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**Co-Creating at the Threshold:  
A Dialogical Approach to Festival Planning  
At a Cape Town Waldorf School**

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**MJRELI001**

A dissertation submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of  
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**COMPULSORY DECLARATION**

This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: 

Signed by candidate
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 Date: 5 February 2009

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## ABSTRACT

Waldorf schools were first established in Germany in 1919 under the guidance of Rudolf Steiner, with the intention of educating children for the renewal of society. Since the spread of Waldorf schools to South Africa in the 1950's, South African Waldorf teachers have been faced with the challenge of localizing the pedagogy to meet the needs of modern South African children. One arena for this challenge is in planning the school festivals.

Through data derived from ethnographic observation of festival planning and enactment at Michael Oak Waldorf School in Cape Town, South Africa, I show that Michael Oak teachers consider the celebration of school festivals to be intrinsic to the education of the children, and that in adapting the festivals to their own context they are confronted with conflicting opinions and ideas about how to juxtapose the Christian and seasonal festivals, how to negotiate religious differences, and to what extent to adapt the festivals to reflect specific aspects of South African culture. Using data obtained from participant observation, predominantly semi-structured, unstructured, and informal interviews with more than seventy people (including Michael Oak teachers, former pupils, and past and present parents), along with background reading and study, I show how these teachers, recreating each festival anew every year instead of relying solely on established traditions, took a dialogical approach to conceptualizing and planning their festivals - one that, though time-consuming and sometimes complicated, was itself a ritual meaningful to the teachers. This dialogical approach was outwardly manifest in the festival's ritual symbols, particularly the use of time and space, and the objects and performance filling them. It was also observed in the planning meetings and was described by the Michael Oak teachers in interviews. Through this dialogical approach, the teachers experienced what Victor Turner calls *communitas*, a liminal, threshold state of creativity, changed relationships, and potentiality. I demonstrate through teachers' statements that by remaining on the threshold of these often conflicting ideas, the teachers found in themselves a creative energy that extended to the children as the teachers included them in festival preparation and enactment.

## **DEDICATION**

In honor of the Michael Oak Waldorf School teachers in Cape Town, South Africa, who, in carrying out their “sacred task” of teaching, embody the head, hands, and heart of Waldorf Education.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

Many people have contributed to the creation of this dissertation. In particular, I wish to thank the Michael Oak teachers, who allowed me to observe and who answered my questions, in spite of their busy schedules; Julian Sleigh, who mentored me as I delved deeper into the meaning of the festivals and learned about the particular questions that have been asked in South Africa; Marion Penfold, who lent me precious materials and gave me precious time, teaching me from her personal experience about Michael Oak and the history of the Waldorf movement in Cape Town; C. Abbott, D. and B. Reeler, G. Aguilar, and M. Ralphs for sharing their photographs; and the more than seventy-five other Waldorf teachers and parents, former students, and anthroposophists whose opinions, insights, and experiences lent a depth to my research that would have been otherwise lacking, and who are greatly appreciated even though they have not been named individually here.

I am particularly grateful to my advisor, Professor Andrew “Mugsy” Spiegel, of University of Cape Town’s Department of Social Anthropology, whose precision and attention to detail were invaluable, whose extensive knowledge of South African history and society as well as Waldorf education were very helpful, and whose perceptive insights and questions were gratefully received.

Finally, my deepest appreciation for the love and kindness of my family - for my two children, who introduced me to Waldorf education and have patiently put up with me as I observed at their school and worked in their home; and for my husband, Nelson, whose expert technological help has rescued my efforts on too many occasions, whose steadiness, strength and good sense have supported my achievements, and who holds my heart.

## ONE. INTRODUCTION

Waldorf Education is a developmentally appropriate, balanced education that integrates the arts and academics for children from preschool through twelfth grade. Waldorf Education encourages the development of each child's sense of truth, beauty, and goodness; an antidote to violence, alienation, and cynicism. The aim of the education is to fully develop the capacities of each student and to inspire a love for lifelong learning. (<http://www.awsna.org/welcome.html> /12 May 2007).

What happens when strong forces converge in one location? In our earth, we see earthquakes and volcanoes form and erupt as the tectonic plates underneath the earth's surface move towards each other and collide (Jeanloz & Lunine, no date<sup>1</sup>). Yet this same force also leads to the eventual creation of new islands and mountain ranges. In the center of these plates, for example in older parts of the earth's continents (like parts of Africa and North America), the mountains are established and nothing visible is happening geologically. However, even though no apparent activity is present, on the boundaries of these plates, scientists have recorded these same destructive and creative physical movements (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/dynamic/understanding.html> /1 February 2009).<sup>2</sup>

I wondered what would happen when differing ideas and influences converged in a single location, a primary school in Cape Town, South Africa. At the Michael Oak Waldorf School, I observed as teachers negotiated the often-opposing factors and opinions that confronted them as they conceptualised, planned, and enacted the school's set of regular festivals. Although I observed nothing as cataclysmic as the collisions of the earth's tectonic plates, I did observe through my fieldwork that the teachers chose to remain within the tension of a set of opposing forces, at the threshold of impact, engaging in dialogue with both sides; and that in doing so, the teachers found and expressed a sense of creativity, meaning, and purpose they said would be missing had they unthinkingly remained within the

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<sup>1</sup> Found at <http://www.britannica.com/eb/article-54198/Earth> /1 February 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Photographs and diagrams available in Louis (2001).

established practices of supposed school traditions. Like the old and established African continent, the school continued its ongoing lessons and activities, including its festivals, with little public evidence of this dynamic process taking place within, as the teachers allowed divergent forces and ideas to converge within their festival planning process.

Victor Turner referred to festival celebrations as “high tides,” “peak experiences in social life which mark an occasion or an event with ceremony, ritual, or festivity” (1982:11). These celebrations reflect the key values of the participating social group (Turner, 1982:14)<sup>3</sup>, and the celebration “attempts to manifest, in symbolic form, what it conceives to be its essential life, at once the distillation and typification of its corporate experience” (Turner, 1982:16). As I will demonstrate in Chapters Four, Five, and Six, in doing the research on which this work is based, I found the Michael Oak festivals to be symbolic manifestations of the teachers’ dialogical planning process. Turner’s own belief “that process was the basic condition of life” (E. Turner, 1992:14) fueled his interest in the ritual process, and consequently, in liminality, an issue I explore below (Chapter Four).

As an explicitly Waldorf School, Michael Oak Waldorf School follows the broad guidelines set out by Rudolf Steiner when he founded the first Waldorf school in 1919 in order, it has been said, to renew society through the education of children. Michael Oak is thus one of the by now 964 Waldorf schools that have formed around the world (along with about 1500 Waldorf kindergartens), each supposedly following Steiner’s clear guidelines that outline, but do not absolutely define their curricula and other aspects of their identity as Waldorf schools (<http://www.waldorfschule.info/index.39.0.3.html> / 1 Feb. 2009).<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Unless noted otherwise, all citations labeled “Turner” refer to Victor W. Turner.

<sup>4</sup> In South Africa. Waldorf schools must meet certain criteria set by the Southern African Federation of Waldorf Schools. According to one Federation member, if a school refuses to comply, the Federation will make great effort to communicate with it, and find out and address any barriers to compliance. If this dialogue is refused, then the school is expected to refrain from calling itself Waldorf.

In South Africa, Waldorf education began in 1955, when teacher-training began in Johannesburg in preparation for the founding of a nursery school there (Penfold, 1994:135-136). Although anthroposophists (followers of Steiner's cosmological worldview, called "anthroposophy," which provided the philosophical and developmental framework for Waldorf Education) in Cape Town had requested help from Dr. Zeylmans van Emmichoven, then leader of the Anthroposophical Society in the Netherlands, for starting a new Waldorf school there a year earlier, only in 1959 did the first Waldorf nursery begin in Cape Town, with the first primary school opening in 1960 in a large old Victorian house in the suburb of Rondebosch. This school soon split because of differences between the funding group and the teachers, and Michael Oak Waldorf School was founded in 1962 in Cape Town's southern suburb of Kenilworth (Penfold 1994:137).<sup>5</sup>

Both its identity as a Waldorf school and its South African context proved important in the formation of Michael Oak. The Waldorf curriculum guidelines and ethos, along with the teachings of Rudolf Steiner, have shaped what Michael Oak has become; and the turbulent history of South Africa with its apartheid and ensuing social upheavals has provided an environment that has been perceived by the teachers as especially needing the social renewal offered by the Waldorf pedagogy. As I will illustrate, Michael Oak has consistently taken concrete steps to apply this particular pedagogy to the changing needs of children in South African society, and one means of doing so has been in the process of festival planning and enactment, which is the main focus of this work.

According to Waldorf educators, the regular celebration of seasonal festivals is intrinsic to the healthy development of children (Wharton, 1989:144; Penfold, 1984:8-9; Steiner, 1996d:152). It also "gives the whole school year a balance and a sense of continuity, as well as helping to form a strong community experience" (Burnett, et al, 2000:20). And throughout its forty-

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<sup>5</sup> The split also resulted in the formation of what is now Constantia Waldorf School, and at this stage the two schools are regarded as sister schools with Constantia Waldorf School taking in Michael Oak children from Class 11 onwards since the latter offers classes up to Class 10 only.

seven-year history, Michael Oak Waldorf School's teachers have considered the planning and celebration of seasonal festivals to be an essential part of the school's life for teachers, children and the broader school community.

Michael Oak's South African context provides particular opportunities for germinating diverse dialogues that arise in the processes of conceptualizing, planning, and enacting festivals at a Waldorf school. Those opportunities arise, *inter alia*, from a tension between enacting festivals that were originally formulated in the northern hemisphere and in predominantly European and Christian context and have now to be adapted to the realities of a southern hemisphere, multi-cultural and religiously diverse setting that is marked by a particular socio-political history.

My main focus during the year-long ethnographic research project I conducted through 2005 and that has extended into 2008 was on the planning and enactment of festivals in the primary school, for children of (approximately) seven to fourteen years of age.<sup>6</sup> And what I observed is that, in approaching the festivals, the teachers faced challenges in adapting the festivals to the particular needs of South African children. Rudolf Steiner's indications for how to understand and to enact the festivals, connecting a particular festival with each season, were given to Europeans. But in the southern hemisphere, Waldorf educators are confronted with the conundrum that Steiner's four seasonal festivals do not match up with the seasons he mentioned in his lectures. As they planned the festivals, the teachers have thus had repeatedly to ask, "What is the meaning of this particular festival as it is placed in this particular season?"<sup>7</sup>

What I saw therefore, and what is a core focus of my attention in this dissertation, was a consequent tension that the teachers at Michael Oak

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<sup>6</sup> I am also a parent of two children at the school, and my involvement extends beyond my role as ethnographic researcher. I comment further on this in my methodological discussion in the following chapter.

<sup>7</sup> Some Southern Hemisphere schools, most notably in Australia, have addressed this issue by either flipping Steiner's festivals back into their traditional season (i.e., Christmas in June), or by making the festivals into seasonal observations, without mention of the four "Christian" festivals named by Steiner. I will speak briefly about these schools later.

appeared to embrace as an opportunity to find particular meaning through engagement with the differing ideas and opinions raised as they tried to leave behind assumptions and traditions belonging to a festival as it was, and often still is, celebrated in northern hemisphere, European and predominantly Christian contexts, and to find new understanding and practice in their southern hemisphere, South African, religiously pluralistic setting.<sup>8</sup> The result of this engagement is that festivals were conceived, planned, and enacted through a process of dialogue – a dialogue not just between teachers, but also on a philosophical level between tradition and innovation, anthroposophy and cultural context, European and African expressions, and the seasonal and the ecclesiastical (Christian) celebration of festivals. According to the teachers, this process of dialogue was (and remains) in itself a form of ritual,<sup>9</sup> which is as much meaningful and transformational to them as is a festival's actual enactment.

As I document in detail later, the way this ritual was performed by the teachers was through their studying the background to the festival deemed appropriate for each quarter of the school year, each time attempting to gain contextual insight into how the festival might meet the needs of growing children in their particular geographical and temporal context. While they met as a whole primary school teacher body to discuss the festivals' meanings, to be addressed by the local Christian Community priest about the festival,<sup>10</sup> and to consider how each class would contribute, they divided into smaller teams of four to six teachers for actual planning. Usually, planning for a festival also extended into the classrooms, with classes for weeks spending portions of time working on something to display or perform before others at the school during the festival's enactment – itself a means whereby the festival lasted

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<sup>8</sup> According to a number of my respondents, this was not something addressed by teacher bodies at all South African Waldorf schools.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Turner defines *ritual* as “prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (1967:19). Further definition is given later in this dissertation.

<sup>10</sup> There is a history of close ties between individual Michael Oak teachers and the Christian Community which is a “Movement for the Renewal of Religion” started by Catholic and Lutheran priests with advice from Rudolf Steiner in 1923 (Heidenreich, 1965, describes the Christian Community's founding). The priest of the Cape Town congregation is a parent at Michael Oak and the spouse of a teacher.

longer than the day of its public enactment, just as did the teachers' dialogue about the meaning of each festival as its time came around each year.

In this dissertation I aim to show how this dialogue has become central to Michael Oak's approach to festival planning in the context of the Waldorf movement in South Africa, how it unfolded through both festival preparation and celebration during the time of my research, and how it is representative of issues of phenomenological and pedagogical importance in Waldorf education. As I recount details from my fieldwork in the primary school, observing the festivals themselves, participating in festival planning, and interviewing teachers, former pupils, and other community members, I describe the festivals in their role as ritual symbols, with fully developed aspects of sacred space and time. I describe what belongs in the festivals – story, dance, song, poetry, visual art, food – and what does not belong. Furthermore, I show how these ritual symbols, including the use of time and space, provide a visible manifestation of the process and results of the dialogue in which the teachers have engaged.

In Chapter Two, I explain my methodology – how I set up the project, observed and helped plan the festivals (mostly) during the 2005 school year using participant observation, and how I interviewed more than seventy-five people – Michael Oak teachers and former pupils, parents of Michael Oak pupils past and present, and members of the greater Waldorf and anthroposophical community – using mostly semi-structured, unstructured, and informal techniques. I detail the particular challenges of my fieldwork as well as my approach to the ethical issues that arose, particularly due to my close involvement as parent in other aspects of the life of the school. I address the issue of belief as participant observer, and how I maintained an appropriate boundary around my own beliefs so as not to read my experiences into the experiences of those I was observing and interviewing. I also outline my involvement at Waldorf and anthroposophically related conferences, and my study of outside materials, and explain how they have helped inform the direction of my dissertation.

In Chapter Three, I contextualize the study, beginning with an introduction to Waldorf education and the circumstances under which it was formed. After providing a brief history of the movement, I explain Steiner's theory of the child's stages of development, focusing particularly on the primary school years between ages seven and fourteen, and then explaining what Steiner calls the "sacred responsibility" of being a Waldorf teacher (Steiner, 1996d:15). I introduce Michael Oak and how its particular interest in festivals developed. I describe the festivals celebrated by Michael Oak in recent years, and detail my experience in attending a teacher-training course on festivals, and the extent to which, in outlining how to plan festivals, it emphasized the importance of contextualization. Through these aspects of context – the Waldorf history and pedagogy, the history of Michael Oak, and particular self-identity of Waldorf teachers resulting from these other factors – I provide a basis for understanding some motivations the teachers might hold in engaging in the festival planning dialogue that is a main focus of my work here.

In Chapter Four, I examine the Waldorf festival as a progressive dialogue between polarities, laying a foundation for discussion of the various intricacies of festival creation, preparation, and enactment that I observed. There are strong differences between members of the wider anthroposophical community regarding whether festivals should be oriented towards the Christian or the seasonal year. And these are reflected at Michael Oak because of the relationships the school has, as an institution and through individual teachers, with the Anthroposophical Society and the Christian Community. I therefore examine issues raised around interpreting Rudolf Steiner's lectures (particularly 1984 and 1996a) on the subject. And I show how Michael Oak's teachers appear to have chosen to engage aspects of both the Christian and seasonal calendars, and thereby to work with the creative tension that enables them each time to reconsider the significance of local contextualization. Unlike teachers at some other southern hemisphere Waldorf schools, who have chosen to celebrate festivals either as fully seasonal or as fully Christian, Michael Oak's teachers, I shall show, wrestle continuously with the ambiguities and sense of paradox: "lucky", as one

teacher said, “to be challenged to understand a festival’s inner meaning outside of time and season.”

Chapter Four continues as I show how, as Michael Oak’s teachers contemplated and discussed the meaning of each festival, they created an external expression of inner will and intention. “For it is a mistake, “ wrote Mary Douglas, “ to suppose that there can be religion which is all interior, with no rules, no liturgy, no external signs of inward states. As with society, so with religion, external form is the condition of its existence” (1984:62). I thus show how the teachers’ inward contemplation and study of festivals led them to expressions of creativity through their resolute refusal to rely blindly on past practices that might otherwise have become traditions and their insistence on studying each festival anew in the context of its season each year.<sup>11</sup> I further show how the teachers’ process of festival preparation with the children deepened the meaning and function of the festival for both the teachers and children, particularly as the teachers dealt with anomalies that provided further tensions in their planning process.

The forms these festivals took help illustrate how the teachers’ expressed beliefs, ideas, and motivations manifested in their festival planning and enactment. Mircea Eliade wrote (1965:206-207), “Symbols preserve contact with the deep sources of life; they express, as one might say, ‘the spiritual as life experience.’” In Chapter Five, I treat the festivals as rituals, and detail the use of space as a ritual symbol within the festivals. I relate how these ritual symbols express the dialogic process in which the teachers have engaged, and support my argument that the teachers have eschewed the ease of enacting the festivals only in one way, instead remaining on the threshold of the new, receiving and wrestling with the various factors and ideas which potentially shape the outcome of their planning. Thus my discussion of the ritual use of space includes not only the physical school and festival layout, but also the subjective experience of the sacred as it is mediated through

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<sup>11</sup> Although Anthroposophy is not a religion according to the Administrative Director of the Anthroposophical Society in America (Yeager, <http://www.waldorfanswers.org/NotReligion1.htm> /1 Feb. 2009), I will show the relevance of this statement within the context of this study of festivals.

space. I show how the festival space was symbolically a place where the sacred met the ordinary.

I analyze the ways participants moved in and out of this space and within it, and the significance of these movements within the expressed beliefs of the teachers. What and who can be in the festival space, and what may happen in it, were further issues negotiated from season to season. I detail how these decisions, particularly regarding the attendance of parents, affected the utilization of the space. In exploring what the festival space meant to the teachers, I also examine a recurring theme in the festival stories – that of a journey.

Chapter Six is devoted to an exposition of the use of festival time as a ritual symbol, and how that time is perceived, defining and describing three ways of perceiving time – rhythmic, chronos, and kairos time. Drawing from my fieldwork observations, from the comments of teachers, from former pupils' recollections (or lack thereof), and from the writings of scholars like Alessandro Fallassi (1987), and G. van der Leeuw (1938), as well as teachings of the 2005 Michael Oak eurythmist Cobie Roelvert, I explain how each of three perceptions of time is experienced within the Michael Oak festivals, giving an example of how all three were found in the same festival, as a ritual symbol manifesting outwardly the undercurrents of the teachers' dialogue. My discussion of time includes not only festival time within the calendar year, but also within the perceptions and memories of the teachers and participants.

I describe how, in planning the festivals, the teachers enter and exit what I call kairos time. Using Victor Turner's concept of liminality (1969), I show how, through their interactions with each other in the course of festival planning, the teachers experienced what Turner calls *communitas* – a moment set apart, wherein relationships are changed and a potent power is felt.

In summary, the purpose of this dissertation is to show that in planning and enacting school festivals the Michael Oak teachers chose not to avoid the

tensions of negotiating diverse and often-conflicting ideologies and opinions arising from the juxtaposition of their South African context and the European beginnings of Waldorf education. Instead, by engaging with these binaries, they found a creativity with which they planned and enacted the festivals. Furthermore, this process was a meaningful ritual, observable through the ritual symbols and actions of the preparation process and festival enactments themselves.

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## TWO. METHODOLOGY

... it is clear that what participant observation makes possible is the exploitation and later explication of the serendipitous, of the encounter that could not have been imagined, of the questions that could not have been voiced (James, 1999:116).

In conceptualising and planning the festivals, Michael Oak's teachers constantly integrated new materials and listened to differing viewpoints. Although this methodology was for them more time-consuming and complicated than simply making a precedent and following it every year, the teachers expressed their belief many times that their experience of the festivals was richer for the time and effort they expended in the preparation. Likewise, I found that by listening to the same differing viewpoints and reading the same texts as the teachers did, as well as through talking with the teachers themselves and observing the festivals and planning sessions, I could understand better the factors they said made their festival planning and enacting process both more complicated and richer. Concurrently, I also researched theoretical frameworks which helped me better understand the dynamics of what I was seeing and hearing.

With this focus, I employed three primary, concomitant means of gathering information. The first was observing the festivals themselves, participating in the planning meetings for the festivals, and helping with the setting up and cleaning up for some of the festivals. In doing so, I became a participant observer, using myself and my own personal experience as a research tool (Watson, 1999:4). Second, I conducted over seventy interviews, mostly informal and unstructured. Sometimes these interviews were with the teachers as a group gathered in a weekly teachers' meeting, but mostly they were with individuals. Third, I read background material and conducted library research to help me better understand my subject and the research process. These three branches of my investigation are explained in this chapter. I also consider and explain the ethical concerns that arose from my dual role as Michael Oak parent alongside that of ethnographer. Most of my observations were conducted during the 2005 school year, though I also observed festivals

in the 2006-2008 school years less formally. I have also continued to ask clarifying questions of individuals, to conduct interviews as opportunities have presented themselves, and perform relevant background research. These data are included where appropriate.

## **How It Began**

My interest in festivals in Waldorf education began in 1994 with my involvement in the Waldorf School of Atlanta, Georgia in the USA. My older child was a toddler and together he and I attended a class for parents and toddlers at the local Waldorf school. There I learned the importance Waldorf educators place on “rhythm” (that is, having a predictable, repetitive schedule for the day, week, and year), how to begin to achieve it at home, and how to help our home reflect a seasonal reality. By the time my children had completed their (combined) nine years of parent-toddler group, playgroup, and kindergarten, I had read quite a bit about Waldorf education, become involved in study groups for Waldorf education and Rudolf Steiner’s teachings, and had attended at least fifty parent evenings, school-wide lectures, and workshops about issues of parenting and education from a Waldorf perspective; I continued to frequent these events until 2005, when my family and I moved to live for a while in South Africa.<sup>12</sup>

While still in the United States, I also attended every school festival open to parents throughout my association with the school, except where my children each had a festival on the same evening and I had to choose between them. With my own background as a trained and practising ordained Presbyterian Minister of Word and Sacrament, creating and celebrating various rituals and festivals in a church context, I became especially interested in the Waldorf festivals, learning as much as possible about them. I learned that the teachers at the school, particularly in the kindergarten and lower primary school, observed some of the festivals (for example, Advent and Chanukah) in their daily class routine. I learned new ways of celebrating these and other festivals at home, and incorporated new insights about the Christian festivals into my

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<sup>12</sup> My husband, a computer expert, wanted to be able to work in South Africa in a voluntary capacity.

home life and my work within the church. Upon moving to Cape Town and enrolling my children at Michael Oak, I was grateful for the opportunity to continue my education about Waldorf school festivals – now within the South African, southern hemisphere context – through my parent involvement and fieldwork at Michael Oak.

My fieldwork began with my telephoning the liaison to the College of Teachers (the policy-makers in the school)<sup>13</sup>, telling her about my project and asking for a meeting. She then scheduled me into the following College meeting agenda, where I asked permission to observe the festivals, perhaps to help out if needed in preparations for them, all in order to get insight into the kinds of thought and preparation that go into the enactment of festivals. I explained how I had come to be interested in festivals in Waldorf schools in the southern hemisphere, how my undergraduate degree in anthropology had helped inform my life as a Presbyterian clergywoman, and how that experience had led me to examine anthropological questions about myth, ritual, and symbolism. I also explained that I was taking the opportunity, while in Cape Town, to study anthropology at the University of Cape Town.

Since both my children's class teachers were College members, the two of them were asked to keep me informed about and when things would be happening. They accepted my offer to help with festival preparation, and seemed very supportive of my proposed presence. I emphasized that I would not ask the children questions, explaining that I understood how a Waldorf approach to the spiritual nature of festivals means that they need to work in children's development through the children experiencing them on a non-intellectual, non-cognitive level, and that asking children questions would draw them into conscious analytical thought about ritual that is meant, by Waldorf teachers, to remain experiential for young children.

As Stanford Maher writes, "Steiner advocated that educationists respect this

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<sup>13</sup> "The College of Teachers comprises committed members from the staff who are willing to carry the day to day running of the school. The College members work together without a headmaster. They meet weekly; the chairperson is elected each year" (from the Michael Oak website, <http://www.michaeloak.org.za> /12 June 2007).

process of the development of consciousness in children from activity, through the feelings to the thinking” (Maher, 1995:12). What that means is that, from a very broad perspective, from birth to about age seven, children should be taught in an activity-based way; between ages seven to fourteen they should learn in a way that appeals to their emotions and feeling; and only from age fourteen should they be encouraged to analyse using more abstract thought. As asking younger children abstract, reflective questions would likely have skewed this educational process, I assured the College that I would not use children as respondents. I also told them that I would not videotape or photograph the festivals themselves (unless requested to do so by teachers). According to one of my children’s previous US-based Waldorf class teachers, media representations are discouraged in Waldorf schools because they are said to reduce a living process into a non-living fixed moment, they make children and teachers unnecessarily self-conscious and, if viewed later by participants, they change the participants’ perceptions of the event. Some College members simply nodded in response when I mentioned this, and I wondered later whether I was not more concerned with these issues than they.<sup>14</sup>

### **Participant Observation**

Corollary: The scientific role of the participant observer is interdependent with his role in the culture of the observed (Bruyn, 1966:18).

Most of my fieldwork centred around Michael Oak Waldorf School. The largest part of my research was observation of the planning and enacting of the festivals themselves; and I functioned as a participant observer whose intent was to “catch the process as it occurs in the experience of those he studies” (Bruyn, 1966:13). This method seemed well suited for me. Because I was living near the school and my children were both pupils there, I had the opportunity to be both visible and involved. The teachers could see me in a

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<sup>14</sup> However, whatever its effect on my project, I hold these beliefs as clergy and educator myself. My understanding of the pitfalls of photography and video is based on my own connection with Waldorf education, along with the parent education I received along the way, as well as on my seminary training and experience in church work. Many of the Michael Oak festivals were nonetheless photo-documented either by other parents or by teachers themselves. And, during the 2006 Michaelmas festival, I myself surreptitiously took a few photographs amid the flashing of cameras all around me.

variety of contexts and so trust could be built relatively quickly. I walked my children to school most mornings, picking them up myself most afternoons. These visits gave me the chance to “hang out,” a skill important for participant observation, according to Bernard (1994:151-152), because it “builds trust, and trust results in ordinary conversation and ordinary behaviour in your presence”.

My life as a Michael Oak parent also meant that I attended parent-teacher meetings, class functions, and participated in organizing the 2005 Michael Oak annual fundraising fair. In that role I not only went to fair committee meetings, but also attended meetings of class representatives called “links”, and visited parent-teacher meetings of other grades to encourage parents in their efforts to make crafts and prepare food to sell at the fair. I also participated in some of the outside activities enjoyed by several teachers and informants. During the time of my fieldwork, I found pleasure and meaning in attending an occasional Christian Community service, though my main church involvement remained at a local Protestant church. I also joined the Anthroposophical Society of the Western Cape, and attended various events there, many of which were also attended by teachers, who may or may not have been members. I participated in a teachers-parents conference in April 2005 organized around a visit of Waldorf teachers and teacher trainers from around the world;<sup>15</sup> in a teacher training module on festivals offered at the local teacher training facility in July 2005; and in the Kolisko Conference, a gathering of Waldorf educators, therapists, and anthroposophical medical practitioners, in April 2006.<sup>16</sup> These gatherings gave me a chance to meet

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<sup>15</sup> Known as the Hague Circle, this is a group of Waldorf teachers and teacher trainers who meet once or twice a year to discuss aspects of the pedagogy and to compare its potential and practice around the globe. The April 2005 conference marked the first time that the group had met outside of Europe, and it was combined in South Africa with the annual Waldorf Teachers' Conference organised by the South African Federation of Waldorf Schools. Parents and others interested in Waldorf education were invited to participate – in fact, special workshops were created to support parents in their school involvement.

<sup>16</sup> The Kolisko conference, held every four years previously in Europe and the USA, was for the first time in 2006 held in relays in nine countries, one of which was South Africa. Over 300 people, including Waldorf teachers and therapists and anthroposophical medical personnel, came to Cape Town to attend eight presentations, almost 50 workshops, a panel discussion and many conversations, all focusing on the theme “How do teachers and therapists develop their diagnostic, observational, and practical skills to meet today's children in Africa and in Waldorf schools?” (Pastoll, 2006). In Cape Town in 2006, this medical conference was combined with the annual South African Waldorf teachers'

Waldorf educators from other schools in Cape Town and across South Africa, and also from around the world. And so my profile in and around the school became more visible with my participation in my research, involvement as a parent, and in following my own interests.<sup>17</sup>

Besides physically watching the festival enactments themselves, I also watched rehearsals, helped set up and clean up for the festivals, and sat in on planning sessions. The extent to which I performed any of these functions varied from one festival to the next. In planning meetings, I at first just watched and listened. But soon someone had asked my opinion, and I volunteered a thought here and there. I was careful, though, not to seem insistent that anyone should act on my suggestions, though I doubt they would have done anything they did not want. My involvement in the meetings could, in sociologist Robert Cole's words, be called "activist participation," not because I was trying to effect a result, but because I was actively involved as a participant in the organizational process. Cole himself served on the boards of several organizations he was studying, and as a committee member in others (Cole, 1991:159-160). "I had 'real-time' organization access to many of the key decision makers," he writes. "That is, I could interview participants at the time events were occurring and before they had time to forget or reconstruct events. This is often an overlooked advantage of participant observation research" (Cole, 1991:161). Like Cole, I appreciated access to data and conversation that I would not otherwise have had and, like Cole, I dealt with the potential ethical dilemma of being at cross-purposes with the teachers by being as transparent as I could with my goals as a researcher.<sup>18</sup> I was pleased on one occasion to be able to offer a fresh translation of a particular Biblical verb from the original Greek so that the group could decide

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conference.

<sup>17</sup> Bernard also writes that participant observation is foundational to cultural anthropology because it "involves getting close to people and making them feel comfortable enough with your presence so that you can observe and record information about their lives" (1994:136); and Bruyn writes that the participant observer should be a "normal part of the culture and the life of the people under observation" (Bruyn, 1966:15).

<sup>18</sup> Cole writes, "Located in the center of the organizational network, I was privy not just to outcomes but to organizational process in ways that enormously enriched the research. At the same time, by presenting myself from the outset as a scholarly researcher, I avoided ethical problems associated with deceiving my research subjects" (1991:165).

how the text might be recited. But all the real decisions were made by the teachers, and my interventions were simply suggestions. Whyte compares this kind of participation to a social scientist who enters an interdisciplinary partnership, first as a participant observer “showing respect for the work of practitioners and technical specialists, and seeking to learn from them;” then, upon gaining “an understanding of the organizational culture and work systems, ... find[ing] ways of contributing that are appreciated by the technical specialists” (Whyte, 1991:240).

Sometimes the job of participant observer was plain fun for me. In preparation for the first festival I observed, the 2005 autumn harvest festival, I was asked to help my daughter’s Class Four as they baked bread:

On Wednesday, March 23<sup>rd</sup>, I helped Class Four bake bread for the festival. I arrived at the kitchen at 8:15 am as requested, just as the children were arriving. First I helped the Afrikaans teacher distribute the flour to the children, pouring it into their sieves after she had measured it. Then I helped measure salt, sugar, cinnamon, and butter, finally helping the children as they stood in line for milk. There were many little jobs to do to help. The children sifted the flour and salt, adding the flour that they had grown and ground themselves, mixed in the spices and sugar, grated the butter and mixed it in by hand, mixed the milk in, and kneaded it. Then they covered it in their pan and let it rise. Next they braided it into an Easter loaf shape, and let it rise again. I helped supervise the cleaning up, and they went on their way. Their teacher, who was also present, helping and teaching along the way, baked the bread (from my field notes).

As I had earlier taught children regularly in my professional capacity prior to moving to South Africa, I enjoyed this opportunity again to work with children and thereby to become acquainted with my daughter’s class. But even more meaningful for my research, I was able to observe firsthand how a class was preparing for the festival, and how, in doing so, they enacted a traditional autumn pre-festival role for the Class Fours at Michael Oak. By spending a bit of time with the class, I also began to know a different group of festival participants – they ceased to be theoretical children about whom we spoke,

but instead were children with names and faces, with whom I had a relationship. I began to see them a bit more as the teachers did.

### **The Problem of Belief as a Participant Observer**

Regarding his own fieldwork in a church in Zimbabwe,<sup>19</sup> Matthew Engelke questioned whether he might have better understood what he observed had he shared a belief in the supernatural. He raised the question surrounding what he calls “the problem of belief” – how to maintain a “proper” distance from the subjects’ inner lives, neither blurring the lines between one’s own beliefs and that of the subjects, nor staying “outside” the subjects’ experience to the degree that one cannot understand it (2002:3).

I have also had to consider the potential benefits and disadvantages of my own belief system being so similar to that of my subjects. As a self-professed anthroposophist (and member of the Anthroposophical Society), Waldorf parent, and Christian, I often shared similar beliefs and perspectives with the Michael Oak teachers and others I interviewed. However, the maelstrom of differing opinions surrounding the festivals showed me, if nothing else, that what it means to be an anthroposophist, Waldorf parent, and especially Christian are highly debated – I heard accusations voiced at different times within the anthroposophical and Waldorf communities that some person or group were not true anthroposophists, or not “really Waldorf,” or not properly celebrating as Christians. My own personal beliefs fell somewhere in the middle of this maelstrom, and never neatly. I found myself agreeing with some on the anthroposophical interpretations and on Waldorf issues, but not in relationship to the Church. Other times, I related well to Christians but not to their Waldorf or anthroposophical views. I might agree with one group at one time, but not another. I might agree partially with several people, and completely with none, but I almost always appreciated the opportunity for the dialogue that arose. So the danger that I would over-identify with the Michael Oak teachers was diminished, precisely because they did not always agree with each other any more than I had to agree with all of them all of the time.

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<sup>19</sup> Engelke studied the Johane Masowe Church, “an African religious movement with roots in the Makoni District stretching back to the early 1930’s” (Engelke 2002:3).

Instead of making assumptions about their beliefs based on my own, I tried to listen to what they expressed and to clarify the meanings that they assigned to an experience, some of which were similar to my own interpretations, but often were different.

One area in which my own beliefs helped me interpret the words of some Michael Oak teachers was in the area of spiritual experience or “consciousness,” an issue I return to in Chapters Five and Six. When someone spoke of a changed consciousness or a special experience during the festival enactment, for example, my own experience did not inform me of the meaning assigned to those words – I needed clarification for that from the subject. But because I have myself experienced moments of changed consciousness, I did not doubt the professed experience itself, but knew that I still needed to find anthropological theory to help me express what I heard from respondents. As Geertz (1986:373) says: “We can but listen to what, in words, in images, in actions, they say about their lives” and then we must find adequate words and images to explain, indeed to translate, what we have heard.

While the danger of reading one’s own meaning into a subject’s experience clearly exists for everyone, “believer” or not, the challenge for all anthropologists is “to discover something about how ... ‘the hard won meanings’ that inform ‘the whole human vial repertoire of thinking, willing, desiring, and feeling’ are ‘said, painted, danced, dramatized, put into circulation’” (Geertz, 1986:375 quoting Victor Turner). Moreover, as Edith Turner has pointed out (1992:14, original italics), this is necessary because “we are dealing with matters beyond language, born in the world of antistructure and liminality,<sup>20</sup> a word of which the processes of *ritual* are the language”.

