

Trees for Life

A Study of an Emerging Collective Memorial Ritual for Deceased Cancer Patients¹

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1. Introduction, orientation, positioning

The Queen Wilhelmina Forest

Since the year 2000, the so-called Trees for Life Day has been an annual event, organised in the Dutch Flevopolder on the last Saturday in November. On this day approximately 6,000 people plant some 1,500 trees to commemorate loved-ones who were claimed by cancer. The Trees for Life Day starts with a memorial programme, after which the participants go out to plant their saplings, which as a collection will eventually give shape to the memorial forest, the *Koningin Wilhelminabos* (Queen Wilhelmina Forest). The names of the deceased are engraved on glass plates at a central place of commemoration in the forest. With the establishment of the Queen Wilhelmina Forest, a memorial site for cancer victims has been created that has a national appeal. The forest was conceived by the director of the National Festival of Trees Foundation, after he lost two family members to cancer in 1999. On his organisation's initiative, the Dutch Forestry Commission presented (the site of) the forest to the Dutch Cancer Society in the same year, on the occasion of the Society's fiftieth anniversary.

Introduction

Focus, theme - The past decades have seen a steep increase in innovative ritual forms and spaces both in the public and the private domain that have emerged alongside and partly serve as a substitute to traditional ritual spaces, such as churches. The Queen Wilhelmina Forest with its annual Trees for Life Day is a remarkable case in point. This research is part of the project Holy Ground. Re-Inventing Ritual Space in Western Culture, which in turn is a branch within the NWO Programme The Future of the Religious Past. The Holy Ground Project focuses on the changing relationship between space and ritual in contemporary Western society. By means of empirical research based on a study of the material and ritual culture of the Trees for Life Day, a contribution will be made to the study of current ritual and religious dynamics.

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Method - This research should primarily be viewed within the domain of Ritual Studies. Ritual Studies is a multi-, inter- or trans-disciplinary framework, within which religious as well as non-religious rituals are being studied. Its focus not only is on traditional rituals, but also on so-called 'emerging rituals'. An ethnographic approach seemed particularly apt for studying the Trees for Life Day, since a qualitative research methodology relies on such elements as fieldwork, (participant) observation, personal narratives, interviews and archives. Accordingly, the objective was to compile ritual narratives. Interviews were carried out from May 2006 to 2009, and the Trees for Life Day was attended in 2006, 2007 and 2009.

Theoretical framework

In recent years, central concepts in ritual studies, such as space and place, sacrality, religion and religiosity have been re-evaluated and reframed, as these in particular are expressed through (new) ritual practices. For a study such as this one, a perspective on the 'spatial triad' of space/place, idea and ritual practice (Lefebvre) is fundamental, as an investigation of sacred space would otherwise easily lose touch with empirical reality.

Sacred fields - In this study, as in much current-day research into the topic of emerging rituals, the term 'sacred' is defined broadly and openly to embrace the whole range from the religious sacred to the spiritual sacred (cf. Evans). The term can be applied to fields where a certain coherence (and hence identity or profile) emerges from the interplay of locus and situation, cultural practices and representations in the sense of ideas, ideals, dreams and visions. In this study sacred fields are directly related to the 'spatial triad', as developed by Henri Lefebvre and, in his wake, Jonathan Z. Smith and Kim Knott. The model of the spatial triad offers perspectives that are fertile for the analysis of place, ritual and religion. It shows that place/space is not an abstract and passive category, but, in contrast, a productive one. First and foremost, space is a socially productive category with three aspects that are dialectically related to one another. The first aspect is that of *representations of space*, or conceived or conceptualised space. Examples include representations by architects or planners. These representations have a strongly public character and are generally very influential. The second aspect of the triad is *spaces of representation*, also designated as 'lived space'. Here all sorts of associations with images and symbols come into play. The third aspect is *spatial practice*, i.e. the ways in which people generate, use and perceive space. Lefebvre's triad is a valuable analytical instrument, particularly when considering that the three aspects should be viewed as being in a constant mutual dynamic, and that they have to be employed heuristically, in order to draw attention to the processes involved. This seems especially fruitful for the relation between religion and space/place and is directly relevant for the Holy Ground Project.

