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AGENCY, POWER AND CONTROL OF SPECIAL KNOWLEDGE IN THE PRODUCTION OF ART AND RITUAL. A contrapuntal examination of two disparate cultural examples: western conceptual artist Joseph Beuys and Zambian Kunda women's rock art images and chisungu coming-of-age rituals, and how these resonate with my identity and art practice.

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ABSTRACT

There are two separate, but related questions posed in this study. The central enquiry relates to how artists and cultural practitioners retain power over their work and how the management of secret or special knowledge within each case contributes to this. I intend to explore how ritual, art and shamanism act firstly, in the practice of Joseph Beuys, a German mid-twentieth century performance artist, and secondly, in the practice of *chisungu* (a Kunda female initiation practice) in the Luangwa River valley in Eastern Zambia. Because these examples are from two unrelated cultural paradigms, the second, underlying question therefore is 'how does one examine two apparently disparate cultural practices together?' The study engages questions of the hybrid nature of cultural practice, ownership of knowledge, and of art itself as the object of inquiry. It does this by examining specific art practices, my own included, in which the knowledge is often controlled by theorists, artists and practitioners. The making of images for a specific ritual function as amongst Kunda women, empowers the makers and viewers in that very process, but viewed later out of context may be as equally read or misread leading to shifted visual and written interpretations. I claim that by bringing these together in a contrapuntal analysis, the understanding of each is enhanced because the criss-crossing of ideas from one brings new light to the other. These are hybrid readings and they affect each other, highlighting similarities and differences in both these cultural practices.

The study will emphasise the controlled knowledge inherent in these examples of art-making practices with ritual overlays. I relate these to my own biography and art-making identity, which is itself one of hybridity and apparent contradiction. I aim to demonstrate that the creative power of cultural hybridity in art and ritual is specifically revealed by an examination of issues of transformation (and their intimate connection to ritual), the management of knowledge and power, and the emphasis of process over product.