By doubting the possibility of a subject’s “otherworldly” experience, one risks discounting not only the realities of those being observed, but also the data

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<sup>20</sup> Liminality is discussed more in Chapter Six.

produced by one's own fieldwork. In opposition to what she sees as a "hierarchy of authority," the belief that "trained anthropologists supposedly understand aspects of a culture better than the field subjects," Edith Turner raises the possibility that the subjects under observation might actually understand their own culture better than the anthropologists (1992:4). As Engelke (2002:3) further suggests, these subjects might even understand something about the human condition better than the researcher – what Engelke (ibid.) quotes Katherine Ewing (1994:571) as calling an "embarrassing possibility". For both Edith Turner and Engelke, belief is at issue. To what degree can the anthropologist share the beliefs of the subjects of research without "surrendering anthropological authority" (Engelke, 2002:3)?

Evans-Pritchard too voiced the dangers of misrepresenting a subject's beliefs and experiences as a result of one's own commitment to detachment. He said that

I find myself in agreement with [Wilhelm] Schmidt... 'If religion is essentially of the inner life, it follows that it can truly be grasped only from within. But beyond a doubt, this can be better done by one in whose inward consciousness an experience of religion plays a part. There is but too much danger that the other [non-believer] will talk of religion as a blind man might of colours, or one totally devoid of ear, of a beautiful musical composition.' (1965:121, quoted in Engelke, 2002:6).

Whatever the case, I agree with Richardson, who writes, "The ethnographic trick is not to factor out the biases, for that would factor out the ethnographer; rather the best strategy is not only to be aware of the biases, but to utilize them in the research" (1990:222).

Victor Turner's interest in liminality "was fueled by his own experience of it, as a poet and a pacifist and, later, in the circumcision camps of the Ndembu where the novices were taken for their initiation" (E. Turner, 1992:15). In his later years, Turner struggled with the relationship between his personal faith and his role as anthropologist (Engleke, 2002:8). Edith Turner's personal experience of seeing a spirit manifestation during a tooth-removing ritual in

1985 was an unexpected entry into the participant experience for her (1992:2). “In the second [ritual of two attended], I participated instead of merely witnessing,” she writes. “At the climax of the second one, to my surprise, I saw with my own eyes a large, afflicting substance, some six inches across, emerge from the body of the patient under the doctor’s hands.” This experience proved formational to her and led her to question how anthropologists deal with such material (1992:2). She writes, “After my return at the beginning of 1986, having seen the surprising result of my attention, I was free to ponder anew certain features of anthropological theory and found that these features appeared to vindicate my venture into personal participation and merited further exploration” (1992:10). Engelke asks that we take note of the moments when they [anthropologists] slipped out of a clearly professional frame and treated such considerations as a mixture of personal and intellectual challenges – when belief, in other words, became method.... Perhaps the point was to suggest that the study of religion, even in the tradition of scholarship indebted to Durkheim, often retains something ineffable (2002:8).<sup>21</sup>

The tension between my own beliefs and experiences and that of the Michael Oak teachers provided a source of introspection and creative energy for me as I participated in their discussions and festival enactments. The tension also fuelled a dialogue between my own beliefs and experiences and those I was observing. Careful not to impose my own beliefs but to listen to the other, I did allow myself to be affected by my participation, but did not try to read the experiences of others through my own eyes. Kapferer (1986:189) writes that individuals’ self-experience is formed through

a commonality of experience and a shared framework of understandings through which they become aware of their own and others’ experience.... Individuals experience themselves – they experience their experience and reflect on it – both from their own standpoint and from the standpoint of others within their culture. This is what gives to the practical activity of

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<sup>21</sup> Durkheim is credited with recognising “the existence of religious phenomena” for which he and others “did not possess appropriate terminology, and were reluctant to write about, yet which they knew were important to their theories of religion” (Olaveson 2001:90).

everyday life some of its movement and process. Further, I do not experience your experience.... I experience my experience of you.

The relationship of individual to group was a core dynamic in the dialogical relationship that the teachers had with one another in the festival planning and enacting process. Because it was also a core dynamic in the way that I related to different groups, including those with whom I helped plan, prepare, and celebrate festivals, it became a guiding factor in my own methodology, creating for me a dialogue which informed me as ethnographer as I sought to understand the experiences of others and as I intentionally distinguished my own experiences from theirs.

## **Interviews**

There were all the anthropologists, and there were all the tourists. The tourists were asking the Indians all the questions the anthropologists wanted to ask but didn't because they were afraid of ruining rapport (Nader, quoting Professor Robin Fox, 1970:113).

In addition to participant observation, I conducted interviews, mostly semi-structured, unstructured, and informal. Initially, I had wanted to interview all the school's teachers. But I soon found that most were very hard to catch. Often a teacher would ask that we wait until after a particular term was over, only to discover that the next term too was just as busy. Sometimes, seeing the fatigue in a teacher's face I would leave off: my multiple-level involvement in the school told me how many things that teacher was doing outside school hours, in addition to balancing the needs of spouse and children at home. Often a teacher would say she would like to talk with me but when I followed up and tried to set a date, she would again be too busy. Like the tongue-in-cheek story recounted by Robin Fox (see quotation above), I did not want to spoil the rapport I had with the teachers by insisting on an interview in spite of being able to see the signs that my timing was bad. I felt that to do so would be insensitive and boorish. On the other hand, I believed that "Discreet, objective, but genuine interest in other people seems everywhere to overcome a host of other barriers to communication" (Du Bois, 1970:227). These attributes, along with genuine feelings of gratitude, respect, and a love of learning were ones that I have tried to bring to life in general, as well as to

my fieldwork and interviews.

My formal meetings with the primary school teachers as a group, and with the College, became opportunities for structured group interviews: situations, as Bernard (1994:209) puts it, “where you won’t get more than one chance to interview someone”. I would come armed with a list of questions and would ask as many as I had time for, but always keeping watch on the time allotted me. Usually I tried to take notes, but I often found that I listened better if I recorded the interview from memory afterwards. Sometimes, for example, when interviewing the whole primary school teacher body, I took notes as they talked, but was not able to specify exactly who said what. For this reason, I have referenced them as a group when referring to something that somebody said in this particular context, using phrases like “The teachers said.” In some instances I was able nonetheless to clarify remarks made by discussing them afterwards with a teacher who had been present. I also constructed semi-structured interviews and conducted them with various members of the wider community, particularly when I needed specific pieces of information as background to my research.

One person in particular became a special mentor for me in understanding the history of the festivals at Michael Oak. That was Marion Penfold, a retired teacher of 29 years experience at the school as class teacher, and still extremely active in school activities. She was very gracious – and trusting – as, when she met me the first time, she lent me a very special notebook full of clippings, stories, and notes about festivals from her many years of teaching at Michael Oak.<sup>22</sup> As my fieldwork progressed, Marion would often stop and ask me how it was going. I always saw her at the festivals, as they have always been a very important part of her life and experience of Waldorf teaching, and as she continues her involvement with both Michael Oak and the broader Southern African Federation of Waldorf Schools as a friend and mentor. But soon Marion and I both began to show up at other talks, events, and performances around town, and the conversations that followed –

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<sup>22</sup> When I refer to this notebook, I have referenced it as “Marion’s notebook.”

whether related to Michael Oak festivals or not – helped me understand more about the Michael Oak community of which I had become a part. I was also able to ask clarifying questions of Marion, as I knew that I could either 'phone her or that I would soon run into her at an event. And even now as I write, Marion continues to give me festival-related clippings that she has found around her house – clippings that have often added a unique perspective to some piece of my dissertation.

Many of my interviews were unstructured, where “you sit down with an informant and hold an interview. Period” (Bernard, 1994:209). The purpose of these interviews, which I used particularly with former Michael Oak pupils,<sup>23</sup> was “to get people to open up and let them express themselves in their own terms, and at their own pace” (Bernard, 1994:209). I might ask a broad question like, “What do you remember about festivals when you were in primary school at Michael Oak?” By their initial response, I would discover what was most outstanding in their memories. Asking further open-ended questions, I learned more about the impact that the festival had had on the former pupil. I found this relaxed approach with the former pupils particularly useful because their answers provided me with some sense of their individuality. While initially most responded similarly (remembering the Michaelmas dragon or the St. John's bonfire, though without necessarily with which festival they were associated) an open-ended approach allowed them to go into more depth. I interviewed nine former pupils, significantly fewer than planned. First, many were really not interested in being interviewed and I had to convince them it would be helpful to me as they really did have something important to say. The older former pupils often felt they had little to contribute, or said they could not remember the festivals at all.<sup>24</sup> Many, younger and older, were also very busy and hard to pin down. Almost always, scheduling

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<sup>23</sup> I chose only to interview those former pupils who studied at Michael Oak most or all of their primary schooling, through tenth grade. These were all people who experienced many years of festivals (and general learning) at Michael Oak, often beginning in a nursery class. I refer to them here as “former pupils” of the school.

<sup>24</sup> I inferred that perhaps they expected the younger former pupils to remember much more. As I show in Chapter Six, the festival memories retained by the younger pupils were varied and often sketchy. One older former pupil, on being asked a second time approximately two years later, was able to recall more details.

an interview with a recent former pupil was out of the question, as the answer, even about tomorrow, tended to be, "I don't know, we'll have to see." I found that the best way to actually get an interview was to stop someone where he or she was, or be able to catch them on the 'phone at home and arrive at their house within fifteen minutes. Compounding the challenge was that I did not start driving until well into the year, and then only very short distances.<sup>25</sup>

Many of my most informative interviews were completely informal, "characterized by a total lack of structure or control. The researcher just tries to remember conversations heard during the course of a day in the field" (Bernard, 1994:209). I might be at the school waiting for a child and, standing next to a teacher, I would ask a question like, "did the festival go the way you expected?" Or sharing a meal with a teacher from another school at a conference the teacher might ask what I do (vocationally) and, upon hearing about my research, share his or her own festival experience. It was my "hanging out" at Michael Oak and around various conferences and anthroposophical or Waldorf-related places that gave me access to these informal conversations. Ethically, I either let the informants know from the beginning that their thoughts on the subject would be really helpful to my research, or I allowed them the option of reading and approving the specific statements I attributed to them before anyone else read them, so that they would not feel betrayed by a conversation out of context. On the occasions when I reached for my writing pad to make sure I was able to quote them correctly, they seemed pleased that they were able to help in such a simple way. I also interviewed a few Michael Oak parents in this way, mostly just to test how much awareness of the festivals was reaching into the parent body.

Finally, and because I was having so much trouble scheduling individual interviews with teachers, I conducted one written survey which I left for a teacher to hand out at a teachers' meeting at the end of 2005. Two people – a subject teacher and a retired former teacher – returned the completed survey, having given great thought to the answers. The other teachers, I learned later,

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<sup>25</sup> Public transport in Cape Town is notoriously unreliable and not always very safe.

felt overwhelmed by the big policy issues they were dealing with at the time and, being tired at the end of the school year, did not have the energy for it. I asked many of the same questions later at a group interview with the teachers.

Email was another form of written interviewing. I asked questions by email of other Waldorf related people (teachers, a farmer, and a parent) in other southern hemisphere countries (see below), and searched the archives of the Waldorf email list-serve<sup>26</sup> of which I have been a participant for about 13 years, raising some further questions in that forum (with limited results).

In all, I interviewed more than 75 people whom I can recall, although I am sure that I have spoken with others in informal conversation at Waldorf gatherings like the Hague Circle or Kolisko Conference. Many of the interviewees fell into two or more categories, for example Waldorf student and teacher, parent and teacher, or, among the Michael Oak teachers, parents, high school, and subject teachers. I recorded them in the category for which I interviewed them. For example, if I interviewed a Michael Oak parent in her role as Michael Oak teacher, then she is recorded as teacher only. Two of the former pupils I interviewed were themselves teachers and were interviewed in both roles; I have recorded them in both categories. Therefore the numbers in the sub-categories do not add up to the category total. I have categorized them as follows:

From the Michael Oak community: approximately 35  
 Michael Oak Primary School Teachers: 8 class teachers and 8 speciality teachers  
 High school teachers (3)  
 Nursery teachers (2)  
 Michael Oak former pupils (9)  
 Other (administrative staff, former Michael Oak class teachers) (3)  
 Michael Oak current parents (4)  
 Michael Oak former parents (approx. 8)

Other South African Waldorf School Teachers: approximately 24  
 Stellenbosch Waldorf School teachers (4)

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<sup>26</sup> See <http://waldorfworld.net/waldorflist/> 14 June 2007.

Constantia Waldorf School teachers (4)  
 Roseway Waldorf School teachers (approximately 6)  
 Dassenberg Waldorf School teachers (1)  
 Gaia Waldorf School teachers (1)  
 Zenzeleni School for Creative Education (Khayelitsha, Cape Town) teachers (approximately 5)<sup>27</sup>  
 Inkanyezi Waldorf School (Alexandra, Johannesburg) teachers (1)  
 McGregor Waldorf School teachers (2)

Other Waldorf/Anthroposophically-related: (approximately 19)  
 Centre for Creative Education/Federation of Southern African Waldorf Schools (5)  
 Other Waldorf/ Anthroposophical Society of the Western Cape/ Christian Community (9)

Other countries:  
 Australia (2)  
 New Zealand (2)  
 Brazil (3)  
 Argentina (1)

Most of my data involved the Michael Oak primary school teachers. Of the eight class teachers interviewed between 2005-2008, all but one were women. Two were very involved with the Christian Community (one the daughter of a priest), and two also attended Christian Community services. Three or four were members of (or had strong ties to) the Anthroposophical Society of the Western Cape. Seven were South African-born, the other European. Racially, seven were white, the other coloured. At least four were fluent in Afrikaans language, and at least two also spoke German. One had extensive teaching experience outside of Waldorf before taking a class for seven years at Michael Oak, two had taught at least ten years at Michael Oak, two had experience at other Waldorf schools (one helped found another Waldorf school in the Western Cape), one spent many years as a Michael Oak kindergarten teacher before becoming a class teacher, and two were relatively new teachers. Four had children attending Michael Oak during the time of my fieldwork. Two others had older children who were Waldorf educated.

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<sup>27</sup> Though commonly referred to as the “Zenzeleni Waldorf School,” this school is officially called the “Zenzeleni School for Creative Education” (as seen on its prospectus). However, according to a Southern African Federation of Waldorf Schools council member, the school is a fully accredited Waldorf school in good standing with the Federation and so can legally and ethically use either name.

Of the eight subject teachers, seven were women, at least six were South African-born, the other one or two European. Racially, two were black Xhosa-speakers, the rest white, speaking either Afrikaans or English as a first language. Three were very involved with the Christian Community church, one the wife of the local priest. One was Jewish. One was educated in an established Waldorf School in England. Three had children attending Michael Oak during the time of my fieldwork, and four or five had older Waldorf-educated children.

### **Ethics**

The issue for the ethnographer is, "How can I repay these people who give me so much?" while the issue for the community is, "What does she give that makes up for the trouble she causes...?" (Golde, 1970:10).

The biggest ethical dilemma I faced was in the very closeness of my personal world and that of the schools, particularly the Michael Oak community. The same factors that helped me build trust as a foundation for my research into the festivals demanded a high level of self-reflection and intentionality so that my role as ethnographer was clearly differentiated from my other roles. While Bruyn writes that "the role of the participant ethnographer requires both detachment and personal involvement" (1966:14), I found that detachment came not in how I handled personal relationships, but in my having to constrain any hopes, expectations, or other opinions I might have about the way festivals might be conceived of, prepared for, and enacted in Waldorf schools, particularly in the southern hemisphere, and specifically at Michael Oak.<sup>28</sup> This role differentiation was important because, while I was forming some close friendships among those whom I interviewed or observed, the College of teachers, in particular, had made clear that it was very aware that if

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<sup>28</sup> As a northern hemisphere Christian clergy member. I have celebrated both Christian and seasonal festivals personally and in the church, with no ideological conflicts between the two. I supported the seasonal, religiously pluralistic (mostly Christian and Jewish) festivals celebrated at the U.S. Waldorf school with which I was involved. Though I personally believe that the seasonal celebration is as important as the Christian one, and even more so in the Waldorf school setting, my clergy background influences my inclination against switching the Christian festivals to their opposite seasons as the "Lorien Stream" of Australians has in their churches and Waldorf schools (for more on the Lorien stream, see West, 1994).

I inserted my personal opinions into my work I could disrupt the school community in ways that could require responsive action on the College's part. To complicate matters, I was unaware, when I began my research, that I was delving into an already controversial subject in the broader anthroposophical community, one that another new immigrant member of that community had recently raised when he questioned how festivals should be celebrated and took an opposite view from the Michael Oak College. Indeed it was clear that various people were concerned about this person's influence over me and whether I might possibly support him and thus challenge Michael Oak's approach to festivals.<sup>29</sup> I thus found myself being asked, on a number of occasions and by people from around Cape Town, from Michael Oak and from other schools (or not involved with any particular school), "whose side are you on?" Or I found people trying to convert me to their position. Even as I now write, it is only recently that a non-Waldorf-teaching anthroposophist told me at great length why I *have* to think a certain way and why the "other side" is just wrong about the festivals. I was also often surprised at the energy with which people spoke of the festivals. While this ongoing background debate made gaining the trust of the College even more crucial, it had a real benefit – people either came to me, or were quite happy to let me know what they thought. But it also meant that I had consistently to be transparent in my intentions and objectives.

I was also consistent in expressing my own belief that festivals take place within a social system, and that any major change to festivals as practiced in a particular school must occur within a defined, intentional process so as not to cause conflict among the wider community, particularly the parent body, because of carelessness or rashness. This belief comes from knowledge I have gained through my own specialized training in organizational process,<sup>30</sup> and is motivated by my own personal investment in maintaining a healthy, intentional, transparent governmental process and social arena at my children's school. So I made clear to any who were interested and concerned

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<sup>29</sup> Ironically, I did not even meet him until early 2006 when I took a class with his wife, so I had no contact with him until I had already begun work on writing this dissertation.

<sup>30</sup> I have specialized clergy training as an interim pastor, one who understands organizational process as a background and helps congregations make transitions in leadership.

about my position, that I had less of a personal interest in what the teachers believed or did regarding festivals than I had a professional opinion about an intentional, fair, and effective organizational process.

Bruyn discusses the dangers of over-rapport between the observer and the subjects of observation, explaining that the possibility exists for one's research to be derailed either because, as observer, one has become too close to ask questions or to report data without damaging those relationships foundational to gathering data; or when one does not adequately distinguish between one's own interests and values and those being observed (Bruyn, 1966:229). I was very much aware that I did not want to displease the people who would be teaching my children for the next couple of years or longer. And again, I counted honesty, objectivity, and transparency as part of my *modus operandi*. I tried to suspend value judgments about things that happened – for example, when teachers failed to include me in the planning of the Harvest festival, or forgot to call me when a meeting time changed. I then simply tried to understand and observe what might have caused what had happened, noting, for example, that the teachers were often extremely busy, some even missing school at times because of fatigue or extraordinary circumstances in their personal lives. Also, I acknowledged, first to myself then later to the teachers themselves, that they might have needed to know that they could trust me before they let “just anyone” into planning what for them was an extremely important and meaningful part of the school year. I was therefore able to ask hard questions like “why didn't you call me?” by waiting and taking what I hope was an honest and objective approach. In return, I did not sense any anger, resentment or defensiveness that might have jeopardized their relationships either with me or with my children. In fact, I sometimes sensed appreciation that I had acknowledged the reality of busy teachers' lives.

Another ethical issue that I encountered was that of reciprocity. Cora du Bois (1970:226) writes that “one cannot, and should not morally, work in a community on whose good will one depends without rendering some services in return”. I wanted to contribute in some way to those helping me with my fieldwork by taking time to speak to and include me. I felt self-conscious of my

always asking people for things – interviews, answers, papers, photos, among other requests. My role in setting up and cleaning up after a couple of festivals helped somewhat with this dilemma. Aware of my debt, I constantly asked how my work might be helpful, especially to the teachers. They answered, in one meeting, that perhaps I could later write articles for parents, either for new parents or to place in the *Leaflet*, the school's weekly newsletter. In another group interview, they said that what I would write about them might help other schools not as intentional with their festivals. I wondered if this latter request assumed that the data I recorded was flattering to the school; however, I realised, when I read Glenda Muhl's (2006) dissertation about pupil attrition within the Constantia Waldorf School, that my discussing struggles that these teachers faced might also help teachers from other schools if the latter could read about them.

I was conscious of bothering busy teachers, of the potential of upsetting the people who taught my children, of making my own life as a parent at the school difficult. I was conscious too of the potential consequences of my presence for my children. "Reciprocity in some form can be the anthropologist's means of demonstrating her value, her importance, her membership in the community, and of counteracting the negative effects of her differences" (Golde, 1970:10). The anthropologists mentioned by Golde gave English lessons, "did favors, provided medicine, gave food, drink, or material goods" (1970:10). I gave Greek lessons, helped plan the annual fair, attended the functions I was expected to (such as parent evenings), helped bake bread or chaperone field trips, and similar tasks, along with the ones the teacher group suggested I take on. This reciprocity was not the only reason for my involvement, however, since I benefited from the additional exposure, and, in retrospect, my children benefited from my being an involved parent. Parents in Waldorf schools are expected to be very involved, as I knew from my involvement at the Waldorf School of Atlanta, and which the Michael Oak staff made very clear when we had first applied for our children to attend Michael Oak, before I ever decided to undertake a research project. In addition, I truly enjoyed my involvement (and have continued with it after the formal fieldwork period ended), and felt fortunate to have the opportunity to

engage with the school and its teachers.

### **Background Reading and Study: The Evolution of a Thesis**

Fieldwork is “not the effect of a sudden, blinding flash of light, but the much slower destination reached through sore feet and blisters” (Shore, 1999:27).

The third part of my research, which was conducted concurrently with the participant observation and interviews, was my study and background reading. These provided not just a vehicle for interpreting what I saw and heard, but also opened doors to further conversation as I began to understand some of the issues involved in planning festivals from an anthroposophical point of view. I read as much as possible on festivals, particularly the lectures of Rudolf Steiner, and met regularly with Julian Sleigh, a retired Christian Community priest living in Camphill Alpha, near Dassenberg to the north of Cape Town, who kindly mentored me in my search for even a basic understanding of festivals and the particular issues arising for those enacting them in the southern hemisphere. More than forty years previously, Sleigh had become one of South Africa’s first Christian Community priests, influencing the development of that church in the country, with the influence of his father-in-law, Dr Karl König, founder of Camphill Villages<sup>31</sup> worldwide. Celebrating the festivals in the southern hemisphere context has been an interest of Julian and a topic of study for him throughout those forty-three years, and I have been exceedingly grateful for the time he has spent with me.

I also found that activities and studies that I did not consider relevant to my fieldwork informed my understanding of the subject in unlikely ways. Attending weekly anthropology seminars and tutoring a group of undergraduates for a class on belief and symbolism broadened my understanding of my fieldwork

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<sup>31</sup> The first Camphill Community was founded in 1940 in Scotland to educate a mentally disabled group of children. Drawing from Rudolf Steiner’s philosophy of anthroposophy, founder Dr Karl König’s group of “doctors, medical students and creative young people” sought a holistic approach by “living in a community with the children 24-hours-a-day” (<http://www.camphill.org.uk/about/camphill-history> 27 May 2008). Today more than 100 Camphill communities (serving mentally disabled children or adults) can be found in more than 20 countries worldwide (<http://www.camphill.org.uk/about/a-worldwide-movement/> 27 May 2008).

and gave me new ideas. My weekly study group at the Anthroposophical Society, and the assorted anthroposophical books and lectures that I read, lent me an understanding of the subject that I did not realise until later. As Shore (1999:26) has said, “The idea of “the field” as a discreet, bounded geographical locale is proving to be increasingly outdated and untenable ... the traditional idea that fieldwork can be neatly divorced or “bracketed off” from “normal” time and space is itself a highly dubious and problematic notion”. In retrospect much more of my reading and conversations contributed to the shaping of this dissertation than I could have imagined.

One early challenge of my fieldwork was discovering exactly what and when festivals are. There seemed to be an assumption that everyone should know. But I did not. I asked about some of the festivals that I had celebrated with my children over the previous eight years at the Waldorf School of Atlanta, and discovered that the festivals with which I was familiar were not the same as those celebrated in Cape Town. It took an interview with a former Michael Oak student before I understood that at Michael Oak there are four festivals each year, each one associated with a season – Easter/Harvest with autumn, St. John’s with winter, Michaelmas with spring, and the Star Tree Festival with summer. It was a full year into my research that I realized that a fifth semi-festival must also be mentioned in connection with the school’s major festivals – the Pancake Evening, an event that is not a festival in itself, but, as I show below, is an important event because certain aspects of the other festivals have been transferred to it as they have been transposed from northern to southern hemisphere celebrations.<sup>32</sup>

I struggled from early in the process to define my focus. My initial working title was “Celebrating Festivals in Waldorf Schools in the Southern Hemisphere.” Because South Africa is not the only southern hemisphere country with Waldorf Schools, I began to research what was happening in other countries – Australia, New Zealand, Brazil, and Argentina. I met an Argentine teacher

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<sup>32</sup> The annual school fair sometimes bears the label of “festival,” but this use of the word is different altogether from the subject of this dissertation, referring instead to the tradition of “trade fairs”, which may have had some origin in sacred festivals but became secularized at some point in history (Waters, 1970:2).

and Hague Circle member at a dinner at the April 2005 Hague Circle conference, and we talked about celebrating Easter. Emails to Australia, Brazil, and New Zealand produced mixed results. I followed up with a couple of people I remembered from an international Waldorf email list, and wrote a biodynamic farmer I knew who had moved from Georgia, USA to Australia.<sup>33</sup> His partner has a close friend who teaches at a Waldorf school, and she was happy to talk. Later, I talked with some Brazilian teachers who were in Cape Town for the April 2006 Kolisko Conference. I found that Waldorf schools in other southern hemisphere countries were dealing with the same issues, asking the same questions as South Africans.

I also began to ask questions of teachers at other South African schools. I learned that the Stellenbosch Waldorf School also celebrates a Whitsunday (Pentecost) festival, which they call the Dove Festival. In 2005, the Zenzeleni School in Khayelitsha celebrated its first festival ever – a St. John's festival which became a celebration of food, shared with the surrounding community. Roseway School near Durban, I learned, takes its festivals quite seriously, but celebrates them in a way that mirrors the traditional northern hemisphere celebrations. Constantia Waldorf School (like Michael Oak) celebrates the dance of the May Pole; but unlike Michael Oak, they dance in May, in the autumn (Michael Oak dances in September, in the spring, at Michaelmas).

I also studied Rudolf Steiner's lectures on the subject of seasons and festivals, particularly a lecture series that Julian Sleight strongly recommended and one to which the Michael Oak teachers had referred me – five lectures in a book called The Four Seasons and the Archangels (Steiner, 1996a). This book was cited frequently by teachers and others as an important explanation of the role and importance of the festivals in anthroposophical terms. For at least the first six months of my research, I considered delving into theology as part of the dissertation, especially when a real conversation seemed imminent between different people of different vocations in the Cape Town Waldorf community who expressed differing opinions on how the festivals should be

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<sup>33</sup> Biodynamic farming is a method of organic farming using indications given by Rudolf Steiner.

celebrated, and planned a discussion group. However, my focus needed to be narrowed, not expanded and, interesting as the subject was, the discussion group came together only late in 2006 when I joined its activities in a role other than researching anthropologist. This elusive conversation, which always seemed imminent (from what people said), was a prime example of what Gubrium (1988:17) means when he writes, "...as fieldworkers, we must to some degree, ignore what people actually say, just as they do, and attend to what they could be telling each other and us. Their conversations alone are inadequate to the task. They voice much more than they say." While all the members of the discussion group spoke emphatically of the fundamental importance of our conversation, and of their enthusiasm to participate in it, when I tried to schedule meetings, the group members (except Julian Sleight) found little time to return calls and had considerable personal and professional time constraints, which made finding a meeting time rather difficult. However, we remain in close contact, and the intention to carry on discussion and researching the issue continues, though some members are celebrating festivals in their own ways, with a general invitation to the other members. What I have thus heard "voiced" behind the words is that actually celebrating the festivals is more important than talking about them.

Later, while writing about the boundaries of ritual time and space within their context as ritual symbols (Chapters Five and Six), I realised that the scope of my subject matter needed to be expanded after all, to include a phenomenological explanation of the perceptions and experiences of the teachers as they created something very experientially meaningful to them in the festivals. This was because I found that giving a contextual description of what happened was insufficient. Gubrium (1988:73) writes "... that field realities were a point of reference for seeing and conveying the folk philosophical details of people's lives, what literally makes their lives meaningful and what does not". This made me consider that what the teachers intended, how they enacted transformation of themselves and the environment, and how they perceived the experience of the sacred, were all intrinsic to my understanding of what happens during Waldorf festivals. I thus followed up with more study and clarifying interviews with teachers.

Interestingly, I found that it was my more recent experience of weekly eurythmy classes with a eurythmist from Cape Town's Kairos school that has helped me to understand these concepts more clearly – another unrelated activity that proved invaluable and irreplaceable in the course of my fieldwork.<sup>34</sup>

### **In closing**

My fieldwork represents for me many fascinating hours of study, conversation, and observation over the more than three years that the project has taken. Surprising to me is that many of the outside activities with which I was involved, and many of the books which I read for my own interest, turned out to be so helpful to me in my field work. Because of my activities within Michael Oak, the greater Waldorf school movement, and the anthroposophical community, I made contacts and had conversations that otherwise I would have missed. Because of these activities, and along with the anthroposophical or Waldorf related books that I read because of various points of interest, I began to understand my subject on a deeper and broader level than I would have otherwise, becoming increasingly aware of the complex and often conflicting abundance of influences that the teachers considered as they conceptualised and planned the festivals. Nevertheless, my project represents just a moment in time, an observation of events and a recording of thoughts that all took place within a limited period within the history of Michael Oak and the Waldorf school movement in South Africa. In the following chapter, I provide a brief outline of that particular historical and pedagogical context in which my fieldwork was conducted.

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<sup>34</sup> As I will explain in Chapter Three, Kairos eurythmy is a particular approach to eurythmy that maintains an awareness of time and space and how the individual moves through them. Though all forms of eurythmy share that awareness in one way or another, the Kairos eurythmy contains special exercises and movements developed by Ursula Zimmerman, a eurythmist in Dornach, Switzerland. Kairos eurythmy is becoming an influence in South African eurythmy training. Cobie Roelvert, who taught primary school eurythmy at Michael Oak during most of the 2005 school year, has offered weekly public Kairos eurythmy classes for non-professionals like me.

### THREE. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS: CONTEXTUALISING THE STUDY

...Festival commonly means *a periodically recurrent, social occasion in which, through a multiplicity of forms and a series of coordinated events, participate directly or indirectly and to various degrees, all members of a whole community, united by ethnic, linguistic, religious, historical bonds, and sharing a worldview.* Both the social function and the symbolic meaning of the festival are closely related to a series of overt values that the community recognizes as essential to its ideology and worldview, to its social identity, its historical continuity, and to its physical survival, which is ultimately what festival celebrates [original italics] (Falassi, 1987:2).

Understanding the context within which Michael Oak finds itself is immensely important for comprehending what kinds of factors influenced how the teachers planned and enacted festivals. The first area of influence was the Waldorf tradition, as described by Rudolf Steiner in his books, essays, and lectures. With their far-reaching ambition of changing and renewing society through children's education, the teachers set themselves goals that extended beyond conveying just information to their pupils. The Waldorf tradition also encourages teachers to continue to learn and experience personal growth in the course of teaching, an ethos strengthened by collegial mentoring support and also by the convention whereby a teacher remains with the same class for the whole of the class's primary school experience. The South African location gave further context to the teachers' perspectives. As evidenced by writings of the leadership of the Federation of Southern African Waldorf Schools, and also by information on websites of schools like Michael Oak, Max Stibbe in Pretoria, Gaia in Pinelands (Cape Town), and the international organisation Unesco (about Alexandra in Gauteng),<sup>35</sup> a strong motivation exists within the South African Waldorf school movement to help heal the ills of South African society through what transpires for children in Waldorf schools. Michael Oak's festivals were a place and time where these factors converged, together with belief (based on the words of Rudolf Steiner) that festival participation helps children grow into fully-developed human beings.

<sup>35</sup> See <http://www.michaeloakschool.org.za/> (4 June 2008), <http://www.maxstibbe.co.za/> (4 June 2008), <http://www.gaiawaldorf.co.za/> (4 June 2008), and [http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wtd\\_97/8.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wtd_97/8.htm) (4 June 2008).

Speaking, as founder, about the first Waldorf school's purpose at its 1919 opening, Rudolf Steiner referred to his own work there as a "sacred obligation," and to the teachers' work as a "sacred responsibility, taken on by teachers in their specific social communities when they embark on the ultimate community service with children, with people who are growing up and ... becoming" (Steiner, 1996d:15). Michael Oak Waldorf School was founded in 1962 in the context of this heritage.<sup>36</sup> I use this chapter to explain the social goals Steiner set for Waldorf schools and their teachers, and his understanding of the developmental processes that form the basis of the pedagogy. I also show how Michael Oak was established with the aim of bringing social renewal in its South African context, and how that reflects in how its present teachers consider their task of working with children to be for more than conveying information for intellectual development. Steiner said,

if we want to be real teachers and educators, we must ... foster the whole person within us and then this whole person will be related to what we have to develop in the child in educational and artistic ways... What we as educators need is an awakening of our living human nature, which will experience in itself the whole of the child to which it makes a spiritual connection (1996d:25).

Drawing on data from interviews with teachers and from my observations of festival preparations, I show how this thought is consistent with how the teachers planned, prepared for, and enacted festivals with the school's children. I also show how the unique goals and expectations of Waldorf education, together with its developmentally specific pedagogy, provide a context through which the teachers conceptualised and planned festivals. Furthermore, I provide a contextual background in which to develop my general argument – that the ways the teachers dealt with the dichotomies and polarities that arose from Michael Oak's context as a Waldorf school in South Africa contributed to the meaning and purpose they found in the festival

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<sup>36</sup> The Michael Oak website says, "Waldorf Education is a holistic response to the question "How can education best serve the growth of the individual and of society?" (http://www.michaeloak.org.za /12 May 2007).

process with the children; and that that in turn led them to see the whole process of festival planning and enactment as even more important than any specific elements of a festival.

### **Brief History, Background, and Aims of Waldorf Education**

Education is a burning issue today. The well-being of our children and the health of our societies are greatly influenced by our schools. A child's development must be carefully and lovingly guided if he or she is to have a firm foundation for becoming socially balanced and productive. We cannot know the demands which the future will place upon our children, but it is clear that inner strength, intellectual flexibility, empathy and sound independent judgement [sic] will be qualities vital to their future. Rudolf Steiner's insight into child development enabled him to indicate ways in which Waldorf Schools can methodically work to develop these qualities (Southern African Federation of Waldorf Schools website, <http://www.waldorf.org.za> /14 June 2007).

The first Waldorf (or "Steiner") school was founded in 1919 for the Waldorf-Astoria Cigarette Factory workers' children in Stuttgart, Germany, by the factory owner, Emil Molt, reportedly at the workers' request and under the direction and help of Rudolf Steiner. In the context of then prevailing social and political upheavals in Europe and Asia, revolutions and war, Steiner envisioned a pedagogy where children would be guided and empowered to function effectively in their own cultural context, yet think freely beyond the limitations of prevailing socio-cultural thought patterns. Given the difficult political circumstances of the day, he intended that, through his curriculum, the new school's children would have the time needed to develop the entirety of their beings – in their actions, feelings and thought processes – gradually building on each prior stage of development until they entered society as free-thinking adults, ready to reform and renew society itself (see Steiner, 1995). Referring to people who had not had such opportunities in childhood, Steiner spoke about the "human wrecks serving in responsible positions" in German society at the time, and about "those brutal and violent human beings who come out trampling everything under their feet as a result of not having been able to cultivate their will" (Davis, 1996:xi).

Education, he said, should enable children to develop the fullness of their humanity and become people who know not only how to think, but also to feel and to act. They needed, he said, to be competent in life, “educated to become people who are prepared for a life that corresponds to these demands, which are ones that anyone can support, regardless of what social class he or she comes from” (Steiner, 1996d:2). Recognising the accomplishments of (what was then) modern technology (1996d:16), he added that “we need a new scientific attitude. Above all, we need a new spirit for the entire art of education” (1996d:18), a new spirit that would address the issues of “social justice” and “the difficult challenges facing the generations to come” (1996c:27).

The Association of Waldorf Schools of North America (AWSNA) official website explains:

It is easy to fall into the error of believing that education must make our children fit into society. Although we are certainly influenced by what the world brings us, the fact is that the world is shaped by people, not people by the world. However, that shaping of the world is possible in a healthy way only if the shapers are themselves in possession of their full nature as human beings (<http://www.awsna.org/awsna-faq.html> /12 May 2007).