Following from the concept of sacred fields, five fields with a more or less distinctive identity were initially identified in this study. *The religious field* is present in society and culture through its institutional manifestations, such as church buildings, worship services, clergy and ritual-religious experts. With respect to *the field of healing*, it is postulated that all our rites and symbols ultimately are concerned with the banishing of evil and death, and the evocation of a new perspective through salvation and healing. *The field of memorial culture*: besides death/funereal rites, it also includes diverse forms of dealing with the past, of mobilizing the past for present-day agendas and of idealizing the past. The fourth field, *the field of 'culture'*, is the area of 'art and culture', in which theater, film, art festivals and drama are situated, as well as musical events, concerts (classic and popular), architecture, and our thirst for beauty and aesthetics. This field often intersects with the field of *memorial culture*, as well as with the fifth field, i.e. *the field of leisure culture*. This last field embodies the area of our free time, which includes activities ranging from strolls in nature, through sports, vacations, travel and festivals, to the garish world of amusement parks and tourist attractions.

When considering the five different fields in their relations to one another, the fluidness of their boundaries immediately becomes apparent. There are at least three forms of interaction that are crucial when relating the Trees for Life Day case study to the themes of the triad: firstly, tensions and collisions, contestation and conflicts; secondly, ritual transfer and the role of ritual references; and thirdly, overlap and continuity. With these three intersections yielding an overlapping (sixth) field, places as well as ritual repertoires can henceforth be heuristically indicated, characterised and interpreted. In other words, this model will elucidate certain distinctive elements in the profile of the Trees for Life Day in particular, that may serve to draw further conclusions about contemporary sacred spaces in general.

Actual dynamics

In order to understand a ritual like the Trees for Life Day properly, it is essential to consider it within a broader framework of contemporary rites as well as a historical context of (changes in) more traditional ceremonies. Since the 1960s ritual repertoires have undergone major transformations, including complex alterations in its ritual dynamics. Most contemporary emerging rituals can be discerned in the field of the so-called life rituals. Especially death has become the object of a powerful development of ritual dynamics. In the 1980s and 90s, new ritual emerged to cope with instances of what has been coined as 'sudden, unwarranted and unjustifiable death'. Beside these, rituals of popular religious culture such as pilgrimages have remained popular. Lastly, small-scale private rituals, such as domestic ceremonies, deserve a brief mention. New ritual has been emerging, while traditional, mostly institutional religious rituals appear to lose their foothold. Rites, ritual symbolism and sacred zones are shifting, liter-

ally 'changing places'. Many of the ritual repertoires have shifted to a space outside of the walls of church buildings.

2. Empirical exploration of space and ritual repertoire: description and analysis

The following empirical section concentrates on presenting the fieldwork data and placing them in a broader context. During this phase the case of the Queen Wilhelmina Forest and the Trees for Life Day has been studied ethnographically, and its results are here distinguished in different themes: persons and organisations, practices, and lastly, time and place.

Persons and organisations

In this section, individuals and organisations have been presented that play a central role in the forest and the Trees for Life Day. Through observations and interviews, distinct points of dispute emerged, such as discussions about finances, ritual style, ritual design and continuation. These tensions and their intrinsic relation to the key players' power and control over the ritual proved an interesting crystallisation point for analysis.

Practices

Seven ritual elements were distinguished: singing and music, spoken words, a moment of silence, letting go of balloons, the use of names, planting of trees, placing of objects.

Singing and music - Music is a central element of the Trees for Life Day. As the participants gather at the central place of commemoration, they are welcomed by songs from the Singing for your Life Choir, which consists of members who had (or still have) cancer. The choir also sings a song during the actual programme. Peter Derksen, organiser and initiator of the Trees for Life Day, provides another musical contribution by singing two songs to conclude his speech. The lyrical repertoire is based on a straightforward and understandable language, breaching such themes as hope, consolation, encouragement, grief, memory and nature, and as such fits perfectly into the overall picture of newly emerged memorial rituals. By and large, 'traditional' religious themes and motifs are circumvented, and religion is consciously approached in very general terms: it is associated with a general spirituality that largely transcends traditional institutions. Particularly striking is the important dimension of salvation and healing.

Words of hope - Words and lyrics are playing a major role during the memorial programme, mainly in the form of speeches. Not only did two members of the organisation give a speech, but two surviving relatives were also given the opportunity to tell their stories. The organisation emphasised the symbolism of

the memorial forest, while the surviving relatives mainly told a personal story about their dealings with the loss of a loved one to cancer which consisted of various elements that made them not dissimilar to eulogies spoken at funerals. Despite the differences, the addresses displayed an important similarity: they all dealt with hope and a positive outlook on the future.

