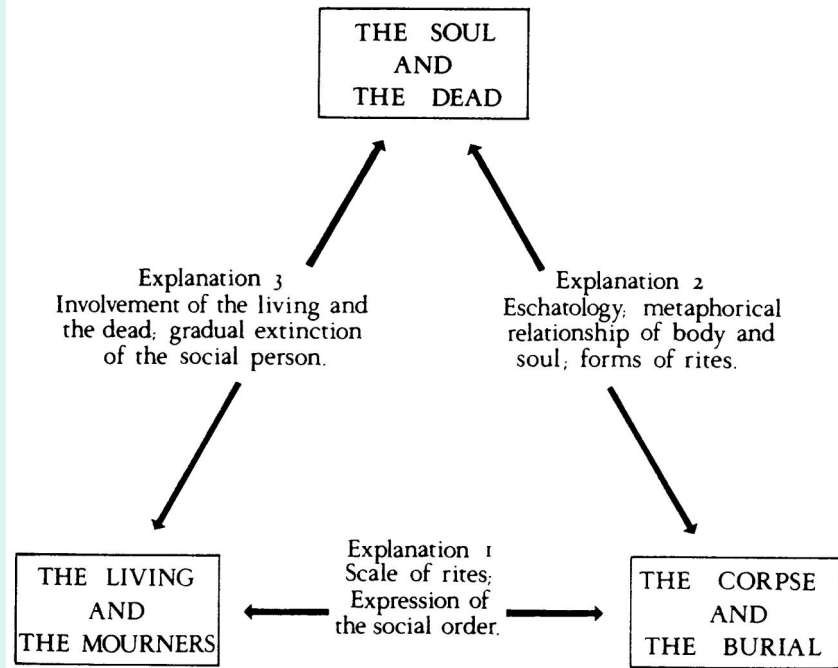
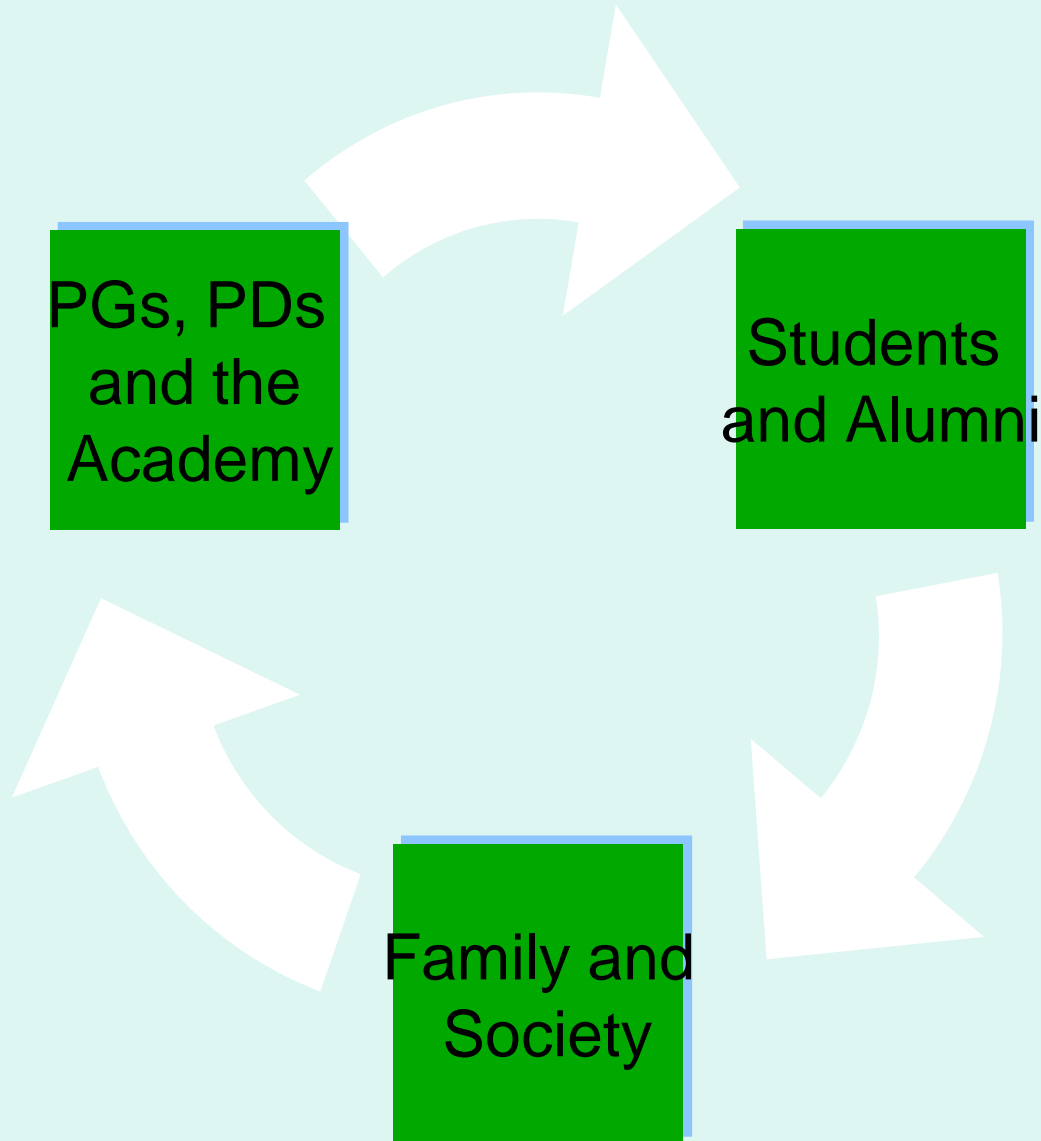


Figure 3. Schematic diagram of Hertz's arguments.



Continual process, many transitions, generic need to support and manage over whole life-cycle (within & beyond the academy?)

We are **all ritual specialists** now ...

- Consider your areas of responsibility in relation to negotiating the differing concerns of **three categories of persons** (students, family/society, the academy);
- What about **endings** (and new beginnings) – how can/should we best support and manage different transitions? Where do our responsibilities end (and begin) ...?