The principles of Waldorf education were thus designed to nurture and educate children in such a way that, as they grow and develop, they develop as fully as humanly possible (Steiner, 1996d:27).<sup>37</sup> “In practice,” says the Michael Oak website, “through observing the children’s enthusiastic response to subject matter artistically taught, one recognises the curriculum as being fundamentally important. It answers developmental needs of the children, nourishing and strengthening them at each stage” (<http://www.michaeloak.org.za> /12 May 2007).

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<sup>37</sup> For more information on the intentions behind the founding of Waldorf Education, please see Steiner’s essay entitled “The Pedagogical Basis of the Waldorf School” (1996d:1-10).

Steiner's educational ideas were based on his philosophy, known as Anthroposophy, which, although it is never taught explicitly to children in the classroom, informs the pedagogy.<sup>38</sup> Steiner believed that just as children change in their physical form from birth into adulthood they also change in a corresponding way psychologically and emotionally.<sup>39</sup> Humans develop from birth into adulthood, according to Steiner, in seven-year periods or phases. In the first seven-year phase, the growth of the child's physical body is most prominent, and takes the majority of the child's energy. However, as the child enters what Waldorf educators call the second seven-year cycle (first grade and beginning of primary school in South African Waldorf schools), the Waldorf educator takes note of significant changes, which are addressed in the curriculum (Van Alphen, 2000).<sup>40</sup> According to anthroposophical medical literature available in the Michael Oak parent library,<sup>41</sup> children will have, at this point, become physically "less rounded," and have begun to lose their milk teeth. Psychologically, each is said to begin to relate to the world less by imitation – i.e. by moving through it and touching it as before – than now by responding emotionally through feelings about what is encountered. "The full range of emotions – joy and sorrow, love and hate – are felt more deeply than before, colouring thinking and behaviour. The child's thinking becomes less directed by sense perceptions and more imbued [sic] with imaginative pictures that arise out of his own creative fantasy" (Goldberg, 2003a:05).

In response to these perceived changes, the Waldorf curriculum guidelines approach the primary school child through traditional subjects like reading,

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<sup>38</sup> At the opening of the first Waldorf school, Steiner said, "Anyone who says that anthroposophically oriented spiritual science is founding the Waldorf School, and that it is now going to inject its philosophy into this school, will not be speaking the truth." For full text, see Steiner (1996d:25-26).

<sup>39</sup> Waldorf school doctor Raoul Goldberg details these changes more fully in his article, "The Three Births of Childhood." (2003a).

<sup>40</sup> The Southern African Federation of Waldorf schools website says, "Each year the child ripens to another level and the natural modes of learning change dramatically in the three principle phases: Pre-School, Primary School and High School. The loss of milk teeth and the transformations at puberty mark the two most important changes in the physical and psychological development of the growing child which have to be taken into account both in the curriculum content and the teaching methods used. Therefore a subject is only introduced when the child has reached the particular stage where understanding and assimilation can best take place. To skip a phase or to introduce one too early can be harmful to the child" (<http://www.waldorf.org.za/> 12 June 2007).

<sup>41</sup> Dr. Raoul Goldberg, mentioned previously, has written a series of articles about child development and related issues, now available in pamphlet form under the title "Awaken to Child Health," reprints available at [www.syringahealth.co.za/](http://www.syringahealth.co.za/) 12 June 2007.

mathematics, foreign languages, and science, but always alongside artistic activities like drawing and painting, poetry, music and movement. That is so that the child will comprehend the subjects through feeling (believed to be the faculty developing during these years) rather than through dry analytical thinking (believed to develop more fully in the following seven years). Later, in the third seven year phase (ages 14-21, beginning with the start of high school and the onset of pubescence), the child's developing intellect is said to become more mature and to be the primary tool for approaching subjects which are expected previously to have been internalized emotionally in primary school.

The youngest (pre-primary) children in Waldorf schools thus learn primarily through play, experiencing the world around them in a sensory, non-analytical way. Their abilities in observation are said to be honed as they watch and imitate those around them, with kindergarten teachers giving children much opportunity to imitate. Entering primary school, children are taught more explicitly to notice what they perceive through using their senses, particularly sight, sound, taste, touch and smell, and perhaps even their sense of motion, balance, and thoughts, among others – through what might be called a phenomenological approach. As D'Aleo (2004:28)<sup>42</sup> puts it: "The underlying premise to the phenomenological approach ... is that all empirical knowledge begins with sensory impressions." As I show later, Michael Oak's teachers planned festivals in such a way that they were rich with components to stimulate the children's senses: colour, art, speech, movement, food, and warmth among others.

As children move into the upper primary classes, Waldorf teachers guide them into ways of finding relationships between their sense impressions, believing that "It is then and only then that the logic can be rightly applied to determine if the relationship will hold true in the context of other relationships

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<sup>42</sup> Michael D'Aleo teaches Physics and Physical Sciences at the Waldorf School of Saratoga Springs (New York), and also trains Waldorf high school teachers at The Center for Anthroposophy in Wilton, New Hampshire. According to an article in the *Waldorf Science Newsletter*, "he is currently the director of research for SENSRI, a non-profit scientific research group that investigates that [sic] methods and applications of phenomena-based science" (D'Aleo, no date).

that are known. This process of looking for a relationship among phenomena is the true activity of thinking. Thinking is not simply the recollection of previously known facts” (D’Aleo 2004:29). By using this kind of phenomenological approach in the upper primary classes, the “students are given an experience of phenomena and then have to struggle to discover the order that they demonstrate and/or the relationships between them” (ibid). I show below how Michael Oak’s teachers used this pedagogical process in preparing for festivals with their pupils in the classroom, and how in doing so they were fulfilling a requirement of the curriculum – that is, to help children learn to think in ways that might enable them to function in a changing society. This method of teaching, seen in the planning and enactment of festivals, reflects the highly idealistic and far-reaching goals of Michael Oak’s teachers. As the Michael Oak website explains, “They thus receive a truly scientific training - working from the phenomena and then engaging in deep thinking processes, finally coming to new insights and conclusions” (<http://www.michaeloak.org.za/> 12 May 2007). By using this method in the upper primary school classroom, allowing the children to observe and make connections between different ideas on their own, the teachers aim to address situations in the children’s lives by letting the children observe different perspectives on the subject, and to draw connections between them to create new ideas and perspectives. The children’s classroom discussions were thus guided by teachers to reflect the very same kind of dynamic process of wrestling with dichotomous, even contradictory factors, as the teachers – as I show below – engaged in within their festival planning meetings.

### **Brief History and Background of Michael Oak**

The people of South Africa are calling for an entirely new approach to education (Van Alphen, 2000:1).

Michael Oak Waldorf School in Cape Town, South Africa “was started in 1962 through the initiative of parents who wanted Waldorf education for their children” (<http://www.michaeloak.org.za/> 12 May 2007). Heinz Schotte and Lia Gabler were the pioneer teachers, and the school was visited frequently by influential lecturers and teachers from England, Holland, and Germany, “most

of whom still carried within them the inspiration from their personal contact with Dr. Steiner himself” (Penfold, 1994:137). Supplemental funding for the school came later from Pharma Natura, a local company that produced anthroposophical medicine inspired natural pharmaceutical products (Penfold, 1994:137).

The South African situation of the 1960s provided a particular set of constraints in which Waldorf education could grow. Waldorf schools were required, under the apartheid government, to register as “private” schools for white children only, and for many years were required to fund themselves entirely, though in later years they received a small state subsidy (Van Alphen, 2000:13). The schools were, in later years, able to accept pupils from differing socio-economic and racial-ethnic backgrounds, first with restrictive state-imposed limitations, “and later freely as the process of dismantling apartheid began” (Van Alphen, 2000:13), and they found ways to provide funding for some children who could not afford the fees. Work in townships<sup>43</sup> began through the outreach of the Baobab Centre in Johannesburg, which helped develop relationships eventually leading to the establishment of Waldorf schools there.

The Federation of Southern African Waldorf Schools makes the claim that “Waldorf Education has made deliberate moves to help start the process of reconstruction in the South African society” (Van Alphen, 2000:13). The fourth South African Waldorf school, Max Stibbe Waldorf School says on its website that

The school boasts a truly integrated student body, representing some 20 different language and cultural groups from a wide spectrum of socio-economic backgrounds, from South Africa, other African countries and guest learners from Europe... This provides the opportunity to learn about people from diverse backgrounds ... [the] parent body comprises socially responsible parents who wish to ensure that their children receive a holistic education. They tend to be idealists who want to educate their

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<sup>43</sup> Areas where, by apartheid legislation, black Africans in cities had to reside.

children to create a better world  
 ([http://www.maxstibbe.co.za/maxstibbe\\_main.htm](http://www.maxstibbe.co.za/maxstibbe_main.htm) /12 May 2007).

During the 1980s, often understood to have been the most extreme apartheid years, Michael Oak accepted children from families of all races and creeds, in order to provide the children and their families with a more pluralistic community in which to learn than was possible in most other schools (<http://www.michaeloak.org.za> /12 May 2007). Sponsorships were often established to enable individual children from impoverished backgrounds to attend Waldorf schools. One Michael Oak recipient of such sponsorship from this time is recorded to have written:

I found Michael Oak was like another world. Outside there were these terrible things happening - there was toyi-toying<sup>44</sup> and riots, but at school that was totally different. They encourage your individual side. What I experienced was to express myself - me! It also taught me to get in touch with my creative side.

Michael Oak School taught us to relate to other people where there is so much division. This is the meaning of ubuntu<sup>45</sup> for me: to develop as an individual as part of this great whole.

I owe my education, and the way my life is now, to my sponsors. They gave me a light at the end of this narrow dark tunnel . . . it gave me a dream and a hope for something for me (Manuella Xorile, <http://www.waldorf.org.za/> 12 May 2007).

During the time of my fieldwork and indeed as I write, Michael Oak's community was and still is a mixture of families from different countries,

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<sup>44</sup> A Michael Oak parent defined toyi-toyi as an indigenous South African term, referring to "a group of people dancing and protesting against a common cause, specifically injustice." The MEC for Education in the Western Cape, Mr Cameron Dugmore, writes, "Our people have always used music and the arts overtly and covertly to express our joys, our sorrows and prayers of life. We have used the arts to liberate ourselves from oppression. It was the freedom songs and the toyi-toyi that sustained our struggles over the years" ([http://wced.wcape.gov.za/comms/press/2004/49\\_jackmeyer.html](http://wced.wcape.gov.za/comms/press/2004/49_jackmeyer.html) /19 June 2007).

<sup>45</sup> The Western Cape Education Department defines "ubuntu" as "humanity to others" ([http://wced.wcape.gov.za/circulars/minutes04/ehrd64\\_04.html](http://wced.wcape.gov.za/circulars/minutes04/ehrd64_04.html) /19 June 2007). A Michael Oak parent explained to me that "ubuntu" is "used to describe good will towards one's neighbour, a willingness to help other people. If someone was in trouble, the chief would help, or a neighbour would help."

religions,<sup>46</sup> and backgrounds. According to one parent, the school had a greater percentage of black students before the end of apartheid than it does now (because fewer educational choices existed then for black families) and, according to the 2005 Michael Oak family directory, students came mainly from Cape Town's middle-class southern suburbs. But others were from less affluent surrounding neighbourhoods and from the poverty-stricken townships. I heard teachers use words like "diversity" and "inclusion" to describe how they attempted to meet the needs of different children, either as individuals or as members of a group. Describing the complexities of these widely-debated concepts, and then evaluating the effectiveness of the teachers' attempts to engage these concepts on a practical level is beyond the scope of this dissertation. However, that the school was placed in this particular historical context and attempted to engage in conversation and action in dealing with these differences within its learner community is important for understanding the issues causing tension as the teachers tried to agree on ways to celebrate the festivals.

### **Becoming – and Being – a Waldorf Teacher**

Imbue thyself with the power of imagination  
 Have courage for the truth,  
 Sharpen thy feeling for responsibility of soul.  
 (Rudolf Steiner's motto for teachers, in Shepherd, 1995:108)

Understanding what it means to be a Waldorf teacher is also important for understanding why teachers made the effort to struggle with the tensions they found as they planned festivals. To become a Waldorf teacher and fulfil the "sacred task" that Steiner spoke of, one must undergo a specialised training in Waldorf pedagogy (<http://www.cfce.org.za/federation/info/> 12 May 2007).<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> In an informal discussion after a life-skills lesson in 2005, a group of Class Fours discovered that they represented several different religions among themselves – Muslim, Buddhist, agnostic, Jewish, atheist, along with several different interpretations of Christianity. Each class has life skills classes for 2-3 weeks a year, during which they explore feelings, relationships, and social issues like bullying. This particular life skills lesson dealt with different religions and festivals associated with them.

<sup>47</sup> The Southern African Federation of Waldorf schools website says, "Full time Waldorf teacher training is offered in countries throughout the world including South Africa. A conventional training is the starting point of most Waldorf teachers. While qualifications are important, enthusiasm and the ability to inspire the children are considered indispensable. In-service training and on-going studies are part of the work of all Waldorf teachers" (<http://www.waldorf.org.za/>, 12 May 2007). In South Africa,

However, the formal training is only a starting point for learning to be a Waldorf teacher. One Michael Oak teacher wrote that Waldorf teachers do not only need to understand the pedagogy – they also need to assume a lifestyle of introspection and reflection in order to form strong relationships with the children in their care and with those children’s families, and thereby to meet the needs of each growing child (Reeler, 2006). The primary class teacher, who ideally teaches a class for all seven primary school years (eight years for most countries outside South Africa), must adapt to the changes in the growing children. While attending a Centre for Creative Education lecture on adolescence intended for high school teachers, I learned that a teacher’s expertise and inspiration has regularly to be supplemented by continuing education. It has also to be infused with continual curiosity as s/he prepares to move onward and upward academically with the class,<sup>48</sup> and recognises the changed circumstances for each class as it proceeds through the seven or eight year primary school sequence.

From that perspective, a teacher is one who is learning, just as the child is. One teacher trainee (and Michael Oak former pupil) told me that rather than aiming somehow to be ‘perfect’ as a teacher, her goal was to express a joy of learning to children, to invite them to learn with her as they explored a subject. If successful in this way, she and others indicated, the teacher can become a model of one who is growing, changing, developing, just as the child is, overcoming his or her own shortcomings in different subjects.<sup>49</sup> Through this process, the teacher “aims to become a worthy authority for the pupil.

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this training is offered by the Centre for Creative Education in Cape Town, although some Michael Oak teachers have trained at Waldorf training colleges abroad and others have been mentored on the job. According to the Centre for Creative Education website (<http://www.ccee.org.za/federation/info/> 12 May 2007), experienced teachers from other pedagogical systems who come to teach at Waldorf schools are now obliged to undergo a form of continuing education, learning about the unique Waldorf approach by taking classes in the evenings and weekends, and attending conferences. And a feature of the annual South African Waldorf Teachers’ Conferences is that they provide opportunities for teachers’ continuing education in a milieu of re-connection with colleagues from around the subcontinent and of sharing ideas.

<sup>48</sup> Former Waldorf teacher Peter Michelson found that about 40% of American Waldorf teachers stay with their class for the whole eight years (Majoros 2001:7).

<sup>49</sup> A former non-Michael Oak Waldorf class teacher told me that he always used to draw his chalk-board drawings before the school day began, so that the children would not see his mistakes as he drew. A more experienced teacher suggested he draw his pictures while the children were able to observe: he noticed that his class children began to take a more positive attitude towards him and their own drawings after seeing his struggles.

Commitment, caring and concern foster mutual respect and help to develop self-discipline in the child” (<http://www.michaeloak.org.za> /12 May 2007).

Because of their long-term relationship, the children and teacher ideally come to know each other fairly well. One teacher wrote:

I have seen the children in my class transform: from milk-toothed cherubs to gangly teenagers. I went with them through their nine-year old crisis, insecure pre-adolescence and then puberty. Now most are taller than I am, some more articulate, and all more confident and capable. I look at these emerging young people and feel honoured to have been a part of their lives (Michael Oak teacher Beulah Reeler, in *The Leaflet*, 17 November 2006).

The class teacher, therefore, is meant to maintain a special role in relation to the children.

Veteran teacher and now retired teacher trainer Batya Daitz of the Centre for Creative Education writes,

I think we have an urgent task to train teachers in Waldorf education who are contemporary and who can make a difference to the community and to the children stepping into the new millennium.<sup>50</sup> We need teachers who can take up the task of cultivating a culture of questions in an age which is out of touch with process and wants instant results. In the question lies the quest leading to a state of becoming rather than arriving – a continuous state of self-development....To be a Waldorf teacher at this time enables you to meet the demands of continuous inner development, because you can not only pay attention to what you do, you must awaken to what you are (Daitz, 1999).

I heard Michael Oak teachers tell of experiences in the classroom where they

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<sup>50</sup> Some teachers even have such a strong sense of mission and purpose that they are willing to forgo a competitive wage. The township Waldorf school in Alexandra, Gauteng, has a strong vision, but the teachers never know how much they will make in a given month: "the money in the pot is divided out between all the staff and often falls short of our needs" ([http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wtd\\_97/8.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wtd_97/8.htm) /1 Feb. 2009).

were able to teach more than subjects like history or mathematics or writing, although these were given close attention. For example, one teacher helped his students understand issues of poverty and crime in Cape Town. In my own children's classes too I heard of the teachers addressing issues of social relationships, self-care, ideals and values. One teacher wrote that she considered her role as teacher to include another component, one not taught through didactics or lectures – that is, being an example for the children, as she examined herself and worked to become the person she hoped to be. “I realise more and more that to be the teacher I need to be, the most important thing is not to stuff my head full of answers, or even full of questions – the most important thing is for **me to be well**, here, in the present, happy and whole” (Beulah Reeler, Leaflet, 17 November 2006).

However, a teacher's own personal growth faces its own challenges. I have heard Waldorf teachers describe, both at Michael Oak and in the U.S., how difficulties with parents of pupils and with other teachers can overwhelm their sense of the teacher's role, and can, in fact, make continuing with a class impossible. Several teachers have also described (in the US and at Michael Oak) how disapproving, distrusting, and critical parental attitudes towards a teacher negatively affected the way children perceived a teacher, often discouraging the teacher, sometimes causing the teacher to leave the class, and sometimes leading parents to withdraw their child from the school. In spite of these challenges, however, these same teachers expressed a commitment to both their own self-development and to working out their relationships with both parents and children.

This dialogical approach to negotiating differences is what I saw in action again as they planned the school festivals, as I will demonstrate in the following chapters. I will also show how Michael Oak's festivals, like the teachers themselves, are evolving (and have evolved) from year to year, depending on the circumstances and the needs the teachers perceive. I will also show how, like the teachers, the festivals are imperfect, but how the process of preparation, of *becoming*, is reflected in the way the teachers plan festivals, as it is in their own self-development.

## The Development of Festivals at Michael Oak

With so many past pupils, it is the festivals they remember and appreciate most vividly, I have found (Marion Penfold, former Michael Oak Teacher).

According to Marion Penfold, one of the school's earliest teachers, Michael Oak's teachers have consciously considered and wrestled with the issue of festivals for most of the school's forty-seven years, and four seasonal festivals have always been celebrated in the school. Of the two founding teachers, she said, one had grown up as a Catholic, and therefore had an appreciation for festival life which grew from her ecclesiastical background; the other was mainly of a phlegmatic temperament – in other words, one who would by nature tend to appreciate the regularity of the cycles of the year and structured, regular observation of them. When Marion was teaching, from 1965 to 1994, a Christian Community priest would often be invited to come and speak to the teachers on the biblical background to the festivals at the beginning of the teachers' planning stages, and then the teachers would take what the priest presented to create the festival. The same applied in subsequent years. Not only did this occur during the period of my research, but I found a back-copy of *The Leaflet* (2003) recounting when the priest had spoken about the upcoming festival at the Sophia Family Centre of "Lifeways," (a place on the campus of the Constantia Waldorf School where parents could bring their small children and hear a talk on a particular subject), and a Leaflet article by the priest explaining St. John's (Goodall, 2003).<sup>51</sup>

I personally observed four annual festivals closely at Michael Oak: Easter or Harvest, St. John's, Michaelmas, and the Star Tree festival. These festivals were seasonal, one marking the end of each school term and, according to Marion Penfold, have been a part of the school year since Michael Oak's founding in 1962. In this section I provide general information, mostly from Michael Oak literature. In the following chapters, I expand upon these

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<sup>51</sup> For an example of a recounting of a priest's Easter talk at the Sophia Centre for "Lifeways", see *The Leaflet* dated 25 April 2003, and about St. John's in Marion's notebook (undated Leaflet article).

descriptions, showing how the Michael Oak teachers re-examine the meaning of the festivals each year, and then plan their enactment accordingly.

The South African school year begins in mid-late January and ends in early December, divided into four quarterly terms with a summer break over the Christmas and New Year period. The four festivals were celebrated at the end of each of the four school terms, because the South African school calendar broke for holidays just before the two equinoxes and one of the solstices (the December summer solstice falling in the middle of the summer holiday), and because Waldorf festivals are seasonal and celebrated at the solstices and equinoxes.<sup>52</sup> Each of the teachers I interviewed from eight other South African Waldorf schools said that their schools also celebrated their festivals at the end of the school terms. The ways they expressed the festival differed from that at Michael Oak and between the various schools, as I will note in the next chapter.

The first Michael Oak festival I observed during the 2005 school year took the form of a Harvest festival.<sup>53</sup> A teacher explained that, had it fallen after Good Friday (that year it fell before that day), it would have been celebrated as an Easter festival rather than a Harvest festival. In 2005, the Harvest festival nonetheless included Easter themes, although a subsequent Easter assembly, which I did not know about until later (and so did not witness), was held on the first day back at school the next term. In 2006, however, when the dates were again such that Easter fell after first term's end, the festival I observed focused much more on the season, and much less overtly on Easter, as I will show in the following chapter.

The next festival I observed was St. John's festival, which took place in June, around the time of the winter solstice. It comprised a celebration of John the Baptist, who is said to have preached a message of repentance (changing the

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<sup>52</sup> Though everyone that I interviewed named these four festivals as being the primary festivals for both Waldorf schools and anthroposophists, I learned from my experience in the U.S. Waldorf school that not all Waldorf schools celebrate these four.

<sup>53</sup> Northern hemisphere readers should recall the southern hemisphere 'reversal' of the seasons in relation to the Gregorian calendar.

direction of one's life and attitudes) and to have baptised Jesus. The Michael Oak St. John's festivals used to include a bonfire, typical of northern hemisphere schools. Most former pupils that I interviewed remember this fire warmly; three recalled the year the teachers substituted lanterns for the bonfire, and two of them expressed their disappointment at the time. In the two St John's festivals I observed (2005, 2006), fire was still prominent: in one, the children carried lanterns; in the other they heard a story involving a sacred flame.

Michaelmas was celebrated in spring at Michael Oak and, as I was told in a planning session, usually has the theme of overcoming difficulty and challenge. Sometimes the story of St. George, the archangel Michael's earthly counterpart, has been told or portrayed, and the values of "courage and action, of deeds more than words – of WILL" are prominent (Penfold, 1984:9).<sup>54</sup> When this story of Michael or St. George was re-enacted, a child or children would tame a dragon.

The African context does affect how the Michaelmas dragon has been perceived in at least some African schools:

The boys in this township [Alexandra in Gauteng] have very few good role models. For example, in a lesson which dealt with Saint Michael slaying the dragon, some children became angry with the dragon and shouted that Michael should have killed it. A timid little boy jumped up and said 'but Michael killed the dragon, he'd be just as bad as the dragon, he'd become a dragon.' This statement had the class in discussion for almost a week but at the end of it most of them agreed that you cannot fight violence with violence. After that, fights in class subsided.

"The climate of violence that reigns in the community has an enormous influence on the children," concludes Lorna [a teacher]. "To teach values and undo their strong inclination for violence is a huge challenge. Teachers need to be motivated to fight the dragon of crime prevalent

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<sup>54</sup> In Waldorf schools and anthroposophical circles, "Michael" is pronounced "My-chy-el," closer to the original Hebrew pronunciation, to give emphasis to all of the vowels as Steiner suggested. The festival, however, is pronounced "Mikl-mas" in English.

everywhere in our country.” ([http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wtd\\_97/8.htm](http://www.unesco.org/education/educprog/wtd_97/8.htm) /19 June 2007).

The teachers at this school not only adapted the Michaelmas festival to the perceived needs of the schoolchildren, they also incorporated discussion of the Michaelmas theme with the children, allowing them to make observations about both the festival story and their local violence, looking for relationships between the two that would hold true to their own experiences. In doing so, they engaged the children in the aforementioned phenomenological process while involving the children in festival preparation through their discussion – a process the Michael Oak teachers stated was important to them, as I explain in the following section of this chapter.

Even though Michael Oak has not experienced violence in the same way as the Alexandra school, situated as the latter is in an extremely violence ridden township, the violent South African context still affected how the dragon was treated during the festival. The teachers on Michael Oak’s 2005 Michaelmas planning committee were very clear that the dragon should be tamed and not killed, and that each class should have a role in the taming process.

The fourth festival I observed was the Star Tree festival, which was held at the beginning of summer just as the school year ended. It has apparently often contained Christmas elements: various teachers and former pupils tended to remember a tree, sometimes decorated with stars. Some teachers remembered the Biblical Christmas story being told or recounted with the children enacting a pageant. One former pupil remembered this re-enactment with fondness. She recalled that each class held a role – that is, class one might be angels, class two, shepherds, and so on. In the 2005 and 2006 Star Tree festivals I observed, a non-Biblical story was told, but Christmas songs were among those sung. In the 2006 enactment, a song by John Lennon was played while a high school class performed eurythmy.

## **The Planning Process**

Teamwork amongst the teachers always seems to create a magical festival. It helps if more experienced teachers hold a particular vision for each one and then everyone works consciously to do the footwork. Including the children in just the crafts beforehand makes their participation more meaningful during festivals (A Michael Oak class teacher).

The Michael Oak teachers gave many hours each term to thought and planning around the festivals. Sometimes a smaller planning group met, and this smaller group then held further discussions with the whole primary school teacher body. Most festival planning group meetings were organised in advance, and I was often invited to those, though I did notice, particularly during the planning process for the 2005 Michaelmas festival, that planning group teachers might be held up with classroom issues and tasks and unable to meet at those times. Moreover, I was not able to attend spontaneously organised planning group meetings that took place when group members found themselves in the same room with a few minutes to talk. When I attended meetings of the whole primary school teacher body, I noticed that discussion of the festivals usually lasted about ten to fifteen minutes – long enough just to elicit feedback on the theme and plans suggested by the planning group, and to discuss how each class might be a part of the festival as a whole, but not really enough to discuss details – those were addressed again by the smaller planning group in their next meeting.

Preparation for the festivals also included working with the children. As I will show in greater detail in the following chapters, the teachers included the children in festival preparation through story-telling (which would introduce the theme), crafts, music (particularly in vocal and recorder-choir classes), and class discussion. For the 2005 and 2006 first term (Harvest) festivals, particular classes baked bread and picked grapes. For the 2006 second term (St. John's) festival, the children heard and discussed a story, creating opaque, colourful tissue-paper tableaux that would be integral to the festival enactment itself. Often, social situations in the classroom led to discussions

about topics directly relevant to the festival. For example, one class teacher recounted that, after telling her class the 2006 St. John's festival story, a conflictual situation arose between some of her pupils. The timing of this conflict, she explained, had given her an opportunity to use the story to help the children re-examine the situation in an effort to resolve it. Using the phenomenological method that I referred to earlier, the teacher helped members of the class recall what had happened, make observations about how the events were related, and then, drawing on imagery from the festival story, find ways of relating to each other that did not compromise the integrity of each child's experience.

In June 2006, I was asked to speak to a gathering of the Anthroposophical Society of the Western Cape about my fieldwork in one in a series of monthly forums where members shared their research on various topics. The Michael Oak teachers present agreed that including the children in the planning process was vitally important to the whole festival experience. One Michael Oak high school teacher commented that what remains with the children as they grow to adulthood is due to the teachers' planning the festivals from scratch (as opposed to "running an old tried-and-true programme"). This influence has to do with the processes themselves, he said – the *process*, not *specific elements* of the festival. The teachers, he said, must know why they are preparing. Investing their time, energy, and thoughts into this process thus becomes "gold for the children."

### **How Do Teachers Learn about Festivals?**

These are just ideas – the festivals need to be renewed every year so they have meaning and stay relevant (Catherine Van Alphen, lecturing in 2005 to a group of Waldorf teachers and teacher trainees about different ways of conceptualising and celebrating festivals).<sup>55</sup>

I wondered how and what the teachers might have learned about festival planning, and how this training influenced the way they conceptualised festivals when they became Waldorf teachers. So in July 2005, I attended a

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<sup>55</sup> Catherine van Alphen was at that point a lecturer at the Centre for Creative Education. She had previously, for many years, been a primary school teacher at Michael Oak.

teacher training module on festivals. The class met each afternoon for five days, following other lessons, including a music class where we sang songs of the St. John's festival which most of the schools had just celebrated at the end of June. Catherine van Alphen led the classes comprising students who, for the most part, were currently teaching in Waldorf schools in the Western Cape. She focused on how to conceptualise and plan festivals. Starting with the very basic idea of a festival associated with each season, Catherine expanded the study to explore the underlying qualities of each season and festival, asserting from the start that festivals are not so much a celebration of the season or a religion but a celebration of the human being. Although she outlined an example of how one might plan festivals, leading the class through that process until the class had planned and enacted one themselves, she used a method which I saw used too among the teachers at Michael Oak – she elicited students' observations about the seasons and possible meanings of the festival, and encouraged them to make connections between the various data. This somewhat open-ended procedure allowed disagreements to emerge between the students.

To me, some of the tensions concerning the way festivals are planned were made clear as a couple of the teacher trainees expressed concern with any use at all of Christian festivals, or with the juxtaposition of southern hemisphere season and northern hemisphere festival. Their questions were honoured and addressed, though no real solutions were offered except to try and find out what the underlying message or paradigm of each particular festival might be, apart from its Christian traditions. For example, Catherine said that, in looking at Easter with its Christian themes of death and resurrection, one might focus on putting aside what we need to let go of and of moving through the process of letting go. She said that one could then build a festival around core themes, and gave examples of stories that reflect that process, like the stories of the Easter hare that are often used in kindergartens and the early primary grades and that represent the themes of new life, rebirth, and self-sacrifice.

Her approach seemed to me to be an enactment of the dialogical process that might occur amongst teachers in a Waldorf school, trying to find a creative way beyond personal preferences regarding a purely Christian or a purely seasonal festival, to allow a new idea to emerge from the trainees confronting seemingly opposing perspectives. This was much like the approach I was observing among the Michael Oak teachers and which I document in greater detail in the chapters below.

Catherine also discussed what else one might include when planning a festival. Each festival should, she said, have a social component, some ritual with intention and meaning, some activities and challenges, and finally, it should have diverse forms of nourishment, like food, music, and visual beauty. She also said that often one can find a story that embraces all four of these qualities and use that to structure a particular festival's enactment. However, she stressed throughout that each festival must be reworked and renewed (or re-thought) each year, precisely so that it can have meaning and stay relevant to its historical and social context and to the persons involved in enacting it.

The trainees on her course were then given opportunity to plan a St. John's festival themselves. Several story ideas were mentioned by different participants, but one person eventually suggested a traditional African story she had recently read, which embraced the theme of opening one's heart in the time of cold, maintaining warmth, and overcoming discomfort. The class brainstormed ways to illuminate and ritualise the story, like passing light along through candles, circle dancing to keep warm (a social aspect), writing on paper and throwing it in a fire (creating ritual), singing, and eating seasonal food like butternut soup (providing nourishment). Catherine added that in the winter St. John's festival St. John becomes Everyman,<sup>56</sup> one who goes on a spiritual quest into the wilderness of his soul, seeking for meaning, not for comfort. He must, she said, therefore find his inner flame – to find warmth for

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<sup>56</sup> Miriam Webster online dictionary defines "Everyman" as "the typical or ordinary person" (<http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/everyman> /15 Sept 2008).

himself in a context of outer coldness, and to be able to share that with others on the same quest.

What was important for me and my research project was that I learned from this course that at least some teachers have learned to plan festivals by considering different factors having to do with Christian meaning or with season, thereby being able to add ritual elements to support what they want to express in the enactment of festivals in the ever-changing school context. Within this particular group of already practicing class teachers and teacher trainees differing opinions were expressed; the individuals in the training module juxtaposed their particular opinions with the requirements and consensus of the whole group, and thus negotiated a festival as a group effort. I also saw how they took a single person's idea and expanded upon it to create a festival, complete with crafts, food, and performance, in much the same way as I was seeing the Michael Oak teachers do.

The teacher trainee participants on the course commented that the planning exercise they had been required to undertake had been helpful since many had not understood the festival planning process previously. Those who were already teachers at Michael Oak recounted that they had not been taught about festivals in their own teacher training and, although they thought it would have been very helpful, expressed gratitude that they were privy to collegial discussion within their own teacher body as they studied and planned for festivals at the school.

Comparing the training module with the way festival planning occurred at Michael Oak, it is evident that, just as Catherine had suggested possible meanings for the festivals during the teacher training module, so very often did the Michael Oak teachers rely on someone to bring an idea as a starting point. For example, in a meeting of the primary school teachers (7 February, 2006), one commented, "As an inexperienced Waldorf teacher, it is very useful to have [Christian Community priest] Richard Goodall come to give the teachers a picture about the meaning of our festivals beforehand." Another said that, for a festival to be successful, one person must have a strong vision

that others can follow:

It is wonderful to have one person holding a vision, to be able to go with someone else's vision. If there is resentment, that is sad. We are grateful for the vision that someone carries. It brings the faculty together. Even though the impulse is carried by one or two people, all are involved.

I saw this particular dynamic manifested during the 2005 St. John's festival planning, for example, when one teacher brought a poem about European trees which the other teachers amended to describe African ones (see tree poem in Appendix A); and again before the 2005 Michaelmas festival, as Richard Goodall gave a general talk on a Michaelmas topic, which stimulated the teachers' thinking as they planned the festival.

In the chapters that follow I shall show that, for many Michael Oak teachers, even those who had participated in courses such as that offered by Catherine, the training happened (and was repeatedly reinforced) on the job, in-house as it were, with the more experienced teachers mentoring the newer ones but always themselves also learning anew; and with the priest (or possibly someone else that the teachers respected) sharing a thought on the festival when asked to do so. From this starting point, as I demonstrate in greater detail below, the teachers then discussed further the meaning that the festival would take, with its rituals and ritual symbols, and the ways it would be enacted.

## **Conclusion**

The history of Waldorf education, the particular context in which it was established, its pedagogy, and the particular goals that were set for teachers by Steiner when he founded the approach, all contributed to the background from which the teachers planned festivals. In this chapter, I have explained how Waldorf teachers are trained to take seriously their own development, both as teacher and individual, and to establish long-term relationships with the children in their class in order to try to transmit particular values of hard work, self-reflection, and self-development. The phenomenological teaching

approach was consistent with this ethic of self-development, as it required a greater effort from both pupils and teachers - instead of simply presenting information to be memorised and repeated back, the teacher needed to guide the children in making observations and forming concepts based on those observations. In order to teach in this way, the teachers themselves needed to be willing to examine each subject anew, as they would be asking the children to do. Similarly, as I will show in the following chapters, they gave the same effort to festival planning, eschewing rote ideas and solutions, listening to each others' observations and judgments, struggling with tensions that arose from the dichotomies within their context, and spending time and effort to wrestle with issues that arose as they planned each festival.

In the following chapter, I look closely at the festival planning process and give specific examples of the way contextual factors influenced how festivals were planned and enacted. I consider especially how those factors created tensions that the teachers needed to and did negotiate. I show how, in confronting a diversity of perspectives before them, the teachers found meaning and scope for what they saw as their special task as teachers, and how including children in festival preparation processes brought a depth to their teaching that transcended the teaching of traditional subjects like writing, mathematics and language. Finally, through detailing the particular binaries between which teachers found themselves as they thought about and planned festivals, I show how dealing with tensions between divergent influences opened up for the teachers new thoughts and ideas, and in the process increased their sense of enthusiasm and courage. I thus try to show that, like the undercurrents and tremors beneath the ocean surface, the meeting, engagement, or even collision of divergent influences formed the environment within which the creation of new forms of festival life took place in the Michael Oak Waldorf School context.