Connected by silence - In our contemporary culture, many are diligently searching for appropriate new ritual language and form. As these new forms are habitually sought away from 'traditional' religious rites, very general and basic forms are often arrived at. Hence, 'emerging rituals' are characterised by a certain set of recurring elements, such as walking, silence, light and fire. The moment of silence, with its powerful reference to war memorials (cf. The Last Post at Ieper) is a fixed component in virtually all new memorial rituals. Different from many other new rituals, (a moment of) silence plays a relatively small part in the Trees for Life Day ritual. During this ritual, the moment of silence is one of the few things that the participants actively engage in together. The shared silence creates a bond, solidarity and a feeling of community.

'A postcard to heaven' - The letting go of balloons is a ritual form that befits the contemporary search for an appropriate ritual language and form: it is non-linguistic, creative and can be appropriated with general symbolism. Balloons denote the beauty and the brevity of life. Moreover, the letting go of the balloons is presented as making a salute to the deceased: the balloons rise from the earth to the heavens. Apart from the moment of silence, the letting go of the balloons is the only real collective action during the Trees for Life Day. The ritual gesture is all the more powerful due to its collectiveness. The letting go of balloons is a general trend during memorials and funerals, especially at funerals of children. The colour of the balloon represents qualities such as innocence and love. The colour white is dominant in memorials. Often the balloons are released after a moment of silence, as is the case at the Trees for Life Day. Because balloons are principally associated with festive events, they serve to make funerals a little 'lighter', less heavy-handed. This is also the case for the ritual in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest.

Remembering by names - Names play a major role in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest in general and during the Trees for Life Day in particular. They are a central element at the memorial site, but are also seen in other places, such as on the certificates that people receive and at the trees. It is primarily the mentioning of the name in the public domain that is necessary to commemorate. Participants of the Trees for Life Day quite literally desire 'a place' for the name of their loved one, sometimes in the absence of a grave or another memorial place. The rituals of commemoration for victims of war strongly correspond to the tradition of commemorating at the Queen Wilhelmina Forest. Consciously or unconsciously, the repertoire of war memorials seems to have been a major

source of inspiration, as is not only evident from the memorial site's spatial and symbolic design, but also from the language in which the bereaved speak about their deceased loved ones and their deaths: their speeches include (military) references such as a (lost) fight, fighting, recognition, 'the fallen', and the field of honour. The metaphors of war and fighting used here are directly linked to the dynamics of the spatial triad of Lefebvre and Knott.

Planting of trees - Nature is a central recurring theme in contemporary memorial ritual, many modern-day commemorative rituals take place in gardens, parks or forests. In the case of the Trees for Life Day the participants themselves have an active role in this ritual, as they help to give shape to the forest by planting trees. This is a trend in all emerging memorial ritual: people feel an urge to act, to 'do something'. The Queen Wilhelmina Forest with the Trees for Life Day can be placed within a general (international) framework of tree and forest symbolism. In the Queen Wilhelmina Forest, references can be found to commemoration and marking, tree planting days and -holidays, the creation of special forests, and tree, forest and burial culture.

One of the main reasons for the participants to plant a tree is the symbolism related to the passing on of life: the loved one lives on, albeit in a different form. This is a theme that the organisation emphasises: the forest as a symbol of continuing life, representing the cycle of life that repeats itself again and again. Thus, trees are signs of hope and life, through which the loved one's life may continue. In the Queen Wilhelmina Forest a certain discrepancy can be discerned between the interpretation of the organisation and the majority of the participants: for the participants it is not the collective forest, but the individual tree that represents the individual life of the deceased.

Objects in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest - Material culture is abundantly present in death rituals – coffins, urns, headstones, pictures of the deceased, mourning clothes, burial gifts et cetera. In the Queen Wilhelmina Forest a variety of articles are being left behind near or in the tree and at the glass plates. Often they are the same kind of items that can be found at (temporary) monuments and at cemeteries. Common items are photos, butterflies, notes and drawings, angels, flowers, cuddly toys, rocks, animals, crosses, nameplates and so-called 'live strong' bracelets. The organisation's intention is that all trees together constitute a collective forest, and not a collection of individual trees. Hence it is officially not allowed to leave objects near or on the trees, yet it is tolerated that participants breach this prohibition.