## **FOUR. LOCALISING WALDORF FESTIVALS: A PROGRESSIVE DIALOGUE BETWEEN POLARITIES**

A living thing functions and develops because it is immersed in the rhythmic tension produced by two or more fields of energy (Bryant, 1993:19-20).

At the centre of much of the maelstrom of differing ideas and opinions impacting the planning of Michael Oak festivals was the issue of localization. How should Steiner's pedagogy, developed nearly a century ago for Central European children, be adapted to the southern hemisphere, South African child of today? This question was repeatedly raised in various ways and many different contexts during my four years of research including Waldorf teacher conferences, teacher meetings, fieldwork interviews, and informal conversation. Jedeikin (2007:15), writing about the process of accommodating the specific socio-political dynamics of South Africa in the McGregor Waldorf School's art and drama classes and activities, defined localisation as "an inevitable part of applying general principles and broad policies to specific social environments." The way Michael Oak's teachers negotiated this process is the subject of this chapter.

Festivals were planned and celebrated at Michael Oak within a particular climate. Chapter Three detailed the particular historical context of festivals in the evolution of the Waldorf School movement and Michael Oak's own development. In this chapter, I show how the particularly South African, southern hemisphere context of the school provided a counterpoint to the Waldorf School movement's European, northern hemisphere beginnings and curriculum. I outline various issues that Michael Oak's teachers have faced because of this polarity, and how they have approached the resultant choices. As I describe the tensions arising from the South African southern hemisphere context, I explain how the teachers have had to negotiate divergent factors confronting them. Those included whether to observe the festivals at the same time as the northern hemisphere schools and the Christian Community, or to change their seasonal referent as some other southern hemisphere schools have done; whether to emphasise a Christian perspective as opposed

to a religiously pluralistic viewpoint; whether to use songs, verses, and movements originating in the European Waldorf tradition or to include features from South African traditions; and, in addressing these issues of localisation, to what extent to maintain the school festival traditions or to introduce new, innovative ideas and practices. As I show below, I often heard teachers say that they preferred to work and plan within the tension of these often conflicting perspectives, that they wanted the challenge each year of looking at each festival anew and re-thinking how to negotiate the apparent oppositions involved. I show too how what I observed, both in planning sessions and in the festivals themselves, revealed some of the ways teachers have re-examined and re-conceptualised the festivals and have combined elements of different traditions and perspectives for festival enactments. As I illustrate these findings, I recount how the teachers' predominant view was that they preferred to conceptualise the festivals from within a tension – a polarity even; and that they valued working that way, despite the extra time and effort required, because they felt they drew energy and meaning from doing so.

### **Southward Movements: The Hemispheric Factor**

To people with a deep past connection to ecclesiastical Christianity ... the very concept of a seasonal festival ... may appear of little value. The interest of these people is in maintaining and deepening their relationship to the events described in the Gospels. In this regard, we can recognize the enormous value of the traditional Christian festivals, in that they are meditations, so to speak, on the deeds of Christ. But other people feel more of a connection to the old nature festivals of Europe ... and sense that the cycle of the year has a deep significance for our soul.

Now that anthroposophy offers a deeper perspective on both Christianity and the seasons, we may reconcile these two contrasting attitudes (Anderson, 1993:46-47).<sup>57</sup>

When I began telling people in the broader Cape Town anthroposophical movement about my research topic, I immediately found myself caught between conflicting opinions. Some asked whether I thought South Africans should celebrate purely seasonal festivals or should plan according to the

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<sup>57</sup> Anderson's (1993) book was mentioned in the Michael Oak teacher meeting as one that some teachers had read.

northern hemisphere Christian calendar.<sup>58</sup> I soon realised that much emotion was tied up in that particular subject, with various people reportedly voicing strong opinions. Many of those people, on both sides, were reading the same texts but drawing different conclusions about how festivals should be celebrated in the southern hemisphere. What follows is an exposition of the collision of these conclusions as they impacted the Michael Oak teachers, and the way the teachers responded to them by maintaining a dialogue between the differing ideas.

According to Julian Sleigh,<sup>59</sup> pioneer of the Christian Community Church in South Africa, former Michael Oak parent, current Michael Oak grandparent, and one involved for more than forty years in the study of festivals in the South African context, lectures given by Rudolf Steiner<sup>60</sup> at various times and in various places provide reason for Waldorf Schools to celebrate four seasonal festivals. In those lectures Steiner described what he said happens spiritually as we see nature changing around us, and how human life can be enhanced by observing regular festivals to mark the four seasons. Julian pointed out to me that, because these lectures were given in Europe to northern hemisphere residents, they describe the cyclical life experience of one who has four regular seasons providing, as it were, for four distinct festivals: Christmas in winter, Easter in spring, St. John's in summer, and Michaelmas in autumn. In translating these lectures not only into English but also into the southern hemisphere context, he said, questions arise about how each festival should relate to a season, and therefore how each should then be celebrated.

Since Michael Oak has been celebrating the festivals for most of the school's forty-seven year history, teachers there have been obliged to address these questions for a long time. Moreover, the subject of season and festival has also arisen at other schools. At the Hague Circle Conference (April 2005), a

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<sup>58</sup> Celebrating festivals at the same time as the northern hemisphere churches seems to dominate ecclesiastically in Cape Town – I have not seen or heard of any church in Cape Town, of any denomination, moving Christmas to June, or Easter to September.

<sup>59</sup> In interviews.

<sup>60</sup> For example. Steiner 1984 or 1996a

parent from the Constantia Waldorf School asked, “Why do we have the festivals the way we do? We live in the Southern Hemisphere. Here at Constantia we just had the May Day Festival, and it seems like it should be at a different time of year.”<sup>61</sup>

Two factors I found to have been informing Michael Oak teachers’ thoughts are their repeated studies, both as individuals and as a group, of those Steiner lectures and their reading of other anthroposophical books and discussions with other anthroposophists; and their relationship, again both as individuals and as a group, to the Christian Community and the teachings that its priests have provided them.

#### *Interpreting Steiner on festivals*

At a February 2006 teacher’s meeting, I asked about the influence of Steiner’s lectures on the teachers’ festival planning process, particularly those to be found in his *The Four Seasons and the Archangels* (Steiner, 1996a). I explained my surprise that the teacher-training module I had attended at the Centre for Creative Education did not include Steiner’s lectures on the subject, particularly those in that book. And I asked how much the book influenced the thoughts and motivations of the teachers in their festival planning practices. One reply was that they had studied that subject as a group. Later, I discovered, from Marion Penfold’s notebook, that there has been an intermittent return to the subject of archangels at least four times (1978, 1992, 1994, and an undated entry) over the approximately 25 years that the notebook records.<sup>62</sup> Both *The Four Seasons and the Archangels* (1996a) and another of Steiner’s lecture series, *The Cycle of the Year* (1984), had been considered, probably because they characterise some of the difficulties anthroposophists in South Africa and other southern hemisphere

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<sup>61</sup> Some Australian anthroposophists (including within the Waldorf community there) have addressed this issue too, some subscribing to the “Lorien” or “Alan Whitehead” stream that seeks to “Australianise” the Waldorf schools (West, 1994: 189). This Australian influence was felt at Michael Oak when a recent immigrant to South Africa (who, though not Australian himself, had lived and worked there previously for a number of years) challenged the South African anthroposophical community to consider the option of changing the seasons in which the festivals are celebrated.

<sup>62</sup> Also, the archangel Michael is discussed in some detail every year in preparation for the Michaelmas festival.

countries face in deciding how to celebrate the four Christian Festivals in relationship to the four seasons.<sup>63</sup>

In *The Cycle of the Year* (1984), Steiner describes what he understands to be the seasonal rhythm of the earth itself and of the earth as part of the larger cosmos, arguing that the seasons reflect in physical form a concurrent spiritual process. Throughout the ages, he claims, clairvoyant persons have recognised the relationship between physical and spiritual processes, and many seasonal festivals, celebrated since the earliest days, reflect this knowledge which, he says, was (and is) fully understood by few but instinctively known by many.

Steiner presented these lectures to Germans in Germany, people who experienced four quite evenly spaced and distinct northern hemisphere seasons. The question for Waldorf teachers (and the anthroposophical community) in southern hemisphere countries in more temperate zones, according to a large number of the people I interviewed, is whether the festivals need to change time of year altogether or whether they can be adapted for celebration in the same month as they are celebrated in the northern hemisphere, but to reflect a different, local, seasonal reality.

The other book, *The Four Seasons and the Archangels* (1996a), describes how Steiner understood four of the archangels to work through the spiritual processes of each season. There he describes in great detail how Michael works through the forces of autumn, Gabriel through the winter, Raphael through the spring, and Uriel through the summer. And he goes on to say that the festivals, as the northern hemisphere celebrates them, reflect this understanding. For example, as a parent in a northern hemisphere Waldorf school, I saw the school community there celebrate the autumnal work of Michael at the Michaelmas festival in the autumn, and the winter work of

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<sup>63</sup> As the focus and intent of this dissertation is an ethnographic study of festivals at Michael Oak and not a theological or philosophical exposition of Rudolf Steiner's works, I present Steiner's lectures as relevant background but in general terms only. The density of those works and of the particularities of their content mean that any attempt to deal with them in greater detail here would be misplaced, although they provide stimulating and enriching reading for one seeking more detail on the subject. See also Steiner 1996c, *Festivals and Their Meaning*.

Gabriel, appearing to Mary, mother of Jesus, near the time of the winter solstice. The southern hemisphere anthroposophists whom I interviewed, whether Waldorf teachers or not, asked whether in the South one might celebrate Michaelmas in the spring when the spring-oriented healing work of Raphael is seasonally predominant, or Gabriel in the summer, when the summer work of Uriel is seasonally predominant.<sup>64</sup>

Steiner gave some hint of an answer to these questions in the fifth lecture of *The Four Seasons* (1996a). He said that in each season one archangel is indeed predominant, working in the very overt, outward way that he had described in the previous four lectures. However, the archangel of the “opposite” season is also working in an “inward,” quieter and less obvious way. And it is that comment that enabled Julian Sleight to explain to me that, while one may mainly experience the healing powers of Raphael in the springtime, one might also experience the work of conventionally autumnal Michael, perhaps in giving us courage to fight temptation and overcome strife as summer approaches. And Marion Penfold, taking notes at a lecture at a teacher’s conference in 1994, recorded discussion about the restorative forces of the archangels so that Gabriel could be understood to work in people’s bodily constitution (towards healing, digestion, and will), Uriel to work in their consciousness, Raphael to work in people’s breathing, and Michael to work on the iron in human will, making courage a more conscious thing.

What that meant, therefore, was that a study of the archangels in relation to the seasons, and their effect on children at a Waldorf school, might be considered important by Waldorf teachers seeking to meet the particular demands of the Waldorf pedagogy, that is, to teach in such a way as to strengthen the bodily constitution of the child, as well as develop the mind and feeling capacities. The struggle they then faced was to understand how the seasons might affect children, how particular archangels might work through

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<sup>64</sup> Many of these anthroposophists had strong opinions on the subject, shown in the forcefulness or the clarity of their arguments one way or the other. Other anthroposophists preferred to maintain neutrality for the time being. I do not develop this issue since it is peripheral to my discussion here.

those seasons, and how the seasonal festivals themselves might be most helpful to the children.

These two of Steiner's books were particularly mentioned as important resources by both Michael Oak teachers and by anthroposophists who believed, like the Lorian stream of Australian anthroposophists, that the festivals should be celebrated at the opposite time of year from the northern hemisphere schools – and the two groups, reading the same texts, came to different conclusions about how the season and festival should be juxtaposed.

The Michael Oak teachers themselves told me that they had “talked around the Australian issue,” that is, they had considered whether or not the festivals should be moved to a different season – Easter to spring, Christmas to winter, Michaelmas to autumn, St. John's to summer.<sup>65</sup> “In many preparatory meetings,” one teacher said, “we bring in the angels and archangels in North and South, mirroring, looking at the opposite. For example, St. John's is not as it is overseas, but the angel mirrors here at specific times.” St. John's is not celebrated as it is in Germany, they said; there is no bonfire. Instead, there is an inner quality of time (and the bonfire, they reiterated, has been moved to the Shrove Tuesday Pancake Evening. See Figure 1, below).

This removal of the bonfire from the festival had happened only in recent years – all of the younger former Michael Oak pupils I interviewed fondly remembered the big midwinter St. John's festival bonfire, and how the most daring of them had jumped over it. Almost all of them expressed regret that it had been taken out of the midwinter festival. The teachers explained to me, however, that, while they believed that fire itself still belonged to the St. John's festival, the bonfire itself was more appropriately used in the summertime, and lanterns were more appropriate for winter. And it was the children's demonstrated love of the big fire that had prompted the teachers to re-install it

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<sup>65</sup> This and the following teacher comments came from the meeting with teachers 6 February 2006.

in another annual event, the relatively newly constituted late summer Pancake Evening.<sup>66</sup>



Figure 1: 2005 Pancake Evening Bonfire on the oval.

The changes made to the St. John's festival illustrate one way the teachers dealt with the tension of which season should go with which festival. They chose to keep on celebrating the St. John's festival in winter but included aspects considered to be in keeping with a mid-winter festival and to exclude those associated with St. John's as a midsummer festival as celebrated in many northern hemisphere Waldorf schools. And one teacher explained during an interview, "The quality of the festival is what we look for, not necessarily the seasons or time, but what quality the festival brings, what is its essence."

Whether that "essence" of the festival was found in its seasonal nature or its association with a particular archangel or in some other tradition was an issue with which the teachers wrestled, and it provided impetus for much study and discussion. One teacher, quoting Sergei Prokofiev,<sup>67</sup> a leader in the anthroposophical movement world-wide, a prolific writer, and someone who has visited and spoken in South Africa, said, "The task of the South is to develop the festivals outside of time." In doing so she was emphasising the

<sup>66</sup> The Pancake Evening is usually in February, which in Cape Town is one of the hottest summertime months of the year.

<sup>67</sup> Some of the teachers have read (or are familiar with) Prokofiev's *The Cycle of the Year as a Path of Initiation: An Esoteric Study of the Festivals* (1991).

need to find a means to define and characterise that “essence” of each festival without direct reference to season and implicitly with greater reference, as an anthroposophist, to the workings of the archangels and the spiritual (or ‘supersensible’) world of which they are understood to be part.

In contrast, during an interview with all the primary school teachers, another teacher pointed out – to a general sense of murmured agreement – that “the festival is connected with the season, though.” And yet another teacher said, “looking at Easter or harvest, [which the Michael Oak teachers had by then chosen to celebrate together] we think of the qualities in both that can live together. We think of colleagues celebrating spring while we are celebrating autumn.”

This way of conceptualising these issues has proven stimulating and rewarding to Michael Oak’s teachers. Note, for example, how the teacher quoted last referred to Easter as (apparently necessarily) a harvest festival, and without direct or immediate reference to any season. On one hand this reflects the extent to which the collapse of Easter with harvest had effectively been normalized so that the teacher concerned could refer to the two in one breath.<sup>68</sup> On the other, the teachers’ repeated interrogations of the relationship between season, festival and spirit world (as seen by anthroposophists) was precisely what enabled them to subject that kind of normalization to reflective critique. That in turn allowed them to maintain a strong sense of their own agency in how they constructed the school’s relationship with its local conditions and to imbed the children at the school in their local environments – physical as much as social, cultural and temporal.

While Michael Oak has approached this kind of issue in the manner I have just described, other southern hemisphere schools have taken quite different approaches. Teachers from one South African school explained to me, when I discussed the issue with them at the Kolisko Conference in 2006, that they placed great importance on and effort in the festivals, and that they

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<sup>68</sup> But see later where another teacher is shown to have used a temporal indicator to distinguish an Easter festival from a harvest festival.

emphasised the traditional meaning of the mainstream Christian festivals (Easter and Christmas), and were not particularly concerned with season. An Australian teacher, in contrast, told me, in an email interchange, that teachers at her school also consider the festivals to be a priority, but that they celebrate seasonal festivals only, and make no explicit reference therefore to Christian festivals. In further contrast, I discovered, another South African school – this one situated in an African township – reportedly celebrated their first St. John’s festival as a summertime feast shared with the neighbouring community, possibly to emulate the extensive midsummer food and drink consumption that has come to be associated with Christmas among black South Africans.<sup>69</sup> Yet the same school celebrated the next April (autumn) with an Easter festival in the form of a (Christian) passion play about the death and resurrection of the Christ.

The Michael Oak teachers chose none of those approaches in the festivals I observed, but instead questioned how they could incorporate both seasonal and more traditional Christian festival elements into the festivals, always rethinking, always reflecting on what might be best for the particular set of children at the school during a particular chronological and seasonal time, and designing with those goals in mind.

#### *The Influence of the Christian Community at Michael Oak*

One influential voice in this dialogue was that of the Christian Community. The Christian Community priests of South Africa have also asked the above questions throughout their forty-three years of ecclesiastical presence in South Africa. Evelyn Capel, an English Christian Community priest who helped establish the Christian Community in South Africa and is considered its “grandmother” in South Africa, wrote short books and articles on the subject (1979, 1991). Julian Sleight, one of the founding priests and for many years *lenker* (lit: “steering wheel,” [http://translate.google.com/translate\\_t/5](http://translate.google.com/translate_t/5) August 2007) of the Christian Community of Southern Africa (called

<sup>69</sup> A common greeting after the Christmas and New Year midsummer break when many people travel to distant homes is the question – translated here into English from Sesotho – ‘where did you eat Christmas?’ or ‘did you eat Christmas well?’ (personal communication, Andrew Spiegel 29 Aug 2007).

“overseer” in the American Christian Community), has also given the subject a lot of thought and become a strong influence on the Christian Community and local Waldorf schools about it.<sup>70</sup> Being part of an international ecclesiastical organisation, the Southern African Christian Community celebrates the Christian Community ecclesiastical calendar in parallel with its worldwide counterparts, with everyone celebrating Christmas in December and Easter on the first Sunday after the first full moon after the northern hemisphere’s spring equinox.<sup>71</sup>

Because several Michael Oak teachers are actively involved in the Christian Community, with others attending more occasionally,<sup>72</sup> that church’s ecclesiastical influence is indeed felt in the school. For example, those who attended the Christian Community’s Lent services in the period leading up to Easter saw the black liturgical colour of the priest’s garb and altar cloths, and heard the particular verses read which relate to the liturgical time preceding the Easter festival. Attending these services, I found my own attention drawn to the liturgical time of year rather than the autumnal season, a sense that one teacher, an active member of the Christian Community, said was “my [her] experience also.”

I asked the same teacher how difficult (or necessary) she felt it might be to try to separate what she learned at church about a festival from the way she might approach the same festival in her work at school with the children, especially when drawing from the same Steiner lectures in both spheres. In answer she explained that Michael Oak teachers approached the issue in diverse ways. Of those who have a very Christian orientation,<sup>73</sup> she said, some felt that the festivals should be more, and others that they should be less overtly Christian. She added that teachers who considered themselves to

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<sup>70</sup> Julian Sleight has published several articles on festivals in the southern hemisphere, including 1988, 2005a, and 2005b.

<sup>71</sup> While the Christian Community celebrates the four seasonal festivals that Steiner mentioned in his lectures, they also celebrate a full ecclesiastical liturgical calendar, replete with various traditional festivals, like Ascension, Pentecost, and Epiphany, throughout the year.

<sup>72</sup> Some teachers have told me of the importance of the Christian Community in their lives, and others I have seen attending as I participated in the services and activities of the congregation.

<sup>73</sup> Not all were members of the Christian Community Church.

be Christian also had different relationships to the church – some attended often, some occasionally, and others not at all, and they consequently brought diverse church influences to school discussions about festivals.

One way this particular teacher said that she felt her own church experience influencing the festivals was in the placement and timing of the autumn festival which was always scheduled at the end of the first academic term of the year, a date that sometimes fell before and sometimes after the solstice marking Easter. She explained that she felt very strongly that if the festival was to be held before Good Friday it was inappropriate to make it an Easter festival, and therefore a Harvest festival should be held. In such an instance, she went on, one should tell an Easter story at the opening assembly of the next term, that way to observe Easter after rather than before its liturgical date.

As mentioned previously, Christian community priests have long been invited on various occasions to give talks on the festivals both at Michael Oak and at the Sophia Centre of Lifeways on the Constantia Waldorf School campus – this as a way to help teachers deepen their understanding of the festivals from a spiritual point of view. The talks seemed to be welcomed and valued: One teacher wrote in response to a questionnaire I distributed, “As an inexperienced Waldorf teacher, it is very useful to have Richard Goodall [Christian Community priest as well as Michael Oak parent and teacher’s spouse] come to give the teachers a picture about the meaning of our festivals beforehand.” Another said, “[Inviting Richard to speak is] something we’ve done strongly. We are lucky to have Richard to speak, to plant a seed; [it] makes the meaning of the festival come anew.” Yet another gave the example of a time when the nursery teachers wanted to change the Easter Festival to an autumn festival. Speaking to Richard about their thoughts gave them reassurance as they made the change. They felt “affirmed that we were doing it right.” Since Richard came to speak only when invited, no teachers expressed to me any discomfort at his presence.

I heard one of Richard Goodall's talks to all the Michael Oak teachers at one of their weekly meetings in August 2005. It was an exposition of the work of archangel Michael from a particular facet that provided a basis for the teachers to begin planning the upcoming spring Michaelmas festival.

Drawing from a Biblical text as found in the book of the Revelation according to St. John, pictures said to be given by the Christ to John when he was exiled on the Greek island of Patmos, Richard talked about the symbolism of the four horses mentioned in that text,<sup>74</sup> each representing a period or epoch of human history and the consciousness held then. After the four horses appeared, an angel – the archangel Michael – held the space open for a new way of thinking needed then, indicated Richard, for humanity's renewal. Having described Revelation XII's subsequent fight between the archangel Michael and the dragon, he said: "A seed needs to be laid in the child for a new way of thinking." He did not explicitly explain the relationship between the dragon and contemporary humanity (or developing children), but in retrospect I gained a sense that he and the teachers were drawing on their own previous studies and discussions to inform their understanding of the role of the dragon. Having used a dragon in almost every Michaelmas festival, the teachers had had many opportunities for discussing it. For example, in 1992 then Michael Oak teacher Paul King wrote an editorial for the school newsletter saying that the heavenly battle between Michael and the dragon has an earthly counterpart: "In heaven the battle is won; but the dragon is now on earth and here the battle continues soul-size" (Leaflet No. 23, 11 September 1992). He cited outer conflict between people as a projection of inner conflict, an inner battle against hatred and fear, needing honesty, a "force of courageous love" and "Michaelic strength" to overcome "the dragon in the soul" – "certainly only one aspect of the Michaelmas festival." I have heard other Michael Oak teachers say at other times that Michael himself gives us courage and strength for this inner battle.

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<sup>74</sup> Revelations VI.

Richard also explained why, from an anthroposophical perspective, the archangel Michael's work is especially important in the present age. And he added that Waldorf education is the vehicle through which Michael can enter into contemporary civilization with its increasing sense of individualism and individual consciousness. He explained further that, since Waldorf's method aims to make way for a re-individualised thinking by humans, it aims to reveal what has already been embedded, by Michael's school of angels, in each child's soul before the child's birth and present incarnation on earth, countering what he termed "dragon thoughts." Adding that "We can say that the whole of Waldorf education is [tantamount to being] a Michaelmas festival, but [that] pictures of that need to be presented to the child," he left the teachers with the question: "How do we empower children to think differently when they go out into the world?"

"We cannot know the demands which the future will place upon our children, but it is clear that inner strength, intellectual flexibility, empathy and sound independent judgement will be qualities vital to their future," says the Southern African Federation of Waldorf Schools website ([http://www.waldorf.org.za/info/about\\_waldorf.html](http://www.waldorf.org.za/info/about_waldorf.html) /6 Dec. 2007). Emphasis on developing a child's free independent thought and future role in social renewal is consistent with Michael Oak's educational goals: "Michael Oak Waldorf School educates the whole child towards creative responsibility, developing confident individuals empowered to work with the challenges of tomorrow," (Michael Oak homepage, <http://www.michaeloakschool.org.za/home.htm> /6 Dec. 2007). As I shall now show, one can interpret Richard's talk and the consequent festival preparations to support these goals.

Michael Oak's teachers engaged this challenge of preparing children for the future as together they took the question Richard posed – 'How do we empower children to think differently when they go out into the world?' – and pondered not only some possible responses, but also how those responses might inform how they might work with the children in preparation for the festival. They first asked themselves, both in the larger primary school

meeting and again later in the smaller festival preparation group (four teachers were assigned to plan this particular festival), what “dragon thoughts” might be, how they might manifest particularly in children of various ages at the school at the present time. “Each class could look at which dragon thoughts they need to subdue – how can this be expressed?”<sup>75</sup> From what was said at various points I came to understand “dragon thoughts” to refer to non-individualised ways of thinking consistent with the inner conflict Paul King wrote about in 1992 – thoughts influenced by the “dragon within the soul.”

The small planning group suggested manifestations of dragon thoughts as perhaps conflict in classes, or not recognising beauty in the world, and the challenge of completing difficult projects together (for the older upper primary children) or creating things of beauty (for the younger lower primary children) as ways of confronting and taming such thoughts. Taking the idea of dragon thoughts further, they decided to plan the festival around it, planning challenging projects for each class, the results of which would be displayed in some way at the festivals through object or performance art. And they asked themselves “Which aspects [of dragon thoughts] should be done in the week leading up to the festival and which aspects could be presented at the festival?”<sup>76</sup>

They also asked other questions. With so much physical war being waged in the world today, they asked, are some of the traditional Michaelmas songs, which have war imagery (for the spiritual war between Michael and the forces of evil), not inappropriate for the wider Waldorf community now? And on a more abstract level, as they planned challenging projects for the children which would help tame the dragon within, they discussed the nature of challenges, suggesting that they should be approached from what they called “I consciousness,” or an “I permeated with humanness” perspective – concepts I have interpreted loosely to mean a positive, intentional sense of

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<sup>75</sup> From a teacher’s notes after an impromptu meeting when I was not present.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid.

oneself, without being self-centred. As one among them said, “morals and ethics, not egotism.”<sup>77</sup>

The discussion started by the priest therefore became, in this example, a beginning point for a dialogue through which the teachers created a festival. The influence of the Christian Community was felt here as the priest taught about a possible festival topic that the teachers could explore and plan around, knowing, of course, that for many years that festival has been marked by the appearance of a dragon (portrayed by the Class Seven group) that threatened all and then was tamed by a Class Six child.

However, as indicated, Richard made no suggestions at all in his talk regarding what the teachers might do with what he said, except to ask the question I have quoted above. The teachers in the small planning group themselves decided what they would discuss and what elements would be included in the festival. The open-endedness of Richard's approach, with its lack of easy, set answers, left the four planning group teachers (and in later stages of festival preparation, the entire primary school teacher body) with much opportunity (indeed the challenge) to wrestle and struggle to create an appropriate festival – and so contributed to a tension that in turn helped generate new ideas.

### **Continental Shift: From Europe to Africa**

A special feature of Waldorf education is its ability to adapt to the indigenous culture of the community in which it is used.

The South African Waldorf Schools are continually researching the “Africanisation” of their curriculum. The indigenous cultures need to be alive in the classrooms to avoid them being swept aside by modern modes of living (Van Alphen, 2000:9).

Another issue relating to diversity that Michael Oak's teachers faced as they planned festivals was the fact that Rudolf Steiner created Waldorf education for European children being taught by European teachers in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Yet here they were, South African teachers using that same method to teach South African children in an early 21<sup>st</sup> century South African

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<sup>77</sup> Many of these thoughts and ideas were expressed during a festival preparations group meeting on 6 September, 2005.

city school. Already quite sensitive about European influences on what they understand to be African identity and culture, many Michael Oak parents and teachers, and those in the wider South African Waldorf community, have repeatedly asked what it means to be Waldorf in South Africa. At the April 2005 Hague Circle conference, which was combined with the annual South African Waldorf teachers' conference, questions were raised by teachers from across the country as to how Waldorf education might address what was described in the conference documentation as 'the African child' in particular, especially when so many of the stories told come from a European tradition (for example, the stories of the saints told in Class Two).

I did not always understand what people meant when they used the word "African" in the context of who is the "African child" and what festival aspects might be considered "African." Having heard various people refer to black Xhosa-speakers as "African" (for example, in referring to my black Xhosa-speaking next-door neighbours), I wondered what people meant when they used the label "African" in the course of my fieldwork.

Shizha (2005:65) raises the questions, what do we mean by "African," and "Who is *the African* in contemporary African society" (original italics). He describes Africa as a "salad bowl of black Africans, white Africans, Arabic Africans, and Asian Africans," who do not share a common "African" culture (2005:66). Indigenous people, he says, have knowledge not shared by those who colonised them precisely because western Euro-American information and thought was promoted to the exclusion of this indigenous knowledge. He argues that "a [pedagogic] system that recognizes and allows for multiple ways of learning and explaining reality transforms classroom life [and adds that] Multicultural education ... infuses the entire school curriculum with the lives, experiences, works, practices, attributes, and dreams of the traditionally left out." And he recommends that schools should recognise the diversity of African culture and that African languages represent views of reality or shared experience not acknowledged or recognised by a uni-cultural and unilingual approach (Shizha 2005:78).

Jedeikin (2007:45-46) has argued that the term “multiculturalism” is often misused, “overemphasizing cultural distinctiveness” as if the boundaries of race and ethnicity are firmly set rather than admitting that a diversity of social backgrounds exist, intermingling “in work-based or social relationships. These processes suggest that socially constructed boundaries morph continuously according to contemporary social context” (Jedeikin 2007:46).<sup>78</sup> Often I saw these boundaries to be fluid as Jedeikin describes – Michael Oak parents and children gathered in social groupings both at and outside of the school were often a mixture of skin colour, nationality, and religious orientation. However, I found that the fluidity seemed to end when parents living in the townships could not get to weekend or evening school or social events because of safety or transportation issues, and their children could not easily go to another child’s house for the afternoon without spending the night, because they would then miss their afternoon ride home. Then, the Xhosa-speaking families seemed more clearly-defined as a group.

For the most part, I interpreted the teachers’ use of the word “African” to reflect Shiza’s meaning because I saw them making various attempts to include Afrikaans and Xhosa language in some form in each festival, as well as gumboot dancing at Michaelmas and a story about a San child in the 2006 Harvest Festival (the children learned about the San people through stories, verbal instruction, and museum visits in Class Four – those children who attended Michael Oak for Class Four would supposedly understand some of the cultural context meant by that label). However, one teacher developed this idea further, reflecting the fluidity of the diverse social relationships, writing in the school’s newsletter:

I have come to realise that Africa is not just about drums and making beaded jewellery, nor is it about speaking an ‘African’ language. Neither is it about bringing African fairy tales and fables into the classroom or singing and dancing African songs. It is all that and more. It is about knowing and

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<sup>78</sup> Jedeikin explored the ways that the McGregor Waldorf School (South Africa) understood its own African identity and adapted the Waldorf curriculum accordingly. She emphasizes that “since localization ensures that no two (Waldorf) schools are the same, anyone who advocates Waldorf pedagogic principles...needs to recognize that applying them has always to be socially contextual (2007:58).

celebrating diversity, not only African diversity, and recognising the common humanity within us all and our striving to be fully human. This is the message of both Ubuntu<sup>79</sup> and of Waldorf education (Reeler, 2004).

I perceived this definition, this acknowledgement and this kind of emphasis on diversity as Michael Oak's teachers' primary approach towards "Africanising" the festivals. Likewise, emphasising the elements of our "common humanity" mentioned above was important. When asked in a survey if specific elements made the festivals a reflection of South African culture, a former teacher wrote, "No – I don't see that as the intention. All true S.A. culture will recognise the universal human & spiritual truths of any festival preparation that has been prepared with the full consciousness of the essence the College has agreed upon...and the responsibility we have to our whole community" (original underscoring). This perspective reflected what I had read in Waldorf literature on the subject of multiculturalism: "I would argue that teachers should bring stories, myths, histories, ideas, insights and religions from each culture, from Africa, from Asia, from South America, from Europe, from all over the world into their teaching....to the extent that these resources reveal some aspect of our humanity...that teachers believe is ready to be revealed to students at their particular stage of development..." (Kane 1995:95). Kane continues, "If we've been educated well, if we take the gifts of each culture, we can then transcend the limitations of each culture. We become members of a new culture, a culture of free human beings. This is what Waldorf education strives toward and prepares you for: to walk as a whole, responsible, free human being" (Kane 1995:96).

In 2006, Michael Oak's teachers were able to gather with colleagues from around South Africa (and a few other African countries) at their annual South African Waldorf teachers' conference and, now together with doctors, psychologists, massage therapists, curative eurythmists and other medically-oriented specialists, they addressed the question of how teachers and therapists might "develop their diagnostic, observational, and practical skills to

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<sup>79</sup> As noted in Chapter Three, the Western Cape Education Department defines "ubuntu" as "humanity to others" ([http://wced.wcape.gov.za/circulars/minutes04/ehrd64\\_04.html](http://wced.wcape.gov.za/circulars/minutes04/ehrd64_04.html)) /19 June 2007).

meet today's children in Africa and in Waldorf schools" (Pastoll, 2006). The questions raised for and by teachers in response to what they saw as the African context were numerous and ever-present, and the emotions showed by those attending suggested that they were close to the surface of the minds of many across the country. In part that may be because the 2004 South African Waldorf Teachers' Conference had taken as its central theme "Waldorf in Africa, Africa in Waldorf" – "a theme," wrote one teacher, "we have also grappled with as Michael Oak parents and teachers. How do I bring Africa into my classroom? How do I bring African experiences into my teaching? What will make the curriculum more African? What do I need to bring, change, add to, adapt – to make Waldorf education relevant to the African child?" (Reeler, 2004).

Questions of localisation and concern over African culture and experience continued to confront Michael Oak's teachers throughout my fieldwork period, and indeed still do. At a class parents' meeting in 2005, a group of primary-school parents argued for more Xhosa language instruction so that their children would be able to better relate to the Western Cape's large black Xhosa-speaking population. Yet at another class parents' meeting two years later, a group of high school parents argued for more Afrikaans instruction (Afrikaans is more widely used in the Western Cape than Xhosa) and less (or no) Xhosa (or at least the freedom to choose which language would be studied). Unsurprisingly, therefore, questions of how to achieve cultural inclusiveness in festivals tended to focus on cultural attributes said to be associated with speakers of these two languages (and not necessarily on gender, physical disability, left- or right-handedness, sexual-orientation, or other differences).

In the few informal interviews I held with parents about the festivals, the question of the African context was far more important than any seasonal one. One white parent commented that the recorder, itself a European instrument, was always played for festivals; and then asked why 'African pan-flutes' were

not used instead.<sup>80</sup> And as I became acquainted with other parents, I understood that many had been involved in marching and protesting actively against the apartheid government, often at great personal risk. In my daughter's class of 26 children in 2005, at least eight parents had been involved in the movement as "freedom fighters," a term used by the class teacher and by many of those same parents. So my open-ended questions to them about festivals (such as "what do you think about the festivals here?") drew very quick replies pointing to this same diversity issue of being a Waldorf school in Africa.<sup>81</sup>

I observed the teachers talking quite a bit in festival planning meetings about how to include the experiences of Xhosa and Afrikaans speaking people, and they always seemed to begin with inserting songs from those languages into the festivals. The 2005, 2006, 2007, and 2008 Michaelmas festivals all included gum-boot dancing (see Figure 2, below),<sup>82</sup> and all the festivals I observed included songs or verses in Xhosa or Afrikaans, or both. The 2006, 2007, and 2008 Michaelmas festivals included Southern African drumming (see Figure 3, below). The 2006 Star Tree festival had Xhosa-language gospel singing, which occupied a significant amount of time.<sup>83</sup>

Most parents attending the festivals appeared to me to be contented with the way the teachers combined traditions, just as most parents at parents'

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<sup>80</sup> Ironically, African pan-flutes are not indigenous African instruments but were found in such places as ancient Greece, China, and Southeast Asia (<http://www.panflutejedi.com/pan-flute-history-main.html> /1 October 2008), and this parent's assumption to the contrary might imply that he believes simple instruments are more likely to be African than those made with more complex technology like recorders – thereby reflecting a deeply-seated cultural racism (Spiegel 2008) assuming Africans to be technologically simple.

<sup>81</sup> Interestingly, my ten years of association with the North American Waldorf school movement showed me that this question of context is not limited to Africa. North Americans are very concerned about fitting American children into a pedagogy that can feel very German. In Australia, as mentioned, the "Lorien" or "Alan Whitehead" stream of Waldorf schools seeks to "Australianise" the education (West, 1994: 189). I was told by a Hague Circle member that the question of cultural context even exists in Europe, raised by teachers and parents of different countries who want Waldorf education to meet the particular needs of the children of their country.

<sup>82</sup> Gumboot dance is an indigenous South African dance form developed first as a means of communication for gold miners working in the dark mines, wearing gumboots, or Wellingtons, to protect themselves from the water. Later it evolved into a form of dance entertainment (<http://www.gumbootsworldtour.com/english/history.html> /14 August 2007).

<sup>83</sup> It lasted longer than had been imagined in the planning: as one teacher told me later, the length of the performance came as a surprise.

evenings supported the school's language-teaching efforts. I also found that the same relatively few parents who felt the school's efforts at "inclusion" were inadequate voiced their opinions repeatedly, making the issue seem more extensive than perhaps it was. Yet their voices were a significant influence on the teachers, who had already vocalised to me their intentions, as one teacher put it, to be "inclusive of all families. so that nobody would feel left out".



Figure 2: Gumboot Dancing in 2005 Michaelmas Festival



Figure 3: Drummers in 2006 Michaelmas Festival

### *Christian Festivals in a Religiously Pluralistic Society*

Cape Town's residents include persons of many different religions and, within easy walking distance of Michael Oak, are churches, a mosque, a synagogue, and a centre where various smaller religious groups hold meetings. Despite the number of teachers who called themselves Christian and who were involved to varying degrees with the Christian Community or other Christian churches, the teachers were also aware of religious diversity within the school. Several teachers were Jewish or Muslim and the school community included support staff and families who celebrated Muslim, Jewish, and Hindu holy days, or none at all.

Given this diversity of religious persuasion, the teachers had decided to seek what they understood to be basic, universal meanings to the festivals, meanings that might be relevant to all humans, regardless of religion. "We need to make the festivals inclusive so that Muslim/black/Jewish/Hindu/etc. families feel OK.... We try to focus on the universal rather than the specific,"

wrote one teacher in a survey. Two former pupils told me that they remembered, as part of the Star Tree Festival, a Christmas tableau enacted with Mary, Joseph and Baby Jesus, shepherds, angels, and animals. They added that different classes would dress as a group of characters, and songs and stories would be told. However, I was told by teachers that, beginning in 1996 as the teacher constellation had changed, they had decided to make the festivals less overtly Christian so that children and families of other faith backgrounds would be able to relate to the festivals' central messages or themes, and also not be offended. One teacher mentioned leaving out the nativity tableau from the Star Tree Festival as a specific example. Regarding this change towards greater universality, a former teacher wrote, "My concern is that we sometimes now seem to make a really conscious effort to include our families of other cultures & religions to the extent of avoiding Christianity. However, in spite of my personal belief that the incarnation of Christ represents the 'turning point of time (evolution),' I appreciate, too, festivals that go beyond sectarianism, and experience spiritual truths common to all."

As in other areas, it seems that that the Michael Oak teachers were willing to surrender their own particular perspectives for the unity of the teachers and the broader school community on the issue of religious diversity, although, when objections were raised, the other teachers listened. For example, I heard from two teachers about a discussion during the 2006 St. John's festival planning, where a story about a soldier's conquest of Jerusalem during the Crusades was planned because it provided an opportunity to show how an initially self-centred fighting man learned higher values than combat, winning, and self-glorification as he came to care for something sacred, giving and receiving help along the way from other people and from animals. But at least two teachers had objected to what they understood as an anti-Semitic aspect to the festival story.<sup>84</sup> So the planning group found a way to write the particular historical context out of the story, and to concentrate instead on what they were trying to convey – the change that occurred in the soldier which was now represented as happening as he carried a sacred flame from

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<sup>84</sup> Interestingly, and this shows the absence of Muslims amongst the school's main teachers, no reference was made to the same story being potentially anti-Islam.

a foreign land back to his hometown. One would not need to know details about the war being fought to understand the storyline. The historical placement of the story was simply omitted.

Michael Oak's struggles to be inclusive of different religions surfaced also within the wider South African Waldorf movement. In a 2006 Hague Circle plenary session, for example, one teacher with twenty years experience in the Constantia Waldorf nursery school and now training early childhood educators in townships asked, "When we look at each others' festivals, we ask each other how we celebrate those festivals. How is it celebrated in the Muslim community? How do we celebrate it in the southern hemisphere?" And the Southern African Federation of Waldorf Schools,<sup>85</sup> states on its website that:

Waldorf schools provide a supportive base for children of every faith. The schools are Christian in the universal sense and therefore non-denominational. The teachers hold that all young children are naturally religious, and that if this quality is not distorted by dogmatism, nor withered by neglect, it can become a firm basis for confidence in life (<http://www.waldorf.org.za/> 16 June 2007).<sup>86</sup>

But the question of religious diversity was approached differently in different schools in South Africa. When I spoke with teachers from other Waldorf Schools, one in the Western Cape, I found that at least two celebrated Christian festivals with overtly Christian meaning – one even having an Easter Festival passion play about the death and resurrection of the Christ. At least one, I was told, operates in a predominantly Christian context so the teachers felt no tension between their festivals' Christian character and the Christian church-going community of school families. In comparison, the diversity of religious affiliations within Michael Oak's parent and student body meant that

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<sup>85</sup> A Federation Council member, who is also a Michael Oak teacher, explained to me that one task of the Federation was to try to find and express the commonalities between the different Southern African Waldorf schools. The statements made on the website and in the curriculum guides express those findings.

<sup>86</sup> "In the Waldorf schools we make a strong distinction between a natural religious devotion and the profession of a particular faith, for all human culture, not only of religion, but of art, philosophy, healing, rulership and social law, until recent times had its roots in the soil of religious experience" (Penfold, 1984:30). *Root and Shoot* (Penfold, 1984) is a booklet compiled from articles written by teachers for the Michael Oak journal between 1974 and 1984, intended to give kindergarten and primary school parents "a deeper insight into Waldorf Education at Michael Oak" (introduction, no page number).

its teachers had chosen to try, as a teacher explained, to make each festival “something that all the children can relate to”.

### *Climate changes*

A comment I heard quite often from Michael Oak’s teachers and from local anthroposophists who were former Michael Oak parents concerned the willingness of each festival’s planners to consider festivals anew. One teacher summed the comments up in a teachers’ meeting: “People have said that the festivals at Michael Oak are so much more meaningful because they have been so well thought out. Nothing is taken for granted, or done because it is always done.”

In the aforementioned 2005 Michaelmas festival, where the topic of discussion was how ideas about dragons (what priest Richard Goodall had called ‘dragon thoughts’) might be used in the festival’s enactment, one teacher stopped the conversation in a small planning group meeting, asking “will we have a dragon this year?” and adding that she wanted to avoid starting with any assumptions. Yet, because Richard’s talk had inspired them to discuss ‘dragon thoughts’, and since no-one provided a compelling reason to abandon the dragon, they decided in favour of it,<sup>87</sup> although that did not mean that they did simply and unthinkingly accepted that the dragon would appear as it had done before. One teacher wrote in her notes, “What would the dragon symbolise this year? The dragon is most definitely part of our tradition and we felt this should continue. However, the dragon thing got out of hand last year – so we really do need to look at this carefully.” The dragon (in fact a dragon costume – but referred to throughout the discussion as ‘the dragon’), used by then for many years, was, one teacher commented, worn and falling apart; styrofoam stuffing was showing through and other parts needed re-painting or repairing. Another commented that some would miss this particular dragon when it was gone (or “retired”). And so the dragon was kept on for one more year and its retirement scheduled for the end of that Michaelmas festival – among many reasons because that year’s Class Seven

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<sup>87</sup> One recent graduate told me she remembers a Michaelmas bull being used in connection to a Greek story told at the festival that year.

teacher (it was the class seven teacher who had each year to take charge of the dragon) had no time or energy to make a new one. Moreover, the then Class Six teacher, who would have the following year to take charge of the dragon if one was to be used, was considered to be particularly talented with colour and design and so could be expected to create a very good new dragon. What this shows is that the teachers involved were ready for innovation, but that practical concerns and busyness sometimes overwhelmed their ability to realise their intentions.<sup>88</sup>

The polarity between the teachers' need to accomplish certain required pedagogical and administrative tasks and their desire to maintain or change traditions created a further tension for them, and emphasised the dialogic nature of their festival planning process. For each festival, the teachers had not only to negotiate the content of the festivals, but also to consistently weigh their priorities regarding the management of their time. Sometimes, as in the 2006 Star Tree festival, the teachers carved time from their daily teaching schedules for more than one week to help the children rehearse their parts together for the shadow-puppet play. At other times, as in the above example, re-creating the dragon was considered less important and was dropped as a priority.

Basing their decision on a reading of Steiner's teachings (1996a) that the role of the archangel Michael is to strengthen the individual in the face of challenges, members of the planning group had agreed that they needed, as in the past at Michael Oak, to include challenges in the festival. This was not only because the inclusion of challenges was a Michael Oak tradition – "There are always challenges at Michaelmas," said one former pupil; it was also because they saw such challenges as intrinsic to the meaning of the Michaelmas festival, a way of attaining greater strength and courage by testing one's ability to do something difficult. Yet they had still to consider the character of the particular challenges they would set for the school's children.

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<sup>88</sup> Indeed, the same occurred the following year when the then Class Seven teacher, who had not been part of the 2005 planning group, and thus not party to the decision then to retire the old dragon, also found she had neither time nor energy to make a new dragon costume; and so the "retired" dragon re-appeared in 2006.

Often, particularly in recent years (though also in the memory of at least one young adult former pupil), the challenges had taken the form of games in which the children would meet a physical challenge. Yet now the teachers decided to have those kinds of games restricted to Sports Day, a regular school day (in the summer term) when the children spent a good part of the day playing tug-of-war and competing in other ways. The Michaelmas challenges, the 2005 planning group decided, would have to take a different form. "We thought that perhaps we should consider bringing back the idea of challenges – as representing how we are faced with dragon challenges," noted a teacher. And again the theme of 'dragon thoughts' was drawn upon to help decide the kinds of challenge to be set for children of each class – thus reflecting the underlying principle that each class should be handled in a manner particular to its own members' ages and to the character of its own constellation of personalities. One teacher created a challenge to address some of the interpersonal conflicts amongst class members whilst simultaneously addressing the disparity of musical ability amongst them. The challenge she set was for those children who already knew how to play recorder to teach other children who did not, and to do so to a point that, by the time of the festival, the class would be able to play a recorder piece together. In setting the challenge in this way, the teacher aimed to ensure that the children learned a skill whilst simultaneously working together in spite of their differences, and having to give and receive. In another class the teacher required the children to learn peer mediation skills – as a means to discover how to deal with interpersonal differences and tensions. In that way the festival's challenge component was transformed from the games of previous years into a different sort of test, in these examples, a social one.

### **The Ideal and the Real**

If we discuss community as an active, complex, and changing creature, we will not confine ourselves within an idea that community can only be perfect, whole, and good. Recognizing the complexities opens up the possibility of change (Bushnell 2001:159)

We have always known that life does not conform to our most simple categories (Douglas 1984:38).

The teachers, as I have shown earlier, had social and pedagogical ideals involving the festivals. Because of their belief in providing images, thoughts, and sounds that appeal to the children's senses in a particular way, they were concerned that the songs, verses, and general atmosphere of festivals would support the goals they had set. But what happened when festivals, or their preparations, did not turn out as hoped?

What happens, for example when power saws and neighbours' barking dogs drown out what teachers have planned, to create an atmosphere where the children can listen closely to each other and the festival story, where not only the visual senses can be met with beauty but the aural senses too through songs, verses, and stories? This was the situation during the 2006 Harvest festival, and it pulled the ideal and the real very far apart from one another, the children becoming bored and fidgety, two of them telling me later that they could not even hear the story. What happens when, as I overheard one child say to another, "The autumn festival is very, very, very boring and unfunky," or when, as another added, "first you hear a really, really, really long story, then you sing songs and eat bread and grapes."<sup>89</sup> What then of all the care with which the teachers have chosen and prepared such a story and set of events?

Evaluating a festival's enactment afterwards, teachers did tell me things that they believed could have run better. One questioned the 2005 St. John's festival's long duration, another noticed a restlessness among the children at the 2006 Harvest festival, and yet another wondered whether the 2005 Star Tree Festival story might, after all, have been better suited for a St. John's festival. Several teachers also expressed extreme dislike for the Witteboome Civic Centre hall in the neighbouring suburb of Wynberg that they had often had to use; but they immediately acknowledged that it had been their best option for accommodating parents while being close enough for children to

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<sup>89</sup> After the 2007 Harvest festival, I overheard another parent ask this same group of children how the festival went, and the children all said that it was much better this time. The differences that I perceived in the 2007 festival and the previous one were that there were fewer people in the hall so it was less crowded and stuffy, several teachers shared the storytelling although the children still thought the story was too long, fewer songs were sung, and there was less outside noise.

walk there for rehearsals.<sup>90</sup>

Even preparations for a festival sometimes seemed less than ideal, particularly rehearsals. I often observed children being distracted when they were expected to pay attention and practise their performances, and that class teachers had repeatedly to quiet them. In the rehearsals for the 2005 Michaelmas and Star Tree festivals, I observed many older children talking and their teachers repeatedly asking them to be quiet or separating those who did not. And I saw particular children who were prone to misbehave in other circumstances doing the same during Star Tree festival rehearsals, leading one teacher to say in an aside, "This is a mess!"

By the time of the 2005 Star Tree festival's final rehearsal at Wynberg's Witteboome Civic Centre, it appeared that all members of the various classes had learned their parts. Yet the disruptions continued. The rehearsal began with the Class Five teacher welcoming everyone, and practising her request that cell phones be turned off and cameras not be used. As the children sang the opening song, *Havenu Shalom Alechem*, I noticed how "the Class Seven boys were already in trouble. They were split up and moved around, but continued to talk and get into trouble" (field notes). And I wondered, as the teachers stopped to rehearse a recorder piece with the Class Sixes while younger children popped up and ran across the hall to find the toilet, whether we would even make it through the rehearsal, much less enact the festival itself. However, by that evening, as all gathered with parents at the Civic Centre, something had changed. What I had found to be the usual distractions were present – little siblings ran up and down the aisles, parents talked, and the great hall magnified every extraneous sound made. But despite all that, the pupils were attentive and all the classes remembered their lines and spoke them loudly and clearly, singing their songs and playing their recorder pieces with focus and apparent enjoyment.

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<sup>90</sup> This was before construction of a new school hall on the campus, a process that reached a point of completion that made the hall usable only late in 2006.

To me, the difference between the final rehearsal and performance illustrated what one teacher meant when she said, “I’ve not been at the point of having expectations. We have aims, but not expectations. We prepare, go through the process, but the last magical thing of how it will come out, the feeling that the children will have, is hard to predict. We are often surprised by how the children respond.” Herbert Blau had a similar sentiment when he wrote, “all performance moves between expectancy and observance, between attentiveness to what happens and astonishment at what appears” (1990:264).

What became clear to me, as teachers emphasised it repeatedly, was that for them the whole process that both they and their students went through in preparation for each festival was meaningful in itself. As they said, there was a dynamic quality that came from and inhered in the whole process of a festival, not only from its preparation and the care taken in its planning, but also from what happened because of the teachers’ attitude and focus. The individual parts of the festival and even of the process were important so that, in the end, they all added up to something much bigger than their sum. The dialogical nature of the planning process meant that the coming together of all of these factors of localisation, along with the tension between what the teachers ideally hoped for and what they were in reality able to accomplish, all contributed to the creative energy perceived by the teachers as they planned and enacted the festivals.

### *Dealing with Anomalies*

I have already provided many statements by Michael Oak teachers that show their perceptions that the festivals were conceptualised within a context of seemingly conflicting factors. As the teachers confronted these factors and their polarities, sometimes a single aspect or minority opinion would in itself cause tension, and they would have to deal with the resulting anomaly.<sup>91</sup> About such kinds of anomalies, Douglas wrote,

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<sup>91</sup> The Miriam Webster Dictionary defines anomaly as “deviation from the common rule: IRREGULARITY” and “something different, abnormal, peculiar, or not easily classified” (<http://www.m-w.com/cgi-bin/dictionary?sourceid=Mozilla-search&va=anomaly> /12 June 2007).

“There are several ways of treating anomalies. Negatively, we can ignore, not just perceive them, or perceiving we can condemn. Positively we can deliberately confront the anomaly and try to create a new pattern of reality in which it has a place. It is not impossible for an individual to revise his own personal scheme of classifications. But no individual lives in isolation and his scheme will have been partly received from others” (1984:38).

The dialogue into which teachers entered, both with each other and in negotiating the binaries of their context, was a means of confronting such anomalies, and of “creat[ing] ... new pattern[s] of reality in which [they had] a place” (ibid). Having indicated that one can do so both negatively and positively, Douglas goes on to name five ways of dealing with anomalies. First, the participants in a dialogical process could “settle for one or another interpretation,” and so resolve any ambiguity that was produced by the anomaly (1984:39). For example, the teachers could choose a strictly winter festival or a traditional northern hemisphere summer festival. I talked with a teacher in one school (in Australia) that celebrates a purely seasonal winter festival and not a St. John’s festival at the time of the southern winter solstice; I spoke with teachers at another South African school which celebrates a more traditionally northern St. John’s festival in June, complete with the bonfire traditionally associated with the northern hemisphere’s summer festival. The Michael Oak teachers chose neither of these options in 2005. Instead they decided not to “reduce the ambiguity” (Douglas,1984:39), but rather, in some senses, to enhance it by celebrating a St. John’s festival with traditionally winter elements like the eurythmy spirals, which are the central activity of many northern hemisphere Advent festivals, “bringing light into the darkness” as they spiral outward with a lit candle (Waldorf School of Atlanta, The Garden Breeze, 3 December 2007).<sup>92</sup>

The second and third means of dealing with anomalies, according to Douglas,

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<sup>92</sup> “The form of the involuting and outgoing spiral was one that Dr. Rudolf Steiner gave as a recommended form to walk because it involves the whole child and their sensory systems. The children experience these forms in many ways, through walking them and through the form drawing that is part of the curriculum, for instance” (Waldorf School of Atlanta, The Garden Breeze, 3 December 2007).

are physically to control them or to avoid them altogether (1984:39). As examples she respectively refers to killing night-crowing cocks because they do not crow at dawn, and avoiding crawling things altogether. In the school context, the teachers might control the anomaly of children's families disrupting the flow of a festival by banning them from attending all festivals because sometimes (as I observed in the 2005 St. John's festival), they talked more and moved around more than did the scholars; or the teachers might avoid any overtly religious elements that might either conflict with each other or with the beliefs of some in attendance – such as occurred when the 2006 St John's festival story was altered to avoid concerns about it being understood as anti-Semitic. That example aside, the teachers, as I observed, chose neither of those options; they allowed discordant elements to exist side by side. For example, they chose to invite families to the 2005 St. John's, Michaelmas, and Star Tree Festivals, their disruptive behaviour notwithstanding.

The fourth way Douglas identifies for dealing with anomalies is to label them as dangerous (1984:39-40). This particular means would be easily seen in disagreements between two people or factions. Anxiety, Douglas explains, is normal in human disputes. However, when one person or faction labels the opposite opinion as “wrong” or takes the issue as “beyond dispute” and so closes the possibility of conversation, then the anomalous subject (or object) has been labelled “dangerous” to the conformity of the group with which it is in conflict, and is therefore dealt with accordingly. In a case where dialogue between teachers had been ended because one or some of them refused to concede or to discuss the matter further, then the teachers would have employed this method of dealing with the anomaly that constituted such a disagreement. However, I never observed this kind of dynamic in the meetings I attended. I did hear of three examples, from four different teachers, of a time when they had disagreed with the other teachers. In two, the teachers who had disagreed, after raising their point, said that they conceded to the majority opinion without feeling resentment. Both explained that working together as a group, even when they did not agree with everything, was more important than labelling the others' opinions as “wrong” or “dangerous.” In the

other situation, I was told, the majority listened to and heard the objection, and the festival element was changed. In all three instances then, dialogue was preserved in spite of the presence of anomaly.

Douglas's fifth and final suggested means whereby anomaly is dealt with is the way that I saw the Michael Oak teachers act. She wrote, "...ambiguous symbols can be used in ritual for the same ends as they are used in poetry and mythology, to enrich meaning or call attention to other levels of existence" (1984:40). In the 2005 St. John's festival, the dissonance caused by juxtaposing the winter spiral with the (summer) story of St. John was brought together in the song "Thou Messenger of Light." After hearing the Biblical verse and song about John the Baptist and spiralling inwards and outwards with lighted lanterns, the children sang (together with teachers and some of the parents), "St. John, St. John, thou messenger of Light, O kindle the fire in the dark winter's night that life" (second verse "love") "may come to birth."

Either element on its own would have produced its own distinctive focus to the festival. The spirals, as mentioned, symbolise finding light within and bringing it out into the darkness, an action traditionally associated with a seasonal winter festival. The story of John the Baptist, on the other hand, calls attention to the June northern hemispheric aspect of the St. John's Festival, a focus on John the Baptist who was said to give witness to the Christ, who was referred to as "the Light."<sup>93</sup> In a summer St. John's celebration, one sees and feels the strength of the summer sun as a reminder of this "Light." The above song brings together the seasonal southern winter aspect and the northern summer perspective, along with the Christian St. John's story. Together they call attention, as Douglas stated is likely, to a deeper meaning inherent in light, one that is common to both a bright sun and a lantern in the dark, to an outer manifestation of light and one that is found, symbolically, within oneself, and furthermore, to a spiritual being that has qualities of both.

Moreover, the juxtaposition of the tree verse (explained in more detail in the

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<sup>93</sup> See the Gospel of John, chapter one.

following section) with these perspectives on light provided yet another layer of focus. As we sang “You and I, I and you..., we shall kindle our light too, for we all live together on the earth, our mother...,” the themes of earth (and trees) and light (with St. John as symbolic bringer of light) were brought together, much as the individual children were brought together first into classes as they recited and spiralled, then as a school as they sang all together.

### **Bringing It All Together: Festival Creation in Dialogue as enacted at Michael Oak**

Thus speaks the leaden Saturn  
 Through the trees of the dark woods,  
 Through the yellow woods, ironwoods and mahogany  
 Let us feel responsibility  
 For the need in our time,  
 And the whole of humanity.  
 Take up with earnestness and fervour  
 The task that life gives to us.  
 (Verse spoken by Class Seven in the 2005 St. John’s Festival)

When I spoke to a gathered group at the Anthroposophical Society of the Western Cape, I likened the tension of living in an African southern hemisphere country and there adapting a European-oriented curriculum and translating lectures given to northern hemisphere audiences to that caused by the tectonic plates of the Pacific Basin, great pieces of rock and land under the Pacific Ocean, which, when they knock against each other, unleash energy great enough to cause volcanoes (the origin of many South Pacific Islands) or some of the earthquakes and their resulting tsunamis which plague Central America, California, Japan and various Pacific rim islands. The energy caused by the plates crashing can be seen as destructive; but it is also highly creative, making mountains, islands, transforming existing land. As I pointed out in my talk, I found that likewise, some Michael Oak teachers have affirmed that when conflicting ideologies meet in a single place, the resulting tension can cause either conflict or transformation, the latter constituting a change or expansion of existing ideas or the advent of completely new ideas. As William Bryant writes, “A living thing functions and develops because it is immersed in the rhythmic tension produced by two or more fields of energy” (1993:20).

And for Michael Oak's teachers, their school, its activities such as festivals and its curriculum, constituted such a living thing – with a creative tension at its heart. The way the teachers confronted this tension was through dialogue. While information may or may not have been shared about a festival's meaning by the local Christian Community priest, the teachers must, in the end, decide what to do when preparing for and enacting it. In this sense, they participated together in the task of structuring meaning for the Michael Oak community.

### *Creating a Festival in Dialogue*

I saw this kind of dialogical pattern at work in the preparation group for the 2005 St. John's festival as its members processed their ideas. Four teachers participated in this small group: one was an experienced class teacher who was also the daughter of a Christian Community priest, whose parents were European and who had lived both in South Africa and Europe; one was a European music teacher who had lived in South Africa for many years and who was the wife of a priest, one was a South African class teacher in her second year of teaching, and one was a South African (Xhosa) part-time Xhosa language teacher who had experience teaching in non-Waldorf schools in South Africa and was relatively new to festival planning. She did not speak much in these meetings.

In their first preparation meeting, the teachers thought about different elements that might be possible in the festival. They brainstormed: Word, footprint, spiral, transformation. They (with me participating) discussed how the Word generally refers to the Christ for whom John the Baptist, the St. John of the festival, prepared the way through his teachings and baptising. And they considered the spiral as a tradition in the winter St. John's festival at Michael Oak. One participant, the newer class teacher, thought of the theme of a journey (the specific themes of "footprint" and "transformation" were dropped as specific festival elements, though they might be indirectly implied). Then the music teacher mentioned nature: "in nature, we can find the middle road. What can we ourselves find?"

After brainstorming on general themes, they suggested specific elements, beginning with the festival opening. They decided to keep the lighting dim at the beginning of the festival by using just a single candle. Because the festival was to be in the evening, the dimness would be accentuated. The music teacher suggested a song – the teachers would sing a song of John the Baptist: “Truly I shall send my angel to go before, for thee the way preparing. The voice of him that calleth in the wilderness: change your ways, for nigh at hand is the kingdom of God.”<sup>94</sup> The group decided that twelve children from Class Seven, the oldest in the primary school, would light the twelve tapers in the spiral. The Class One children would advance first into the spiral with their lanterns.

Finally, at that same first meeting, the more experienced class teacher suggested a verse brought over from Germany, one that contained trees, metals, astrological signs, and the days of the week. This verse, she said, was supportive of the rhythms not only of the week and the season, but also of the cosmos. However, the trees mentioned were all European trees. Everyone in the room liked the verse, finding it meaningful and practical – with seven days of the week there were seven verses, one for each of the seven classes to recite. However, it was thought that exotic trees were inappropriate to glorify in a South African school, where alien trees drank up scarce and precious water, causing great division and debate in the press and among South Africans, some of whom like these trees for various reasons, and many of whom would like to rid the country of them. So all were sent away with the task of thinking of trees that were native to South Africa, seven of which had to have characteristics corresponding to those of the trees mentioned in the poem.

At subsequent meetings, South African tree names were set in their appropriate verses, and the primary school teachers as a whole decided that Class One would take the first verse, Class Seven the last, and the other classes the verses between, in order of grade (see Appendix A). Asking

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<sup>94</sup> The words come from the gospel of Matthew (3:2-3), as well as Mark (1:2-3), and Luke (3:3-4).

whether Biblical texts about John might be useful or appropriate, I suggested a short passage in the prologue to the Gospel of St. John (the author being another St. John, Jesus's disciple), which refers to John the Baptist. Speaking of the Christ, there called the Word, the passage reads, "In the Word was life, and this life was the light of all humankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it" (John 1: 4-5, my translation).<sup>95</sup> It is thus a verse in which images of light and dark abound, along with the life forces of plants, animals and human bodies – suggesting a connection of the verse to the spiral and the tree verse. The teachers liked the suggestion, particularly since the passage continues with five further verses that they decided they could themselves recite alongside the song about St. John:

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.<sup>96</sup>

Afrikaans and Xhosa songs were then added, as were traditional English language St. John's songs for the children, allowing the teachers to address the school's cultural plurality: "Inclusiveness is an issue – make each festival reflective of the cultures of all children," said one teacher in the February 2006 interview.

I saw the teachers' dialogical process as they planned. The small planning group's process of choosing to retain some traditions (like the spiral and the lanterns), and add others (for example, standing around the oval – without a bonfire – singing) illustrated how, through dialogue, they attempted to look at the festival as a new creation rather than a fixed tradition. Their evaluation afterwards, including the question of whether the period of singing might have been too long, was an example of how they dealt with the discrepancy between what they might consider as ideal and what they perceived as the reality of the festival expression. To me, their creative festival planning process reflected what I heard them say and what the previously mentioned Waldorf literature states (see Chapter Three) about their own process of

<sup>95</sup> All other biblical quotations come from the New Revised Standard Version, unless otherwise noted.

<sup>96</sup> John 1:6-9.

learning and becoming – that they learned for themselves as they actively confronted the dichotomies and diverse factors in their festival planning. As they created the festival, the teachers were simultaneously creating a new understanding and knowledge base for themselves.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have addressed the various binaries that Michael Oak's teachers confronted. I have shown how, instead of taking any one approach for granted, the teachers formed a modus operandi of dialogue and re-negotiation, re-considering how to enact a particular festival anew not only for each year, but for each season. While this approach proved to be very time- and energy-consuming, the teachers repeatedly told me that, for them, the process of festival preparation was in itself a meaningful ritual. In the following chapters, I focus on the ritual and ritual symbolic facets of Michael Oak's festivals, pointing out how they in turn are themselves outward manifestations of the dialogical process explicated in this chapter.

## **FIVE. BORDER CROSSINGS: SPACE AS RITUAL SYMBOL**

Ritual gains force where incongruency is perceived and thought about (Jonathan Z. Smith in Bolle, 1990, 211).

As scientists have located specific areas of the earth and specific factors involved in the different confrontations of the earth's tectonic plates. (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/dynamic/understanding.html> /4 August 2007), I found specific factors – in this instance they were ritual symbols – involved in the confrontations of ideas and opinions as Michael Oak's teachers planned festivals. In this chapter, I focus on festival space as a ritual symbol and the staging of the festival performance within this space, showing how Michael Oak's teachers' use of space illumines their ethos of reconsidering each festival anew every year, engaging in dialogue with each other and with the various factors that might influence their planning, preparation and enactment. Further, I show, their use of the physical space in this creative, dialogical way elicits a meaningful, experiential spatial dimension that they expressed as sacred.

Victor Turner defines ritual as “a prescribed formal behavior for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (1967:19). Humphrey and Laidlaw (1994:71) disagree, arguing that ritual refers to “a quality which can in theory apply to any kind of action,” and constitutes an adjective applied when action has undergone “a particular modification of the normal intentionality of human action.” I take a middle ground, using Turner's definition, which contains reference to the mystical, adding that recognition that some form of intention combined with an action is intrinsic to the meaning of the word. A Waldorf festival, then, would be a ritual, a non-routine human action, “with reference to beliefs in mystical beings or powers” (Turner 1967: 19).<sup>97</sup>

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<sup>97</sup> In contrast, a morning routine of brushing teeth or reading the paper while drinking a cup of coffee would not be a ritual, even though some might use the word that way. Intention, of course, is nearly impossible to assess empirically.

The very definition of ritual calls up a tension between two opposites, according to Mary Douglas (1984:60). Writing about ritual in the context of religious life, she explains that in the histories of both Judaism and Christianity, interior will and exterior enactment contrast each other. "Of its very nature any religion must swing between these two poles" she writes. "There must be a move from internal to external religious life if a new religion endure even a decade after its first revolutionary fervour." For Douglas, then, ritual is the outer enactment of inner will.

As they planned outer festival enactments, the teachers also experienced the polarities of sacred and profane. Durkheim, according to Douglas (1975:xiii), says that "sacred and profane are the two poles of the religious life on which the relation between individual and society is worked out. The sacred is that which the individual recognises as having ultimate authority...". Eliade agreed with this polarity of sacred and profane, calling them "two modes of being in the world" (1959:14). According to Studsill (2000:177), Eliade maintained that "'sacred' is phenomenologically understood as that category of objects construed in the mind of the believer as both ultimately real and other with respect to the profane/material world." For Eliade, the "*sacred* is equivalent to a *power*, and, in the last analysis, to *reality*. The sacred is saturated with *being*" (Eliade, 1959:12; original italics). The profane is therefore the ordinary, the natural order. For the profane to be sacred, the sacred must reveal itself through the ordinary. Therefore, a stone can be profane, just like any other stone. "...[F]or those who have a religious experience all nature is capable of revealing itself as a cosmic sacrality," says Eliade, who used the word *hierophany* to describe such sacred revelation through the profane (1959:10-12). The belief that a St. John's lantern might be a sacred ritual object because, through its symbolism of light, one might encounter some truth, some reality about the sacred that is significantly different from the ordinary lantern, would fit in with Eliade's position (1959:12). As I reference the festival space, objects, performance, or time as "sacred," I will demonstrate that they hold this quality of "otherness" that Eliade calls "power" or "reality" in the perception of the teachers, and that this sacred is manifest through the ordinary or profane, the meeting, the teachers might say, of heaven and earth.

Michael Oak's teachers' values – their inner will – could be seen in their use of space in festival rituals. The use of space at Michael Oak was relative. In this chapter, I detail several aspects of the teachers' use of space for festivals – the physical boundaries and arrangement of the festival space, movements into and out of this space, and the symbolic meaning that the teachers said such ritual space contained for them. And I show how the teachers' use of space changed according to what they felt was needed from it for a particular festival. I also demonstrate how objects and performance used in conjunction with space functioned symbolically to support that use of the space. Furthermore I show how the teachers allowed themselves to remain in and work from a tension caused by the polarities they experienced when dealing with the issue of space usage: a tension between finding the simplest and easiest solution and searching for a space that would embody the ideals they held for a particular festival; a tension between repeating elements of previous festivals and bringing in the innovative; and a tension that derived from their choosing between various options, each of which were held as important values, such as a "good atmosphere," capacity to accommodate children and their families comfortably, and shelter from the elements.

### **Mapping the Terrain**

The marked off time or place alerts a special kind of expectancy, just as the oft-repeated "Once upon a time" creates a mood receptive to fantastic tales.... Framing and boxing limit experience, shut in desired themes or shut out intruding ones. (Mary Douglas 1984:63).

Michael Oak is a suburban neighbourhood school with a limited campus size.<sup>98</sup> During the period of my research, the site was bounded on three sides by high walls along residential streets, the fourth by a fence alongside a suburban railway line. Gates at four places in two side walls provided access, although three were kept locked during the school day. According to my school-going daughter, elaborate arrangements were made as to which classes could play in which areas during which periods of the day.

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<sup>98</sup> See maps in Appendix B.

The high school buildings backed up onto a narrow garden, used by high school children only, and that garden in turn onto the railroad fence. Most primary school children entered the high school area only to use the school library located there. An asphalt area between the high school and the new school hall (an area that was a basketball court before the hall was built) had become a prime play area for circus-style acrobats on unicycles, skateboarders and soccer players. The upper primary classes (grades 4-7) were located upstairs in a building adjacent to this court and, during the course of my fieldwork, I often saw children standing and talking on the stairs leading to their classrooms and on the landing outside the rooms. Lower primary classrooms were located downstairs in this same building, all opening onto a playground on one side of the grounds.

The school's administration was housed in a large, stately late 19<sup>th</sup> century building. According to a former pupil, it had housed the whole school in the early years. But by 2005 it contained the front office, kitchen and aftercare dining rooms, administration staff, and teachers' meeting rooms. It connected to the old hall, a small (approximately) 15 metre x 7 metre wooden-floored room with a stage at one end, and doors in the longer sides, one set opening towards the classroom block across a small garden cum play area, the other towards a larger play area known as the oval. The old hall could just accommodate the entire student and teacher body, as long as only the high school students sat on chairs and the other children sat on the floor, with the teachers either on stage or standing along the edges (see Figures 4 and 5 of the 2006 Harvest festival below). With so many people in it, however, the room was very crowded, meaning that parental participation was precluded for lack of space.

The oval comprised a flat brick-paved area surrounded by lawn (see Figure 1 – the bonfire was set on the brick-paved oval). Beyond it was the movement/eurythmy room and a large wooden play structure to one side, and the nursery school towards the other, with the latter's play area between and

behind a small fence. The 2005 St. John's and Michaelmas festivals used this oval for their enactments, as did the Pancake Evening.



Figures 4 and 5: 2006 Harvest Festival in Old Hall  
(photographed from the stage)

A description of the school layout needs to take into account that it changed dramatically in 2005-2006 while what has been commonly called "the new hall" was built. Not only has that meant that a building exists now where there was an open play area previously, but different parts of the school were fenced off and opened at different times, as particular aspects of the work were done. At one point, class six had had to move their desks to the movement room across the oval to avoid the construction noises. At times stairs were boarded off, classroom doors were moved, and access from one end of the campus to another was completely blocked on the main entrance side of the school by the construction process.