The most dominant reason for leaving objects at a tree is marking the spot. There are many objects in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest that express a personal connection. It seems as if the surviving relative(s) still want(s) to nurse the deceased, as if this person continues to live and could use these objects. Items such as cuddly toys, food or drinks may provide comfort and consolation and are meant to breach the chasm between the deceased and the living and to es-

establish and maintain a physical presence when faced with physical absence. Consciously or unconsciously one wants to evoke an idyllic situation, an atmosphere of happiness, salvation and hope. Finally objects used in mourning therapy form a parallel with the objects that are left behind at memorial sites. During mourning therapy patients leave meaningful objects behind in a leave-taking ceremony. Moreover, just as the behaviour of others in the forest is imitated, it is very probably that these ritual acts are influenced by the leaving behind of objects in disaster areas, after the death of a celebrity or after an attack. In short, the act of leaving objects shows a complex transaction process for which there is no straightforward, univocal explanation.

Time

Time is another important factor in memorial rituals. The annual Trees for Life Day takes place on the third Saturday in November. The actual memorial programme lasts approximately 20 minutes. It appears that time sometimes is a matter of debate. Even though November is a very suitable time for the planting of trees, it is not so much for an open air memorial meeting. The length of the actual memorial programme is also a topic of discussion and depends strongly on the season: it is mainly due to the cold that the organisation believes it couldn't take too long. Over some things, there is little dispute: Saturday appears an appropriate day for a collective memorial. While the Trees for Life Day takes place in a part of the year with many holidays and commemorations, this has nothing to do with the choice of date, day and time according to the organisation. The underlying thoughts are particularly practical and relate to the planting season of the trees, other activities of the National Festival of Trees Foundation, and Saturday being a day off from work and school.

Place: between nature and monument

The actual site forms the basis of the memorial ritual in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest. One cherishes a place and gives it form as a ritual landscape with a centre. The forest, the ritual site, is conceived and designed. The practices that take place during the Trees for Life Day are largely localised; the ritual assembles to the spot. There are two evident (place) dimensions: the Queen Wilhelmina Forest as natural area and as a (natural) monument.

3. Comparison, synthesis, interpretation

Synthesis, balance and perspective

The Trees for Life Day as a ritual for fellow-sufferers: context

The Trees for Life Day in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest is a modern, non-denominational and collective memorial ritual. Although the forest may be seen as a new ritual space, it does not stand on its own in this regard. Consciously or unconsciously, war memorials and disaster ritual have had a significant influence on this ritual. The ceremony of planting trees to commemorate certain

people or occasions can at least be dated back a number of centuries, and the memorial rituals and the establishment of monuments on behalf of specific groups of fellow-sufferers has gained popularity since the early 1990s. Examples of the latter are victims of aids, road traffic victims, casualties of railway accidents, stillborn children, police officers who died on duty, members of the air force who died on duty, persons who donated their bodies to science and fire fighters who died on duty. The Queen Wilhelmina Forest can thus be seen to fit this trend of new ritual sites of commemoration, albeit a relatively early bird with its establishment in 1999.

The Trees for Life Day as a ritual for fellow-sufferers: elements and trends

The inspiration for the design of a memorial ritual or the establishment of a monument for a certain group of fellow-sufferers often lies abroad. The establishment of memorial forests has its origin abroad too: in Israel for instance there is a long tradition of planting memorial forests and trees. Memorials for fellow-sufferers often develop along similar lines and certain patterns in the execution of the rituals can also be detected: in most cases, there is an annual memorial ritual with a relatively fixed pattern and/or a place with a monument. Furthermore, the memorial has a rather clear-cut and general symbolic ritual character that takes shape in (semi-) public domain. In addition, frequently the original initiative has been taken by an individual. What commences as an individual, personal affair changes into a national memorial of a group of fellow-sufferers and thus becomes (semi-) institutionalised. The mission statements of the organisation (in this case the National Festival of Trees Foundation, the Dutch Cancer Society and the Forestry Commission) are playing a role in the creation of the ritual. Because the ritual is linked to established institutions, the ritual finds itself embedded in a strong organisational framework and therefore its continuity is often better safeguarded. However, tensions caused by uneven power relations and different outlooks may surface too in the creation of the ritual. There is a complex relationship between the individual and the community. Perhaps conscious of the tensions between the private and the communal in these ritual settings, modern-day rituals have often been designed or have evolved with a certain 'layeredness', in which some actions are aimed at the individual experience and others at the collective. The community is incidental, momentaneous, and bound to a certain event.