The limitations of the campus and the unpredictability of weather were determining factors in where festivals were held, and who was allowed to participate. Teachers and graduates told me that, in the past, the end of year Star Tree festival was often held at the Witteboome Civic Centre in neighbouring Wynberg because this centre was indoors, nearby, and could seat all school families. Several teachers told me that they were not completely pleased with the civic centre as a festival site because of its bad acoustics and the aesthetically plain, open, undefined area, which the teachers had somehow to make festive for the occasion. Consequently, when

the weather forecast promised dry mild conditions, the 2005 St. John's festival was moved from the civic centre to the oval at the last minute. The change of plan, which happened after the children had rehearsed at the civic centre, was lauded afterwards by many teachers who told me that celebrating the festival in nature under the stars lent a sacred feeling to the festival, one which would have been more difficult to create in the building.<sup>99</sup> For reasons relating to similar concerns about the civic centre space, the 2006 St. John's festival was, like the Harvest Festival preceding it that year, in the old hall, and parents were not invited; the teachers who had planned it had decided that the small space with its limitations was preferable to the big, impersonal civic centre site and the logistics of trying to rehearse there. Yet they also expressed their expectation and hope that the new hall would solve some of these dilemmas.<sup>100</sup>

Given the above constraints, the ritual festival space has, for many years at Michael Oak, not been in a fixed or permanently orientated place – it was always created anew, set apart, marked, sacralised by the teachers who planned each festival. This lack of fixed-ness of space meant that, like the symbolic content of each festival (Chapter Four), various other issues and factors too needed to be re-negotiated each season. With the addition of the new hall, which would function in non-festival time as a facility for sports, plays, and other pedagogical uses, many teachers hoped the school would gain some constancy of festival sites. However, with that hope of constancy came a dilemma: how to ensure that festivals continued to be re-imagined each time. As Jonathan Z. Smith has explained (1987:75),

The creation of a new ritual site is always an intriguing process. For, from the standpoint of ritual, novelty may result in a functional gain, but, just as

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<sup>99</sup> Rudolf Steiner writes effusively on the relationship between the cosmos (stars, planets, and the spiritual beings in the heavens), the “elementals” (nature spirits and beings found in the physicality of earth's natural resources) and the celebration of festivals (for example, 1996a; 1984; 1924). Some teachers expressed awareness of these relationships and made a conscious effort to support them in the planning and enactment of the festivals. Others communicated simply that being outside in a natural environment lent a good feeling to the festival.

<sup>100</sup> They recognized that constraints on available parking space would nonetheless be an issue for parents' participation.

away from the stage. Furthermore, at the 2006 St. John's festival, the chairs faced the stage at the opposite long end and on which the teachers were enacting a drama. Similarly, at the 2006 end-of-year Star Tree Festival (the first festival held in the new hall), the chairs were turned away from the stage, pointing towards what was ordinarily the rear of the room, so that all participants faced big open windows and the rear-wall mounted pentagon-shaped window etched with the Michael Oak symbol, an oak leaf in a star (See Figure 6, below). The following year, the chairs faced the opposite direction in the new hall for the Star Tree festival. The teachers thus tried different configurations of the festival space, and, in keeping with their general approach to festival planning, re-conceived and re-established the sacred space for each festival, allowing themselves the freedom – and imposing upon themselves a struggle<sup>102</sup> – to consider different viewpoints and ideas and to realise them, in this instance, in the ways they used and sacralised space.



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Figure 6: Michael Oak Symbol, taken from <http://www.michaeloak.org.za>, 9 Oct. 2008

What might be called a rite of valorization or sacralisation happened as the space was set aside, modified for its special use, “reclaimed, cleared, delimited, blessed, adorned, forbidden to normal activities” (Falassi, 1987:4). In the planning meetings, particularly those of the smaller planning group, the teachers decided where the festival would take place, what objects or decorations would be needed, and who would obtain the objects and prepare and orient use of the space. I watched as teachers in the smaller 2005 Michaelmas planning group walked across the grounds several times determining the boundaries of the festival, examining the area around the basketball court<sup>103</sup> where the first part of the festival was subsequently held, and standing at the oval to discuss the placement of chairs.

<sup>102</sup> And simultaneously implicitly resisting any imposition on them by the building's design.

<sup>103</sup> This was before construction began on the new hall.

The first part of the festival was to be the official “Turning of the Earth” ceremony for the new hall’s construction, and it had therefore to take place on what was then a basketball court, a space about to be demolished. On the festival day, a small public address system, with speakers and microphone, was set up in one corner of the paved basketball court so that the children and gathered parents could hear the teachers read the ground-turning liturgy and the architect and builder describe what was to happen to the space. The second part of the festival would take place around the oval, with the children’s handmade shields displayed as usual on ropes around the borders of the oval area, physically marking the boundaries of that space. Chairs were arranged around the oval for parents and students (facing each other), and a May Pole was set to one side ready to be placed in the middle for the Class Four maypole dance. The teachers decorated the area themselves, early that morning, and in doing so set it apart, valorising it for festival usage.

Children and subject teachers (who did not ordinarily teach in the first two hours of the school day) then participated in the valorisation of the 2005 and 2006 Harvest festival spaces, completing the old hall’s decoration in the few hours immediately preceding the festival. The children had made crafts and bread, and brought them in to be displayed on tables, on the walls, and hanging from the ceiling. The Class Sevens had already decorated the windows with coloured tissue paper (see Figure 7, below). Several subject teachers and I set up trestle tables and covered them with cloths. We gathered and displayed donated food from the classrooms also. The high school art teacher arranged pictures on the walls (see Figure 8), and we ensured that the table at the front of the hall had a candle next to its flowers.

David Chidester (1988:79) writes,

Human beings do not simply occupy space. They live in meaningful space that is ordered, organized, and experienced through a variety of strategies of spatial organization.

The locative aspects of the school’s festivals became symbols, “naturally typifying or representing or recalling something by possession of analogous qualities or by association in fact or thought” (Turner, 1967:19). Thus, the

effort that went into choosing the festival place, demarcating it and decorating it, supported and reflected the expressed beliefs of the teachers regarding the importance of approaching each festival as a new creation, deciding what particular place best suits the needs of the children at a particular festival, and what objects could most appropriately demarcate and decorate it.



Figure 7: Class Sevens Decorate Glass Windows Before 2006 Harvest Festival



Figure 8: Objects, Artwork, and Glass Window at 2006 Harvest Festival

### The Michael Oak Teachers' Experience of Festival Space

"The festival is a space where awe and reverence can come in" (Michael Oak teacher at primary school teachers' meeting, 7 Feb. 2006).

Beyond the logistical physical landscaping of the situational view of space, we have what Chidester (1994:211) names the substantial – "attempts to replicate an insider's evocation of certain experiential qualities that could be associated with the sacred ... full of ultimate significance". Mircea Eliade (1959:22) has written that profane space is homogenous, without breaks, neutral, while sacred space constitutes an interruption, "qualitatively different from others" and where the sacred breaks through the ordinary – that is, where what he calls heirophany happens. The term 'heirophany' (from *heiro* – "sacred" and *phaineii* – "to show") is defined as the "manifestation of the sacred in any culture or religious tradition" (Gunning, 2003). Rodney Frey<sup>104</sup> defines it as "a shining through of the sacred" (<http://www.webpages.uidaho.edu/~rfrey/116pilgrim.htm> /15 January 2008).<sup>105</sup>

<sup>104</sup> Rodney Frey is Professor of American Indian Studies and Anthropology at the University of Idaho.

<sup>105</sup> Gunning also notes that "our understanding of the sacred is obviously bound up with its

In a meeting in February 2006, teachers reminded themselves that besides having the “social aspect of coming together,” the festivals held a sacred function where participants “entered into a higher spirituality,” the festival space being one “where reverence and awe can come in.” During the small group planning meetings for the 2005 St. John’s festival, one teacher explained a symbolic meaning of trees (featured in the children’s verses) as a “bridge between heaven and earth.” (I interpret “heaven” as representing the spiritual or sacred). At the same festival, the teachers and children sang a song drawing attention to this meeting of heaven and earth:

Flames of St. John	Heaven and earth have
May they inspire	Met in the fire
Deep in our hearts the	May they unite in
Will for the good.	Deeds of men too.

“The festival”, wrote one teacher in a survey response, “is always prepared with a real striving towards an unspoken spiritual experience. The teachers are filled with the spirit of the festival first.” A former teacher wrote (in response to the same survey) that most meaningful to her in the festivals was “[t]he opportunity to celebrate together in community, thus uniting in a shared soul experience ... a linking of things cosmic and earthly.” The festival space, then, was not only a physical place; it was also a place that was designated and set apart through both physical preparation and mental expectation as a place where the sacred would meet the ordinary.

Eliade is one of several scholars who have expounded upon the idea that sacred space is often tied to a concept of a place where heaven and earth meet – from the Australian aboriginal pole, which makes a place habitable and gives the aboriginals a connection with the sky (1959:32-36), to the axis of the universe in Islam, found in the Makkah, and the ka’bah, a shrine housing the ancient meteorite called the Black Stone, which is the centre of the earth with the gate of heaven directly above it, “and it was through this hole that a communication could be effected between earth and heaven” (Bennett, 1994:95). Eliade writes that “this possibility of transcendence is

expressed by various images of an opening ... hence there must be a door to the world above, by which the gods can descend to earth and man can symbolically ascend to heaven” (1959:26). The words of songs and verses like the one above and the 2005 St. John Tree Poem (“Let us transform what is low/ Into that which is high, like the plant does,” for example) describe places where heaven and earth meet (in these examples, through the fire, the plant, and the work of the human).

During the festival, the oval or the new hall at Michael Oak might become sacred spaces because they are sites of heirophanies – they might be physical brick, stone, and mortar, but they are also something else – a place of divine appearance. Not all spaces are equal, and just as the festival can, in Falassi’s words (1987:4), be called “time out of time” (see Chapter Six) the festival space could be called “place out of place,” a break from its usual use as ordinary space to one where it is used and perceived as sacred space, a qualitatively different place where the rules are changed from what they are normally.

### **Approaching the Sacred in the Michael Oak Festivals**

The Festival will commence at the basketball court with a special introduction of the builder who is to transform that space for us! Afterwards we will move to the oval together to celebrate TRANSFORMATION. Please remember to switch off your phone and not applaud to help us create a peaceful and reverent atmosphere amongst the children (Invitation for “Parents and Friends” to the 2005 Michaelmas festival).

The ways that the participants physically moved into the festival space, as well as how they prepared themselves to experience the space as different from the everyday, were clues to understanding how the festival space was understood by the teachers and how it functioned in the context of the ritual. Baruch M. Bokser has raised questions about “the proper protocol required when approaching sacred space,” or what Mircea Eliade called “gestures of approach” to the sacred (Bokser,1985:279). The diverse ways that Michael Oak’s teachers addressed the issue regarding ways to approach festivals demonstrated again the maelstrom in the school community of differing

participants' ideas, all of which the teachers needed to recognise and negotiate as they planned festivals.

Were a scientist to approach a hurricane to measure its force, the timing and equipment used would need to be precise, the approach well-planned and the process designed for accurate measurement. In contrast, I observed that these criteria were less significant to Michael Oak's teachers in respect of how the children physically approached festival spaces. All that did concern them was that the children should be there, in the right place and on time. In the festivals I observed, children, teachers, parents, and visitors physically entered the space in one of three ways. The first was an orderly procession, perhaps to music, children walking with their classmates to be seated together. The 2006 Star Tree Festival attempted this entry, though some confusion over seating made the procession so long that the children were talking quite a bit by the time they came into the new hall.<sup>106</sup> The second means of approach was for all simply to arrive and take their seats. This approach particularly marked the 2005 Star Tree Festival, where children arrived with their parents for an evening festival. The third approach was that children arrived from their classrooms in loosely formed class groups, sometimes walking, sometimes running, and sometimes clustered in conversational groups. This approach was taken in the 2005 Harvest festival, and in the movement between sites in the 2005 Michaelmas festival when the ground-turning ceremony on the basketball court was followed by music and dances on the oval. Often, too, different approaches were used in the same festival. For example, in the 2005 Harvest festival, the younger primary classes filed quietly from their classrooms into the old hall, while the upper primary and high school groups arrived in conversational clusters. When parents were invited, they would often find a seat, while the children went to their classrooms and moved from there to the festival site.

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<sup>106</sup> The presence and behaviour of parents also seemed to influence how the children approached the space. I will address the influence of parental participation and its role in the way the teachers make decisions about the festival rituals in a separate section in this chapter.

Parents' involvement also affected the way festival space was approached. Of the eight festivals I observed in 2005 and 2006, parents were invited to five. One teacher explained that at some times teachers felt more than at other times in favour of inviting parents. One factor of course was the issue of spatial capacity. Before the new hall had been built, with adequate seating to accommodate the parent body and guests, the festival had had to be held either outdoors or in a hired hall if parents were to be able to attend. But, as indicated earlier, several teachers expressed dissatisfaction with hiring a hall, primarily because of lack of "atmosphere," and convenience, but also because of cost. However, another factor that influenced the teachers' attitude towards parents' attendance was their experience that parents, for the most part, lacked any formalised gesture of approach to festivals – one that might recognise their sacred character. Parents entered the space as they would any other large scale gathering, while the teachers expressed their preference to have a quiet, reverent atmosphere. The teachers' concerns were signalled at the beginning of festivals where parents were present by the teacher who spoke the first words, usually of welcome, also asking parents to please turn off their cell phones, and then offering a few words of explanation about the meaning of the festival.<sup>107</sup>

In strong contrast, however, at the 2005 St. John's festival held on the oval and where children arrived with their parents for an evening festival and were not brought into the site in a formal manner, many younger siblings continued to run and play as they would have in any other situation, and did so throughout the festival enactment. The result was that one could not hear all the spoken verses or the music. And one toddler ran onto the oval, right into the centre of the ritual space, while a class was performing eurythmy spirals. Its parents called to it, but they did not fetch the child out until it was obviously in the path of the moving eurythmists. And although though the majority of parents did seem engaged in watching the festival, some continued to talk as if they had not entered a distinctive space, even throughout the festival enactment. A similar dynamic was apparent among parents and siblings in the

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<sup>107</sup> As in the past, parents were also asked not to use flash cameras indoors because, it was pointed out, the festivals were solemn occasions and the teachers did not want the process disrupted.

2005 and 2006 Star Tree festivals, and during the 2005 and 2006 Michaelmas festivals, leading me to wonder whether the lack of gestures of approach for parents (and visitors) might not have been a strong factor in this dynamic.

Baruch Bokser (1985) discusses gestures of approach in Judaism, from the Mosaic era through late Hellenistic times. He writes that early Judaic belief in a physical centre made sacred by a “potent presence,” that is a divine presence (1985:281), led to the codification and observation of actions and attitudes that would serve to define and protect that sacred centre. For example, he points out, Deuteronomic Law mandated physical cleanliness and a set of behaviours in the sacred centre that were different from the ordinary (no defecating, for example) (1985:281-282). With the destruction of the Temple came the Jewish experience of exile. If the sacred centre was gone, where would one find the sacred and what kind of approach would be used? “Since one always stood before the Potent Presence, would an individual constantly and everywhere have to observe the `gestures of approach` and live up to the special protocol?” Bokser (1985:287) asked. The belief that one could approach the sacred without the temple, wherever one resided, led rabbis to redefine sacred structures (one was the presence of the Torah) and, in the words of Jacob Neusner, “to permit Israel in the words of Mishnah to experience anywhere and anytime that cosmic center of the world described by Mishnah: *Cosmic center in words is made utopia*” (quoted in Bokser, 1985:288, original italics). Jews, therefore, created the sacred spaces, and prepared themselves through actions (e.g. offerings), personal physical preparation (e.g. attention to hair and lack of menstruation), and the understanding of appropriate deferential behaviour once in the sacred space (e.g. no spitting) (Bokser 1985:288-290). Rabbinic Judaism not only provided a means of creating, valuing, and approaching sacred space, but also ensured that these actions “could be performed by any individuals who, in their daily lives, elicited the transcendent by acting on rabbinic guidelines for prayer, concentration, and study” (Bokser, 1985:297).

Neusner writes further, “An object, a substance, a transaction even a phrase or a sentence is inert, but may be made holy when the interplay of will and

deed of man arouses or generates its potential to be sanctified. Intention has that power, in particular, to initiate the processes of sanctification” (Bokser, 1985:298). And taking the point yet further, Eliade (1959:29) writes:

This is the reason for the elaboration of techniques of orientation which, properly speaking, are techniques for the construction of sacred space. But we must not suppose that human work is in question here, that it is through his own efforts that man can consecrate a space. In reality the ritual by which he constructs a sacred space is efficacious in the measure in which it reproduces the work of the gods.

From what I heard several Michael Oak teachers say, using phrases (as previously mentioned) like “unspoken spiritual experience,” “filled with the spirit of the festival” and “a linking of things cosmic and earthly,” it became clear that they subscribed to a perspective that one can find a potent presence in the centre of sacralised ritual space; and that such a space can be created by anyone, wherever they are, through “will and deed” – in other words through planning, demarcating, and filling a space with intentional words, objects, and actions.

The gestures of approach for the teachers thus came from their adopting such a perspective, which in turn manifested in their preparation of themselves (clothes and inner attitude), of the school classes in their respective care (through art, performance, discussion and suggestions regarding festival clothing), and of the space itself.

However, no such gestures of approach (nor any other formalised preparations) were made available for the parents, most of whom thus came to the festival out of the context of their own quite secular daily lives. Furthermore, since many of the parents’ beliefs about the sacred differed from those of the teachers, and since many parents were ignorant of the teachers’ beliefs about and attitudes towards festivals, those who attended festival enactments did not, in general, have reason to act differently in a festival space than anywhere else.

Because of the potential difference in belief between teachers and parents, with the possibility of differing expectations regarding festival behaviour, the teachers were then faced with the choice of whether or not to include parents in festival enactments. Should they do so and thereby strengthen the identity of the school community through gathering together for a common event and sharing with parents the fruits of the children's artistic endeavours? That was possible, sometimes at least, through including the entire Michael Oak community – parents, former teachers and families, and friends of the school – in a ritual of expressed value that was important to the teachers. Or should they avoid inviting parents and thereby maintain the festival as what one teacher called an “in-house thing” thereby emphasising that the ritual was one only for those who had prepared in some way, who, in doing so, had made gestures of approach? By doing that they could make the festival an expression which held some shared significance (regardless of whether participants enjoyed it) on a very basic level.

A couple of teachers expressed awareness of the tension arising from these seemingly conflicting options. When asked directly, one teacher acknowledged that she would have liked to open the Harvest festivals to parents, but space was an issue in the old hall, where it was held during the time span of my fieldwork.<sup>108</sup> Another teacher similarly recognised the conflict between including parents and maintaining the intimacy of only teachers and pupils. As before, the tension seemed most commonly to be resolved not by the teachers creating hard-and-fast rules about parent involvement in festivals, but, like other details, the issue being reconsidered with the planning of each festival.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>108</sup> The availability of the old hall's large glass windows and doors for class seven to decorate with coloured tissue paper was an important factor, said a couple of teachers, in their choosing it as a space for a harvest festival.

<sup>109</sup> However, a nursery teacher and College of Teachers member explained to me that because she considered festivals to be times for deeply spiritual experiences and she thus desired certain attitudes and actions from participants during festival enactments, she had guided the parents in her class about festivals at her parents' evening meetings, and had shown the children what she expected, by example in the classroom.

That said, during the period of my fieldwork, the Harvest and Easter festivals, which were held in the old hall, tended to be in-house with the teachers and children only, the Michaelmas and Star Tree festivals being opened to broader community, and the St. John's festival being opened to others in 2005, but not in 2006.

### **The Journey as Spatially-focused Ritual Symbol**

The wise being pondered and said: "If you are strong enough to take the journey you may go. But you will find the journey hard and you may have to come back before you have done as you wish. But, "God Speed," and you will be welcomed back whenever you come" (from Saint Michael as the Helper of Incarnation, told before 2005 Michaelmas festival. See Appendix A).

While I observed very practical considerations that the teachers faced in moving into each festival's space, I also observed a particular theme recurring in some of the festival stories – that of pilgrimage or journey. Several of the stories explicitly dealt with the main characters being impelled to move from home to another place, and then back home again. When they returned home, they found themselves to be changed in the process of the journey. As I will demonstrate, the repetitive inclusion of this theme showed that the concept of space, and movement into and out of a particular kind of space, had a symbolic meaning to the teachers. I will further demonstrate that the way teachers used space as a ritual symbol in the stories reflected the symbolic value they placed on location, and the dialogical process in which they engaged as they planned for the festival enactment, a process that they repeatedly explained made the festivals more meaningful for them.

The first time I perceived this theme was in the 2005 Michaelmas festival, where I was myself recruited to find and tell a story to the lower primary children about a boy who, given a vision of a far-away land that lacked beauty, left his beautiful country for that new land, in order to plant and tend seeds from home to grow into beautiful plants that would encourage other people and remind them of the country from which they had come.<sup>110</sup> The

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<sup>110</sup> The small planning group had asked me to help find a story appropriate to the festival and with a journey theme, and I found this one in Marion Penfold's notebook (see appendix A). The teachers in

strong archangel Michael was his “helper and friend” on this journey. Entitled “Saint Michael as the Helper of Incarnation,” this story contains symbolism (not explicated to the children) of a movement between heaven and earth. It also makes a statement about the availability of Michael as a helper and source of strength when one faces a great challenge. In these ways, the story reflected the festival’s pedagogical importance in providing the children with more than intellectual instruction, and the teachers’ desire, as one of them said, to “enter into a bigger, higher spirituality”.

The second festival to observe this theme during the course of my fieldwork was the 2005 Star Tree festival, when a teacher told a story from the King Arthur cycle to the accompaniment of the primary school classes whose members sang and spoke for the different characters, followed by the Class Ten teenagers who acted out the story as a shadow play (see Figure 9). Introducing the story, the teacher explained that the story “concerns a sister and three brothers who are playing, when the sister disappears. It is left to the brothers to find her. It is only through thorough preparation and the purity and light of their hearts, that they are able to overcome the false light of enchantment.” The children travel through the dark, confusing realm of the Elf King in order to find their lost sister. They do so with the only advice being that

...to fill the dark with light, much work must be done  
 Let the light in your hearts show you the way  
 And then your sister’s sunshine will return to you.

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this group approved it and then asked me to tell it to the children in an assembly the week before the festival. The upper primary children heard a different story. I was asked by the four teachers in that group because one of them was speaking to the upper primary at their concurrent assembly, another was an upper primary school teacher and was therefore attending that same assembly, and the third, a lower primary school teacher, and fourth, a subject teacher, also seemed to want me to tell it.



Figure 9: Shadow play performance at 2005 Star Tree Festival

The teacher then offered a practical interpretation: "We would like to dedicate this festival to all those children of the Western Cape, and of South Africa, who face a life journey filled with darkness and the most strenuous of challenges. We think today particularly of those whose young lives are affected by HIV/AIDS". This statement shows how the teachers viewed the festival as not only contextualised for South African children, but also as a way of engaging the children in something other than an intellectual manner, and it shows how the teachers saw themselves not only as academic teachers, but also as people with responsibility to prepare the children for the many facets of life beyond school.

A third use I observed of the theme of journey or pilgrimage was in the 2006 St. John's festival. The story around which the festival was built and which I have briefly recounted in Chapter Four, focused on a hero on a journey, traveling to Jerusalem (the holy place) to fight, and thereafter carrying a sacred flame home from Jerusalem.<sup>111</sup> In preparation for the festival, each class decorated a tissue paper panel depicting a scene from the story (which the teachers had already told their respective classes), and discussed story themes with their teacher in the course of the weeks leading up to the festival.

<sup>111</sup> This story, known by one title as "The Sacred Flame," can be found in Lagerlöf 2002:167-190). As mentioned, Catherine Van Alphen taught teacher-trainees in July 2005, that St. John's festival lends itself to hero stories, said as St. John represents the everyman, going into the wilderness of his soul and seeking for meaning rather than comfort. On a spiritual quest, he must find own inner flame. The festival of St. John, Catherine said, is thus the journey of the hero or heroine.

Again, the teachers stressed the importance of the story they had chosen for the children by spending class time on this project.

Jonathan Z. Smith claims that objects, songs, texts and other ritual symbols are sacred when they are found in a space that is considered sacred. In relation to songs in the Temple, he says, "It is not their symbolism or their meaning that is determinative; the songs are sacred or profane sheerly by virtue of their location. A sacred text is one that is used in a sacred place – nothing more is required" (1987:104). I would argue that the stories above were sacred not only because of their location in the sacred festival space but also because of what they represented. A festival story with the theme of journey or pilgrimage can be considered sacred whether told in the classroom or in the designated festival space itself, depending on the content as well as the intention of the teachers who work with the children, because in such stories, sacred space is not just the physical festival location. Rather it is the awareness of the story's symbolism of "a higher spirituality", of a "coming together of heaven and earth." In this way, space becomes, as one teacher explained to me, "consciousness" – by which I understood him to mean "the quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself" (<http://www.m-w.com/dictionary/consciousness> /19 January 2008). In this instance, it was awareness of one's human relationship to both earth and heaven. One might expect, when on a pilgrimage, to travel to a sacred location, a place filled with the presence of a potent power. Yet, while in the text of the stories, the characters (the boy in Michaelmas story, the children in the Star Tree story, the man in the St. John's story) move from one physical location to another, symbolically they have moved from one state of knowing to another – the Michaelmas boy from heaven to earth, the Star Tree children through a "dark world of false light" to their own world and "the freedom and life," and the St. John's man from a life lived for merry-making and abusiveness towards others to a new sense of life purpose and a love for others. Examined in this way we see that the true centre with the potent presence to which they have traveled in each case is constructed as being within themselves; and it is therefore there that they can find the 'real', which is how Eliade (1959:63), following Durkheim (1989:132), described the

sacred. “[W]here the sacred manifests itself in space,” writes Eliade, “*the real unveils itself*” (1959:63; original italics). The continuity of the profane is broken at the point, the centre, where “communication with the transmundane” happens; “for the centre renders orientation possible” (Eliade 1959:63).

So our heroes, traveling on their journeys that turn out to be journeys into themselves, discover what is real as the sacredness of their centre reveals itself. The Michaelmas boy overcomes difficulty with the help of Michael to incarnate and begin to carry out his life purpose; the Star Tree brothers avoid illusion and find their sister; the St. John’s hero puts aside false values of arrogance and selfishness to understand the integrity of his own self as one who can love. In these stories sacred space reveals another dimension, illuminated in the real.

Van der Leeuw speaks of the “primitive” human’s search for sacred place as a homesickness, a “longing for house and home, for his native country or town ... ultimately therefore the yearning for salvation, for the consciousness of powerfulness, bestowed by one’s own selected place” (1938:401). Therefore we have pilgrimages to holy places,

where the Power of the Universe renewed itself daily, and where the heart of the world could be approached....Thus the seat of grace may become the image of the other world, and all life be regarded as a pilgrimage or a crusade. But mysticism interprets this also in quite a different way: it can believe in no holy place whatever, and transfers all salvation to the holiest of holies in the heart (van der Leeuw, 1938:401-402).

Likewise, Evelyn Capel (1976:41), often described as the grandmother of South Africa’s Christian Community writes,

The person who really wishes to know who he is will not find his answer in the world outside, but equally he will not find it by retreating into his inner world. He will find himself on the threshold between the two worlds when he is able to distinguish clearly between the two. By not identifying himself entirely with his inner world, he will be at liberty

to notice influences that work upon him which do not originate with him...

The stories of journey or pilgrimage that were used in the festivals showed a bridge between heaven and earth, between an old way of thinking and a new, between self-awareness and action in the world. As such, they were the outer enactment of the teachers' inner will.

## **Conclusion**

Culture viewed as speech, gesture, and action is performance; and performance not only requires but commands its own kind of space (Tuan, 1990:236)

Michael Oak festival space, like other aspects of the festivals, was renegotiated every season. In planning, the teachers decided what kind of physical space they needed, even changing locations at the last moment in the 2005 St. John's festival. The space had meaning also as a ritual symbol, as the teachers experienced what Chidester has named its "substantial" aspect (1994:211). To the teachers, the concept of "space" had a meaning in addition to its physical aspect. They used words and phrases like "enter" and "come in" and "coming together" to describe an approach not just to the physical place, but also into their experience of the festival. Thus, not only did they organise the physical festival space, they structured their understanding of it as a sacred space, a place where heaven and earth meet in the human. This meaning was underlined by their use of stories wherein a journey from one place to another was a metaphor for a change in consciousness.

In the following chapter, I examine perceptions of festival time from a similar perspective, showing there how time also was a ritual symbol for the Michael Oak festivals and one that again reflected that same dialogical process that manifested in the ways I have in this chapter described space being used.

## SIX. THRESHOLDS OF TIME

Human life takes place on earth in many realms at the same time. One of the essential realms is that of time. To the children time is of the greatest importance, for to those fast and rhythmically growing beings time has deeper articulations than it has to adults, who take time as the shadow of their calendar... The days in their sequence become especially important in the month of preparation for a festival, when "every day we come closer." But the essential division of time is the "membering" of the year into the four seasons. (Pusch, 1976).

There is a tide in the affairs of men,  
Which, taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;  
Omitted, all the voyage of their life  
Is bound in shallows and in miseries.  
On such a full sea we are now afloat;  
And we must take the current when it serves'  
Or lose our ventures.

(Shakespeare, quoted in the Michael Oak Mini-Leaflet 22 September 2005,  
just before Michaelmas festival)

The creative force of earth movements often takes millions of years to become evident as new mountain ranges form from continents pushing against each other, and can explode seemingly quickly as volcanoes erupt or earthquakes tremble (<http://pubs.usgs.gov/gip/dynamic/understanding.html> /4 August 2007). Festival time at Michael Oak as a ritual symbol was measured not only in time but in the way the participants remembered and conceived of it. Quoting sociologists of religion Henri Hubert and Marcel Mauss (1909: 207-209), David Chidester (1988:105) writes:

[T]he experience of time... may be regarded as an "active tension by which consciousness realizes the harmony of independent durations and different rhythms," through the cultural media of myths of beginning, myths of the end, historical records, genealogies, sacred calendars, and the patterned rhythms of ritual, work, leisure, and the transitions of the human life cycle.

G. van der Leeuw refers to time as "a spurious concept, due to the idea of the trespassing of space upon the field of pure consciousness" (1938:384). As I will show in this chapter, participants in Waldorf festivals experienced time on three main levels, which I call *chronos time*, *rhythmic time*, and *kairos time*. I also show that each of the festivals has elements of rhythmic, chronos, and

kairos time, and that participants experience time on all three levels, though mostly unconsciously.

The experience of time as a ritual symbol is another way to apprehend the dynamic and somewhat complex dialogues that the teachers experienced as they negotiated the festival process. Time was, like other festival aspects, something to be negotiated; in describing how the teachers and former pupils related their experience of festival time to me, particularly how they related their experience as chronos, rhythmic, and kairos time, I will show that in each of these ways of experiencing time, the tension and need for dialogue was manifest.

### **Chronos Time**

“These memories go back 12-15 years”  
(Marion Penfold, on the history of festival preparation at Michael Oak)

A festival must have a beginning and an end in time. The first way that I perceived Michael Oak festival time was as an event in what I am calling chronos time – an event occurring on a particular calendar day, with a particular time for beginning (this was always determined in advance by the teachers), and a particular time for ending (this was not determined in advance, though it might have been estimated). The word *chronos* comes from the Greek *krounos*, meaning “spring” or “source,” and often refers to Kronos, god of time (until replaced by his son Zeus) (Bryant, 1993:102). “Kronos is symbolized by the newborn baby that ushers in the New Year and ends the year as a bent-over old man: Father Time” (Freier, 2006:2). Chronos time, as I use it in the Waldorf context, refers to the linear, chronological movement of time as marked by events that follow one after the other, “tick-tock time” as Freier (2006:2) says.

The history of Michael Oak festivals was measured in chronos time. In an interview, a teacher might try to remember when an event took place – was that before I joined the college of teachers, or after? Was that before we

moved the festival from the Claremont Civic Centre<sup>112</sup>, or afterwards? One former pupil, I shall call him Peter, narrated in what I call chronos time how he remembered some events. At the beginning of his primary schooling, Peter said, there had been a bonfire for the St. John's festival. But then, he added, the teachers had stopped it "for safety reasons or something." The bonfire and its ignition had been exciting. The children had always waited eagerly for the year's Class Seven children to light it with their torches (each member of the whole class doing so simultaneously). But then, Peter said rather sadly, "the festival changed. Now it is more lanterns-oriented." The decisions made by the teachers as they negotiated such issues were experienced by both pupils and teachers in chronos time.

In relating the history of Michael Oak festivals, different teachers commented on what happened in different periods of time as well as in particular years, and how the decisions they made in festival preparation varied from one period of time to another. For example, two teachers related how the festivals were more strongly Christian in the years leading up to the mid-1990s. In the second half of that decade, as new teachers were hired and the composition of the school leadership changed, the teachers decided to make the festivals less explicitly Christian and more universally accessible to families of any faith.

As the teachers planned the festivals, they consulted their calendars and determined the date for the festival. During the course of the term, they set dates for meetings, for the priest to talk with them, and for any assemblies that related to the festivals (for example, the 2005 and 2006 Easter assemblies after the Harvest festivals, or the 2005 Michaelmas assembly in the week preceding the festival). And they discussed how much time they had in which to complete festival preparations with their classes. Often, I noticed, the teachers' schedules became crowded. As noted in the previous chapter, sometimes the addition of festival meetings and rehearsals to the

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<sup>112</sup> When asked, one parent of young adult former pupils remembered a Star Tree festival being held at the Claremont Civic Centre, "but that was a long, long time ago." She conjectured that the festival was probably moved to the Wynberg Witteboome Civic Centre location because of convenience and perhaps cost.

teachers' schedules meant that they struggled to accomplish all that was needed both in the classroom (through the curriculum) and in the administration of the school. In a 2005 Michaelmas planning meeting, I heard two teachers discussing how they might obtain paper from the store for making shields. One teacher commented that, if it were ordered by phone, it would not arrive in time. The other teacher volunteered to fetch it, but needed to plan around other teachers' meetings and her children's music lessons. Many of the details of the festival were planned in this way in chronos time.

What I call chronos time is also called historical time (Chidester, 1988:115), the tracing of one event after another in a linear fashion. Within the collective historical memory of Michael Oak are all of the festivals of the past, decisions that were made at certain times, judgements and evaluations of what has "worked" or "not worked" as festival elements in the past. "Historical memory, always appearing in the form of historical narrative, is one form of collective memory" (Crane, 1997:1373). The story told in the 2005 Harvest festival about the history of the tree that was to be cut down to make way for the new hall was such a story. The teachers' narratives about their decision to move the bonfire to the Pancake Evening, or to move certain festivals from the civic centre to the school campus, all took the form of an historical narrative placed in historical or chronos time. The plan to build a hall, and move the festivals into it was also related in chronos time. The planning for each particular festival was organised and constituted in chronos time – the first meeting will be on this date, the next will be on that date, the dress rehearsal on the day before the festival, and the festival itself on a day in the last week of term.

For the younger Michael Oak former pupils whom I interviewed, particular events, rather than calendar dates, served as markers of chronos time in their historical memories. All the younger former pupils mentioned remembering the occasion that the Michaelmas dragon caught fire, and the occasion when the bonfire was no longer in the St. John's festival. One, whom I will call James, clearly remembered the dragon catching fire, particularly because he was the seventh-grader playing the role of St. George, sword in hand, ready

to tame the beast (see Figure 10, below). These former pupils could remember this event, and also recall which class they were in at the time.



Figure 10: St. George taming the dragon, moments before it caught fire.

### Rhythmic Time

"To everything there is a season..."

(Ecclesiastes 3:1, read at the 2005 Michaelmas celebration for the Turning of the Soil, in preparation for the building of the new hall).

What I call rhythmic time was also discussed quite often at Michael Oak during my fieldwork, both in interviews and in the course of the school years. Similar to what Chidester (1988) refers to as "body time," it is reflected in the way individuals mark the cycles of inhaling and exhaling, of exerting and resting, of waking and sleeping, of winter, spring, summer and autumn. References to the concept of rhythm is one that I heard repeatedly as a Waldorf parent, not only because it was used as a way of structuring the school day, but also as it was suggested as a means for organising home life through, as teachers (particularly in kindergarten and early primary school) requested, parents giving their children predictable routines such as regular bedtimes and mealtimes. On several occasions teachers said that problems in the classroom, like children's lack of attentiveness and irritability, could sometimes be traced to a home life without such rhythms and routines.<sup>113</sup> Waldorf educators assert that maintaining such rhythms, cycles in the day and

<sup>113</sup> This is not to say that parents necessarily agreed. Indeed many appeared to have quite different and diverse ideas of rhythm: what felt haphazard for one parent seemed quite comfortable for another.

year, brings a sense of comfort to both children and teachers as they come to know what will happen next. The rhythmic constancy thus created is often compared to rhythmic heart pulses or inhalations and exhalations of breath (Foster 1989:57).<sup>114</sup>

Rhythm is particularly important in the nursery school, being set into the routine of the school day and into the routine by which particular grains or food are eaten on specific days. My own children's kindergarten teachers in Atlanta had told me that this is done because children feel comforted and secure when they are familiar with the order of the day and week. And two Michael Oak nursery teachers confirmed that they do several things to help young children notice the seasonal rhythms, including redecorating the classroom to reflect the seasons outside and seasonally changing the stories they tell. Michael Oak's nursery classrooms had "nature tables," special tables holding natural objects from the outside world – freshly blooming flowers, autumn leaves, winter seedpods – anything from nature that the children might pick up, touch and admire (see Figure 10). One teacher said that she regularly added a new object to her classroom's nature table and that within a few days the children always noticed it. In such ways the youngest children, who would eventually constitute many of the participants in primary school festivals, were made aware of the seasons and their rhythm.

Rhythm was emphasised differently in the primary school where family schedules became a larger factor and as the children got older and they spent nights at other children's houses so that their sleeping-time rhythms were sometimes compromised. The primary school teachers did continue to mark daily, weekly and annual rhythms. But instead of gently gathering the children from the playground for "circle time" (or verses and songs) as in the nursery school, primary school children had to respond to a morning bell by rushing to

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<sup>114</sup> This idea came from the lectures of Rudolf Steiner who says "...the human being as a whole has a tendency to rhythm. For this reason, it is beneficial throughout life (and that is what we are concerned with when we educate and teach children) to attend to rhythmical repetition" (2000:85). It has been further developed by anthroposophical educators and medical practitioners (Harwood, 1958; Burnett, et al, 2000; Goldberg 2003b). Anthroposophical doctor Michaela Glöckler spoke to South African Waldorf teachers and therapists at the 2006 Kolisko conference on the importance of maintaining these rhythms in the educational context.

their classrooms to shake hands with their teacher and then stand together behind their desks to say their regular morning verse. Instead of a week marked by different grains or foods on different days, the upper primary schoolchild's days were distinguished by their particular subject classes – Afrikaans, Xhosa, music, eurythmy, and gym, among others.



Figure 11: Nursery Nature Table Detail

The primary school was marked as much by the rhythm of the seasons as was the nursery school. But instead of providing a nature table or telling nature stories, primary school teachers marked that rhythm with the seasonal festivals. As each year had four terms, coinciding for the most part with the four seasons, and as each term ended in a festival, the festivals provided a means of recognising and relating pedagogically to the year's seasonal rhythms. I found that this aspect of the festivals – their regular, cyclical, seasonal celebration – to be the least negotiable aspect in the teachers' festival planning process.

The Michael Oak festivals were regular, term-end occurrences, having happened consistently since the founding of the school. Michael Oak's teachers asserted that the festivals too brought a strong rhythm and security to the year (Interview with faculty, 7 February, 2006). I never heard any discussion at all of the possibility of changing the timing or rhythm of the Michael Oak festivals. In fact, what I saw happening at the school with the regularly-scheduled term-end festival observances was consistent with the expressed sentiment that the rhythmic quality, the regularity of these seasonal

festivals, was in itself medically and pedagogically healthy for the children. Much as I understand a strongly beating heart to be necessary for the health of the body, I understood the placement of the festivals in the seasonal year to be as non-negotiable as the unconscious rhythms within the human body, or of waking and sleeping. The interpretations, meaning, and content given to the festivals as seasonal occurrences were subject to the teachers' dialogical approach in planning; the timing of the festivals in the course of the year was not.

Repetition and regularity were two of the predominant ways the rhythmic nature of festival time was experienced, though people's experience of the festival could differ from cycle to cycle. I found the regularity of these festivals was remembered by former pupils in much the same way that one might remember breathing, sleeping, or regular weekly events – we know we must have breathed because we are still alive, or that we must have been eating regular meals (we may remember our dinner table and chairs, and perhaps our favourite foods, but not what we ate on an ordinary school night), or that we must have had a Xhosa class every Tuesday, because that was the schedule. One older former pupil told me, "oh, I don't remember anything about the festivals when I was in school – ask someone younger." When asked further, though, she told me that she had memories of the Star Tree festival or the St. John's bonfire, though she could not always recall exactly when or even with which school or country her memories were associated.<sup>115</sup> Her memory was non-chronological, an association of a festival with a season but with no specific calendar date.

Younger former pupils I talked to did not remember much more. They too said they remembered the regularity of the dragon, or of the bonfire. But, unless something unusual had happened, like the dragon catching fire at Michaelmas, they could not remember details of specific festivals. James' memories of the festivals were much like those of other former pupils I interviewed – all a blur in terms of detail, but clear in terms of their seasonal

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<sup>115</sup> She had been at school both in South Africa and in Europe.

regularity. He could not remember his nursery festivals at all. Like the other younger former pupils I interviewed, he began trying to remember the festivals by recalling their names, and with which season they were associated. This piece of information seemed fundamental to all of the former pupils, the way the regular, seasonal celebration was most fundamental to the festivals themselves. Only after mentally associating a festival and season did he and the other younger former pupils I interviewed try to begin to add details about the festivals themselves. Most of these young adults were able to place an identifying, regularly-occurring detail with each festival – bread with the autumn Harvest/Easter festival, a bonfire or lanterns with the winter St. John’s festival, a dragon with the spring Michaelmas festival, and a Christmas tableau with the summer Star Tree festival. However, the level of detail of these other memories varied among those interviewed, and for the most part were not as strong as their recollections of the festivals as rhythmical time markers. This fundamental, non-negotiable seasonal aspect of the festivals was what the former pupils remembered first, though in a mostly undetailed, non-analytical way. They tended to remember more consciously the symbols the teachers chose to be associated with these repeated rituals, the “outer enactments of inner will” as discussed in the previous chapter.

### **Kairos Time**

Thus speaks the Milkwood tree  
 With its outspread branches  
 The tree of Jupiter, to whom this is holy:  
 Let us overcome the haste and rush within ourselves  
 Seek for gratitude,  
 In which goodness and wisdom can be born.  
 (Recited by Class Five, 2005 St. John’s Festival)

People need calendars to move through chronos time, to help them be in the right place at the right time. Van der Leeuw points out, however, that within this calendar time are “instants of time [that] have value and possess power,” and that the value and power of these moments are “assisted by celebrations” (1938:386). Such powerful moments constitute what I label *kairos time*: a particular moment in chronological time that is experienced as having transcendent, cosmic properties, or what van der Leeuw calls “the best time,

the time of the due situation ... the time of grace” (1938:384). Kairos time is thus that moment or phase in which one is relatively unaware of the passing of time (chronos) or of one’s location in rhythmic time, and is relatively aware of eternity – it is a moment in which any sense of temporality is felt to be transcended by eternity. Time may, in chronos time, appear to pass in epochs, generations, years, seasons, weeks, or days. It may seem to proceed from date to date. And in rhythmic time it may appear to repeat itself in a way that is often unconscious, like the cycles of sleeping and waking, or of inhaling and exhaling. In contrast, in kairos time one experiences the moment apart from any other thought of what has happened or will, or what might be happening elsewhere.

On the one hand, kairos time could be objectively identified and marked, as time set apart from the regular calendar, delineated like space by acts of valorisation and gestures of approach. Alessandro Falassi describes festival time as “time out of time,” an experience in which participants cross the threshold into what has been designated as sacred time, “a special temporal dimension devoted to special activities ... divided internally by what happens within it from its beginning to its end, as in the “movements” of mythic narrations, or musical scores” (Falassi, 1987:4).

As I will show below, this description fits the Michael Oak festival experience in the sense that participants crossed figuratively into a time as well as a space which is different from the everyday – different from the yearly, weekly, daily rhythms of what the Church (Theology and Worship Ministry Unit, 1993:1037) might call *ordinary time* and also from what I have called rhythmic time. Yet I would prefer to broaden Falassi’s notion and to call it “time within time,” that way to imply that participants stepped not only into a special temporal dimension, but also into a different way of thinking and perceiving, a different consciousness<sup>116</sup> or awareness, an experience of the *kairos* moment as one where attention is given to the “here and now”, not thoughts of the past

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<sup>116</sup> Olaveson writes that anthropologists have precedents for talking about consciousness, as Victor Turner and Emile Durkheim “both recognized the existence of religious phenomena for which they did not possess appropriate terminology, and were reluctant to write about, yet which they knew were important to their theories of religion” (2001:90).

or future, and not of something happening elsewhere. The festival is experienced as kairos time because it is set apart as something sacred and special. Yet moments, whether in or out of the festival itself, are also experienced as kairos time, because in those moments the participant has such an awareness.

Because kairos time is necessarily experienced subjectively, it is rather difficult to evaluate. I thus had to listen for what the teachers said about their own festival experience and how they perceived the children's attentiveness and experience during festival preparations and performance in order to establish whether, how and to what extent it was indeed experienced. I was also able at times during festivals to observe for myself when the children were attentively engaged in festival performance, and when they were not. Being able to do that enabled me to see that not every moment in the festival enactment is necessarily a kairos moment in the participants' experiences in the subjective sense, though objectively the festival itself can be regarded as a time set apart to engage with a "higher spirituality" – precisely because that is how it was constructed by the teachers.

I heard kairos time expressed by teachers when they spoke of the special qualities experienced (or intended to be experienced) during festivals. One teacher reflected that "Children, teachers and parents participate and experience the special magic of the festival together. [There is an] extremely important role for all of us. [It is] one of the major contributors to the "depth" in Waldorf Education" (teacher questionnaire, February 2006). The same teacher also wrote, "I love festivals. I find them deeply satisfying...they all have that inner quality, in some way or another, that we strive for." A former teacher wrote, when asked what was most meaningful to her about the festivals, "the opportunity to celebrate together in community, thus uniting in a shared soul experience, an in-and-out breathing through colour, sound, movement, light & darkness, etc., as well as a conscious linking with things cosmic and earthly." And another teacher simply said, after the 2005 St. John's festival, "I think that worked, didn't you?" All of these statements reflected that these teachers' expectations were met in some way by the

festival experiences. The festivals held for them a quality that was special, though not necessarily analysed by them for what made it special or for what gave it a kairos quality.

As I observed the children, certain moments stood out as kairos moments. Perhaps the most evident was in the 2007 Star Tree Festival in the new hall when the children were singing the Flamingo Carol with parents and teachers. I could hear the children's voices, louder than those of the adults, some of whom were not singing despite having song sheets before them (See Appendix A for musical score). They sang (about the flamingos):

White-tipped and rosy-hued,  
 They soar in flights across the dunes  
 Where the wind of evening,  
 Blows peace, peace – peace  
 Peace across the lagoon –  
 Peace in the vlei,  
 Peace on Christmas Day.

When they sang the words "peace, peace, peace, peace," the children's voices got much louder and stronger, especially those of the younger children, and the enthusiasm carried them through that verse and through the next. I sensed that these young children could have happily sung the same song again. In the same festival, the Class Sixes enacted a Christmas nativity drama about three wise people, the birth of a baby, and a dry well. The other children performed songs and verses as the story progressed. The actors stayed very focussed on their roles and the other children listened attentively. I saw far less talking and shuffling amongst the children than I did in other festivals. The happy faces and positive comments of the Class Sixes after the festival confirmed to me that they had experienced the festival time as special, set apart, and different from ordinary time. The parents I spoke with after the festival seemed to have a similar experience, one commenting that "I think this was the most beautiful festival I've been to," and another saying, "wasn't that play just lovely? It was so moving. The children were so into it."

I observed two other festivals, wherein a particular performance seemed to serve as a kairos moment for some in the room, but also noticeably upset others. In the 2005 Star Tree festival, the Class Tens performed a shadow play set to a story told in words and song by a teacher and the primary school classes. I heard several parents and several teachers say that they felt it was a powerful performance and a meaningful story. I also heard a couple of members of the wider anthroposophical and Christian communities opine that the story was really a Michaelmas story, and not well suited for the Christian festival of Christmas. In the 2006 Star Tree festival, the high school Xhosa choir sang gospel music towards the close of the festival. The festival itself had been a bit uneven logistically, as it was the first in the new hall. The participants – children, families, and teachers – had sung songs and carols that the children knew by heart (the parents were given song sheets). The high schoolers had performed eurythmy to John Lennon's song "Imagine." The mood had become relatively quiet. Then the high school Xhosa choir moved forward, and began some quite energetic singing of Xhosa and African-American spirituals, with the director singing the lead part. The last song, "Rock of Ages," had many in the audience clapping and swaying with the high school choir members. The director/lead singer improvised and embellished in what I know, from my own experience, to be the African-American tradition.<sup>117</sup> The parents and children clapping and swaying along seemed to be enjoying the experience. But a few other adults were noticeably upset. One parent told me he felt that the performance was highly inappropriate for a school festival because of its raucous nature. And I heard later that, through their dialogue with some of the community's anthroposophists, the teachers had decided to exclude anything like it the following year.

What this reveals is that the subjective nature of kairos time itself became another source of tension for the teachers, and one that they confronted again with dialogue and negotiation, evaluating the last festival, considering the next

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<sup>117</sup> I am very familiar with this tradition, having lived all of my life before moving to South Africa in a part of the US where it was particularly strong, and having sung in an African-American gospel choir myself for two years.

one anew. Through examples like that above, I found that not everybody found each festival to be equally meaningful. Yet at the same time, the same people whom I'd heard complain about the 2005 Star Tree story and the 2006 Star Tree Xhosa choir still praised the Michael Oak festivals. Indeed their praise was stronger than that of anyone else with whom I spoke – suggesting that for them, as for all who showed appreciation of the festivals, it mattered less to them that the teachers “got everything right” (even though they were willing to criticise the teacher’s decisions) than that the teachers remained willing to keep re-negotiating the divergent points of view that confronted them, re-engaging with each festival freshly each year. The result of this engagement in the dialogical process by the teachers is that the festivals become, in the words of one teacher,

soul food – reverence, renewal, inner quiet, soul-searching, new insights by creating an environment where this can happen. This works because it somehow always gets the right tone and is always prepared with a real striving towards an unspoken spiritual experience. The teachers are filled with the spirit of the festival first (Questionnaire, February 2006).

Such meaningful moments become, for the participant who experiences them, sacred moments. David Chidester has defined the sacred in reference to Durkheim’s definition: “sacred” is “set apart,” from the Latin, “sacre” meaning the same (interview, February 2007). Yet, he noted, what is thus set apart is actually in the centre – what I might call “time within time,” as opposed to Falassi’s definition of festival time as “time out of time” (1987:4). Van der Leeuw writes that “Duration, then, is the great stream flowing relentlessly on: but man, encountering Power, must halt” (1938:385). And the festival, he says, is the “*tempus par excellence*, “selected” from the entirety of duration as particularly potent” (1938:388).

During the Waldorf festivals I observed, teachers, children, and sometimes parents halted from their normal activities and appeared on the festival site. In particular moments of meaningfulness, participants might find themselves on the threshold between past and future, and as mentioned in Chapter Five,

between earth and heaven. These moments of meaning became for such participants moments of power or potency.

Victor Turner, expanding upon Arnold van Gennep's study of rites of passage (1961),<sup>118</sup> writes that during certain rituals, participants move through a liminal stage "that has few or none of the attributes of the past or coming state" (1969:94). The attributes of ones who are in this liminal state (Turner refers to them as "threshold people") are difficult to describe because they elude many of the usual cultural classifications of time and space. "Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. As such, their ambiguous and indeterminate attributes are expressed by a rich variety of symbols..." (1969:95).

Turner explains that the liminal stage is bordered on either side by movements of entry and exit (1969:94). One *separates* from a previous state or mode of being, and enters the liminal, threshold stage. As mentioned in the previous chapter, rites of valorisation are used in the Michael Oak festivals to transform the festival space from ordinary use into festival use, and gestures of approach are employed to provide participants with the means to make a transition from everyday awareness into an attentiveness to the festival happenings. Exiting the liminal stage, one experiences *reaggregation* or *reincorporation*, when the participant returns to the cultural norms and expectations of his/her social position (1969:95). Michael Oak festivals usually made this transition as the teachers said thank you and good-bye, and told parents how they were to re-connect with their children who were exiting with their classes. Some of the festivals, for example the 2006 St. John's festival, also ended with the children reciting an end-of-term verse, before the children filed out:

The learning and work of the term gone by  
Will help us in days to come.  
To have strength in our limbs,  
Warmth in our hearts,  
And thoughts as bright as the sun.

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<sup>118</sup> See also Gluckman, 1962.

One of the most striking characteristics of the liminal stage, Turner writes, is what he calls a “moment in and out of time,” wherein the participants experience a “blend...of lowliness and sacredness, of homogeneity and friendship” (1969:96). He terms this characteristic *communitas*, distinguished from the ordinary experience of society by the changed positions of the “threshold people.” Whereas in ordinary times, participants have fixed social positions in relationship to each other, this relationship is not emphasised in the state of *communitas* – the “essential and generic human bond” is instead recognised (1969:97). *Communitas*, he continues, “is of the now; structure is rooted in the past and extends into the future through language, law, and custom” (1969:113). The type of *communitas* that I observed at Michael Oak would be closest to what Turner calls *existential* or *spontaneous* *communitas*, “the winged moment as it flies” (William Blake, quoted in Turner 1969:132), defined by an inward experience that “is often speculative and generates imagery and philosophical ideas” (1969:133).<sup>119</sup>

One of the teachers spoke of this experience of *communitas* when she described the festivals’ “social aspect of coming together,” and of the participants “taking something deeper, everyone together.” Another said that planning the festivals “brings the teachers together.” Thus, the very dialogical planning process in which the teachers engaged could be said to be spaces and times of *communitas* – economic class and social position being suspended in favour of their shared status as Michael Oak teachers. The very act of discussing and planning draws the teachers away from their normal spheres of operation within the school – their individual classes or specialty subjects – and unites them in a common purpose of discerning how they might plan the festivals in such a way that the children will be strengthened and prepared for their future role in renewing society itself. Turner comments on the “sacredness of that transient humility” (1969:97), and later quotes Martin Buber who said, “this multitude [of persons], though it moves towards one goal, yet experiences everywhere a turning to, a dynamic facing of the

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<sup>119</sup> Turner also explains what he terms *normative* *communitas* and *ideological* *communitas*, both of which involve an external structuring of the *existential* *communitas* into a social system (1969:132).

others, a flowing from *I* to *Thou*. Community is where community happens” (1969:127, original italics).<sup>120</sup> Though structure is essential for the running of an organisation or of the functioning of society in general, Turner says, *communitas* is “the “quick” of human interrelatedness... “the emptiness at the center,” which is nevertheless indispensable to the functioning of the structure of the wheel” just as the spokes of a wheel (the normal structure of relationships) are useless without a gap in middle of them (*communitas*) (1969:127). This sacred centre, created by the teachers when they take time to plan the festivals, prepare crafts and performance, discuss festival topics with their class, or enact the festivals themselves, brings meaning to the process, and is why one teacher told me that the planning process was almost as meaningful to him as the actual festival enactment. And another teacher wrote, “It was inspiring to be part of bringing everything together & seeing colleagues (& pupils) working together.” This special quality of *communitas*, with its “existential quality” and “aspect of potentiality” (Turner, 1969:127), is what I call *kairos* time.

*Kairos* is the Greek word for a particular moment in time, generally the “right, proper, favorable” time (Bauer, 1958:395).<sup>121</sup> The word was used in the Septuagint<sup>122</sup> as a “definite or fixed time,” as in the festal times or the time of harvest (Bauer, 1958:395): “Three *times in the year* you shall hold a festival for me” (Exodus 13:14), or “These are the appointed festivals of the Lord, the holy convocations, which you shall celebrate *at the time appointed* for them” (Leviticus 23:4). An example of its use in the Christian tradition is: “For while we were still weak, *at the right time* Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6). *Kairos* thus differs from *chronos*, which denotes a longer, more linear time, “a period of time” (Bauer, 1958:887).

Like Kronos, *Kairos* was a Greek god. *Kairos* is depicted, in an image that is foundational to the eurythmy taught in Cape Town, both to teachers and to

<sup>120</sup> Turner asks that the reader substitute “*communitas*” for “community” in Buber’s writing here.

<sup>121</sup> The popular internet search engine Wikipedia defines *kairos* as “a time in between” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kairos>, 5 Feb. 2008) - a definition not referenced to scholarly research, but in this situation, accurate.

<sup>122</sup> The Septuagint is the Greek translation of the 26 books of the Hebrew scriptures, translated for the Jews in diaspora in Greek-speaking areas.

those who are trainee eurythmists in the Cape Town eurythmy school,<sup>123</sup> as a man dancing within a sphere made of trees – the one tree growing from in front of him, the other from behind him (see Figure 12 below).<sup>124</sup> The branches form an arc above and below him with no one part actually touching him or the branches of the other tree. A gap is thus left at the spot where the branches would be expected to touch above and below him. Kairos dances within the sphere made of these trees and branches but in a space that is open to heavens above and the earth below.



Figure 12: Image of the god Kairos, originally taken from an ancient Greek wine vessel, and presently used as a symbol for the Kairos Eurythmy School.

<sup>123</sup> The Cape Town Eurythmy School's programme, based at the Centre for Creative Education, is formally known as The Kairos Eurythmy Training. Most of the Michael Oak teachers either received training or attended continuing education lectures at the Centre, and all teacher trainees are required to attend eurythmy classes in addition to their other coursework.

<sup>124</sup> Other descriptions (Freier 2006:3) of the god Kairos exist, notably as a naked man who must be caught by his hair, as in "seizing the moment". But the above description of the god, Kairos, is the image most commonly used by Cape Town's eurythmy trainers, inter alia to describe their concept of *kairos* time. In 2007, I attended a eurythmy workshop at the Centre for Creative Education, given by Ursula Zimmerman, founder of the kairos approach to eurythmy, where this concept of kairos time was explicitly taught and discussed. At least two former (but no current) Michael Oak teachers were present. In the same year I also heard a Christian Community sermon where this same concept of kairos time was explicated. No Michael Oak teachers were present then.

Eurythmy is an art of movement, a way of making visible through gesture and physical movement that which is invisible in sound – spoken word, tone, music. It is a core part of all Waldorf School curricula, at all levels of schooling, and, at least at Michael Oak, the teachers are aware that it is based on an anthroposophical principle that in working with children one has to work, in a sense, both with sacred space and with sacred time, but without explicating that principle to the children. One teacher told me that the school found itself without a eurythmist for a period of time, and had chosen to substitute folk dancing for the eurythmy classes during that time. Although the children seemed to love the dancing – evidenced by smiles, laughter, enthusiasm and working together – the teachers noticed that behaviour problems and conflicts increased during the time without eurythmy lessons being available. As she said:

In our teachers' meetings we came to realise through our discussion that eurythmy accomplished something that the folk dancing did not. While the dancing connected the children to a particular culture, the eurythmy had connected them more closely to universally human qualities. When they folk-danced, they related to each other in specific ways, which were joyful and fun. But in eurythmy, not only was their relationship with each other different, but we could see, in watching them, that they treated the spaces between each other differently, and that positively affected their relationships. We came to understand the point of view that eurythmy was important as a *performing art*. When we included eurythmy performance in the festivals, we could see something special happening.

As mentioned in Chapter Five, space can be seen to be sacred when it is where heaven is understood to meet earth in the human being, as signified by Kairos as he dances between the gaps in the branches beneath and above him, the gaps through which heaven and earth meet in him. He dances within a sphere, a realm – this realm is what anthroposophists would call the *etheric* realm, the realm of the life forces (the *chi* or *prana*, in other traditions) which surround the human; the realm, for anthroposophy, of the presence of the Christ on earth. As the realm in which the human being, symbolized by

Kairos, lives and moves, it is holy and sacred space. And it is within that kind of sacred space that we find – or expect to experience – kairos time.

Kairos also represents where past and future are understood to meet in the present, thus revealing the liminality of being, in temporal experience, neither here nor there. The god Kairos dances between two mighty tree trunks, neither touching him. The tree in front is the future, the tree behind is the past. But neither the future nor the past are static concepts. Eurythmists describe them as *streams*, one coming from the past into the future, one coming from the future into the past, and the two meeting in each individual human's existence and present consciousness. While many would describe time as moving from past to future, as evidenced by the historical (chronos time) timelines that one sees in newspapers or history texts, anthroposophists describe the particular kind of time illustrated in the kairos eurythmy picture (as opposed to the chronos timeline of ordinary events, or the rhythmic time of days and seasons) as a meeting in the human being of two "streams," past and future. The distinctive nature of this kairos time is not only that it is a particular point in chronos time; it is distinctive because the future "stream" moves towards the human even as the past "stream" does. People are thus understood to be shaped by forces not just in their past (their birthplace, family, and such) but also by forces coming from the future (their respective destinies). Something in or from the future is understood to affect each person in every moment of her conscious existence. While one can meet the future while going through time from the past, one is also constrained by events, already set in motion, which come towards one from the future.<sup>125</sup>

When a person experiences a kairos moment, attention is on the present moment, suspended between past and future, like the Kairos god positioned

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<sup>125</sup> An example might be a person who gathers experiences in a job in one country, while at the same time an organisation in the same discipline as those in which that person is gaining experience is preparing to expand, but in another country. When the person comes to interview at that now newly expanded (in chronos time) organisation, both she and the interviewer can see that events were set in motion chronos-time years ago which have developed in the person the necessary skills and experience needed, at the same time as the organisation was expanding to create the relevant position for such skills. In both cases, something from the other's future became the present for each.

in the moment between the two great trunks of past and future. In festival time, participants step not only into a special temporal dimension, but also into a different way of thinking and perceiving, a different consciousness, an experience of the *kairos* moment that is woven throughout the boundaries of the events and movements of the festival enactment and woven too into the fabric of both *chronos* and rhythmic time.<sup>126</sup>

Kairos time manifests not only during the festivals themselves – it also happens in festival preparation. One teacher, writing about her “midyear impressions” to the parents in her class, described the transformation of time from what I call *chronos* to *kairos* before the St. John’s Festival in this way:

We were discussing the symbolism of the flame in our St. John’s Festival story. We looked at the importance of having a flame within our beings, how we can protect it and how sometimes that flame may even go out. The children took this discussion to quite a remarkable level. Firstly, one child said that we might lose our flame because we want to give it to someone who may really need it. Another child responded by saying that when a flame was given away, we could receive another from someone else. Another child then added that we couldn’t help each other keep our flames alight so that all flames could be kept alive without anyone having to give a flame away. Surely we enter life differently when we are able to explore such things in our classroom communities (June, 2006).

Through these liminal breaks in *chronos* time, during the festival preparation as well as the festival enactment itself, the teachers and children experienced particular present moments as especially meaningful. When I interviewed them as a group (7 Feb. 2006), the teachers expressed strong opinions about the significance of festival preparation time with their classes. Referring to the periods teachers spent preparing for the festival through conversation with the children, one teacher said, “We have had consciousness weeks beforehand

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<sup>126</sup> The late Helmut von K ugelgen, previously a leader of the International Waldorf Kindergarten Association, asked rhetorically in a lecture, “What is the present?” And, reflecting the idea of *kairos* outlined above, he answered, “It comes towards us from the future. If we want to take hold of it, it is already past. We cannot grasp it, for the present is a process of constant transformation.... Children are generally more able than adults to shift instantly from one mode of being to another. Yet it is also demanded of us adults to be fully present in every moment” (1999:1).

for the primary school – those were truly magical.” Another teacher said, “I discussed with one of my classes about the symbolism that they wanted to include in the festival; I try to find a way to get the children to participate in the preparation – not just the crafts and activities.”

At this same meeting, several teachers emphasised the importance for the older (upper primary and high school) children to have a role in the preparations. One teacher told how, in her former school, she was able to include the Class Sevens in the festival preparation by having them help the Class Ones. “One girl in Class Seven,” she recalled, “one of the most cynical among them, later wrote about the wonder she found from working with the Class One child.” Another teacher said,

We had that experience with the Class Tens working on the festivals. [It was] beautiful as a gift from class ten to the community. Leigh [high school and life skills teacher] has done that sometimes with the tenth grade, as when they gave shadow play [2005 Star Tree Festival] as a free offering to the younger ones.

“At one point the whole school community was involved in the festival,” added another teacher; “There seems to be a need in the older ones – to reach out of the high school..., to be given space to be actively involved.”

At these times, not only the festival becomes time within time, but the festival preparation too holds the potential for creating a sense of liminality, of threshold crossing. As von Kügelgen has said (1991:4):

This crossing of the threshold happens as a major experience of the soul, but it also happens in our everyday life. The threshold is very close by and we meet it constantly ... To these daily situations belong, of course, the celebration of festivals. What becomes important about a festival is not how big and grandiose the celebration is, but how penetrated each part is with consciousness.

Rudolf Steiner, speaking to Waldorf children in Stuttgart, had long ago extended the idea of festival to the everyday when he said, “Today, with all our strength and with all the love that has been given to us, let us recall that human beings come into the world from the spirit, and let us promise to

celebrate the festival of working in school, of a work that is carried by love” (1996d: 152-53). Extending the idea further still, the German poet Novalis writes, “Each day shall be a festival, a world-renewing rite” (Marion’s notebook, first page, notes from February 1994).

Like many things anthroposophical that underpin Waldorf education, the concept of kairos time was not explained or made explicit in any way to the children. The teachers simply allowed for an experiential dimension to the festivals, one that could not be planned or indeed expected in anticipation, but one that allowed them to be surprised themselves by the outcome, an outcome that was often exponentially more than anticipated.

These times were often difficult for teachers to describe. When asked if she could recall any special moments in the festivals so far (either in her experience or the children’s) and what made them special, one class teacher wrote,

This is a lot harder to put into words. I think that all the special moments that I have experienced have arisen through a lot of preparation, say on the part of festival groups, individual teachers, & classes working with themes, doing crafts, learning songs, etc., that is then offered in a communal setting/event (say with all parts of the school present + parents + other silent (or listening) participants) and if one is fortunate in terms of mood, timing & inner and outer participation one is then blessed with a kind of grace/special experience, e.g. something of a higher nature being interested or even blessing or recognizing one’s efforts in striving to reach out/ meet that higher element.

Kairos time, then, can be both a result of much preparation and be unpredictable at the same time.

### **Rhythmic, Chronos, and Kairos Time in One Festival**

“There is no universal time scale” (Chidester, 1988:105).

The complex dialogues in which the teachers engaged could be seen in the threefold way festival time was experienced, for example, in the late summertime 2005 Michael Oak Harvest festival. The rhythmic nature of time was shown in the autumnal harvest imagery. That a festival would be enacted in autumn was non-negotiable; the symbols chosen to reflect the autumnal nature of this seasonal ritual were chosen by the teachers. The chronos notion of time was reflected in the school's formal farewell to a tree, planted nearly forty years earlier and now to be felled to make way for the new school hall. And the teachers' and children's engaged experience of the festival revealed its kairos time character. I now describe the events of the festival to show how each notion of time manifested itself through the festival's ritual symbols, and how the teachers' dialogical process was shown through them.

Revealing the rhythmic time aspect of the festival, its opening assembly began with one of the teachers calling the gathered group to order and leading them in a song about grapes and harvest, set to the tune of *Shalom Haverim*:

We gather the grapes  
 We gather the grains  
 Hey-ho, hey-ho  
 The peach and the pear  
 And the berries ripe and rare  
 Hey-ho, hey-ho

Grapes are always harvested in the Western Cape at this time of year, and their physical presence on a table in the front of the room (along with bread baked by the children of class four) were reminders of the season. Children from classes one and two then recited a verse they had been taught about the harvest and that explicitly referred to the seasons and to daily work cycles:

All in the late summer sun	We swing the scythes so blithe and glad
Into the meadows to mow the hay	All in the late summer sun
There we will have some fun.	We'll cut and hew, we'll swish and sway

Until the day is done ....<sup>127</sup>

Eating the bread and grapes later in their classrooms reinforced the rhythmical time of the season in a different way for the children as, though their senses of touch and taste, they experienced what results from seasonal growth, and furthermore, did so in a ritual that tends to happen every year at this same time.

During the festival assembly and after the younger class members' performances, the class six pupils performed a recorder piece, George Frederick Handel's (1747) *Judas Maccabeus*. It had been chosen deliberately by the music teacher, because, she said, in her hymnal it is a Palm Sunday song ("Daughters of Zion") about Jesus' triumphant entry into Jerusalem. While the children performed Handel's beautiful music unaware of its biblical references and its association with a particular day in the annual cycle, some of the teachers, particularly those who were regular church attendants, were aware of the piece's reflection of rhythmic time, as it was regularly played in the Christian Community at the time of year around Palm Sunday.

The festival's physical decorations also helped to reinforce its seasonality – seasonal vegetables (and dry goods) on tables both outside the hall and on tables in the hall were a visual reminder of autumn and the abundance of harvest (see Figure 13, below). Each of the lower primary classes had produced some craftwork with content that also reflected the festival's seasonality: Class One had made little paper baskets containing a potpourri of dried herbs; Class Two had made little bundles or sachets filled with fragrant lavender; Class Three had filled vases with green plants; Class Four had baked bread (also displayed on the table and later distributed to be eaten in the classrooms). The abundance of these crafts, as well as the artworks created by the older classes (greeting cards by Class Six, coloured windows by Class Seven, along with still life drawings and nutritional displays by the

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<sup>127</sup> See Appendix A for entire text.

high school pupils), reinforced images of the season and its abundant harvests.



Figure 13: Seasonal Vegetables Displayed at 2006 Harvest Festival

Alongside the images of rhythmical time associated with the season were those of chronos time, represented – on this occasion – by the school's formal farewell to an old tree that was about to be felled to make way for the new school hall. A middle-aged former pupil came forward once the verses and musical performances were over. He solemnly told how he had witnessed the tree's planting thirty-eight years earlier when he had been in Class Seven at Michael Oak. He outlined how the school had had so few children then that all classes were able to meet for school assemblies in the foyer outside the present administrative office. In his historical recounting, he referred to the tree giving its life to benefit all, offering the place where it now grew as a space for the new hall, and gifting the wood from its trunk and branches for use in a meaningful way for the school. Both history and destiny thus belonged to his story; and his narrative was such that the children might feasibly have been expected to remember the specifics of the big old tree being cut down for the hall, and the incorporation of the tree's story (its own history and destiny in relation to the school) into the festival proceedings. But equally feasibly (as we have seen from the memories of past pupils earlier), the children might have been expected to forget precisely which verse they had recited and which songs they had sung or tunes they had played, since those related to the seasonal cycle and not the chronological particularities of the occasion.

The kairos aspects of the festival were experienced in two ways. First, the time for the festival itself and also its preparations was set apart from the ordinary course of the day, week, or term. I observed the Class Fours baking the bread that would be used for the festival. The course of their day and week was thrown by this process, as was that of both their teacher and a subject teacher who directed the bread-making. The subject teachers who helped set up the hall were involved in valorising not only the space, but also the time and, as the children moved from their classrooms into that festival space, they also crossed over into festival time, set apart for sacred use.

The kairos aspects of time were also experienced in particular moments. The (often loudly) gleeful absorption of the Class Fours in the bread-making process left little opportunity for them to concern themselves with past or future. They were very focused in the moment, getting their ingredients, mixing them, spilling them and cleaning up, shaping the bread for baking. When the Class Ones and Twos stood and recited their verse in the festival enactment itself (“All in the late summer sun/ into the meadows to mow the hay/there we will have some fun”) and sang their song (“Yellow the bracken, golden the sheaves”),<sup>128</sup> their concentration was evident from their focus on the teacher and their performance. With that focus, they would not be expected to think about past or future, or about rhythmical repetitions of the seasons. Likewise, the storyteller was focussed on the telling in the moment – and the majority of children were engaged in listening to her at that point, experiencing the present moment as kairos time.