The majority of the aforementioned memorial rituals, including the case study, are emphatically associated a certain space within the public domain. These ritual landscapes are considered *Holy Ground*. Many collective memorial rituals take shape against the backdrop of a natural environment. What makes the Trees for Life Day singular, is the fact that participants in the ritual themselves play an active part in physically shaping the memorial site. Catering for its varied participants, the Trees for Life Day, as can be observed in many other modern-day ceremonies such as disaster rituals, does not make use of elements indicative of any specific religion, but instead avails itself of an evocative lingo

permeated with archetypal symbols such as light, sky, tree, and flowers. The ceremony's texts as well as the activities are easily recognisable and accessible. However, the Trees for Life Day contains a more elaborate level below the surface: the forest's symbolism refers to cosmic dimensions, (alleged) Celtic tree cults, numerology etcetera. As the planting of memorial trees has been an ancient practice in many cultures the world over, it is not surprising that in modern memorial rituals, trees are often employed as compelling icons. Perhaps the most well known example is a variety of forests planted to celebrate childbirth (since 1990), but there are others planted in memory of other events.

A memorial service is not just about remembrance, but participants may also like to get recognition and respect; they may want to make a statement; they may desire to warn other people or to reconcile, and above all, to never forget. Due to the history of religion in the Netherlands, religious manifestations in the public domain form a sensitive subject matter. At the Trees for Life Day the choir definitely does not want to be associated with (organised) religion, or more specifically, with Christianity. In their own words, the choir wants to sing 'for all the people', and therefore employs a universal symbolic language in its songs, lyrics and dress. Accordingly, the Trees for Life Day is a collective, public, ritual manifestation, a new form of the Dutch seventeenth-century concept of the *omgangsocumene*: groups with different religious backgrounds living peacefully together, while not retreating from maintaining and underscoring their religious differences.

The Trees for Life Day: ritual sacred fields - The Queen Wilhelmina Forest can be situated within the model of sacred fields that was mentioned before. Firstly, the *religious field* does not play a role of importance, at least not in a direct way. (Institutionalised) religion is deliberately kept at bay. The *cultural field* (which largely refers to 'higher culture') plays no important role either. Evidently, the *field of memorial culture* is significant for understanding the Queen Wilhelmina Forest and the Trees for Life Day. Befitting the *field of leisure culture*, the Queen Wilhelmina Forest first and foremost is a nature area in which people stroll, walk the dog or do sports. This aspect of leisure is shown in the design of the forest. In line with the *field of healing*, however, the Queen Wilhelmina Forest provides a location to 'learn to cope' or to 'put one's soul to rest'. The choir that sings on the Trees for Life Day stresses the therapeutic effect of their music. A final aspect is the planting activity itself. Not only does every tree-planter contribute to a good cause, i.e. cancer research through the Dutch Cancer Society, but the activity is also a sound way of contributing to a healthier and greener natural environment.

Tensions and contrasts - Different users of the forest all have different ideas about (the use of) the Queen Wilhelmina Forest, which inevitably yields certain tensions. These are tensions caused by conflicting elements inherent to specific contrasting fields, for instance the fields of memorial culture and leisure culture.

While the participants want to design and use the forest as a memorial place and the members of the organisation aim for a memorial place that looks like and can be used as a nature area, the people looking to spend their leisure time in the forest would like to stroll, jog or cycle without being confronted with any striking (memorial) objects, let alone a pile of ashes. However, along with the tensions and contradictions between the fields, consistency and relationships are also noticeable, for instance in choosing a Saturday as the day for the 'Trees for Life Day' rituals: a day of leisure and remembrance can apparently fit together well.

The two fields that are not directly pertaining to the Queen Wilhelmina Forest, the *religious field* and the *field of culture*, can still provide tension. As the forest and the ritual should be accessible to all, religion is deliberately alluded to in general terms, and is mainly associated with a spirituality that transcends traditional institutions. Yet, the important dimension of salvation and healing, which at its very core also pertains to the realm of religion, is striking. Furthermore, the choir makes use of religious lyrics and imagery, which however should not be regarded as religious per se. According to Mathew Evans' classification, both the *personal sacred* and the *spiritual sacred* are at play here. Nature in itself is a place where a connection with the supernatural often is felt. The presence of the cultural field is very minimal. There is no 'art' present in the forest or only in the form of very accessible poems and a statue of Queen Wilhelmina. The interpretation of the ritual should not be too serious, according to the forest's initiator Peter Derksen, who wants the ritual to remain 'low key'.