As social categories children and teachers experienced chronos and kairos time altogether differently from one another. With the definition I have given for rhythmic time, neither would be conscious of much of its manifestation during a festival, though adults, having a more developed ability for analysis and self-reflection, can be expected to consciously observe its manifestations in a way and to a degree that children would not. Moreover, given the teachers’ regular festival planning process and its explicit link to the seasons,

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<sup>128</sup> See Appendix A.

they could be expected to have been conscious of the need to mark seasonal rhythms and therefore to be aware of symbolic representations of those rhythms during a festival's enactment.

Similarly, and since *chronos* time is quite explicitly constructed, one might expect children to construct it differently from adults, the former ordering it internally as a sequence of events or milestones (including *kairos* moments), the latter being expected to order it more systematically through external devices like calendars. For both categories, though especially for children, rhythmic time continues relatively unremarked, while *chronos* time is recognised, but in general differently by children and by adults.

When children are able to focus on a song they sing, tune they play, or verse they recite, or to listen closely to a story being told,<sup>129</sup> they might be able to experience the kinds of *kairos* moments that the teachers hoped might be achieved for the children during each festival. I did not interview children after the festival for their feedback (as interviews might have added an analytical level of perspective that runs counter to the educational goals for Waldorf primary school children); and, as this was the first festival I observed, I did not ask for or receive as much feedback from the teachers as I did for subsequent festivals. However, two children who were new to the school, having come from another Waldorf school elsewhere, told me that they had been very aware of the teachers standing over them, watching them (the teachers lined the walls of the hall, quieting the children as necessary). And that led me to wonder to what extent their felt need to monitor the children in that way affected the teachers' own experiences of the potentially sacred moment in time. The 2005 Harvest Festival, being one where Classes One through Ten (along with teachers – a total of some 275 or more persons) crowded tightly into the old school hall, clearly faced a challenge in creating an experience of *kairos* time.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> This assumes that they are not distracted by extraneous sounds of noises from outside or of other children's or parents' movements, or by the cramped, crowded conditions of Classes One through Ten gathering in the old hall) – distractions of a kind that, as I indicated in an earlier chapter, were quite common during the festivals I observed.

<sup>130</sup> However, the teachers continued to use the old hall at times when only primary school children and

In spite of these challenges, however, for a comparative analyst of religion such as Eliade (1961), *kairos* time happens in a festival when the spiritual/physical nature of the human is recognised and addressed – because then time is filled with spiritual significance, or in other words, holds expressed meaning for participants as the point in time when the potent presence mentioned earlier is experienced. As Eliade (1961: 36) says, “By the simple fact that, at the heart of his being, he rediscovers the cosmic rhythms – the alternations of day and night, for instance, or of winter and summer – he comes to a more complete knowledge of his own destiny and significance”. Eliade went on to explain that such knowledge is most readily expanded through the process of recovering an understanding of the symbolism of the human body, what he calls *anthropocosmos*, or a consciousness of “a glorious and absolute human condition” (1961:36). The non-negotiable rhythmic nature of festival time becomes the foundation for the *experience* of the festival not only in chronological time, but also in the *kairos* moment. While *kairos* time can be described structurally in its relationship between past and future, the *kairos* moment is *experienced* as liminal.

In their stage of development, primary school children are not likely to be thinking of themselves in self-reflection – instead, they notice the world and natural rhythms around them. However, by growing up to develop a reverent recognition of these natural cycles, “modern man [sic] will obtain a new existential dimension, totally unknown to present-day existentialism and historicism: this is an authentic and major mode of being, which defends man from nihilism and historical relativism without thereby taking him out of history” (Eliade 1961:3). The festival, by drawing attention to and celebrating this natural, cyclical dimension of time, is a rhythmic moment inserted into the cadence of the seasonal progression, changing not just the moment, but also the human relationship with *chronos* time.

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teachers were involved, such as in the 2008 Michaelmas festival. Then, the children were told a story in the old hall prior to joining families and guests on the oval for the remainder of the festival. I noticed that the children seemed to hear the storyteller and pay attention better with that limited group than when the room was more crowded with highschoolers.

The teachers' comments during a primary school teachers' meeting that "Festivals lend a special rhythm to the year...we have a sense that the weekly rhythm is thrown, but by something much bigger" and "We are taking something deeper [through our planning and celebrating the festivals], everyone together" provide clear indication that the teachers were aware that the festivals, which mark the rhythm of the year (rather than of the day or week), require them to disrupt their sense of weekly rhythm in response to something that they regard as much bigger, or deeper (Interview with teachers, 7 February, 2006). Moreover, those comments indicate that they were also aware that, despite their uncertainty as to whether or not the children would enjoy the festivals, the festivals were still able to move both children and teachers in and out of different experiences of time, and thereby to expand the children's attention to an experience of the diverse elements of rhythmic, chronos, and kairos time.

## Conclusion

In the festival preparation and enactments, time itself was a ritual symbol through which I was able to see the teachers' dialogical process. In examining this particular aspect of the festivals, I also found the limits of the teachers' dialogical process – where the other rituals symbols were conceptualised and planned anew every year, the cyclical nature of one festival in each of the four seasons was not renegotiated.<sup>131</sup> Maintenance of this rhythmical aspect was foundational to the festivals, much as Michael Oak's physical location in Cape Town's Kenilworth suburb was not questioned during the course of my fieldwork, and much as Rudolf Steiner's pedagogical philosophy undergirds the curriculum and the school's activities.

In North America, the natural elements become unstable in certain seasons of the year – one knows approximately when to expect hurricanes and storms arriving, in the east from Africa, in the west from the Pacific Basin. The individual circumstances of each hurricane or storm vary, however, as other

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<sup>131</sup> Neither was this cyclical connection of festival and season challenged by those calling for a reconsideration of how to insert festivals into a southern hemisphere seasonal calendar (see Chapter Four above).

factors come together in time and space. So too, did the individual circumstances of the festivals vary according to the unique conditions of each one.

The intentionality with which the teachers approached the festivals each season could be seen in their use and experience of time, as they carved time from their busy schedules for meetings, class projects, discussions, and various other preparations. As different opinions and perspectives were voiced regarding how each of the festivals should be enacted, they made time to deal with these issues, often inconveniencing themselves in order to continue the dialogue. Although repeating the festivals without such a dialogue would have been far simpler for all of them, the teachers demonstrated their acceptance of Steiner's directive (1996d:88) that "our teachers must always be aware that their task consists of calling the spirit of the world down into the school, and they must live in this awareness" – in other words that they must always be alive to the demands of the changing world as they give attention to the many details of planning festivals, hoping always to enable what various teachers described as a transcendent experience during festivals, and, in another teacher's words "planning without expectation" of realising such a goal.

As described above, time functioned in the Michael Oak festivals as a ritual symbol, as seen in the experience of festival time in its rhythmic, chronos, and kairos aspects. Teachers' use and experience of time in its diverse aspects were manifestations of their inner intentions both to aim to create opportunity for a transcendent experience and not to expect its realisation. Through my observing how teachers dealt with the three aspects of time in the context of the festival events they planned, one can see how their commitment to negotiation and change in response to prevailing circumstances manifested itself.

[S]ymbols are essentially involved in social process, [writes Victor Turner (1967: 19), whereby] groups became adjusted to inner changes and adapted to their external environment... The symbol becomes associated with human interests, purposes, ends, and means, and

whether they are explicitly formulated or have to be inferred from the observed behavior. The structure and properties of a symbol become those of a dynamic entity, at least within its appropriate context of action.

In the context of the Michael Oak festivals, time was a ritual symbol that had itself become a “dynamic entity,” revealing many facets of the teachers’ dialogical planning process. I have shown that through examination and observation of festival time as it is experienced in its chronos, rhythmic, and kairos facets, the teachers’ motivations and values became further clarified. The importance placed by them on recreating each festival anew each season – with the limitation that I pointed out regarding the festivals’ cyclical, seasonal nature – was consistent with the teachers’ treatment of other ritual symbols like space and the artistic expression (as detailed in Chapters Four and Five), and with their renegotiation of various philosophical issues as outlined in Chapter Four. It was also consistent with the Waldorf pedagogy and ethos as explained in Chapter Three. Finally, it is consistent with the belief expressed by a subject teacher who wrote (quoted in part previously), “I think our efforts & strivings at Michael Oak may be difficult at times, but we must be doing the right thing (most of the time) – the festivals never fall flat. They all have the inner quality, in some way or another, that we strive for” (questionnaire, February 2006).

## SEVEN. CONCLUSION

There is no one way of celebrating a Waldorf festival in the Southern Hemisphere. You have to take each festival anew every year, and find out what it means and how it should be celebrated each time (Heike, former nursery teacher, Constantia Waldorf School).

For over forty-six years, the Michael Oak Waldorf School teachers have wrestled with the question of how to celebrate festivals. Like the movements and collisions of the tectonic plates beneath the earth's surface, various opposing factors converged on the teachers' festival planning efforts, often unseen by the casual observer. Using ethnographic data gathered through participant observation, interviews, and textual research, I have demonstrated that the teachers have chosen to remain within the tension of those opposing forces, re-negotiating and re-creating each festival each season, instead of relying on set patterns of past festival enactment. I have shown also that, in doing so, the teachers have said, they are able to find meaning and inspiration that affects their own experience, as teachers, of festival preparations and enactments.

Discussing the historical significance of ritual in contemporarily conflicted South Africa, Jean Comoroff writes, "In such contexts, ritual provides an appropriate medium through which the values and structures of a contradictory world may be addressed and manipulated" (1985:196). I have shown that it is precisely Michael Oak's teachers' sense that their context creates for them an intense tension between ideas, attitudes and perspectives, if not a complete contradiction or conflict, that leads them to use the festivals as rituals through which to address and manipulate that very tension.

I have argued that because the Michael Oak teachers took seriously Steiner's belief that education is more than imparting information, and is primarily a sacred task preparing children for their role in renewing society as free-thinking adults (1996d), in the course of my fieldwork, they spent hours in planning meetings and in preparations with their classes, believing that

something important happens through their efforts. Repeatedly using words and phrases like “magical,” “something bigger,” and “higher spirituality” to describe meaningful moments in the festival preparations and enactments, the teachers expressed to me that it is the process of preparation – the dialogue – that is important to them and imparts greater special quality to the festivals, bringing “gold” to the children.

In this dissertation, I have examined these moments, based on what I myself observed and what I heard teachers say to me. Listening to what the teachers expressed as their beliefs and intentions regarding the festival preparation and enactment, I have described some of the ritual symbols that form the outward manifestation of those beliefs and intentions – space, object, and performance. How the teachers made use of space – how they moved in and out of it, and what and who they allowed into it, and how they negotiated these points – gave some indication of their values. Looking closely at the words of the songs, verses, and stories used in the festival space, I showed that space was also expressed existentially as a place where earth and heaven meet, with the human being on the threshold of the two.

I have shown too that festival time was also experienced in diverse ways. I have explained how teachers and children experienced time in its linear, historical form – what I have called *chronos* time – with an awareness of past and future events; how they less consciously lived through the rhythmic aspects of time; and how I saw and heard evidence of their experience of what I call *kairos* time – time that is set apart from the ordinary events of the day, week, and year, and devoted to sacred purposes as the festivals are. By setting aside this “time out of time,” as Falassi (1987) names it, the teachers made possible the experience of what I call *kairos* moments – those moments when one is focused on the present moment, unaware of the past or the future, living as it were in time within time. I have compared this *kairos* moment to what Turner (1969) termed *liminality* – a state of being that is neither here nor there, connected with neither past nor future. In this state of *communitas*, or “fructile chaos, a storehouse of possibilities” (Turner, 1986:42), achieved by the teachers not only in the festival enactments but

also as they discussed and negotiated their ideas and opinions about festival planning, they became less identified with a specific role as class or subject teacher, and more identified with their task as a Michael Oak Waldorf teacher. I have explained how, for them, their experience of liminality in space and time made their dialogical planning process into a ritual “almost as meaningful as the festival itself”, as one teacher put it.

These liminal experiences are what I have defined as sacred, and also point to what Steiner might have meant when he said, “The festivals are nodal points of the year which unite us with the Spirit of the universe” (quoted in Barz 1987:7). In such nodal points, one might expect a threshold experience; but what I found was that, by engaging in dialogue on the threshold of so many conflicting and opposing factors, the teachers found themselves experiencing that threshold even in discussing and planning for the celebration of these nodal points.

The beliefs that the teachers have a sacred role in teaching the children; that the festivals are in some way helpful to the children’s growth and development; and that re-engaging in dialogue every season and every year is better than blindly repeating festival practices, all contributed to the sometimes complicated but often apparently rewarding ways that the teachers experienced their festival planning processes. Like the land masses that are dramatically changed through the power of colliding environmental forces, the teachers and children experienced the emergence of this “bigger sphere,” “higher spirituality,” “creative aspect,” or “space where reverence and awe can come in” out of a creative energy that comes from the dialogical process in which the teachers engaged both with each other and with the children. They experienced what Carol Liknaitzky, previously of Johannesburg’s then Baobab Centre for Teacher Enrichment, meant when she wrote:

There is a connection between the world and our inner soul life. The preparation and involvement in the festivals ... is very meaningful for the children and gives them real nourishment for their souls through their inner and outer experience. It builds a real security and firmly develops within them the qualities of joy, reverence and wonder for the world around them.

It develops real moral qualities without any preaching, and the ability to be self-motivated and creative adults. The importance of this can never be overestimated (Marion's notebook, undated entry).

### **Contributions of this research to knowledge**

The application of Rudolf Steiner's indications regarding festival celebrations to the South African, southern hemispheric context has raised many questions and issues regarding how the seasonal and Christian festivals might be juxtaposed. Waldorf teachers and anthroposophists from much of South Africa as well as from other southern hemisphere countries such as New Zealand, Australia, Brazil, and Argentina told me that this same question has arisen in their Waldorf Schools, as the teachers try to interpret Steiner's writings (particularly 1984 and 1996a) in light of their southern hemisphere context.<sup>132</sup> Each person interviewed from these countries asserted the importance of such a subject of research, though their opinions on the matter were not uniform, and most requested that I contact them regarding the results of my study. Some writings exist on celebrating festivals in the southern hemisphere, and others on Waldorf school festivals. But this dissertation contributes to the body of knowledge on festivals in southern hemisphere Waldorf schools, a subject on which I could find no previous research or writing, and to the growing body of knowledge on Waldorf education in general.

Furthermore, in conveying the dialogical approach taken by the Michael Oak teachers in festival planning, and showing how the teachers negotiated often contentious issues such as those surrounding localisation of festivals given to the originally Central European, predominantly Christian anthroposophists to a religiously pluralistic, South African setting, I contribute to the field of educational anthropology, specifically regarding localisation issues, about which I heard strong opinions expressed by Waldorf teachers and parents

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<sup>132</sup> As mentioned in Chapter Four, the Christian Community has also wrestled with the same question in relationship to church festivals. Because of his forty-three years of priesthood in South Africa, Julian Sleigh has led much of the discussion in the Christian Community of Southern Africa, and has published articles on the subject (for example, 2005a, 2005b). Geert Suwelack, who served as Christian Community priest in Sao Paulo, Brazil, wrote an extensive study, which I borrowed from one of the Michael Oak teachers. (1985).

both in my South African fieldwork and in the US. In presenting a dialogical approach, I show how the teachers of one school addressed those differences, and indeed, even found creativity and meaning in the process.

Finally, this research focuses on school festivals. Using Victor Turner's processual model (1967, 1969), I add to the growing segment of anthropology that addresses ritual process and deals with the experience of liminality in ritual. However, this dissertation adds a new focus in its assertion that for the Michael Oak teachers, the planning process was as much a meaningful ritual as the festival enactment itself.

### **Suggestions for Further Research**

Before he died, Victor Turner had begun to find new ways of describing not just the ritual process itself, but the *experience* of the ritual process, and particularly, of ritual performance (see Turner 1986). Further research might be undertaken to investigate the performance phenomena of the Waldorf festivals, and how the experience of both the performance itself and the preparations for it contribute to the meaning which the teachers told me they found for themselves and inscribed for the children, a meaning they say is re-experienced anew every year, as they re-negotiate the festivals. This research should particularly examine the key performance elements - speech, music, dance, and eurythmy - asking why they are included in the festivals, how they are experienced both in festival preparation and enactment, and how they might contribute to the meaning the teachers described.

The scope of the research can be expanded to include other Waldorf schools that take the festival experience and planning seriously, possibly schools in northern hemisphere in Europe and the U.S. Questions arise as to whether the experiences described by Michael Oak teachers are replicated in other Waldorf schools in other parts of the world, schools that perhaps even celebrate a configuration of festivals different from Michael Oak's four. Furthermore, the investigation might include how observers, particularly the schoolchildren's parents, experience the festival performance phenomena. A

former Michael Oak eurythmist told me, “The festivals are one thing that pulls the whole school together, that they can share. There are not many things that hold us together – everything is falling apart, dispersing now. The whole school is held together if we can have the whole school together participating in the festivals.” Further research might also explore the effects the festival enactments have on the entire school community and its experience as such, along with the transmission of the values and knowledge that help define the community identity.

This dissertation’s research and analysis address questions and issues that I perceived to be present at the Michael Oak Waldorf school and in the wider southern hemisphere and world-wide Waldorf school movement. However, in answering these questions, others are raised in a dynamic process in which new influences are felt much as tectonic plates move beneath the earth’s surface, creating effects perceived and experienced in different ways above. Engagement in a dialogical process with these influences generates new opportunity for innovative and originative studies. In the words of Mary Douglas, “The ritual is creative indeed” (1984:72).

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## APPENDIX A: VERSES AND SONGS

### 2005 St. John's Festival Tree verses

**Sunday**      *Class 1 (white/gold lanterns)*

Thus speaks the light Cape Ash, that rises up high,  
The tree of the golden sun:  
Let us be upright and noble  
May our light shine in the world  
With the pure dignity of Mankind

**Monday**      *Class 2 (blue lanterns)*

Thus speaks the silvery moon in the time of May  
Through the flowering wild plum  
Whose blossoms are the fruits of summer:  
Let us transform what is low,  
Into that which is high, like the plant does.  
Be pure and radiant, become mature, and harvest the fruits of light.

**Tuesday**      *Class 3 (red)*

Thus speaks the gnarled coral tree  
The servant of iron Mars:  
Let us root into the depths,  
And reach into the heights  
Be powerful and strong  
Be fighters, knights, and protectors

**Wednesday**      *Class 4 (yellow lanterns)*

Thus speaks the quicksilvery mercury  
Through the lively growth of the wild Camphor  
And its winged seed:  
Let us move with elegance  
Be active, lively, quick.

**Thursday**    *Class 5 (orange/purple lanterns)*

Thus speaks the Milkwood tree  
With its outspread branches  
The tree of Jupiter, to whom this is holy:  
Let us overcome the haste and rush within ourselves  
Seek for gratitude,  
In which goodness and wisdom can be born.

**Friday**        *Class 6 (green lanterns)*

Thus speaks the coppery Venus  
Through the pure white stinkwood tree  
That roots lightly and drinks much light:  
Let us cultivate our soul,  
In tenderness lovingly admire  
The beauty of the World.

**Saturday**    *Class 7 (multi-coloured lanterns in black frames)*

Thus speaks the leaden Saturn  
Through the trees of the dark woods,  
Through the yellow woods, ironwoods and mahogany  
Let us feel responsibility  
For the need in our time,  
And the whole of humanity.  
Take up with earnestness and fervour  
The task that life gives to us.

## 2005 Harvest Festival Songs and Verse

### **Yellow the Bracken**

*(sung by classes one and two)*

Yellow the bracken  
Golden the sheaves  
Rosy the apples  
Crimson the leaves

Mist on the hillside  
Clouds grey and white  
Autumn good morning  
Summer good night

### **We Gather the Grapes**

*(sung by all)*

We gather the grapes  
We gather the grains  
Hey-ho, hey-ho  
The peach and the pear  
And the berries ripe and rare  
Hey-ho, hey-ho

### **Verse**

*(recited by classes one and two)*

All in the late summer sun  
Into the meadows to mow the hay  
There we will have some fun.

We swing the scythes so blithe and  
glad  
All in the late summer sun  
We'll cut and hew, we'll swish and  
sway  
Until the day is done.

We toss the grass so long and fair  
All in the late summer sun  
Its fragrance fills the sunlit air  
Till our work is done.

Briskly into the haycocks steep  
All in the late summer sun  
The dry and fragrant hay we'll keep  
Till the work is done.

Then slowly home we'll wind our  
way  
All in the late summer sun  
Glad are we at end of day  
That our work is done.

Then let us all, my merry folk  
Thank the sun on high  
For all the gifts he showers on us  
As he circles through the sky.

## **SAINT MICHAEL AS THE HELPER OF INCARNATION**

There was once a child, who lived in a beautiful garden where happiness reigned, and where flowers bloomed with a perfection of scent and colour found nowhere else. The wildest of animals were tame and the lions were gentle and kind as lambs. This child had many friends among the animals, and many other friends, playmates, and wise beings, who helped him to find the sweetest fruits, or most secretly hidden treasures, the first bird's nest, or a dormouse in its winter sleep.

One day, when this little boy was resting after a happy day in the sun, a day of running, jumping and leaping, he said to one of these wise people: "Here everything is so pleasant. Is it everywhere?"

"No" said the person there is a country a long way from here, where people are not so happy and where life is hard. There are fewer green fields and rain and wind blow the trees into crooked shapes. The wind is cold and the sun shines seldom."

" Could it not be as beautiful as this?" said the child.

"Yes", said the wise person "and the people who live there try and make it more beautiful."

"I am so sorry for these people", said the child, "and I wish I could help. Could I not take some of the seeds of the beautiful flowers that grow here and journey to this land and there plant the seeds and tend them? I could help them to catch all the sun when it does shine and shield them from the wind and rain. "

The wise being pondered and said: "If you are strong enough to take the journey you may go. But you will find the journey hard and you may have to come back before you have done as you wish. But, 'God Speed', and you will be welcomed back whenever you come".

So the child gathered seeds from his favourite flowers and set off. He was told in which direction to go, as the country was a long way off, and he had to cross a sea. Before he came to the sea, he had many adventures and saw many things,

and learnt much and traveled a long way. By the time he came to the edge of the great sea, he was footsore and weary. The clouds were gathering and a great storm was brewing. The waves were dashing upon the beach and foaming at his feet. "I cannot go tonight", he said to himself. "I am not ready."

But the seeds, still in his pocket, kept most carefully through all his adventures, said, "If you do not go tonight and plant us as soon as possible, we shall not be able to bloom properly. There is not much time left; had the sea been calm we should have been in plenty of time. Please, get across somehow."

So the boy looked around him for a means of crossing the sea. He walked up and down the beach with the waves tearing at the pebbles and shingle, and the spray in his face. Very soon he saw a boat - a frail looking cockle-shell of a boat with the paint peeling off and even one or two holes in it. But the boy remembered the seeds which he had brought and the country to which he was going, and how they would love the bright flowers, but only if he could get them there in time.

So he launched the frail little boat on the great sea. It was in danger of being washed back several times, but at last he got it past the breakers and into the sea. Then he rode onwards. The further his little boat got from the shore, the greater were the waves and the stronger grew the wind. First, to his dismay, one of the oars broke. Then, as he endeavoured to row with one oar, first one side, and then the other, a larger wave than ever came and washed his remaining oar away. The boat sailed on, tossed hither and thither by the waves and wind. By and by, through mist-blown spray, the boy saw dimly the line of another country in the distance - it grew nearer and then to his horror, the boy saw it begin to recede again. The wind had changed direction and was blowing against him and the tide also was flowing in a different direction.

With the oars gone, the little boy could not steer his boat and was dependent upon the wind and the tide. "I shall have to go back", thought he. But he

remembered the seeds and remembered the new country and a new courage woke in his heart. 'I will go', said he. And he dived out of the boat, after stowing the seeds away as carefully as he could to protect them from the water. The water was bitterly cold but he struck out manfully, and it seemed to him that instead of growing weaker, he grew stronger, and could swim more strongly than ever. In fact, strangely enough, he hardly needed to swim at all but was being borne. And looking up, he saw a great shining warrior, in glittering armour, astride a horse, which was as white as the foam of the waves, with a mane, curling like the crest of a scabbard. He was using his sword arm to hold the child and was carrying him strongly towards the shore. He looked down and smiled at the child who recognised Saint Michael as his helper and friend. With this aid, the boy reached the beach at last. The great horse found his depth and walked out of the sea onto the wet sand.

At the top of the beach above the cliff was a wall with a great gateway in it. The boy climbed the cliff with some difficulty, but it seemed to him that someone was calling to him from behind the door, so he made haste. He knocked at the door and it slowly opened. Beyond it he caught a glimpse of the country that needed his flowers so much- Parts were dark and heavy, but gleams of sun lit up green fields, like those of his home, and he thought, "somewhere here I must plant my flowers." But then his attention was caught by a woman and a man who bade him welcome in the same voices that had been calling to him. "We have been waiting for you," said they, "come and take our hands. We will try and help you to find somewhere to plant your flowers." Though the boy was weak and tired after his long journey, he managed before the gate closed to turn and wave goodbye to Saint Michael, who was waiting to see him safely up the cliff. Then the gate was closed and he turned to his new helpers who took him to a little house, where they warmed, dried, and fed him, and then he found some of the places which needed flowers most, and planted them there. He was just in time. The seeds germinated and sprouted and by and by the beautiful scented flowers grew. All who passed by, though weary and sad, looked at them and remembered the

country from whence they came, and the boy tended to them carefully so that when the time came for him to go back, they were strong and flourishing.

University of Cape Town

# ②7 Flamingo Carol

Words: RAE TOMLIN

Music: EDITH HUGO BOSMAN

Rhythmically throughout

1. Pink, swift and beau - ti - ful. I fly be - yond, be - yond the frin - ges of the  
 2. White - tipped and ro - sy tued. They soar in flights, they soar in flights a - cross the

bay — Lift my long white neck — — and pray. Pray for Peace — —  
 dunes — Where the wind of eve - ning, blows peace, peace — peace — —

*rall.*

*a tempo*

Peace a - mong the krantz - es, Peace in the vlei - Peace on Christ - mas day — —  
 Peace a - cross the la - goon — — Peace in the vlei - Peace on Christ - mas day — —

*rall.*

3

3 Strain - ing, stretch - ing, near - en - ward — where the plain, the plain has scorched and re - touched and

red. Lives with drought and bar - ren - get - a Hun - der for peace —

*rall.* *a tempo* *allargando* *p*  
Peace a-mong the hi - lls Peace in the vale, peace on Christmas Day — — —

*rall.* *a tempo* *allargando* *p*

KENILWORTH ROAD

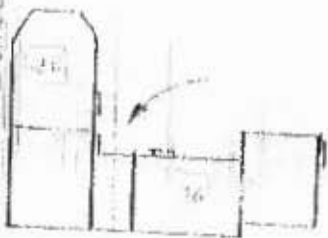


# MICHAEL OAK

# CARNIVAL

## SUMMER FAIR GROUND PLAN

DOWNSTAIRS CLASSROOMS



PRIMARY SCHOOL GARDEN

UPSTAIRS CLASSROOMS

HIGH SCHOOL BUILDING

TENNIS COURT

PRIMARY SCHOOL BUILDING

15

HALL

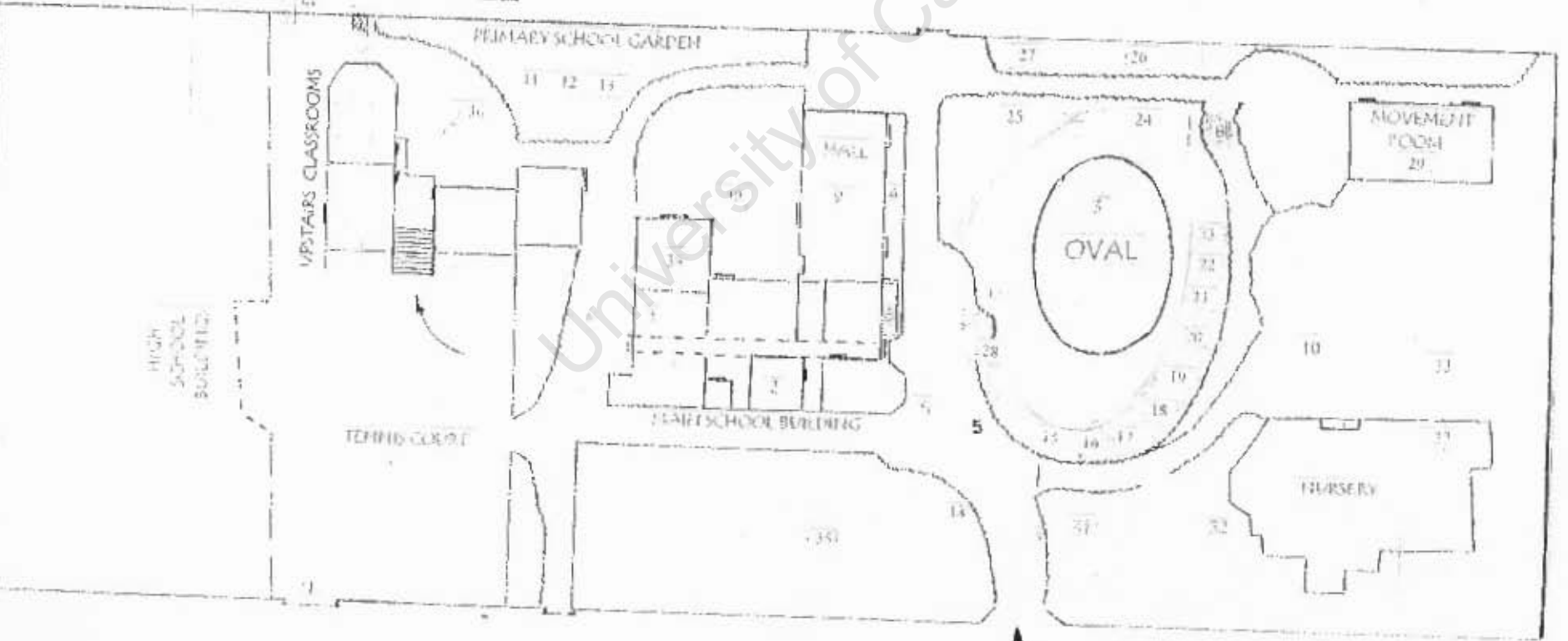
5 OVAL

MOVEMENT ROOM 29

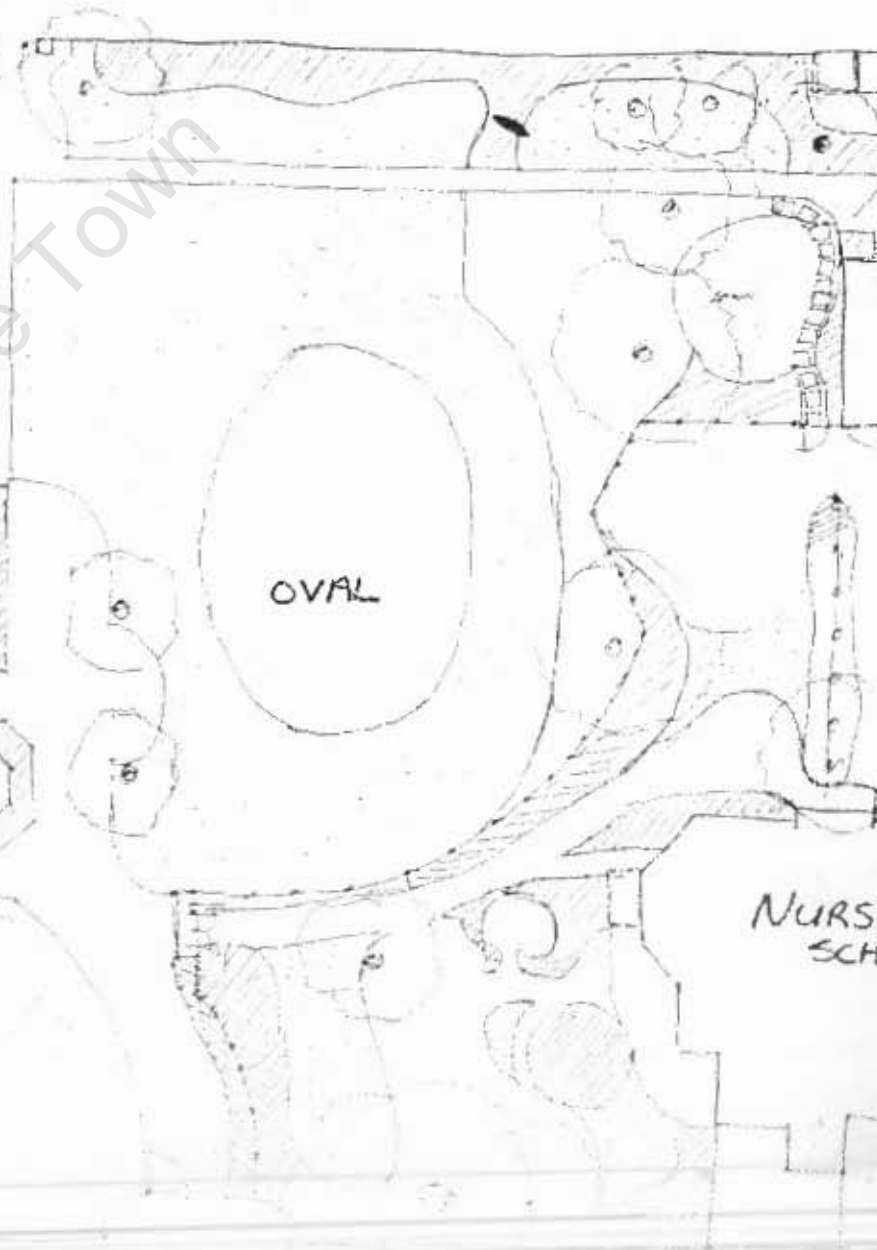
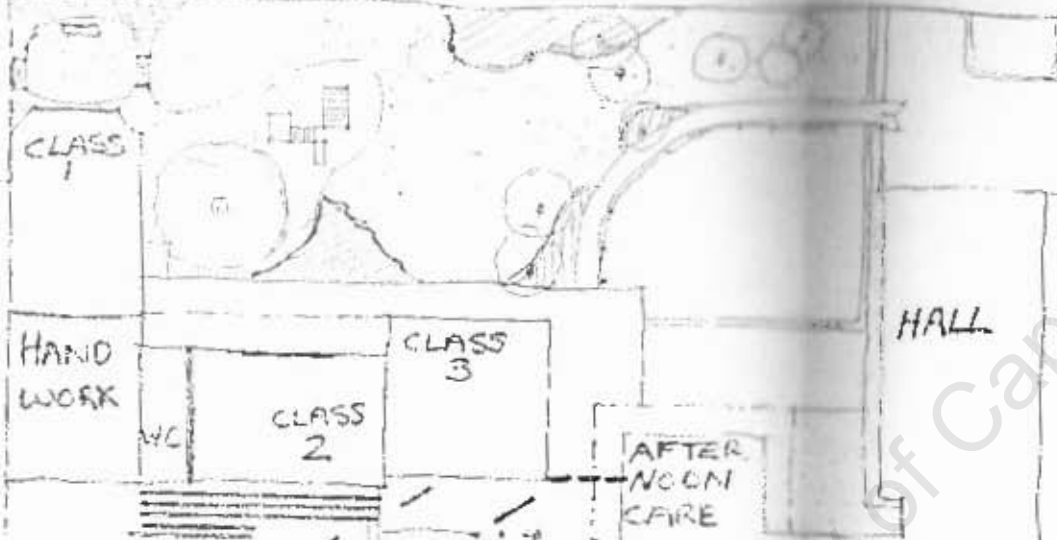
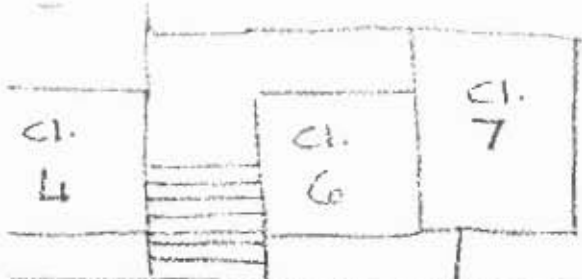
NURSERY

GIBSON ROAD

MARIOW ROAD



Diagrams of ...  
Addition of New Hall €



MARLOW ROAD