Ritual transfer - The important theme of ritual transfer, the movement of particular repertoires originally linked to one field to another, as well as the important subject that each field has, suggest there are certain 'prescribed' or 'assigned' ritual repertoires and places. But besides certain tensions and contrasts between the fields, there also appear to be connections and relationships. There is clearly a shared area, an area of overlap, a dimension of convergence and coherence at a somewhat higher and more general level. There is ritual transfer regarding (elements of) the field of memorial culture, the religious field, the field of healing and the field of leisure culture. Regarding the first field, there is an obvious transfer of the element of a moment of silence, which originated from war memorial rites, and which now is widely applied in all kinds of emerging memorial rituals. Other elements transferred from war memorial rites include the general design of the central place of remembrance with its engraved glass plates, as well as the 'war metaphors' used in speeches. Besides elements from war memorials, there are other elements that originated in other parts of the field of memorial culture that now play a role in the Queen Wilhelmina Forest: memorial trees, the letting go of balloons, the marking of names, the adornment by leaving objects behind, the time of year (November) and, pertaining to a similarity between (war)graves and the glass plates and the trees: the use of the name, the decoration, marking and the use of the biography of the

deceased. Regarding the religious field, one can see various elements at the Trees for Life Day: (gospel) choir, All Souls Day (a collective memorial), general symbolism like the hereafter and heaven, (religious) objects, procession. Regarding the field of healing one can see the link with mourning therapy, ‘to give someone/something a place’, supporting the Dutch Cancer Society. Regarding the field of leisure culture there are the elements of tree planting days and -holidays, nature and leisure area, celebration and the Saturday as a leisure day.

Success and perspective - When superimposing the sacred fields model onto the Queen Wilhelmina Forest and its ritual characteristics, the ritual can be seen to intersect with three different fields. In this overlapping area, the fields of memorial culture, of leisure culture and of healing are the dominant elements. Hence, the forest and the Trees for Life Day is situated in a part of the model that, more than the fields of religion and culture, is rooted in contemporary popular culture, as is also true for many other manifestations of emerging rituals. By consciously detaching itself from the fields of (traditional, institutional) religion and of (high) culture, the ritual becomes accessible for a wide audience: its symbolism is relatively basic and straightforward and the ritual is not ‘too serious’, as a result of which it is easy to participate. While high culture and traditional religion generally invite their audiences/congregations to be passively engaged, the Trees for Life Day (and many other contemporary commemorative rituals) acknowledge the fact that participants want to ‘do something’. Although participants feel that the ritual and the forest are theirs, and that they decide how both are given shape due to an open framework or *casco* approach, much of the design of the ritual has in actual fact been decided on by the organisation. One of the aspects that adds to the ritual’s success and may yield continue, is the individualised emphasis on the deceased persons’ names, as can be seen in many other emerging rituals. Due to the personal, individualised nature surviving relatives are more likely to return to the monument later. Another element of the memorial site’s success is its allegiance to the Dutch Cancer Society and the Forestry Commission, because participating in the ritual is associated with a certain social relevance, in the shape of a monetary contribution to the Dutch Cancer Society’s research as well as a direct contribution to life and nature, by means of the tree planting. As such, the ritual is felt to reach out beyond personal issues of grief, coping and healing towards the wellbeing of the society as a whole, often on behalf of the deceased. In numbers, the memorial forest speaks to a wide audience – nearly everyone will know someone who died of cancer, which may ensure the forest’s ongoing appeal. The Trees for Life Day is a one-time ritual in which everyone can participate, yielding a different set of participants each year. In addition, the monument is for everyone and one can return to it as often as they like. In many respects the Queen Wilhelmina Forest has a unique position within the range of rituals for fellow-sufferers, if only because participants have to pay to take part in the

commemorative ritual and because the participants actively help to give shape to the monument, the forest. Though the Trees for Life Day rites do not have an air of institutionalisation, the forest and the ritual are completely maintained by well-established organisations, which add to the site's strength and continuity.

There is much uncertainty about the continuation of the Trees for Life Day. The initial idea was for 2007 to be the last year in which the Trees for Life Day would be organised. The annual commemoration continued, yet the same doubts arose in 2009. To this day, the future of the Trees for Life Day is uncertain. In the mean time, the National Festival of Trees Foundation has started a new forest for newborn children and children who have died at a young age. This forest and the symbolism used are remarkably similar to the Queen Wilhelmina Forest. Because of the success of these types of memorial forests and the ready-made design which can be transferred and used in various other settings, it is not unlikely that the Netherlands will see more of these similar forest rituals in the future. This development not only confirms the *casus*-dimension of this emerging ritual, but is also a good example of ritual transfer: with only minor adjustments, the concept and content of the ritual of the Queen Wilhelmina Forest can be reused for another ritual for a different target group at a different place.

